

February 24, 2021

To: Senate Education Committee

From: Chelsea Myers, Associate Executive Director, Vermont Superintendents Association

Re: Senate Education Bill on Improving Literacy

Thank you for inviting testimony from the Vermont Superintendents Association on the current draft of the Committee Bill on improving literacy. This testimony is reflective of our ongoing interest in the importance of literacy education in the state and feedback from our members related to the current components of the bill.

[Feedback on dr req 21-0807 – draft 4.1](#)

<b>Component of the Bill</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
"Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to continue the ongoing work to improve literacy for all students in the State, while recognizing that achieving this goal will require a multi-year and multi-dimensional effort requiring continued focus by the General Assembly, the Administration, and school leaders."	Thank you for the recognition that this work takes time and commitment from every level of the system. As you have heard from other witnesses, system-wide literacy improvement takes time and resources and the purpose of that bill starts off with that message clearly stated.
Sec 1. (b)(2)	The findings aptly reference Act 173 as a key foundational element to this work. In the SBAC statistics raised, it is important to recognize the disaggregated scores of students of historically underserved populations. We are faced with clear opportunity gaps in the state of Vermont, including in the domain of literacy. While the statistics for all students are presented, disaggregated data paints a picture more reflective of opportunity gaps in

	<p>accessing literacy instruction. Including the disaggregated statistics is an important signal that the state recognizes that disparities for BIPOC students, students in poverty, and students with disabilities need to be addressed in any legislation on literacy. This recommendation also connects to suggestions on later components of the bill.</p>
<p>Sec. 3. Literacy Grant Funding; Appropriation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Any grant funding should incentivize systemic thinking, sustainability, and connection to the structures emphasized in Act 173, VTmtss, and EQS. At the appropriate time, it might be worth considering some of the structures of the grant program outlined in H.101.</li> <li>● The grant funding criteria/considerations should include data disaggregated by historically underserved populations (i.e. BIPOC students, students with disabilities, and poverty) with due consideration for student privacy laws. We cannot ignore how institutional racism and biases lead to worse literacy outcomes for BIPOC students.</li> <li>● Exclusionary discipline should not be included in the grant criteria. Engagement would be a complex measurement to capture for this grant process and might unnecessarily exclude schools doing positive work in the domain of exclusionary discipline that might also be struggling with literacy instruction. This could also be an opportunity to learn more about the status of the statewide school climate survey that was postponed at the Agency of Education, especially as it pertains to the COVID-19 recovery work the Committee is doing.</li> <li>● As a state, we still need to contend with teacher recruitment and retention in any training initiatives that we do, as well as the clear disparities in access to and retainment of experienced teacher candidates across the state.</li> <li>● Though it might not be appropriate for this bill specifically, conversations related to grant funding for literacy professional development has raised concerns about the coherence around how professional development dollars are spent. Specifically, how do we ensure that school leaders and educators are pursuing high-quality</li> </ul>

	<p>learning experiences that align with the mission and vision of the school while also allowing for pursuing interests?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● VSA is interested in learning more about the potential funding streams that might support this work, especially considering one-time funding compared to ongoing sustainable financial support.</li> </ul>
<p>Sec. 4. Agency of Education; Literacy Division; Creation; Appropriation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Overall, any expertise at the state or regional level would be welcomed. However, there is some concern about the ability of the Agency of Education to be able to recruit literacy experts/coaches at the given salary comparisons between LEA work and SEA work.</li> </ul>
<p>Sec. 5. Agency of Education; Literacy Vision</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Is there a way to strengthen the language here to ensure true and authentic collaboration between entities?</li> <li>● Thank you for referencing the articulation of Tier 1, 2, and 3. Integrating the VTmtss structure into this work is crucial for coherence.</li> <li>● VSA recommends considering the ‘age-appropriate proficiencies for early literacy instruction’ rather than ‘core principles for early literacy instructional practices’.</li> <li>● Please include a representative from the Vermont Curriculum Leaders Association. Andrew Jones from Mill River Unified Union School District is the representative there.</li> </ul>
<p>Sec. 6. Agency of Education; Data Collection</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● In numerous conversations with superintendents, reference has been made to local assessment plans. Could that reference be made as a component to this section to further integrate with the work already being done at the local level?</li> <li>● Any data plan should include a focus on how students from historically underserved populations are disproportionately not provided the tools needed to be able to access literacy instruction.</li> <li>● The Agency of Education announced an initiative for data literacy in the recent weeks. The AOE’s work or similar efforts could be crucial to bridging the gap between collecting data to identify problems and collecting data to meaningfully inform leadership and practice.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Again, please include a representative from the Vermont Curriculum Leaders Association.</li></ul>
Sec. 7. Teacher preparation programs; review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Please consider including in this review licensing and re-licensing criteria. The report could include recommendations for increasing the collective and regional specific literacy expertise in the state moving forward. School districts will be challenged with living up to the promises of Act 173 if they are unable to recruit and sustain highly-skilled reading teachers to work with struggling students.</li><li>● The most important characteristics of teacher preparation for literacy instruction are practice, feedback, and coaching. Any comprehensive review should consider these elements as well as the instructional materials provided.</li><li>● Instead of 'evidence-based structured literacy instruction' and the subsequent definition, please consider: 'evidence-based literacy instruction - reading, writing, and spelling instruction that is supported by high-quality research that meets rigorous standards and is proven to translate effectively to classroom practices'.</li></ul>

Thank you!