

March 3, 2019

Additional Testimony to the Vermont State Senate Education Committee
by Heidi Peterson on behalf of

S63 An act relating to expanding dual enrollment to students who attend schools outside of Vermont

In their written testimony on S:63 Changes to S63 (revised February 21st) on behalf of the Vermont Agency of Education, Jess DeCarolis and Emily Byrne made two significant points about why S63 should not go forward—that it impairs the Agency's ability to track and assess the students involved in the Dual Enrollment program and it expands the Dual Enrollment program and will therefore create funding problems. Both of these arguments are problematic.

First, in cooperation with their schools, administrators, and districts, students can already participate in dual enrollment education, receiving high school credit for attending college classes, regardless of whether they are granted a Dual Enrollment voucher through the State Agency of Education. This is a fabulous example of an individualized learning plan, something the Agency of Education itself acknowledges that it is tasked to support. Some of these students are attending high schools in Massachusetts, paid for with Vermont tuition dollars, as part of the normal arrangements within a Vermont school district, including the Districts of Stamford and Readsboro. These are schools over which the Vermont Agency of Education does not exercise “accountabl(ity) to statutory and policy requirements.” It is up to the AOE to determine how they might track the impact of Vermont students engaging in dual enrollment education through these schools. Not having a plan for tracking these impacts is not a reason for the AOE to deny eligible Vermont high school students access to dual enrollment education. In fact, such denial works in opposition to the “goal of the Flexible Pathways Initiative to increase high school graduation rates and post-secondary continuation rates,” as well as the goal of having students have individual learning plans.

The second argument against S63 made in the DOE testimony is problematic as well. S63 is a correction to the previous statute on Dual Enrollment that fixes administrative roadblocks to otherwise eligible Vermont high school students participating in the program. It does not expand the nature of the students who are eligible, but rather allows for what the DOE rightly terms an “entitlement” to be given to all eligible students. There is nothing in the statute that says that Vermont high school students who meet the eligibility for the Dual Enrollment voucher will only be granted a voucher if the budget is not exceeded. The testimony by the Vermont Agency of Education says, in essence, that they budget has increased because more students are participating in the program (a success!), and they want to prevent further increases in the budget by continuing to disallow students from districts in border towns that tuition students to public schools in another state. In short, if a student is unlucky enough to live in the “wrong” district in Vermont, that student will not be granted his or her entitlement to two Dual Enrollment vouchers.

This funding argument offered by the Agency of Education is offensive to the spirit of the Vermont Supreme Court ruling on “substantially equal educational opportunity” in the case *Brigham vs. State of Vermont* and to Act 60 and other legislative corrections to ensure equal educational opportunities that have followed that ruling. The DOE's funding argument promulgates inequity by excluding students from the Dual Enrollment program and discriminating against certain Vermont public high school students from the Dual Enrollment program and discriminating against certain Vermont public high school students.