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MEMORANDUM

TO: The General Assembly
FROM: State Board of Education
SUBJECT: State Board of Education Views on Cost-containment in Education
DATE: February 22, 2018

The Vermont State Board of Education commends the Governor and those in the General Assembly who share our commitment to sustaining a high quality, efficient and equitable education system at a reasonable and economical cost.

The State Board of Education evaluates policy proposals about education in three dimensions: *equity, excellence, and efficiency*. All three dimensions are equally important: we do not choose one dimension over another. Our goal is to shape an education system in Vermont that ranks first in the nation in all three dimensions.

Impartial assessments indicate that Vermont ranks high among the states in offering equitable opportunity for all students, regardless of their social, economic, or geographic circumstance. Similarly, national ratings indicate that the quality of educational outcomes in Vermont rank consistently among the top five states in the nation.

In educational equity and excellence, Vermont is among the best in the nation. However, when it comes to *efficiency in education*, we need to get better. Can we achieve efficiency without compromising equity and excellence? Our staff-to-student ratios show the largest proportion of staff in the nation, and our per-student costs are high. Our state faces many urgent problems that will burden our fiscal capacity. Guided by our commitment to equity, excellence, and efficiency, the State Board of Education advocates seven approaches to reform:

- 1. Implement reforms over a five-year period.** Set benchmarks along the way, and establish clear destination expectations. Give communities the time, 'best practices,' and resources at the Agency of Education they need to devise their own thoughtful solutions to achieve efficiency.



2. **Build on Act 46/49.** Support consolidations to create instructional efficiencies, to broaden course offerings, and to advance equitable access to quality education.
3. **Use Integrated Field Reviews (IFRs).** The IFR process will be used to identify underperforming or inefficient schools as per 16 V.S.A. Section 165.
4. **Reduce student-staff ratio thoughtfully.** Agree on phased staff-reduction guidelines at the state level, and allow local governing bodies to determine the best way to achieve them.
5. **Centralize administrative work at the AOE.** Adding one or more positions at the AOE could centralize data collection and administrative tasks to create consistency, equity, and efficiency.
6. **Improve special education delivery and funding.** Re-align how special education is funded, and improve it by giving special education students greater access to highly trained teachers, interventionists, and coaches. Strengthen early intervention.
7. **Strengthen voters' awareness of the tax impacts of their local spending decisions.** Simplify the current arcane and opaque funding formula while protecting Vermont's commitment to equity and progressivity.
8. **Resist the temptation to impose new educational mandates on schools.** Already overburdened, educators and administrators need and deserve time to incorporate and stabilize innovations of the last several years.

The State Board of Education believes that when the state works with community educators, administrators, and school boards, Vermonters together can shape a system of education for all our children that is foremost in the nation in equity, excellence and efficiency.