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**TESTIMONY**

**Testimony To:** House Committee on Education

**Respectfully Submitted by:** Daniel M. French, Ed.D., Secretary of Education

**Subject:** S.287 Sections 7 and 14, English Language Learners (Sec. 7) and Evaluation and Reporting (Sec. 14)

**Date:** April 6, 2022

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Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this bill. The implications of the Pupil Weighting Study are significant relative to the structure of our education finance system. I have testified on this topic on several occasions over the last few years, and agency staff have been directly involved in providing technical support throughout the process.

Today, I will focus my comments on two sections of the bill, Section 7 (English Language Learners), and Section 14 (Evaluation and Reporting) since I know these sections are of specific interest for the Committee.

**Section 7 – English Language Learners**

This section of the bill outlines new work for the agency in providing “professional development resources for ELL instructors and support personnel.” The agency currently has one position to administer ELL programming. The duties of this position have largely been focused on administering the related federal grant and its reporting requirements, and coordinating the state’s participation in WIDA, a consortium of 42 states housed at the University of Wisconsin.

Our participation in WIDA provides access to tools and technical support for screening ESL students. Additionally, WIDA provides professional learning resources including a series of online learning modules for teachers and school staff. See <https://wida.wisc.edu/memberships/consortium/vt> for more information.

To the extent the language in Section 7 would be new work for the agency, the agency would need additional staff. An early version of this bill contemplated six new positions for the agency including additional staffing for ELL professional learning. These positions were removed from the bill and are now a topic of discussion around S.100, and the total number of positions has been reduced to five. I believe the agency would need at least one additional position to expand professional learning support for ELL.

**Section 14 – Evaluation and Reporting**

I support the concept of evaluating this policy, but the review and audit processes outlined in this bill are impractical. Many of the foundational regulatory structures (e.g., regulations that

define education quality and the quality assurance process) necessary to define the scope of such a review are currently under development and should be enacted prior to any audit or evaluation. It will be difficult to perform this type of review absent these structures being place because Vermont's education system is very decentralized, and we do not have a strong tradition of regulatory oversight from the state level.

I have provided testimony on this topic previously. Here is a quick summary of that testimony with an eye on a recommended sequence of events to address these structural issues.

1. The Education Quality Standards that exist in regulation should be revised and expanded to be District Quality Standards instead of School Quality Standards and should include standards for basic systems inputs such as business practices, board governance, and school facilities. The quality standards should also be expanded to include PreK and CTE.
2. A quality assurance process should be described in regulation. We currently do not have such regulations.
3. The ESSA State Plan should be amended to reflect the new quality assurance process.
4. The state's data dashboards including the Snapshot or Report Card should be revised to provide reporting on quality assurance processes.
5. Once adequate data reporting is established, a review or audit of the funding inputs could be performed.