

Testimony Provided to: House Education Committee
From: Noah Everitt VT NEA member and Special Educator
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Over my 14 years working with children with disabilities, the model of support has changed, best practices have changed and now funding may also change. I have worked in diverse roles including 1:1 support for students with behavioral and learning challenges, as well as case management and program planning. **Always, the goal has been how can we provide more high quality instruction to more students.**

Reading the proposed bill for a shift in special education, from a reimbursement model to a census block grant model initially gave me pause. However, I believe that additional flexibility in how we educate students together is good for all students, but especially meaningful for students with disabilities. When I worked in Winooski, limited space and resources as well as a concentration of need forced difficult solutions to the problems of cost containment and service provision. When I worked with Students with Autism for the Howard Center, I collaborated with general educators and specialists around exceptionally funded students. Now in South Burlington I work co-teaching general education 9th grade English, designed to be inclusive of all learners.

I have enjoyed each of these distinct challenges because I love to teach. Not only do I love to teach, but I love to see the effect and inclusive community can have for all students. Special education is a measure of our society's ability to empathize and adapt. Now more than ever we need to recenter on our values in education, but also in the lessons we can learn from those who are at the most risk in our society. Our youth, and specifically our diverse youth.

After reading the DMG study, as an educator I have three considerations which give me pause:

- The implications section of this document seems to entirely ignore the complexity of holistic student centered education. In my experience it is rare that a student struggles with only reading, or writing or Math. Or that there is a simple one service which will remediate the struggles the student is facing.
- The recommendations for both elementary and secondary school lack the depth of understanding of complexity of scheduling as it relates to student behavior- How will students who struggle to read feel doing an additional 30 minutes of reading as opposed to ARt or Music? How will a classroom function at math time, with a student with ADHD who had to miss PE- to read, cannot sit still? At the secondary level, how will a student learn to pursue social justice if they have double reading, math blocks? IEP teams make these decisions with parents because parents are the experts on their child, there are only so many minutes in the day.
- Finally, In the implications sections the report states: "These recommendations assume the effort will be done on a multi-Supervisory Union and state-wide scale."- Given the constraints of act 46 and the initiatives in Proficiency based graduation, this seems a momentous undertaking for the AOE.

This does not mean I do not support the best practice recommendations, outlined in the report, only that I do not believe they will lead to the savings desired. Please consider this fact:

What we view as the minimum amount of learning for a high school graduate today has greatly increased, and continues to as new technology allows us access to greater and greater amounts of information. However, who we are as humans Biologically, has not changed. Nor has the amount of time we are investing in education of our youth.

Recommendations about best practice can be helpful, but I do not believe that general educators, special educators, or paraprofessionals have been holding back their expertise. Additional highly qualified content area coaches may be able to provide additional remediation to skill deficits, but despite assurances around economies of scale I do not see these as cost saving measures. I feel confident in saying that any teacher would testify that we are not currently able to meet the needs of the students we serve as we would wish to.

From my reading, I believe the evidence remains crystal clear. The best way to spend less money educating students with and without disabilities is to educate them more successfully earlier. The DMG study itself notes this fact. Intensive early child find and public education for all students Birth to 7 is the most promising area for investment, and has been for decades.

I say this with sadness, as I am a high school educator with bad knees and those chairs are just too small....