



VERMONT PRINCIPALS' ASSOCIATION  
MEMO  
From the Desk of Jay Nichols

To: House Education Committee

Subject: Response to Draft Special Education Funding Bill *dr req 18-0693 – draft 3.1*

Date: January 31, 2018

Dear House Education Committee Members,

As I've previously stated to this committee, I support the move from a special education reimbursement model to a census-based model with extra protections for places with high levels of poverty and for students for whom programming requires extraordinary cost.

Ample time for experts to study this issue and make sure that local school systems understand how to implement research-based best practices in order to take full advantage of a census-model is necessary in order to provide the best resources available to ensure improved learning outcomes for all students especially our most struggling learners.

Some specific points:

- The bill as written appears to provide schools with maximum flexibility for use of 70% of the funds with State Board rules being required for spending of the other

30%. This concerns me that potentially onerous rules could be developed to access the 30% and make things cumbersome and less effective similar to how the entire reimbursement model is today. 100% of the flexibility should be given to the Supervisory Union or Supervisory District. Let's not throw up any roadblocks to meaningful and effective instructional practices replacing current status quo.

- A committee of stakeholders that really understand these issues should be convened to provide proper implementation. This should be led by the AOE and appropriate resources need to be provided to the AOE to make sure this occurs
- The 2-tier extraordinary cost reimbursement is worth examining and I commend the committee for looking at that. However, study needs to take place to make sure the proposed thresholds make sense. I also think a built-in inflation indicator should be considered. The current one-size-fits-all \$50,000 threshold has been around as long as I can remember, let's put in place something that will adjust with economic conditions in the state
- The census-based amount in general should have some type of inflation factor in it before 2028. I'm concerned with waiting a decade. Further, I question the wisdom of setting statutory per ADM Grant numbers more than a year or two in advance. It may be more prudent to look at the numbers every year or two to make sure the shift in funding is providing the outcomes we desire (the numbers as outlined in the UVM study could serve as benchmarks for consideration)
- The continued focus on the Supervisory Union/Supervisory District being the entity of authority as opposed to single school districts within a larger structure is the right policy approach and is consistent with recent legislation and rules (including Act 46 goals)
- Changing the payments to SU's to twice a year makes sense and should relieve some administrative burden (educational support grant)
- When looking at special education student results, either allow the mechanism for this to be decided at the AOE level or use student scale scores comparing the student to him or herself over a year's period of time. Do not judge based on an artificial proficiency cut score whether or not a student is making satisfactory academic progress