

Study of Vermont State Funding for Special Education

House Education Committee

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Hello and thank you for the opportunity to comment on the University of Vermont's Study of Vermont State Funding for Special Education.

The Vermont Superintendents Association does yet not have an official position on the study or its recommendations.

The Association does have a meeting scheduled for next Thursday, January 18 and we have included time on the agenda for a review of the findings of the study.

Even though we do not have a formal position, I am prepared to offer some remarks from my perspective of Executive Director, and a long-time participant in Vermont's education policy arena.

First, when in the process of deciding public policy, decision makers have an opportunity to improve the utilization of monetary resources in support of better practice and greater efficiency, the opportunity should not be missed.

The genesis of the evaluation of the funding system was based in a belief that Vermont's current system of funding special education was not especially well-matched to best practice educationally and best use of resources.

In the report itself, and in the response outlined by the Vermont Council of Special Education Administrators, there are recognitions (among others):

- That while the current funding method has provided a predictable source of special education funding for districts and supervisory unions, the method is not well-aligned with other state policy priorities such as MTSS.
- Special education officials at the state and local level believe that the current formula and associated rules limit flexibility in how students are served and result in "siloed" services that are less efficient and student-centered.
- The current funding method (reimbursement model) may also incentivize the over-identification of students as special education eligible.
- Administrative costs and service are higher than they otherwise might be.

The report also calls for careful consideration of poverty adjustments in the context of the special education funding models and the necessity of an extraordinary cost reimbursement feature.

Very significantly, the report indicates that “To achieve savings without potential harmful impacts for students, a move to a census-based funding mechanism must be tightly coupled with shifts in practice and service delivery models.”

In addition to the UVM report, we also have under review now the District Management Group Report titled “Expanding and Strengthening Best-Practice Support for Students Who Struggle.”

The DMG report presents finding on current practices in Vermont schools and makes recommendations for improving those practices.

This is an opportune time to call on experts working at the district and state level to integrate that findings of these reports and develop a plan of action to accomplish an improved funding system and improved services.

Finally, I want to stress that the focus of the work of the Vermont Superintendents Association currently is on improving the systems through which education is delivered in Vermont and developing the most equitable systems we can achieve. The attainment of those goals will rely on doing things differently, and the UVM study and the DMG study provide useful recommendations in that regard.

Thank you.