

VERMONTERS FOR SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY 2015 PLATFORM FOR EXCELLENT PUBLIC EDUCATION



Our Vision: *In Vermont every school is excellent, and every child has real and meaningful opportunities to succeed. Vermonters willingly pay for our public school system in a way that is equitable and fair for all. We have all reaffirmed our commitment to our public school system and its role in fulfilling our state motto of Freedom and Unity. All Vermonters can achieve their full potential by contributing to our communities to keep our democratic culture strong.*

Every Child Has Meaningful Opportunities to Succeed

We must give all Vermont children the opportunity to be the best that they can be. We know that one size does not fit all, and our diversity is our strength.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY = STANDARDS + FLEXIBILITY + LEADERSHIP

STANDARDS:

- Each Vermont school should strive to offer opportunities that meet the needs of their children, and at the same time meet the expectations of the Educational Quality Standards (EQS). We will know we have reached this goal when all children are reaching their full potential regardless of who they are and where they live.
- Each school should participate in a quality review on a regular basis, and the reviewers should include school board members, community members, business leaders, and Agency of Education staff and staff from other state agencies, as well as administrative and teacher peers. Schools should access data provided by the Agency of Education that show schools how they perform against the EQS. The Agency of Education should provide technical support to help schools respond to the review.

FLEXIBILITY:

- Schools should seek to personalize learning and provide multiple pathways to graduation by involving families.
- Each school can determine, with participation from the community, the best way to meet the needs of its students and community, while ensuring that all children have a meaningful opportunity for success.

LEADERSHIP

- School administration and governance responsibilities should be more effectively and efficiently distributed between superintendents and principals. School boards should actively seek to allow principals to play a more direct role in the administration and governance of their school. The Agency of Education should support school districts in building capacity for improved distribution of these responsibilities.
- The Agency of Education should develop a set of guidelines for schools to use to budget for, attract and hire excellent administrators and teachers.
- Create a professional development and educational leadership academy for teachers, school board members, and administrators that builds capacity for effective community engagement throughout our state and encourages leadership at all levels in our education system.

Vermonters Willingly Pay for our Public Education with a Fair & Equitable Financing System

We know that all children must have equal access to the resources available for education in Vermont, and we have made that commitment, as well as a commitment to a fair and equitable funding system. Vermont already has one of the best systems in the U.S., and we can do even better. We must keep community-level democratic control of our schools, and at the same time insist on equitable and adequate funding that honors the Brigham decision.

- End the statewide residential property tax and shift to an income-based funding system for all Vermont residents. Businesses and non-residential property owners should continue to pay statewide property tax.
- Adequately fund the Education Fund every year and do not use the Education Fund to pay for any costs not directly related to providing public education.
- Adopt standardized accounting systems for all school districts and require they are used by 2018 to get state education funds. A complete training program and funding for school districts to shift to this new system must be developed and provided.
- New state education mandates must come with line item funding for implementation.

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VERMONTERS FOR SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY

GUIDING PRINCIPLES



Schools are at the heart of Vermont communities. Schools should be celebrated both for excellence in education, and as community hubs and economic engines in rural communities.

Local democracy is a Vermont value. Decisions regarding education should remain close to students and their communities. Communities and their democratically elected local boards should be empowered leadership partners in their schools and school systems. Our education governance system can be improved without compromising this value.

One size does not fit all. From concentrated downtowns to rustic hillsides, Vermont's demographic patterns are diverse. One governance model will not work for all parts of the state. A variety of models will allow communities to experiment and share best practices.

Schools should be judged by students' experiences and educational outcomes, not size. Opportunity to learn is one piece of the puzzle; outcomes are of equal importance. Student and school performance should be measured in broad and comprehensive ways.

Students benefit when communities are meaningfully involved. Vermont students benefit when parents and local residents are invested in the performance of their schools through local decision making.

Build on strengths. Vermont's demographics, and scattered, small communities create unique challenges but also opportunities. Real solutions will acknowledge and cultivate schools' existing assets, and build on the investments communities have already made.

Social capital is highly valuable. Vermont ranks among the highest in the U.S. for neighborliness, volunteerism, trust, and reciprocity. Local governance reinforces these values, and should be maintained for its role in building leadership and community resilience.

Excellent data is critical. We must ask meaningful questions, and gather and disseminate reliable information on educational costs, quality, equity, and students' experiences and outcomes, prior to drawing conclusions.

Students benefit when taught and led by highly qualified teachers and administrators. Vermonters need to work together to recruit, cultivate and maintain high-quality teachers and administrators for our schools.

Funding must be transparent, equitable and sufficient to support an excellent education. Education funding—where it comes from, how it flows, and where it ends up—needs to be understandable, so that Vermonters can make fact-based decisions and ensure that spending is accountable, equitable and sufficient.

The system must be economically sustainable. From state to local, education leaders and administrators must take responsibility for sound fiscal management and operating efficiency.

The system needs to work for the whole *and* the parts. Schools are just one part of a complex, organic system. Schools, communities, and state government must work in synergy. A 21st Century educational system must be made up of transparent, flexible processes, ongoing networks to communicate innovations as they emerge, and continual community collaboration.