

## **Vermont Association for Middle Level Education**

Testimony in Support of Vermont House's H631: Ending Child Marriage  
January 28, 2022

The Vermont Association for Middle Level Education Executive Board (VAMLE) supports the Vermont State Legislature's proposed H631 to close the loopholes associated with child marriage in Vermont. We the members of the VAMLE Board are advocates for young adolescent (10 – 15 year-olds) and adolescents, promoting developmentally appropriate social, emotional, physical, and cognitive practices that affect their lives. Sixteen and seventeen year-olds demonstrate many of the socioemotional challenges that young adolescents experience.

An unwanted marriage at these ages has the potential to negatively affect many of the future outcomes for these adolescents—particularly their educational futures and successes. We are particularly concerned that 16 and 17-year-old marriages have the potential to limit educational opportunities for these teens, increasing the possibility of leaving high school prior to graduation.

Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2021) reveal that “Dropping out of high school is related to a number of negative outcomes.” Average earnings for high school dropouts between the ages of 25 – 34 (\$26,000) were \$6,000 lower than those of high school graduates (\$32,000). For this same age group, the unemployment rate of those *with* high school degrees was at 7 percent versus dropouts' unemployment rates of almost double that figure at 13 percent. <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/dropout/intro.asp>. The federal government's definition of *poverty* is \$26,500 (2021).

Researchers from NCES also noted the following:

Dropouts age 25 and older were reported being in worse health than adults who were not dropouts, regardless of income. Dropouts also make up disproportionately higher percentages of the nation's institutionalized population than of the nation's noninstitutionalized population. Relative to individuals who complete high school, the average high school dropout costs the economy approximately \$272,000 over his or her [their] lifetime in terms of lower tax contributions, higher reliance on Medicaid and Medicare, higher rates of criminal activity, and higher reliance on welfare.  
<https://nces.ed.gov/programs/dropout/intro.asp>.

Lower socioeconomic status (SES) is linked to health challenges including “drug exposure, respiratory illnesses, dental cavities, and obesity”; problems that continue into adulthood (Bergin & Bergin, 2018, p. 27)<sup>1</sup>. The socioemotional effects of forced marriage at 16 or 17 are challenging enough; but the toll of leaving high school prior to graduation has the potential to create a lifetime of unrivaled difficulty due to the socioeconomic dynamics associated with dropping out.

VAMLE Board members urge the Vermont House of Representatives to vote “Yes” on H631 to close the loophole in the current legislation. We fully support the efforts and data provided by *Unchained at Last* to change the current policy that so negatively affects Vermont's current adolescent population.

*Dave F. Brown*

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<sup>1</sup>Bergin C. C., & Bergin D. A. (2018). *Child and adolescent development in your classroom* (3rd edition). Cengage Learning.