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House Ways and Means
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**Relationship of Proposed Language in H.883 with Respect to
the Goals of the AOE for Improving Learning**

What are the apparent intents of H.883?

Effectiveness: designs that maximize the use of resources to support better student outcomes, and manageable systems with minimal duplication of effort.

Capacity for improvement: management that is efficient and effective, and frees up building leaders to focus on instructional leadership; support for stable leadership as well as development; greater capacity for focused professional development that is appropriate to local needs; and retention of high quality teachers.

Accountability for improvement (outcomes): K-12 systems that are responsible for student learning from the beginning to the end; no ambiguity about who is responsible for progress; and collaborative responsibility at the local level to improve learning.

Clarity of purpose: State (AOE) to develop clear, consistent goals and performance indicators that are shared across the system.

Local autonomy: Flexibility around how common goals can best be achieved at the local level. Enhanced “analyzability” of schools and our system’s performance.

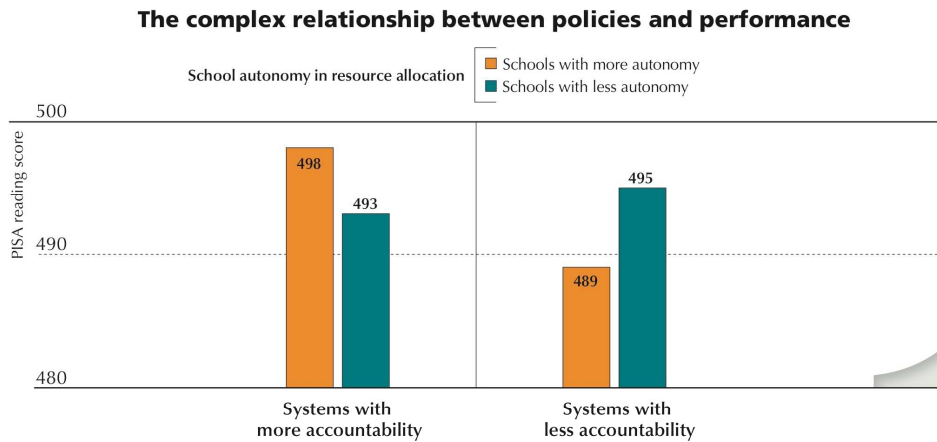
What do we know about the relationship between local autonomy and performance?

- High-performing countries and economies tend to allocate resources more equitably across socio-economically advantaged and disadvantaged schools.
Some of this is addressed by Act 68. Within some SUs there is substantial inequality among districts. It is difficult to imagine how these inequities can be addressed without a common budget for a larger unit.
- School autonomy has a positive relationship with student performance when accountability measures are in place (accountability defined in terms of public transparency about school results and allocation of resources).
- Local autonomy in allocating resources tends to be associated with good performance in those education systems with clear accountability (e.g. when we have clear goals and clarity around who is responsible for making sure students meet those goals). When accountability is unclear, performance is variable.

(The above assumes adequate capacity to implement.)

(Information from a presentation by Andreas Schleicher and from PISA IN FOCUS 2011/9 (October))

What this looks like:



Note: In school systems in OECD countries where all schools post achievement data publicly, a student who attends a school with more autonomy in allocating resources than the average school tends to score five points higher on the PISA reading test than a student who attends a school with less autonomy. In contrast, in school systems where no schools post achievement data publicly, a student who attends a school with more autonomy in resource allocation tends to score six points lower on the reading test than a student who attends a school with less autonomy. These results are seen after students' and schools' socio-economic backgrounds are taken into account.
Source: OECD, PISA 2009 Database.

What is the evidence to support the need for governance change?

For current evidence, the Agency is in a very difficult place because the current structure of governance is so complex that we cannot accurately determine the amount of money spent on many students, let alone develop systems of evaluation and accountability for students and teachers. One of the improvements that can virtually be guaranteed by the change is that the Agency will be able to provide answers; we have frustrated the legislature for years by being unable to provide these answers.

This improved ability to compare will expand the Agency's ability to make all districts aware of best practices and efforts that did not pay off. It is a powerful tool for facilitating improvement.

How does this line up with what we currently have in place?

Vermont's school system is characterized by complexity:

- Vermont has 273 school districts and 59 supervisory unions (332 governing units)
- Some 235 of those districts are towns or cities.
- There are an additional 39 union school districts and 2 interstate school districts.
- Of the 235 town districts, 20 do not operate a school of any type and tuition their K-12 students. Another 56 operate some grades (but not always the same grades) and tuition the remainder.
- 42 towns have a school district that operates a school but also belong to a union school district for the other grades.

- Most of the 273 school districts are grouped together in 45 supervisory unions. Another 12 are supervisory districts with unified governance, and the remaining two are the interstate districts.

This current structure, combined with the small size of our small units, makes evaluation and comparison across systems difficult. What we hear from superintendents, directors of career and technical centers, and high school principals, is that the quality and breadth of learning of children entering high schools and CTEs from different systems is highly variable.

This complexity complicates the challenge of public accountability/public assurance:

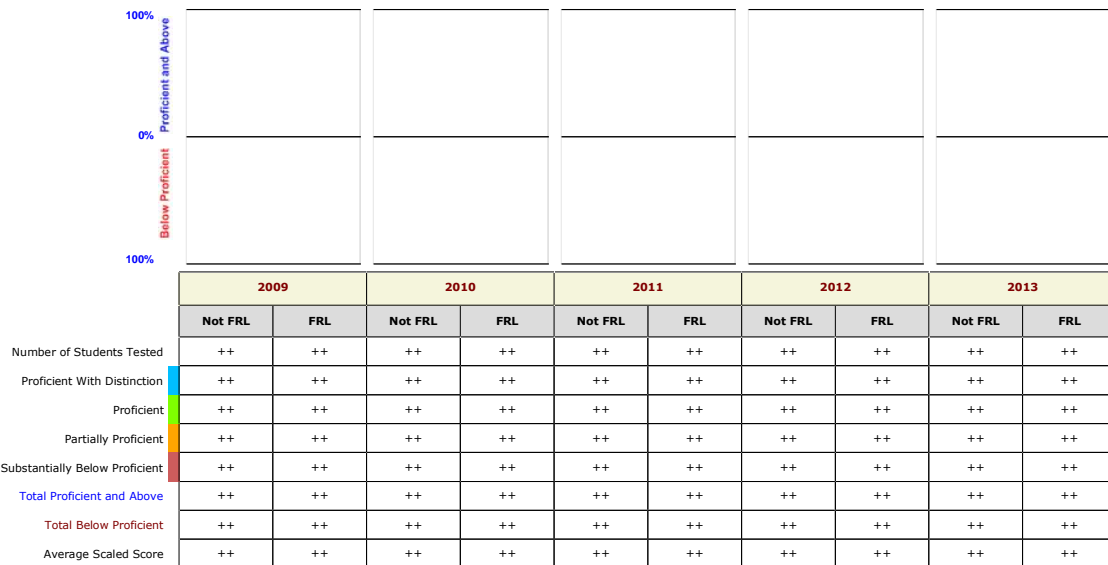
1. It is challenging to **evaluate cost effectiveness**, because different systems manage their financial accounts differently, and different systems locate costs at different levels in the system. It is worth noting that a common chart of accounts supported by training and support for business managers will improve our capacity to analyze, by ensuring that we account for resources in the same way across the state. However, it will not address the challenge of comparability of systems and strategies pursued by different systems, because different systems assign costs to different levels.

2. Many of the units are very small—some so small we suppress their accountability data so that we do not inadvertently release personally identifiable data. For example:



NECAP Assessment Report

Organization:	Lowell Graded School
Teaching Year:	2012-2013
Test/Subject:	NECAP Science Grade 8
Breakdown:	Differences in achievement by family income?
Comparison:	Over Time?



The NECAP test, which is a computer-based test, is administered in October and November. The test is designed to measure student achievement in science and mathematics. The test is administered to students in grades 4, 8, and 10. The test is administered to students in all school districts. The test is administered to students in all school districts.

Variability in Opportunities to Learn

Our outcomes at the high school level are a function both of the preparation students receive prior to high school, as well as the opportunities high schools provide.

Grade 7/8, Two schools in same union feeding one high school:

School A:

Language Arts (grade 7)	3 sections
Language Arts (grade 8)	3 sections
Mathematics (grade 7)	3 sections
Mathematics (grade 8)	3 sections
Algebra I	1 section
Science	6 sections
Social Studies	6 sections
Art	20 sections
Physical Education	
French	19 sections
Concert Band	2 sections
Chorus	2 sections
Music	20 sections
Health Education	20 sections
Industrial Arts	20 sections
Family and Consumer Science	20 sections

School B:

Language Arts (grade 7)	1 section
Language Arts (grade 8)	1 section
Mathematics (grade 7)	1 section
Mathematics (grade 8)	1 section
Science	1 section per grade
Social Studies	1 section per grade
Art	
Physical Education	

Two high schools, same region:

School A:

English
AP Literature
College & Career Literature, Gen & Adv
Global Perspectives/Criminal Justice

Integrated Math
Pre-Calculus
Calculus
Applied Life Math
Statistics
Statistics AP

Science, Gen & Adv
Environmental Science, Gen & Adv
Anatomy & Physiology, Gen & Adv

World Geography, Gen & Adv
US History, Gen & Adv
Modern US History, Gen & Adv
Anthropology Adv

Spanish I
French II, III, IV

Sustainable Agriculture

Band
Chorus
Internship Music Theory
Music Independent Study
Introduction to Art
Advanced Art
Journalism/Yearbook
Music History
Ceramics/Photography

School B:

English
American Literature
Public Speaking

Integrated Math
Problem Solving
Pre Algebra
Algebra I
Junior Math

Biology
Physical Science
Forensics

US History
Civics
Psychology

Spanish I, II

Robotics

HS Art 1 & 2
HS Music 1 & 2
Video Production

(Note: For comparison, course offerings in Stowe and CVU are included in a separate document.)

Vermont needs better indicators of performance that reflect Vermont values, as well as a better model for accountability that supports local conversations about how to improve schools, based on a rich mix of qualitative and quantitative data, some collected by the state, and much of it collected locally.

At the AOE, our commitment is to improving learning systematically across the state. We are committed to engaging in this conversation, because we have confidence in the ability of the state and our citizens to develop solutions that target our resources most effectively where they matter the most: improving learning. We are also open to management structures that free building leaders and teachers to focus on instructional improvement. We know that this improvement work is most effective when schools take the leadership at the local level to define how they respond to the challenges of shared goals.

- We are developing a new accountability model that draws on the Education Quality Standards. Our strategy, basic components, and direction for accountability have been endorsed by the State Board, and we are moving forward with development of the model. The proposed bill gives us a deadline and an increased sense of urgency.
- We are moving to make Improving Learning and Educator Quality core priorities of the AOE:
 - New position focused on educator quality
 - New work around clarifying the roles of teachers, principals and superintendents, and frameworks for professional development and evaluation

“What will happen if we let H.883 die in committee?”

We see struggling districts. Most of these districts are small. There is a pattern typical to their struggles. First, they begin by cutting programs to hold down spending and get budgets passed. If they begin to experience these same pressures at the same time as a neighboring district, they may choose to operate a joint school or, more rarely, form a union district. However, it is not often that two districts reach this position at the same time.

Statewide, discussions about closing schools are becoming more common. Declining enrollments have created overcapacity in Vermont.

The real danger is that districts will fall into this situation a few at a time, rarely with more than one or two in a supervisory union feeling this acute pressure at the same time. The majority of districts in these supervisory unions may be doing well and see no need for change. Over time, a few districts at a time, Vermont students will see significant declines in their educational experience. This process will continue until the number of districts, isolated in their supervisory unions, reaches a critical mass that leads to statewide action. The negative effects on children are likely to be substantial.