

TESTIMONY PROVIDED TO: Senate Health and Welfare Committee

FROM: Karin Edwards, Director, Integrated Support for Learning Division

TOPIC: S.90 Adverse Childhood and Family Experiences

DATE: March 29, 2017

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**Legislation**

S. 90: An act relating to coordinating Vermont's response to adverse childhood and family experiences.

**Comments**

S. 90 proposes an approach to prevention and treatment of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and adverse family experiences (AFEs). It creates a Director of Trauma-Informed Systems at the Agency of Human Services (AHS) to lead and coordinate the work of redesigning health care, including mental health; education; child care and the criminal justice system in a manner that is trauma informed in order to prevent and treat ACEs and AFEs. The following comments on the current version of S. 90 are offered from an educational perspective and describe current efforts that support this work.

- Title 16 and the Education Quality Standards require all schools to have tiered systems of supports (MTSS) that are designed to meet the needs of all students and to respond to the level of intensity of the need with an appropriate level of support. Trauma-informed practices can be included at all levels of intensity within a tiered system. There are existing national models to inform this work.
- Vermont's Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) initiative currently works in 52 Supervisory Unions/Districts. PBIS is a tiered system of supports for behavior that easily incorporates trauma-informed practices. PBIS trainings for the past two years have included training on trauma-informed practices. In addition, mental health staff working in schools are able to participate in PBIS leadership teams and provide social-emotional supports at all tiers of a PBIS system.
- Early MTSS is a preschool model of a tiered system that is in the process of being scaled up in Vermont public and private preschools and child care centers. It incorporates an evidence-based model for addressing social and emotional development of young children. The pyramid model trains the adults who work with young children how to structure an environment, interact and support students in a way that promotes healthy social and emotional development and resilience.
- Success Beyond Six provides a funding mechanism for mental health and school staff to work together to address the educational, behavioral and treatment needs of our students. Many of these children have experienced ACEs. During the 2015-2016 school year there were 674 full time equivalent mental health staff working in schools.
- Act 264 provides a long standing regional and state level structure that could be valuable in addressing both ACEs and AFEs. Last year staff from the Agency of Education and the Department of Mental Health studied issues related to childhood trauma and submitted a report on the findings and recommendations to the legislature. Follow up work on the recommendations of that report are currently in planning stages and the intent is to involve the MTSS workgroup at AOE more directly in that work.

A report prepared by the Vermont Council of Special Education Administrators in 2014 estimated the special education expenditure in Vermont for mental health services at \$43,050,449.70. The effort at creating a trauma informed school system in Vermont is not new and is well underway. I urge the committee to consider this work and not create a new initiative for Vermont schools.

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