



VERMONT PRINCIPALS' ASSOCIATION  
MEMO  
From the Desk of Jay Nichols

To: Senate Education Committee

Subject: Testimony Special Education: H.897

Date: March 16, 2018

Dear Senate Education Committee Members,

Please accept this testimony on H.897

“An act relating to enhancing the effectiveness, availability, and equity of services provided to students who require additional support.” My thoughts are outlined below via sections of the bill.

Section 1

- I agree with the findings and conclusions.  
To Wit, Supervisory Unions need to utilize best practices in educating all students; the current special education funding mechanism actually serves as a deterrent to the utilization of best instructional practices by providing disincentives in allocation of human resources  
(e.g.1. best math teachers not providing math instruction to neediest students because they can't be reimbursed for special education services)  
(e.g. 2. Paraprofessionals providing direct service in reteach/intervention times instead of highly trained teachers as a result of the incentives provided in the reimbursement system)

## Supporting Leaders & Learners

### Section 2 Goals

- Moving from a reimbursement model to a census model will allow school leaders, special educators, and classroom teachers to better utilize resources in common sense approaches aligned with best instructional practices. The cumbersome burden of worrying about funding sources and bureaucratic red tape that hinders the ability of educators to move nimbly to provide the best educational services possible to all students, especially those that are struggling academically, will be greatly reduced in a census model.
- Extra staffing to the AOE to make sure this transition is effective at the field level is critical

### Section 3 Early Implementation

- I am generally supportive of allowing those systems ready, willing, and able to implement a census-based funding system for the 2019-2020 school year to do so. Having early adopters can provide information for other systems that follow.

### Section 4 Changes to Current Special Education Law

- I support all SU's moving to Census-based funding.
  - This is an aggressive timeline – full implementation 2020-2021. I would be more comfortable with an extended timeline that would allow for more training from the AOE/DMG and others to the field, I worry about the transition being rushed
  - Eliminates much of the reporting that is time consuming and necessary in a reimbursement model that does nothing for student learning or resource allocation. (E.g. Service Plan, Time Studies, etc.) This is a big positive step in the right direction
- Adjusts the Extraordinary Cost Reimbursement system that has not been changed for a long time. Whether the numbers in the bill are the right numbers or not I don't know but I do think it is in the state's overall best interest to address this minimum threshold for Extraordinary Cost
- Whatever changes take place it will be critical to make sure the state stays in compliance with federal provisions related to maintenance of effort in relationship to special education spending at the local and state level.

### Section 9: Advisory Group

- This makes sense. I would like to see it have some authority

### Section 10 & 11 Weighting

- Supportive of this in general and especially component of contracting with an organization that understands Vermont's funding system

## Supporting Leaders & Learners

### Section 12: Consulting Services

- Supportive of this. School systems will need assistance in moving away from the cumbersome instructional services delivery model that Vermont has utilized for 40 plus years and implementing systems predicated on providing high quality, real time, support to students regardless of student “category”

### Section 13: AOE Staff Support

- The VPA is 100% supportive of providing this staffing at the Agency of Education. Making a change to a Census-based model and simply leaving schools to figure it out for themselves is not a wise course of action. It is paramount that the AOE play a leading role in this transition. In order to accomplish this effectively the AOE will need at least the staffing resources called for in this bill

### Section 14 & 15: Extraordinary Services

- As stated earlier, I’m not sure this is the right number (\$60,000) or right reimbursement amount (95%) but I think they are both a step in the right direction. I would rather have 100% paid for above some number at the state level and have some type of scale but this is simpler

### Concluding Thoughts

- Moving from a reimbursement model to a census-based model (provided it is funded sufficiently) will be more effective instructionally and allow for more efficient use of resources. Superintendents, Special Education Administrators, and Principals will be able to make decisions that are best for students without having to waste staff time with bureaucratic paperwork compliance exercises that hinder, rather than support, student learning.
- The more flexibility we provide to, and the more barriers we remove from, educators in the field the better we will be able to address the needs of our “students who require additional supports.”
- Special education costs are increasing at a rate that is disproportional to regular education spending increases. Moving to a census model is very likely to slow spending growth in special education freeing up resources and/or reducing cost increases overall.