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Sent: Friday, March 18, 2016 7:14 PM

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Subject:

FYI:

EDITORIAL: About the Fast Track Push to Legalize Marijuana... “Slow Down, Answer the Questions — It’s About Children and Youth”

Posted by [thebridge](#) on [March 4, 2016](#) in [2016 Issues](#), [Editorials](#), [March 3 — March 16, 2016](#), [Op-ed](#) by Nat Frothingham

I invite readers of *The Bridge* to pay close attention to a fast-track bill to legalize marijuana.

That bill has already been approved by the Vermont Senate. Now it has moved over to the Vermont House for consideration and possible action.

Over the past few days I’ve talked by phone with the heads of three non-profit organizations that are related in different but important ways to the quality of our schools and the welfare of our children and youth.

I’ve talked by phone with Jeff Francis who is the lead person at the Vermont Superintendents Association. That association works with and represents our school superintendents across the state.

I’ve also talked by phone with Nicole Mace who heads up the Vermont School Boards Association, an association that serves all the volunteers across the state who offer local governance and leadership to our schools.

And I’ve talked with Ken Page, executive director of the Vermont Principals’ Association and in schools it’s the principals, along with the schoolteachers, faculty and other staff who are on the front lines with kids everyday.

Why these three phone conversations? Well, the associations that serve the superintendents, school boards and principals have put out three separate — but remarkably similar, almost indistinguishable — statements that raise critical, even sobering, issues about the current push to legalize marijuana and the welfare of our schoolchildren and youth.

While there are subtle differences between the three statements — they are absolutely alike in one respect. All three statements draw from the “Health Impact Assessment of Marijuana Regulation in Vermont” by the Vermont Department of Health.

That assessment has found (and here we quote):

- *Early and persistent use of marijuana can lead to the development of anxiety disorders later in life. Marijuana use may lead to development of depressive disorders. Among individuals at risk for the development of some psychotic disorders, marijuana use may increase the risk or mean that onset of those disorders begins earlier in life.*

- *Marijuana use may impact the physical structure of the brain. The exact effect, whether it is reversible, and what the potential health implications are, remains unknown.*
- *Early and continuous use of marijuana significantly increases risk of not completing high school, not enrolling or completing college, low educational achievement, and lower income.*
- *Marijuana use among high school and college students negatively impacts academic outcomes. The association has a dose-response relationship, which means the more a student uses, the worse the outcomes.*
- *The research on the relationship between marijuana use and academic outcomes is almost sufficient to show a cause-and-effect link between the two.*
- *Youth in more vulnerable situations (e.g. already experiencing behavior or mental health problems) are more likely to experience a negative academic outcome due to marijuana use.*
- *In Colorado, there has been a sharp increase in suspensions from 2013 to 2014. The state cannot confirm whether this is due to marijuana use, or due to the state's legalization in 2014. In Vermont, marijuana is the number one substance for which students are suspended from school.*
- *In a convenience sample of 130 Vermont educators, half reported they had not noticed an increase in marijuana use from the 2013 school year to the 2015 school year, but two-thirds expected to see an increase in use under a regulated system.*
- *A legalization and regulation protocol should never allow infused/edible products that could appeal to youth.*

Here's what the leaders of the superintendents, school boards and principals organizations were saying to me in separate phone conversations.

First, they are asking the Vermont House to take the time to ponder the difficult issues raised by the marijuana bill. "Take the time," they are saying. "Answer the tough questions."

And the tough questions are these:

Will legalization limit or increase student access to marijuana?

Will our schools, will the Vermont Agency of Education, get the needed extra money and staff support to deal with the impacts of marijuana legalization?

One association leader said, "What we're saying is take your time, slow down."

Then he added: "How can we ignore brain research? When it comes to learning, would we promote this?"

Forwarded to you by Chief Merkel