

**Testimony before House Committee on Education**

1 September 2020  
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Chair, State Board of Education

Thank you, on behalf of the State Board of Education, for inviting me to speak with you today about the FY21 Budget Restatement.

As a matter of principle, the State Board of Education believes that we, like every other entity of state government, should ‘step up’ and carry our full share of the burdens of cost containment during these trying times.

Specifically, the Board proposes to reduce its FY21 budget from \$80,845 to \$70,750 – a reduction of 12.5 percent. Most of these savings are made possible by the use of virtual meetings through much of the remaining fiscal year, thus reducing reimbursements for travel costs.

I wish to clarify that this proposal by the State Board -- to reduce its expenditures in FY21 by 12.5 percent – is in lieu of anything that the Secretary of Education may have proposed.

In fact, we advocate that the Secretary of Education’s proposals to reduce the Board’s budget be rejected out-of-hand.

>> Although he is a member (*ex officio*) of the State Board, the Secretary of Education has no authority to speak for the Board.

>> The Secretary acted unilaterally in proposing to reduce the Board’s budget by \$24,000. The Secretary never bothered to consult with the Board about his proposal – or even to inform us of his plan to slash the Board’s budget by 30 percent.

>> The Secretary states that savings of \$20,000 can be achieved by terminating the State Board’s membership in the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE). This is a fiction. The truth is that the Board last paid dues to NASBE in FY 2019, and terminated its membership more than a year ago, in early FY20.

>> The Board intentionally terminated its membership in NASBE in order to reallocate those funds for anticipated obligations to retain outside legal counsel. The Secretary was present during these discussions. Outside counsel is needed when citizens appeal actions of the Secretary of Education and when the Board dissents from the opinions of the Secretary and *his* legal counsel.

>> The Secretary’s proposal to cut \$20,000 from the Board’s budget will, if adopted, prevent the Board from retaining outside legal counsel when needed. The Secretary’s proposal conflicts with the Board’s duty to hear citizen’s appeals of the Secretary’s actions and undermines the Board’s ability, as independent, non-partisan overseer of education in Vermont, to challenge the actions of the Secretary and his legal staff.

In conclusion, the State Board of Education is prepared to carry our full share of the burdens of cost containment in the FY2021 Budget Restatement. Specifically, we propose to reduce our FY21 budget from \$80,845 to \$70,750 – a 12.5 percent reduction – largely through reductions in travel reimbursements during the pandemic emergency. Even with these expenditure reductions, we will ensure that the Board’s unique mission -- as independent, non-partisan overseers of education in Vermont – will remain strong and vigorous in these challenging times.

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