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STATE OF VERMONT
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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

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MEMORANDUM

To: Representative Kitty Toll, Chair, House Committee on Appropriations

From: Representative David Sharpe, Chair, House Committee on Education

Date: February 16, 2018

Subject: Provisions in the Governor's Proposed FY 2019 State Budget

The House Education Committee has reviewed the Governor's Proposed FY 2019 Budget and supports the education related proposals, most of which are required or standard language, including: Sec. B. 1101 (Workforce Education and Training Initiative); Sec. E. 100 (Executive Branch Position Authorizations – does not increase the total number of authorized positions); Sec. E. 502 (Special Education: Formula Grants); Sec. E. 504.1 (Flexible Pathways); Sec. E. 514 (State Teacher's Retirement System payment); Sec. E. 515 (Retired Teachers Health Care and Medical Benefits); and Sec. E. 602 (Vermont State Colleges, standard language).

Sec. E. 513 Appropriation and Transfer to Education includes a provision to retain \$200,000 of the Education Fund transfer from the General Fund. The purpose is to fund new positions at the Agency of Education to implement a centralized administration of the statewide universal pre-kindergarten program.

While the House Education Committee strongly supports additional staffing at the AOE, which has lost more than 50 positions over the past 10 years, the proposal for funding in Sec. E. 513 is an inappropriate use of the Education Fund.

It has been the practice – supported in statute – that funding needs of the AOE are paid from the General Fund. Using a reduction in the General Fund transfer to the Education Fund is equivalent to using Education Fund money for AOE needs.

Committee Funding Priorities:

The House Education Committee is currently at work on a committee bill that will improve special education service delivery as outlined in the study commissioned by the Legislature, “Expanding and Strengthening Best-Practice Supports for Students who Struggle” issued by the District Management Group in November 2017. The bill will also restructure special education funding using the recommendation of the Legislature-commissioned report “Study of Vermont State Funding for Special Education,” which was carried out by the University of Vermont for the Department of Education and issued in December 2017. The bill requires Vermont school districts to transition to the best practice recommendations of the DMG report over the course of several years while also preparing for a new funding model that will better allow them to carry out those recommendations.

These significant improvements in delivering special education services to Vermont's children will require state investment as the new model is implemented. For FY 19, the House Education Committee will seek support for technical consulting for school districts and the Agency of Education to implement the studies' recommendations. These services would be contracted.

The committee bill also proposes three additional staff positions at the AOE to provide ongoing support, training and legal advice for all school districts as they implement the changes in special education delivery. The positions would also support the AOE and school districts as Vermont transitions to a census model of special education funding as recommended in the UVM report.

The committee also supports the Governor's request for an Education Weighting Study, the information from which will help guide education funding decisions in future years.

Other Priorities

While the House Education Committee is focused on special education funding, its members continue to keep solutions to the challenges facing Vermont's young people at the forefront. These include:

- Expanded Career and Technical Education Opportunities. The Committee unanimously passed H. 504 last year, the CTE Innovation Pilot Program, which would fund CTE centers up to \$100,000 in grants to provide 7th-graders with practical CTE learning opportunities and expose them to CTE programs. The Governor's call to grow Vermont's skilled workforce highlights this critical need in our schools.
- Expanding Learning Opportunities. The House Education Committee has identified a priority for funding in the Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELO) Special Fund. The ELO Special Fund was created through legislation in 2015, but no money has yet been allocated. Quality afterschool and summer programs are in line with the Governor's top three priorities: strengthen the economy, make Vermont more affordable, and protect the most vulnerable.
- Higher Education. The committee continues to support increased investment in our state colleges and university to assure Vermonters an affordable path to a quality higher education. Vermont's inadequate support for its state colleges and university, especially in light of significant subsidies our neighboring states provide their colleges and universities, has created additional financial pressure that should be addressed. Finally, and equally important, the House Education Committee recognizes the responsibility schools have every day to serve every student. There has been a growing number of students arriving at our schools with significant needs as a result of devastating home life trauma and other adverse childhood experiences. While Vermont's mental health agencies assist as best they can, they have limited funding and must limit services. Schools cannot. They are legally obligated and have a moral imperative to address these needs, regardless of cost. As the committee that speaks to the needs of Vermont's school-age children, we must not lose sight of these most vulnerable Vermonters.