

February 25, 2021

To: House Education Committee

From: Chelsea Myers, Associate Executive Director, Vermont Superintendents Association  
Sue Ceglowski, Executive Director, Vermont School Boards Association  
Jay Nichols, Executive Director, Vermont Principals' Association

Re: H.101 draft No. 3.1

Thank you for inviting testimony from the Vermont School Boards Association, Vermont Superintendents Association, and the Vermont Principals' Association on the current draft of H.101 to improve literacy for Vermont's students. Each of our Associations are committed to improving access to high-quality literacy instruction for all students and thank you for your continued work on this issue.

VSBA, VSA, and VPA welcome and support the overall concept of providing additional assistance to the field. The grant program clearly recognizes that this work takes financial resources, time, and a systemic approach. We also appreciate the connections made to Act 173. The more the field's literacy work can connect with existing initiatives and structures, the greater likelihood that this work will be systemic and sustainable.

In regards to the specific language of H.101 draft 3.1:

<b>Section and Language</b>	<b>Recommended Change</b>
Sec. 3	We ask that you consider all of the grant criteria through the lens of educating and leading systems through a pandemic. Who has the personnel to write and manage this grant? Does that align with who you would like to see receive the grant?
Sec. 3 (c) (C)	In order to target the specific and unique needs of school districts, we

<p>“the literacy indicators and outcomes the eligible applicant seeks to improve, which shall include each of phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, and may include any other areas of current best practices in teaching literacy;”</p>	<p>recommend changing ‘each of’ to ‘one or more of’. For example, if a system identifies through data that their students are excelling at phonemic awareness but are challenged with reading comprehension, it would be beneficial for the system to be able to target professional learning towards the area of highest need. This language is also included in Sec. 3(d)(E).</p>
<p>Sec. 3 (c) (3) The Agency shall develop application scoring criteria consistent with subdivisions (2)(A)–(I) of this subsection (c). On or before July 31, 2021, the Agency shall send a copy of the grant application and scoring criteria, review process, and selection criteria to the House and Senate Committees on Education.</p>	<p>In response to the scoring criteria, in order to target the highest need systems, please consider adding the following additional scoring criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) data on literacy outcomes;</li> <li>(2) the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-priced meals;</li> <li>(3) discrepancies in outcome data on literacy for students from historically underserved populations (including BIPOC students, students with disabilities, and English Language Learners)</li> </ul>
<p>Sec. 3 (c) (5)</p> <p>“If the amount appropriated for this purpose is insufficient to fully fund the grants under that section, then the grant amounts that are awarded shall be prorated.”</p>	<p>What does prorated mean here? If there are more applicants than funds Is the objective to provide full funding for less systems or less funding for more systems?</p>
<p>Sec. 5 (a) (18) Duties of Supervisory Union Board</p>	<p>Sue Ceglowski of the Vermont School Boards Association has separate testimony specific to this portion of the bill. Statewide data from PreK to Grade 3 should be used to monitor progress in literacy achievement, and subsequently to inform professional learning and future policy initiatives. Any benchmark literacy assessment should be specifically tied to professional development for instructors on how to use the data collected to inform instruction and support students. Per Sue’s testimony, school board policy is not the appropriate vehicle for this</p>

	work.
Sec. 6	<p>Per the NEA’s 2/24/21 testimony in Senate Education: “This [section] should be revised because the Standards Board for Professional Educators, (the “Standards Board”) is the body that determines the standards and requirements for accrediting teacher preparation programs. At a minimum, therefore, the Standards Board and the AOE should assess these programs not the AOE exclusively.”</p> <p>Please consider including in this review licensing and re-licensing criteria.</p> <p>The subsequent report could include recommendations for increasing the collective and regional specific literacy expertise in the state moving forward. School districts will be challenged with fulfilling the promises of Act 173 if they are unable to recruit and sustain highly-skilled reading teachers to work with struggling students.</p> <p>Please consider revising ‘science based literacy’ with ‘evidence-based literacy instruction’ as it is consistent with language used in the field. This would indicate reading, writing, and spelling instruction that is supported by high-quality research that meets rigorous standards and is proven to translate effectively to classroom practices. Finally, the language “to what extent these programs prepare teachers <i>to use</i> science-based literacy materials and programs” does not emphasize the true overarching goal, which is to prepare educators to provide high-quality literacy instruction to all learners.</p>

Thank you.