

Ken Page's Testimony for the Joint meeting of House and Senate Education Committees on January 29, 2015 with members of the VPA Executive Council.

Thank you for inviting me to testify with you today. I especially want to thank the committee chairs, Representative David Sharpe and Senator Ann Cummings, as well as their committee assistants, Marj Zunder and Ken Bruno for making this afternoon possible. When I spoke to the Senate Education Committee a short time ago about problems and solutions in schools today, I advocated for listening to those people who are the practitioners- those people who are in schools, and who work closely with students, teachers, support staff, parents and members of the community. My colleague, Jeff Francis is famous for using the word "nexus" in many of his conversations about education. In today's context, I believe that the principal is the nexus, or "the important connection" and the "the key link" to making change happen in schools today.

Both of your committees have heard from the experts-the policy experts, the Agency of Education staff, the tax experts and of course, the many, many people who think they have THE answer to reducing school spending, reducing taxes and maintaining school quality. But I am here to tell you that unless you have sat in the school principal's seat, you don't have the complete understanding of the problem and the many solutions available to you. I told the senate education committee that principals are problem solvers-we think of problems as opportunities for creative solutions.

Today I am joined by Jacki Ball, an Assistant Director of Advocacy with the National Association of Secondary School Principals. Jacki's position takes her to the halls of congress in Washington on a regular basis and she herself is an important connection to the principalship. Her background as a passionate government teacher led her to this national position.

I am also joined by some of my colleagues and board members on the Vermont Principals' Association Executive Council. We had our January Board meeting today and since they were already here in Montpelier, it seemed like an opportune time come to the Legislature to speak with you about our issues, concerns and solutions.

Lastly, if some of you don't know, I have spent my entire career, over 42 years in education. I have been a teacher for 15 years, a principal for 21 years and I am now in my 6th year as VPA Director. I have helped to consolidate a school district, have closed an elementary school and have seen the savings and the energy that comes from a fresh approach to rightsizing a school. And in so doing, the taxpayers of the Waterbury-Duxbury School District have realized considerable savings since our district was created in 1997.

Lastly, I would be remiss if I did not bring up a principal's concern that was so eloquently described in anonymous letter to Governor Shumlin and to Secretary Holcombe in early December on which VPA was copied. In the letter the principal describes the real crisis that exists today in schools regarding mental health issues facing children that have come about because of what the author calls, the Great Recession and the Narcotics plague that we have

faced in Vermont. The letter cited the cases three children named Sarah, Jason and Tony who each have intensive needs requiring more staffing just to be able to access and benefit from school. These staff members no-doubt will greatly increase our student to staff ratio, and make education more expensive. But, what's the alternative? The letter simply asks the Governor if we have a spending problem or are the costs the symptom of a larger disease? If you haven't read this letter, I urge you to do so and to factor in this school leader's points into your overall plans for education reform in Vermont.

With that, let me conclude by again thanking you for work, your time and your interest in considering the voices of school principals, the go-to leaders, who truly at the the nexus of any educational change being considered.