



Vermont  
Superintendents  
Association

To: House Education Committee  
From: Jeff Francis, Executive Director, Vermont Superintendents Association  
Re: Act 166 Implementation  
Date: January 13, 2017

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you this morning.

On February 25, 2016 I testified before the House Education Committee on the implementation status of Acts 46,166 (universal access to PreK education) and 77 (flexible pathways). At the time, I indicated that other than Act 46, Act 166 and Act 77 were the most significant pieces of education-related legislation enacted in the last several years. I continue to believe that to be true.

In that testimony, I reiterated that the Vermont Superintendents Association strongly supports publicly funded early childhood education, had strongly supported Act 62 and strongly supported legislation that ultimately became Act 166. VSA continues to support public investment in early education. Superintendents, as educational leaders, recognize full well the benefits of PreK education and the investments necessary to achieve it.

Superintendents also understand full well the challenges of achieving the efficient, effective and affordable delivery of education and other publicly financed services. They strive to make school systems work for children, communities and taxpayers. The school systems that they lead are being asked to fulfill an ever-increasing array of duties and responsibilities.

Information from the Vermont Agency of Education indicates that in FY2016, Vermont taxpayers supported publicly funded PreK education in the amount of \$32 million. In addition, nearly \$30 million was spent to fund special services for early learners.

One key theme of my testimony last spring was that Act 166 required careful implementation, that it should be monitored for effective implementation, and that the General Assembly (and, by extension, the responsible agencies, public and private pre-k providers and advocates) should be open to adjusting the law and its implementation based on well-reasoned evaluation and analysis.

My testimony on Act 166 included some early observations from superintendents regarding interests, concerns and cautionary notes. I am providing a copy of my February 25 testimony with references to Act 166 highlighted.

Now, in January 2017, Governor Phil Scott, through Executive Order No.01-17, has directed all state agency secretaries and department commissioners to utilize their powers, duties, and programs to pursue the following strategic and operational goals: 1) Growing the Economy; 2) Making Vermont an affordable place to live, work and do business; and 3) Protecting vulnerable Vermonters.

Act 166, through the goals of improving access to, and the delivery of, early childhood education, supports attainment of all three goals.

To ensure that Act 166 is responding to those goals most effectively, a thorough, fair and ongoing review of the implementation of the Act is in order. The review should be an objective evaluation, not an advocacy event. Advocacy for investment in early learning is necessary and appropriate, but it is not a substitute for objective evaluation.

The Vermont Superintendents Association will actively participate in the evaluation process. VSA wants to contribute to the overall success of Vermont's early learning strategies.

To prepare for this testimony, and to obtain a point in time perspective from superintendents on Act 166 implementation, I conducted a short survey of superintendents.

I sent out the survey on January 9 and asked for responses by January 11

I asked four questions:

- What is working well in your system with respect to Act 46 implementation?
- What challenges is your system experiencing with respect to Act 46 implementation?
- What specific recommendations can you make to address those challenges?
- Please share any additional thoughts on Act 46 implementation.

Despite the short response time, I received 14 responses. The superintendents who responded represented all regions of Vermont and all sizes and configurations of school systems.

I have provided a chart that outlines the responses. They are reported just as I received them.

You will see that there are an array of observations and opinions conveyed. I believe that these responses are representative and should be taken seriously by policy makers, implementers and advocates alike. They most certainly can be subject to evaluation - but the fact that these are the responses signals that a review of the implementation of Act 166 is in order.

School districts are a tremendously important partner in the implementation of Act 166 and Vermont's early learning delivery system. In many ways, they have the greatest responsibility in the implementation of the law. The voice of local school officials regarding this Act and how to improve it should be sought out by state policy makers, listened to, and taken seriously.

Thank you.