

TESTIMONY PROVIDED TO: House Education Committee
FROM: Karin Edwards, Deputy Agency of Education
TOPIC: SWIFT Special Education Funding Study
DATE: February 2, 2017

Legislation

Act 179 of 2014. *An act relating to making appropriations for the support of government*

Link to complete text of legislation on Vermont Legislature website:

<http://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Documents/2014/Docs/ACTS/ACT179/ACT179%20As%20Enacted.pdf>.

Objective of Pilot

Sec. E.500.7 SPECIAL EDUCATION EXPENDITURES; PILOT PROGRAM; REPORT

- (a) There is created a three-year pilot program designed to encourage reduced special education expenditures through the use of best practices to provide special education services in the general classroom setting. Pursuant to a process and criteria to be developed by the Secretary of Education and based upon the Schoolwide Integrated Framework for Transformation (SWIFT), the districts comprising the four supervisory unions currently engaged in implementing the SWIFT model may expend special education mainstream block grant funds received pursuant to 16 V.S.A. § 2961 in a manner other than as required by State Board of Education Rule 2366.2.
- (b) To be eligible for the pilot program, all districts within a supervisory union shall submit a joint application providing information prescribed by the Secretary on or before September 1, 2014. The joint application shall:

- (1) describe how the districts' special education spending plan under the SWIFT model will be less costly than special education spending without using the SWIFT model;
- (2) describe how the districts will serve students on individual education programs in a general classroom setting using the SWIFT model;
- (3) describe the manner in which the districts shall measure student performance; and
- (4) demonstrate how the use of the SWIFT model shall result in fewer students found to be in need of special education services at the end of the three-year pilot program.

(c) Beginning in 2015, annually on or before January 15 for the duration of the pilot program, the Secretary shall submit a report to the House and Senate Committees on Education, the House Committee on Ways and Means, and the Senate Committee on Finance regarding the results of the pilot project and any recommendations for legislative action.

(d) This section is repealed on July 1, 2017.

Brief Overview of SWIFT

SWIFT is a national center funded by the Office of Special Education Programs. The focus of the SWIFT work is equity and excellence for all students. The center is working with five states to support implementation of the SWIFT framework in a selected number of schools in each state. The SWIFT

framework has five domains: Leadership, Tiered Systems of Academic and Behavior Supports, Inclusive Academic Practices, Family and Community Engagement and Policy. An initial focus of the SWIFT Center was on inclusive, effective and efficient delivery of special education. This has broadened to a focus on all students.

Vermont initially had two SUs funded by SWIFT and two that were state funded. When one of the two state funded SU decided not to continue, we were unable to continue with the other state funded SU.

Summary of Pilot Results

Year 1: School Year 2014 – 2015

Four supervisory unions were eligible for and applied for the funding pilot: Grand Isle Supervisory Union, Franklin Northwest Supervisory Union, Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union and Windham Southeast Supervisory Union. After learning more about the pilot, Grand Isle Supervisory Union and Windham Southeast Supervisory Union chose to take advantage of the funding flexibility. The other two supervisory unions did not.

Windham Southeast Supervisory Union (WSESU) used the funds to provide professional development to classroom teachers in two evidence-based behavioral practices, positive behavior supports and Applied Behavioral Analysis practices to teach replacement behaviors.

Changes in student outcomes were seen in improvement in literacy and math, increased time in the classroom, decreases in behaviors interfering with learning and decreases in out of district referrals for elementary schools.

Grand Isle Supervisory Union (GISU) used the block grant funds to strengthen tiered systems of support in both academics and behavior in individual schools. The funds allowed individual schools to have special educators working with students who were not eligible for special education but who were struggling academically and/or behaviorally in addition to students with IEPs.

Academic outcomes for students were measured by assessments included in the SUs Local Comprehensive Assessment System. Behavioral outcomes were measured using Office Discipline Referral information collected for each school's Positive Behavior Intervention and Support system. For students eligible for special education progress towards meeting IEP goals were also measured.

Improved outcomes were seen in several areas. Office Discipline Referrals decreased which resulted in students spending more time engaging in classroom instruction and increasing the time teachers spent instructing rather than managing behaviors. Assessment results also indicated that student comprehension of grade level material increased.

Year 2

Two supervisory Unions were eligible for the funding pilot during the 2015 – 2016 school year. Grand Isle Supervisory Union took advantage of the opportunity for a third year. Franklin Northwest again chose not to do this. There was concern about using special education funds for non-special education services and in this SU many of the practices the funding might have been used for are already in place.

In Grand Isle Supervisory Union the block grant funds were used to allow special education teachers to provide targeted interventions to students who did not have IEPs as well as those on IEPs. This is a continuation of what was done in year 1.

Improved outcomes were again seen in a reduction of the number of students referred to the principal for disciplinary reasons. Based on the common local assessments used in the SU students also showed increases in comprehension of grade level material.

Changes in Special Education Child Count and Spending

In GISU the number of students eligible for special education decreased during the 2014 – 2015 school year. There was an increase in the 2015 – 2016 school year. The increase was attributed to students with IEPs who moved into the SU and an increased number of state placed students with IEPs who were placed in the SU.