

To: Senate Committee on Education

From: Jay Nichols, Vermont Principals' Association
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Date: May 4, 2021

Subject: H.106 draft no. 3.1 Community Schools

Good afternoon, thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of our organizations. We worked closely with the sponsor of H.106 Representative Kathleen James and the House Committee on Education earlier this legislative session. Please accept my testimony (Jay Nichols) on behalf of our organizations. Our testimony is limited to the Community Schools provisions in the legislation not the Task Force on Universal School Lunch in Section 5 of the bill.

Consistent with our testimony on February 24, 2021 in House Ed. we want to indicate support for the underlying purpose of the bill, which is to establish a grant program to support the improvement of services to all children, but especially those children, and the families of those children, who are disadvantaged by socio-economic status, disability, race, immigrant status or some other circumstance that makes services and educational amenities less equitably available to them.

Our Associations also support the underlying premise of the bill, which is to support local initiatives to build upon the concept and implementation of "community schools" in order to better support whole child development through the organization and provision of enhanced school services. By improving services in support of children and families, the entire community will benefit.

Our only substantive recommendation has to do with Section 3 (5) inclusion of a legislatively-derived "Site-based leadership team" within the bill. We think this language and any other instance of inclusion of this language within the bill should be removed from the bill.

Here are the reasons we are proposing this change:

- We are against legislation of any school team for such a specific purpose. Schools and school systems already have leadership teams. School districts are governed by school boards and overseen by superintendents with schools being managed and led day-to-day by principals. The systems and teams they already have in place should be utilized. Creating another team reflects redundancy in many cases. If school boards, working with superintendents, principals and others want to create a site-based leadership team for community schools purposes, that is fine. However, this should not be mandated through legislation.

- The more flexibility school districts have to make the concepts of community schools implementable, the better. Mandating such a team with spelled out team member composition will cause many systems to not apply for what is a pretty small amount of financial support given what schools are dealing with post pandemic.
- In many systems, the work of community schools will be additive to work already ongoing in the school district. Allowing schools to implement community schools work in the manner that makes the most sense at the local level will provide the best support for students and families.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.