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To: Chairman Sharpe and House Education Committee members
From: Dr. Rebecca Holcombe, Secretary, Dr. Heather Bouchey, Deputy Secretary;
Agency of Education
Date: 3/17/17
RE: Extended Learning Opportunities

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. We appreciate the Committee's interest in expanding student access to extended learning opportunities. We know that expanded days and extended years can provide students—and especially vulnerable students—with rich, creative and engaging opportunities to learn, while staving off summer learning losses and other challenges associated with limited opportunities.

Context:

The goal of the Agency of Education is to provide Vermont with the highest quality education, with the best value per dollar, in the most equitable way possible. Our implementation and program design work is framed in terms of the following decision criteria:

- 1) prioritize support for the most vulnerable students in the state; (equity)
- 2) prepare students to be members of a healthy and growing Vermont economy, and;
- 3) develop solutions that will be affordable to implement, maintain and sustain (practicality/affordability).

Given anticipated fiscal challenges at the state and local level and with few exceptions, we have prioritized strengthening existing systems, dual purposing existing structures and getting more value out of existing investments, rather than creating new bureaucracies, boards, organizational structures and new continuing obligations.

Though not a home rule state, Vermont is a state with a long and strong tradition of local control. The state sets goals through legislative processes and/or rulemaking, and the AOE and school systems implement. Historically, local entities have been held accountable through AOE oversight and monitoring, and more importantly, through local tax rates and votes. For example, the legislature mandated flexible pathways

legislation, and the AOE provides guidance, support and professional development to support implementation. Ultimately, local districts figure out the most effective and efficient way to use resources locally to achieve state goals. Most funding for implementation is locally administered, whether federal or education fund dollars.

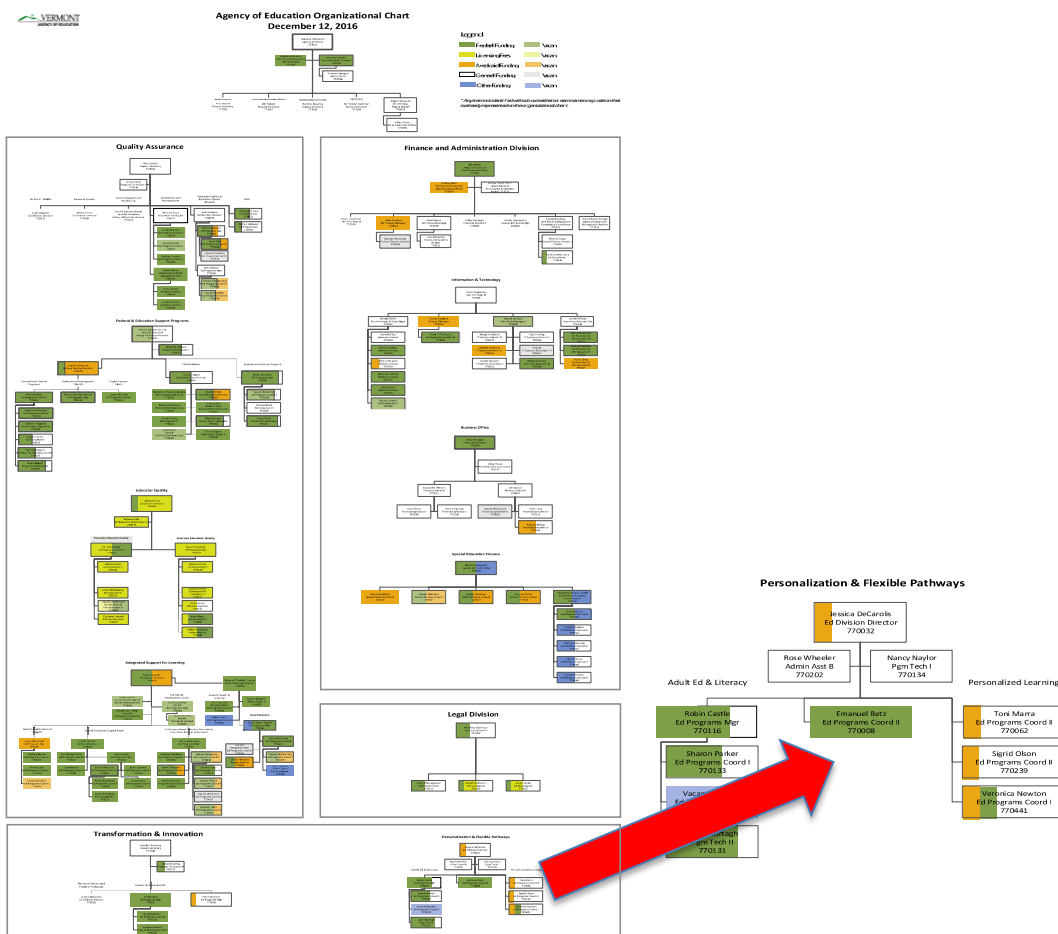
In recent years, school systems have been tasked with implementation of Act 77 (Flexible Pathways), Act 46 (Governance Reform), Act 166 (PK, subject to oversight by both CDD and AOE), Act 153 (consolidation of special education services at the SU level), the new VT Education Quality Standards and the new federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). At the same time, due to spending caps, declining enrollments, growing need for student supports, and public pressure, school systems face strong pressure to contain costs and develop more efficient and resilient ways to ensure access for all students to quality education and supports.

Current AOE initiatives related to Extended Learning:

As presented on other occasions, many districts support extended learning opportunities, primarily using education funds, federal funds and Medicaid dollars. These opportunities include summer programs and extended days, and often provide children with access to federally supported food programs. By design, these programs typically have a strong learning component, but take advantage of other contexts and novel opportunities to engage children in academic, social and emotional learning. For example, some programs use circus arts to deliberately cultivate 21st century skills and collaboration.

The state currently makes no state level investment at the AOE to support state level efforts to advance extended learning. Fortunately, the Federal Government has been supporting ELOs in Vermont for some time. The primary extended learning opportunity at the state level is the 21C program, which sits in our Flexible Pathways and Personalization Team. This is a fully federally funded position. Since the Federal Government provides the funds, they must be distributed in a way that is consistent with federal guidelines and the funds must be monitored. The Federal Government pays for the cost of the monitoring.

As we've previously shared, the federally funded 21C model provides an exceptional, proven mechanism for ensuring the safeguards and responsible spending, while ensuring that resources are targeted at communities with high need.



Governor's proposed investment in Extended learning

The Governor is committed to the goals of affordability, growing the economy and protecting the vulnerable. To that end, in the budget he submitted to the legislature, the Governor proposed several investments in extended learning:

- Section **E.517(2)** specifies \$200,000 for establishing code camp grants for elementary and middle school students. These camps are meant to encourage science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education at an early age, in a novel and innovative context, consistent with the Governor's commitment to career readiness and growing the economy and exposing students to new and applied ways of learning. Because these will be "camp" experiences, they will necessarily take place outside of regular school time, either after school or during the summer. The AOE proposes to target these investments towards programs that actively recruit and support our most vulnerable youth.

- Section **E.517(1)** appropriates \$500,000 to establish annual classroom innovation grants for educators from PK through high school. Section **E.504.1** sets aside \$200,000 for secondary school reform grants. As stewards of taxpayer dollars, we have recently been investing in collaborative work between K-12 educators and expanded learning providers (e.g., current grant opportunity using Flexible Pathway funds) and plan to continue that work moving forward. Linking classroom work and proficiency-based learning/graduation requirements with out-of-school experiences is a critical part of the Flexible Pathways work at the AOE. Of necessity, some of these opportunities occur outside regular school hours. Some portion of the referenced dollars could support access to extended learning opportunities.
- AOE's "Integrating Expanded Learning Opportunities into Personalized Learning Plans and Flexible Pathways to Graduation" initiative provides up to \$150,000 and is designed to foster partnerships between expanded learning providers and local schools and districts.

Recommendations relative to H. 270

The AOE is grateful for the committee's interest in ELOs and for its work to raise attention to and elevate the importance of extended opportunities to learn.

To ensure the resilience, efficiency and quality of the proposed work, AOE recommends deferring enactment until completion of a sustainability study and plan by a subcommittee of the House Education committee and JFO, which evaluates:

1. Total costs associated with:
 - a. creating a new, parallel organizational and reporting structure, tasked with complex work, as specified in the proposed bill,
 - b. available general fund resources to support continued implementation in an increasingly resource constrained environment.
2. The effectiveness and efficiency of creating new parallel infrastructure and entities supported by state dollars, given evidence of existing underutilization of local assets for this purpose and given existing channels and practices for disbursing grants
3. The adequacy of existing capacity and resources at the AOE to support new unfunded mandates
4. Explore and identify ways to incentivize and/or fully leverage existing state resources and assets to efficiently expand access to ELOs without increasing costs

5. The impact of a 1-1 match on equity: do all regions have the same capacity to raise matching funds?

Evaluate the impact on the AOE of:

1. Establishing and staffing another board to be supported by AOE staff and presumably with existing AOE general fund (e.g., for stipends to legislators)
2. Expanding data collection and reporting tasks that will have to be funded by the AOE and executed by the AOE, with no additional funding
3. Tasking AOE with developing and providing professional development
4. Asking AOE to support outreach to philanthropic and business communities in Vermont to pursue and accept grants or other funding from any public or private source for the ELO Special Fund, as well as managing receipt, disbursement, reporting and monitoring of those funds. (Note: “monitoring” has a specific meaning in the context of supervising use of state dollars, and we are not aware of a case where it is done by boards)