



VERMONT PRINCIPALS' ASSOCIATION
MEMO
From the Desk of Jay Nichols

To: House Committee on Government Operations
Re: H.572 Testimony
Date: 2/25/22

My testimony today centers around the intent of the bill and some reflections based on the memo sent by Treasurer Pearce to the chairs of Education and Government Operations, as well as the language on 2/23/22 at 2:51 p.m. which I believe is the most current language.

When I first put together the language which eventually became H.572. my major concern was trying to find another avenue to support schools when they were unable to find suitable principal candidates. After conversations with principals and VT-NEA, I realized I was thinking too narrowly. For years, we have had problems staffing our schools with qualified and licensed educators. This is evidenced by the high number of provisional licenses we issue. I have no problem with provisional licensure and, in fact, many of our schools could not begin to meet education quality standards without provisional educators. That said, we have some very talented individuals who are retired that would be willing to come out of retirement to serve for an interim period of time in a hard to staff position.

A few thoughts on the Memo from the Treasurer's Office:

- I agree with the Treasurer that action needs to be taken to meet the staffing shortfall. However, her bonus incentive plan is more likely to have teachers stay who would have anyway and have teachers that really should retire stay on just for the financial incentive. We don't want that. We

want people who still have a lot to give and want to help out a school in a crisis situation.

- Around the concerns for paying for this, I believe the latest language addresses that. If there are wording changes that need to be made, I'm all for that. The concept is that the retired/interim teacher pays fully into the retirement system as does the school district; there should be no drag on the pension fund and hopefully will generate modest revenue into the pension fund. The retired educator is going to receive their pension either way. The idea here is that they will be working for a year and paying into the pension fund while working. I support any language that makes that clear.
- In the current system, a retired educator cannot fulfill a full school year. When you replace a retired municipal worker with another retired municipal worker the work still gets done. When you replace a retired teacher with another retired teacher it creates great disruption for students. Superintendent Jeanne Collins is on her fourth substitute teacher of the year for a group of students because these teachers are limited by the current pension fund rules. It would have been much better for the school and the students, and I believe the pension fund, if she could have hired one teacher for the year who was paying into the fund instead of four teachers who paid NOTHING into the fund while serving as Substitute Teachers.
- I don't expect teachers to retire early so that they can jump from one job to another. We can put safeguards in to make sure that doesn't happen. Let's develop whatever restrictions are necessary to protect the pension fund. The vast majority of need will be in poor and mostly rural schools where these openings are. Additionally, veteran teachers simply don't do that. Teachers have much more mobility early in their careers. It will be a relatively small number of educators who are willing to do this. However, right now we need to take advantage of any high quality individuals that are willing to take on this challenge.
- We simply do not have enough young people coming into education in the nation and in Vermont. We are also impacted in that states around us with the exception of Maine typically pay better and all have better pension benefits. Young people, as I've already mentioned, are more mobile. It is an employee market and they have their pick often. Having talented young teachers come to rural and poor Vermont schools doesn't happen often and when they do come, they are often only there for a few years before

moving to higher paying districts in Chittenden County and elsewhere.

In terms of the latest draft of the bill, **I would ask you to amend (B) on line 16 to add the words, "or obtains" after the word "maintains."**

This year in the Orleans Central Supervisory Union, a principal went out on Maternity leave. Steve Owens, veteran educator had just recently retired as principal of another school (Albany) in that system. This was a great fit and got the school through the first months of the school year. Once this was done, Steve could make no more money as an educator due to restrictions in the pension fund. As bad luck would have it, the principal who had replaced Steve at Albany resigned for personal and professional reasons. Albany was left without a principal, and their previous, well respected principal was available but unable to step in because of retirement restrictions. If H. 572 was in place this terrible situation would have been avoided.

Please pass some version of this bill with appropriate safeguards to provide school boards and school leaders with another potential avenue of options when they cannot staff a licensed educator position with a qualified applicant. The students in our schools deserve nothing less.

Thank you.