

DMG Report

Our school district was one of the district chosen for this year's study. I will reflect on how the study and been received and how our district is moving forward. Before I begin with specifics though I want to say that consolidation of our districts is making a big difference in the administration's capacity to do this work. Having one school board instead of 5 or 6 really allows the superintendent and those who work with her the time to work on change in a very thoughtful way.

- First instruction by the experts....makes a lot of sense It will take significant staff development time to focus instruction on ALL students. It will take a shift in culture not only in learning how to do it but also getting teachers to believe that they can do it.
- Additional time with experts....rethinking scheduling will be one of the major obstacles For both this area and changing first instruction will require thoughtful building of statewide capacity to help districts make this happen.
- Instruction from highly skilled teachers ...makes sense...again will need rethinking because we have become so reliant on paras.
- Creating system for supporting student behaviorsagain like the concept. Creating feelings of well being and resiliency in students will require adults who have strong sense of well being and resiliency themselves.
- Students with more intensive needs require specialized instruction from skilled experts. Inclusion is not a location. All students belong in a classroom learning with everyone....how do we make that happen with experts in instruction?
- Increase time experts spend with students....makes sense but the literature would say the experts need time for planning and collaboration as well.

How will we build the state capacity to provide the expertise to help school districts make these changes?

Special Ed Funding Study

This was very dense reading. It made me miss being a legislator taking part in these discussions. My overarching feeling is a hope that you will move very carefully as you contemplate these recommendations.

Like:

- The concept of census based funding can advance our goals of serving struggling students without identifying them as needing an IEP.
- Could be administratively less cumbersome

- Could be used in conjunction with the DMG report to improve outcomes for students
- Think using PK-12 numbers to encourage early intervention is a good idea.
- If it could lead to more student contact time with experts that would be a positive outcome.

Questions and concerns:

- The methodology for determining the census based grant amount never identifies the reasons for high per IEP student cost in Vermont.....how is it related to the fact that Vermont is a high spending state generallyshould we be using national norms to determine the grant amount?
- I would be alarmed if the state were to use a change in the funding formula to reduce state spending on Special Education. The grant seems to be determined by the number of students on IEPs....doesn't seem to recognize the cost of serving more students....one suggestion in the report is to use the difference to make grants for Tier 1 and Tier 2 supports....should this be incorporated into the grant amount? Changing the formula is not going to change practice and cost. If the state reduces the state level expenditure it will shift the cost onto the local tax rate....will special education students be targeted? Will it move many districts to exceed the excess spending threshold? There may be a way to phase this in over time in conjunction with the DMG report but it would need to be done VERY carefully.
- Should there be recognition that students with disabilities may not be evenly distributed by population.....the recommendation doesn't seem to do so yet the study acknowledges this is one of the weaknesses of using a census based funding system.
- Will there be accountability for performance? If so, will we be exchanging one burdensome paperwork system for another? Should some sort of auditing system be used?
- VERY concerned about one paragraph given to Federal Maintenance of Effort issues...hope you will give this careful consideration in deciding what to do
- Having some defined split between categorical and non-categorical use of census based funding could lead to further administrative burden and I worry that it would lead to a constant debate about what the split should be.
- I understand there may be some problems with the data....how widespread are they...can this be fixed?
- Extraordinary cost issue needs a lot of thought and perhaps further study. Has the number of students qualifying for this funding doubled because the threshold hasn't changed? Why is the number doubling when the overall population numbers are declining?
 ---the idea of incenting districts to serve students within district is intriguing but do districts have the capacity and even if they do can they do it for less....DAs get a Medicaid match that isn't available to local districts.
 ---I do think if the mechanism stays the same figuring out a way to inflate the threshold over time would be important.

---Idea of a review committee was initially appealing but I wonder if it's actually workable- perhaps if it could be used to focus on technical assistance related to best practice as opposed to approving plans it could be helpful.

---would not recommend 100% funding....too easy to justify serving a student in more expensive ways... there needs to be "skin in the game".

Thank you for inviting me to share my thoughts.

Martha Heath

Former member of Vermont House of Representatives

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