

Testimony of Jeffrey Francis
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Act 166
House Education Committee
February 2, 2017

Governor Scott's Goals

- strengthening the economy;
- making Vermont more affordable;
- And protecting the most vulnerable

Governor Scott challenged school boards to focus on improving schools; and he challenged superintendents to think creatively about how to maximize resources.

In February of 2016 I testified about challenges associated with Act 166 implementation. I followed up with testimony before this Committee last month. My testimony is on the House Education webpage.

In general, my testimony spoke to the need to review and adjust Act 166 to make it work better for school districts, qualified private providers and families, and to better respond to the goals of efficiency, affordability and making sure that children with the greatest needs had access to pre-k education.

I appreciate that the House Education Committee is considering a bill to make some useful adjustments to sections of law related to Act 166.

The bill will generate a good deal of discussion. For today, I have just four simple recommendations:

1. Designate the Agency of Education as the Agency responsible for administering all aspects of the pre-k delivery system when education fund dollars are involved. Of course, the Agency of Education can and should work with the Agency of Human Services where interests, programs and duties intersect, but school districts administering and budgeting for funding should have one primary Agency with which to work, and that should be the Agency of Education.
2. Supervisory Unions and supervisory districts should be granted the authority to establish pre-k regions and partnership arrangements with qualified private providers (through properly warned actions). This approach will provide for local determination regarding the better utilization of publicly-funded pre-k education resources. It will allow school districts and their partners to better respond to the local and regional conditions with which they are most familiar. This approach

addresses the issue of continuity and access to special education services. It also will simplify the implementation of the law and allow districts to focus on strengthening partnership arrangements and program quality.

3. Examine the nexus between publicly funded pre-k education and the costs and funding of both early care and education. This area needs more exploration, but given the goals of affordability and protecting the most vulnerable, we should be considering the interplay between early care and education with a goal of getting both to families and children with greatest need in the most affordable manner.
4. Make clear in law that public schools can assess fees for services provided in support of a partial or full day program provided as a supplement to publicly funded pre-k education (ten hours). In other words, allow school districts to charge for early childhood services (not education) that are provided in a school-based setting that are supplemental to the ten hours of education. This will allow districts to pro-actively respond in areas where there is a shortage of qualified private providers and establish programs that will serve children in full-day programs.

Thank you.