



VERMONT PRINCIPALS' ASSOCIATION  
MEMO  
From the Desk of Jay Nichols

To: House Education Committee

Subject: S. 261 Trauma Amendment

Date: April 19, 2018

Dear House Education Committee Members,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to provide my thoughts on the proposed amendment.

Here are the points I would like to share:

- I am, in general, supportive of the addition of questions in the Youth Risk Behavior Survey around adverse childhood experiences (ACE's). This is data that should be collected in some form and self-reporting via the survey that is already used probably makes sense. Additionally, sharing information in aggregate with the public so that citizens begin to understand the depth of the trauma that our students walk into the school house every day with is important for the citizenry to understand.

- Model Plan:
  - Having a model plan developed at the state level makes sense
    - Requiring that schools adopt that plan or a plan that is at least as rigorous should not be mandated at the state level
    - Where are the resources coming from to provide the training necessary for schools to be “trauma informed?” This is potentially a tremendous cost for school systems both in terms of economics in providing for training and the amount of time staff will need to be appropriately trained
- It is critical to provide the training necessary for all staff to implement a new trauma informed system
  - See same concerns as above
- Licensing Changes
  - It worries me anytime we add additional requirements to licensing. If we make these changes we need to be very clear what this means for practitioners. What programming will be in place to make sure educators receive the training they need? Who pays for this cost? Are we looking at a microcredentialing model?

Some more general thoughts:

Every day, I hear from principals who tell me that they have students exhibiting challenging behaviors like never before. The number of students in our state that are homeless, living in poverty, food insecure, facing abusive home lives, living with drug addicted parents, and so on is at a crisis point. Schools are increasingly serving functions that they are not designed to manage. Without significant resources in preventive programming, both within schools and in society in general, I worry that schools will continue to be put into a position in which they are pulled in so many directions and taking care of so many societal issues that their main focus of student learning often takes a back seat to making sure our students have what they need to be emotionally and physically safe.

Abraham Maslow wrote his seminal work on motivation that shared the Hierarchy of Needs in 1943. Kids today, just as they did then, need to feel safe and have a sense of belonging in order to be successful academically. Schools have a major role in this but they can't do it alone. And they certainly can't provide the supports students need to be ready to learn without the resources. One of the reasons our staff to student ratio is so low in VT is because schools are trying to respond to our ever increasingly trauma distressed student populations.