

TESTIMONY PROVIDED TO: VT Senate Committee on Education

FROM: Crista Yagjian (VT educator and parent of a child with Down syndrome)

TOPIC: H. 897 - *An Act Relating to Enhancing the Effectiveness, Availability and Equity of Services to Students Who Require Additional Support*

DATE: March 22, 2018

Background:

My name is Crista Yagjian. I live in Guilford, Vermont. I am a licensed special educator and reading specialist who has worked with elementary-aged students for over fifteen years. As part of my work, I have participated in many school initiatives and committees. I have been a standing EST (education support team) member, an active school leadership team member, and a school leader as part of our district's involvement with SWIFT (School-Wide, Integrated, Framework for Transformation). I am also parent to a vivacious 9 year old son named Nate.

Concerns:

- It isn't clear that this opportunity is a way to improve education for *all* students rather than primarily being a cost saving measure.
- My worry is that this flexibility in funding could over-burden the teachers required by law to meet the needs of students identified as needing special education. We don't want to "water down" specialized instruction.
- Schools at the local levels need the capacity (financial capacity) to implement the recommendations in the DMG report. Targeted technical assistance from the AOE won't be enough. What I hear from my colleagues is that they need money for interventionists, flexible funding for professional development, and funding to get curricula resources.
- An advisory group has to include parents and teachers.
- There needs to be a bigger conversation about how we get our students the mental health supports they need.
- There needs to be a system for evaluating equity of resources across districts (How to do you ensure equity in students' educational experiences in our state?) - The reality of the small school's constraints are real.

Hopes:

- Slow this process down -Please don't leave my child behind.
- Strengthen education quality- Know the reality of providing "rigorous gen ed"
- Focus on the process for establishing effective service delivery models - Give us time to build our houses, starting with our "foundations."
- Establish a process for continuing to get input from "those on the ground."

