

Testimony on H 897

Senate Education Committee

April 10, 2018

Vermont-NEA supports the premise of H 897; “enhancing the effectiveness, availability, and equity of services provided to students who require additional support.”

There are some concerns and questions we believe should be reviewed as you move forward with this bill:

- P. 4 The identification of a “student who needs support” includes students not on an IEP or 504 plan, potentially increasing the caseload of the special education department. Does this mean there will be more students in need of these supports, with less funding available overall, because of the census-based block grant?
- P. 8 The Educational Support Team (EST) would include both instructional and behavioral interventions as a part of the Multi-Tiered Support System (MTSS). If a school does not have a behavioral interventionist (BI), how would the school provide support for students with behavioral challenges?
- P. 9 Teachers would receive assistance “to plan for and provide services and accommodations to students in need of classroom supports or enrichment activities.” Many teachers already provide individualized instruction for their students in the regular classroom. What kind of assistance would be provided so that they may address the needs of these struggling students? This change would add more teacher planning time and more individualized instruction for these students, possibly taking more time away from the regular classroom students. Currently, the special educator plans for the supplementary or alternative activities, in consultation with the regular education teacher.
- P. 10 Who would report to the Secretary of Education as to the ways the educational support system has addressed the needs of the students?
- P. 14 Is the “Supplemental Adjustment” the avenue through which school districts go to secure more funding for the special education program if they find that the block grant does not adequately address the needs of those students who need support? Or, would a supervisory union be obligated to use funding from the general education budget to fulfill its special education obligations, thereby shorting programming for regular education students?
- P.19 Do the independent schools receiving funding to meet the needs of its special education population comply with the special education rules that the public schools follow?
- P. 23 Is there a reason why “hard of hearing” is used instead of, hearing impaired?
- P. 28 How will “the consistency of special education program implementation statewide” and the “status of tiered systems of supports” be measured?
- P. 34 The Census-Based Funding Advisory Group has only one member who is a special educator in the field, and does not include the Executive Director of Vermont-NEA, when other member organizations include an executive director. Vermont-NEA represents practitioners. Because

these changes have a direct impact on special educators, it is important to include them in any groups making recommendations. Some of these members listed in the advisory group could report to the superintendent representative, and she would then bring these reports to the advisory group, allowing for more practitioners to participate without expanding the number in the group.

- P. 40 “Training for educators in best practices for the delivery of special education services.” Is this for regular classroom teachers, or more training for special educators? Will there be extensive training to meet the needs of students who are living with adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)? Many of the students with behavioral challenges are suffering from ACEs and require mental health services, along with educational services. Is there a mechanism to support school-based mental health services for these students, with the expectation that early intervention would minimize the number of students with behavioral challenges, thereby reducing the number of special education students?

The State Board of Education will be charged with many responsibilities. Is there any consideration of support for the State Board as they work on the implementation of this major change in the delivery of special education services?

Respectfully submitted,

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