



To: House Education Committee
From: Sue Ceglowski, Executive Director
Re: H.101
Date: February 25, 2021

Thank you for inviting testimony from the Vermont School Boards Association on H.101 covering the topic of literacy support for all students. These comments are limited to section 5 of draft 3.1 of the bill.

Section 5 adds a new duty to supervisory union boards, requiring them to adopt a benchmark literacy assessment for all students in prekindergarten–grade 3 with scores that can be reported in a format determined by the Secretary after consulting with the stakeholders in the field and outside experts in early literacy. Section 5 requires the benchmark literacy assessment to include an assessment of each of phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

Roles and Responsibilities in Vermont School Systems

The language in section 5 should be viewed through the lens of appropriate roles and responsibilities of Vermont’s school boards and superintendents.

In 2016, the Vermont Agency of Education issued guidance on [Roles and Responsibilities in Vermont School Systems](#), to ensure that systems are organized to support goals of quality and equity in student learning, and that district resources are used in the most effective way to support those goals.

The AOE’s guidance correctly notes that school boards’ role as elected officials is *governance*. The guidance recommends that school boards fill this role by:

- *Engaging the community to establish the mission and vision for the district*
- *Using the mission to guide decision-making*
- *Setting performance goals for the district*

- *Establishing local policies aligned across the supervisory union/supervisory district consistent with the minimum standards established by the State Board of Education*
- *Employing and supervising the superintendent (sole direct-employee of the Board)*
- *Holding the superintendent accountable for developing a strategy and education work plan to achieve district or SU goals*
- *Negotiating contracts with employees*

The AOE guidance provides that superintendents' role as the CEOs of school districts is *operations*. The guidance recommends that superintendents fill this role by:

- *Providing operational oversight of the school district*
- *Maintaining focus on the school board's mission, and developing an education work plan to achieve the mission*
- *Ensuring quality of education and equity of opportunities within the system*
- *Managing services, programs and resources, for the quality of learning and for the implementation of the school board's annual district education plan and budget*
- *Making day-to-day decisions consistent with the policies set by the school board, and within statute and state regulations*
- *Employing all non-licensed staff, and recommending one licensed candidate to the board for review and approval for other openings*
- *Creating a robust comprehensive local assessment system, implemented systemwide, that assesses student progress toward proficiency-based graduation and captures evidence of learning with respect to all seven education goals outlined in the Education Quality Standards and standards adopted by the State Board of Education*
- *Preparing reports, such as the district strategic plan, district budget, and district fiscal and student learning performance reports that enable the school board to evaluate implementation of its mission and progress towards its goals*

We encourage the Committee to review the Agency of Education's guidance on [Roles and Responsibilities in Vermont School Systems](#) which also covers the role of principals as instructional leaders and the role of teachers in developing and delivering instruction.

Supervisory Union Board Benchmark Literacy Assessment Policy

The above review of AOE's guidance on Roles and Responsibilities in Vermont School Systems is instructive when considering Section 5 of H.101. The proposal for a required supervisory union board policy that focuses on adopting a benchmark literacy assessment for all students in particular grades, and specifies what the assessment shall include takes school boards out of their governance role, moving them into an operational role which is problematic.

In order to stay within their role and responsibilities, it is more appropriate for boards to set goals (tailored specifically for their districts) for improving student literacy outcomes and provide the necessary resources in their budgets to support reaching those goals.