

AOE Testimony: H.668

Testimony To: House Committee on Education
Respectfully Submitted by: Heather Bouchey, Ph.D., Deputy Secretary of Education
Date: February 21, 2020

Agency Position on Draft 2.1

Thank you for inviting us to testify on the latest draft of [H.668](#) you've been working on. We are happy to be here to share our best thinking on how to improve the bill in its current form, hopefully making the core goals of the bill more attainable.

The AOE supports the intended purpose of the grant program proposed in [Draft 2.1 of H.668](#). As you know, we have been building a coherent system and theory of action to address the goals of Act 173 of 2018. Secretary French has presented to this body the core aspects of that work, including a focus on four systemic levers—curricular alignment, local comprehensive assessment, education support teams, and needs-based professional development. Our strong belief is that this grant program will be strengthened by aligning applications with these systems-level levers. We are appreciative of the Committee's efforts to focus on literacy as a concrete area of providing supports for Act 173. If this bill can be aligned to current/future AOE guidance about Act 173, this will make it much easier on the field to develop, apply for, and implement the grant-funded activities that the committee seeks to foster.

As committee members are aware, the AOE has a long history of running grants programs set out in statute by the General Assembly. For instance, each year the Agency deploys \$200,000 in secondary school grants to successful applicants. We also run several federal grants programs such as Perkins, AEL, and 21C, to name a few. Each of these grants programs is based on a clear and transparent process for announcing, scoring, and awarding grant materials and dollars. As a state Agency, we must ensure our work in awarding taxpayer dollar-based grants cleaves to the state Agency of Administration's Bulletin 5. This document lays out the state requirements for awarding grant dollars as a state Agency. Each Agency also has a Grants Plan, approved by the Agency of Administration, that it must use for all granting activity. Within this approved Grants Plan are existing standard and uniform procedures for granting state education dollars.

We understand and appreciate the Committee's interest in ensuring that members of the Advisory Group are involved in the grant application development and selection process for this program. We are happy to work with the Advisory Group, perhaps a smaller number of members from the group to better ensure efficiency, in setting up a grant program. However, there are a number of processes that must occur or be done by the Agency, consistent with guidance from state Agency of Administration. In the next document, I will identify some suggested language that we feel will better achieve the Committee's goals while also preserving the "have to's" regarding state granting process.

We also sense that the Committee would like to better monitor the activity of this grants program, perhaps through more involvement of non-Agency individuals or entities. We have

offered what we feel is a good plan for assisting in this goal, as it has been used recently in other recent pieces of legislation that may also apply here.

In the attached table, we provide specific sections of the current bill version, along with our suggested edits and a rationale for these suggestions.

Additional Recommendations

The Agency continues to recommend the suggestions previously made by Secretary French in his January 30, 2020 testimony:

- Amend 16 V.S.A. § 261a (Duties of Supervisory Union Boards) to include a new requirement for a district level literacy policy:
 - The implementation of a benchmark literacy assessment for all students in grades PreK 3 with scores that can be reported as Lexile scores to the Agency of Education
 - A process for identifying struggling readers, and a description of the intervention processes dedicated to address the needs of these students; and
 - A requirement for a board to formally review and publish an annual monitoring report on student literacy outcomes.
- 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

Language specific to these policy proposals is included in the initial draft of the bill, however we would be glad to work with the committee to adapt and redraft as needed.