

March 24, 2021

To: Sen. Brian Campion
From: Rep. Kathleen James
Re: H.106 Community Schools

Sen. Campion:

Thanks for inviting me to the Senate Education Committee to discuss H.106, an act to ensure equitable access to a high-quality education through community schools. Here is a link to the bill [as passed by the House](#). As promised, below and attached please find additional information about some of the points we discussed.

APPROPRIATION: As amended by the House Appropriations Committee and approved on the House floor on March 18, the bill directs the Secretary of Education to use \$3,399,000 of the amount allocated to AOE from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ESSER2 and 3) for the demonstration grants — to be funded on or before September 1 of each of 2021, 2022 and 2023. This includes the grants and an AOE set-aside for technical support and evaluations.

SELECTION of GRANTEEES: In Section 3(a)(D)(4) and (5), the bill lays out the eligibility criteria to apply for a three-year demonstration grant. In Section 3, subsection (c), the bill indicates that AOE will “develop the application, determine grant amounts, and provide funding ... to successful applicants.” This does not provide much guidance to AOE on how it should determine the merit of various applicants or rank them. Our committee discussed this on the morning of March 19 and considered an amendment from Rep. Lucy Rogers that would have added the following sentence: “The Secretary shall give priority to applicants with the greatest demonstrated social need.” Her amendment was not offered on the floor due to a parliamentary mistake, but in general, our committee felt it would be advisable to offer more guidance and direction to AOE regarding how to rank or select the strongest applicants. In my opinion, the language in Rep. Rogers’ amendment is too broad (how does AOE determine “greatest social and economic need”?) and any new language should be more specific and linked more directly to the language or intent of the bill.

PILLARS and REVISIONS: In testimony and conversations, we did hear from folks in the education field regarding the bill. One group, led by [Carlen Finn of Voices for Vermont’s Children](#) and [Kathleen Kesson](#), suggested language revisions to an earlier version of the bill. Our committee did not accept these revisions — nor did we accept suggestions that we consider adding more pillars.

Why? Our goal was to keep the bill fairly straightforward and to link it specifically to the four data-driven pillars recommended by the [Learning Policy Institute](#) and the “Community Schools Playbook” published by the [Partnership for the Future of Learning](#).

Link here: <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/community-schools-equitable-improvement-brief>

In this discussion, however, I believe witnesses and others raised interesting questions around the language and framing intent of equity. The National Education Association (NEA), for example, also promotes community schools with a model that includes similar — yet different! — pillars. That information can be found [here](#).

DATA, OUTCOMES, SUCCESS: We heard [testimony on H.106 from Anna Maier](#), a policy analyst at the nonprofit, nonpartisan Learning Policy Institute. In an extensive December 2017 publication, Maier shares the results of a “review of the evidence” in which she summarizes 143 research studies “on each of the four community school pillars, along with evaluation studies of community schools as a comprehensive strategy.”

In this [useful 159-page report](#), I will draw your attention in particular to:

- Findings (executive summary): Pages v-vii
- Trauma-informed care: Page 23

- Comprehensive studies: Starting Page 78
- Cost-benefit and return on investment: Starting Page 99

SUSTAINABLE, DIVERSIFIED FUNDING: Please see the [linked policy brief](#) from the Partnership for the Future of Learning, titled “Financing Community Schools: A Framework for Growth and Sustainability.” On page 7 and 8, you’ll see the basic approach: “When it comes to financing community schools, leaders must find partners and funding to provide services and resources to support the work of coordination and collaboration, which is referred to as the infrastructure of community schools ... Financing for community schools requires some combination of tapping and/or redeploying resources already available across a variety of programs, and finding additional funding to fill in gaps.” Also:

- A mix of funding is essential (Page 10): For example, in Lincoln, Nebraska, community schools were piloted with \$100,000 grants in seed money from a philanthropic organization and are now rooted in 29 of the city’s 59 schools.
- The financing framework includes (Page 13) accessing existing resources, coordinating and leveraging resources, and developing new resources – the central work of the community school coordinator.

Thanks again for the opportunity to discuss H.106 with the Senate Education Committee.

Rep. Kathleen James
House Education Committee
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