

AOE Testimony: H.668 Draft 3.2

Testimony To: House Committee on Education
Respectfully Submitted by: Ted Fisher, Director of Communications and Leg. Affairs
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AOE Position on Draft 3.2 of H.668

The Vermont Agency of Education (AOE) supports the bill and the grant program proposed in [Draft 3.2 of H.668](#). As Secretary French and Deputy Secretary Bouchey have outlined, we share the goal of focusing on improving literacy outcomes as a central focus of the state's work in response to Act 173 of 2018.

AOE would like to see the following changes to the bill, which are either small edits or add in provisions that appeared in earlier drafts:

- Amend 16 V.S.A. § 261a (Duties of Supervisory Union Boards) to include a new requirement for an annual evaluation of superintendent job performance including goals for improving student literacy outcomes.
- Require student dyslexia screening in Kindergarten.
- Adjust timelines of the grant process to avoid unnecessary delay.

Capacity and Timeline Concerns

The AOE believes the timelines in the bill can be solidified and simplified by stating specific dates for milestones.

- The Advisory Group should be required to inform the AOE of which members will work on the grant process by **July 1, 2020**.
 - **Concern (timeline):** The AOE is mindful of the chronology this bill is most likely to take, and concerned about the time pressure these deadlines will place on the Advisory Group, which meets only monthly and will be hard pressed to select its three members in time to allow meaningful collaboration to take place prior to the deadline.
- The grant application and supporting materials should be published to the field on **August 1, 2020**.
 - This gives administrative teams several weeks prior to the start of the school year to work on applications. The Advisory Group members can supply feedback on how long the grant application should remain open. The AOE's normal practice is six weeks.
- The grant awards should be made on or before **October 1, 2020**.
 - **Concern (timeline and capacity):** The timeline as currently written, of 10 business days, is not sufficient to complete paperwork with grantee SU/SDs. Signatures are required by the grantee parties and the AOE, and SU/SDs routinely need more time to complete the process. Furthermore, the AOE's grant process currently allows

SU/SDs to obligate funds after an award is finalized, with the AOE reimbursing for costs. SU/SDs need to know whether they will receive a grant during their early budget planning.

- The second year of funding should be made available on or before **November 1, 2021**.
 - The SU/SDs receiving grants are required to progress report 30 days after the completion of the first year of grant funding. Stating a November 1 date to follow the prior year's October 1 grant date is the clearest way to ensure that the timeline will be followed, and that second-year funding is based on review of first-year activities. It also eliminates the use of the word "anniversary" in Sec. 3 (c)(5) (and again in (e)(1)), which is an odd word to use in this context.

Other Comments

The AOE understands Sec. 3 (c)(1) to be drafted to mean three members of the Census-Based Funding Advisory Group, selected by the Advisory Group. However, the AOE agrees with the position of several parent advocates, that inclusion of a member of the public representing the interests of students struggling with literacy (i.e. a parent, guardian or family member) would be a beneficial addition to the review group.

The committee should consider adding a member of the review group, to be selected by Advisory Group, who is a member of the public representing the interests of students struggling with literacy.