

VCSEA Testimony on H.876, Section 30

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H.876, Section 30. “Tiered System of Supports and Educational Support Team”

VCSEA supports the changes to the Educational Support Team as proposed.

For 25 years Vermont education has been focused on developing systems wide responses to address student needs early and comprehensively.

- Act 230 was passed by the legislature in 1990 to develop a comprehensive continuum of supports for students in the regular education environment and establishing instructional support systems and teams (ISSs and ISTs) involving teachers and other professional support in a collaborative effort. It was anticipated that the implementation of Act 230 would help contain special education costs by providing supports to the classroom teachers that would promote classroom interventions and supports. Act 230 was initially focused largely on academic learning.
- Act 157, passed in 1996, re-authorized and broadened the scope beyond academics, requiring schools to develop a comprehensive educational support system that would have the capacity to provide a range of programs and supports that also include health, social, and behavioral supports. Accordingly, instructional support teams became educational support teams and the system, the educational support system. The ESS was designed to increase the ability of the regular education system to meet the needs of all students, and through earlier and effective intervention to decrease the need for special education services and supports. In 2000, Act 117 added greater accountability for implementation and reporting related to ESS.

More recently the national focus has evolved to using a Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) model of school transformation where a school wide system is designed to operationalize current educational knowledge and research. A Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS) has been in the process of implementation in many states for some years, and in Vermont since 2006. A public health model employing a tiered approach to supporting successful learning practices and preventing the development of learning difficulties is the focus. Practices are designed to provide instruction and intervention that is evidence based. Increasing levels of intensity of intervention are implemented as needed. An effective MTSS system addresses academic as well as social and behavioral learning in an integrated manner. MTSS is designed to provide a comprehensive and systemic approach to addressing the needs of all students in a responsive, flexible and timely manner.

Key components include:

- Representative school leadership teams that encourage and support distributed and collaborative leadership.
- Assessments that provide instructionally relevant findings to guide daily classroom practice. Universal Screenings for academics and behavior provide information for prevention and early intervention for learning and behavioral difficulties.
- Academic and behavioral data is actively used to guide school-wide, grade level and

classroom practices. Progress is monitored frequently and data is actively used to guide instruction.

- High quality professional development in both academic and social-emotional and behavioral areas is key part to an effective MTSS system.
- Evidence based instructional practices are used to make certain students are getting the strongest possible foundation in academic, and social and behavioral instructional practices consistently in every classroom and school-wide settings.
- A tiered system of supports is in place which allows for early intervention at the classroom level, and more targeted and intensive supports implemented in conjunction with classroom instruction when increasing need is identified.
- Parent & community Involvement in both the overall system design as well as at the individual student level is viewed as important for community ownership and investment.

An example of the effective use of multi-tiered system of supports is the work done with Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) in Vermont. Currently over 126 or about 40% of schools in Vermont are implementing PBIS since the multi-tiered behavior system was initiated through the leadership of the then Department of Education in 2007. The effectiveness of this approach, as seen in both the behavioral and academic data from PBIS schools when implementation is done with consistency and care, reinforces the understanding that academic learning is closely related to a safe, predictable and consistent school environments and climate. Students know the expectations, are rewarded and supported for knowing and practicing these. Comprehensive implementation strategies at the whole school and classroom or universal level, small group interventions at the targeted level and more intensive interventions at the individual level are in place and available to students and staff.

An MTSS approach to the integration of the full range of educational supports in inclusive schools holds a great deal of promise for students and uses professional expertise throughout the school for the benefit of all students. VCSEA members are in support an MTSS approach with the caution that:

- Flexibility in implementing MTSS that is responsive to the needs of the school and community needs to be ensured. Care about mandating a specific framework needs to be taken.
- VCSEA anticipates that some changes to the current special education funding structures will be necessary to implement a fully operational MTSS throughout Vermont. The current funding structure does not allow for the flexible and timely responsiveness needed.