

Vermont Council of Special Education Administrators PRIORITIES 2015

Equitable and Necessary Access to Mental Health Care for Children and Families:

VCSEA supports access to high quality mental health care for children and families. Given the increase in costs of special education services associated with rising mental health challenges for children, we encourage focused attention on this important topic. Coordinated services with community providers, designated agencies, and schools are critical to establishing and ensuring quality treatment and services. All children must have access to mental health services at the level of care required to address their needs. Medicaid, as well as private insurance carriers, must be required to provide coverage at a level commensurate with a child's and families' identified clinical need. This is true for any child with a mental health diagnosis but is particularly important for students who are reaching a severity where special education eligibility is present due to emotional and behavioral disabilities. The collaboration between mental health agencies, education agencies and insurance carriers must be a focus for the legislature, the administration, as well as agencies and local providers of all kinds. Collectively, we must resolve the inequity in regional capacity for mental health services for children and families across our state. This is important to ensure that all children have their needs met, waitlists of mental health services are a thing of the past, and families and children with mental health needs have an equitable level of care comparable to what we provide under our healthcare system.

Education Funding and Governance:

VCSEA is a necessary stakeholder in the discussions regarding governance and education funding. Special education funding and special education leadership structures are both integral and significant components of the educational delivery system. Both must be considered with a holistic approach to improve flexibility and efficiency in service delivery. We strongly recommend a collaborative effort between education stakeholders and the Agency of Education to consider improved and updated funding mechanisms for special education. Inefficiencies in service delivery are directly connected to the implementation of the current special education funding formula. An effective multi-tiered system of support requires flexibility and responsiveness. As educational costs place pressures on Vermont's budget and as the funding system for all of education is being considered, special education funding should also be reviewed, updated and improved.

Access to Publicly Funded Prekindergarten Education:

VCSEA fully supports a high quality implementation process of Act 166. The legislation for providing access to high quality prekindergarten reflects a major milestone in addressing Vermont's prekindergarten needs. A system that is accessible to all parents who choose a preschool experience will be a strong foundation for early development and learning that will have lifelong positive impact.

A high quality prekindergarten system provides the foundation for high quality services for children with disabilities that are efficient and effective. VCSEA is committed to the education of prekindergarten children with disabilities with nondisabled peers in high quality, inclusive prekindergarten settings. Special education service delivery needs to be considered in more detail in relationship to Act 166 implementation by the responsible agencies.