



To: Senate Education Committee
From: Sue Ceglowski, Executive Director
Re: DR 21-0807
Date: February 11, 2021

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Thank you for inviting testimony from the Vermont School Boards Association on DR 21-0807 covering the topic of supervisory union board responsibilities for the oversight of literacy instruction and outcomes.

Roles and Responsibilities in Vermont School Systems

The proposals in DR 21-0807 should be viewed through the lens of appropriate roles and responsibilities of Vermont's school boards and superintendents.

In 2016, the Vermont Agency of Education issued guidance on [Roles and Responsibilities in Vermont School Systems](#), to ensure that systems are organized to support goals of quality and equity in student learning, and that district resources are used in the most effective way to support those goals.

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The AOE's guidance correctly notes that school boards' role as elected officials is *governance*. The guidance recommends that school boards fill this role by:

- *Engaging the community to establish the mission and vision for the district*
- *Using the mission to guide decision-making*
- *Setting performance goals for the district*
- *Establishing local policies aligned across the supervisory union/supervisory district consistent with the minimum standards established by the State Board of Education*
- *Employing and supervising the superintendent (sole direct-employee of the Board)*
- *Holding the superintendent accountable for developing a strategy and education work plan to achieve district or SU goals*
- *Negotiating contracts with employees*

The AOE guidance provides that superintendents' role as the CEOs of school districts is *operations*. The guidance recommends that superintendents fill this role by:

- *Providing operational oversight of the school district*
- *Maintaining focus on the school board's mission, and developing an education work plan to achieve the mission*
- *Ensuring quality of education and equity of opportunities within the system*
- *Managing services, programs and resources, for the quality of learning and for the implementation of the school board's annual district education plan and budget*
- *Making day-to-day decisions consistent with the policies set by the school board, and within statute and state regulations*
- *Employing all non-licensed staff, and recommending one licensed candidate to the board for review and approval for other openings*
- *Creating a robust comprehensive local assessment system, implemented systemwide, that assesses student progress toward proficiency-based graduation and captures evidence of learning with respect to all seven education goals outlined in the Education Quality Standards and standards adopted by the State Board of Education*
- *Preparing reports, such as the district strategic plan, district budget, and district fiscal and student learning performance reports that enable the school board to evaluate implementation of its mission and progress towards its goals*

We encourage the Committee to review the Agency of Education's guidance on [Roles and Responsibilities in Vermont School Systems](#) which also covers the role of principals as instructional leaders and the role of teachers in developing and delivering instruction.

School Board Literacy Policy

The above review of AOE's guidance on Roles and Responsibilities in Vermont School Systems is instructive when considering committee bill DR 21-0807. The proposal for a required school board policy that focuses exclusively on literacy, requires implementation of a specific type of assessment system for all students in particular grades, and requires school boards to develop processes for identifying and addressing the needs of struggling readers takes school boards out of their governance role, moving them toward an operational role which is problematic.

In order to stay within their role and responsibilities, it is more appropriate for boards to set goals (tailored specifically for their districts) for improving student literacy outcomes and provide the necessary resources in their budgets to support reaching those goals. This is already happening in districts throughout the state.

That said, if the Committee determines that it will move forward with the proposals in DR 21-0807, the VSBA will support school boards by developing a model policy that complies with the law.

Superintendent Evaluation

The draft committee bill also requires the supervisory union board to conduct an annual evaluation of superintendent job performance, including whether goals for improving student literacy outcomes have been met.

Vermont law (16 V.S.A. 241) charges supervisory union/district boards with hiring and evaluating the superintendent. An annual performance review is a critical component of the work of the board and the superintendent. Ideally, that review is the outgrowth and extension of a productive working relationship that is based upon adhering to roles and responsibilities, and implementing the vision, mission, goals and policies of the school system.

The annual performance review should ensure the board performs its evaluation role effectively and in a way that can be directly linked to district goals. Evaluation processes should be tailored to each system's unique circumstances. School boards already conduct annual evaluations of superintendents - this draft bill's requirements for the content of those evaluations is overly prescriptive and assumes that all superintendent evaluations should be conducted in cookie cutter fashion rather than tailored to the needs of each district. We do not think this section of the bill is necessary.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify on the important topic of literacy instruction and outcomes in the context of roles and responsibilities in Vermont school systems.