

AOE Follow Up Testimony: S.16

Testimony To: Senate Committee on Education

Respectfully Submitted by: Ted Fisher, Director of Communications and Legislative Affairs

Date: February 5, 2021

Comments on S.16 – Draft No 1.1

The Vermont Agency of Education is grateful for the Committee's interest in and work on this topic. We appreciate the proposed amendments as reflected in Draft 1.1, in particular the provisions related to membership and membership diversity, and a more active and immediate role in addressing current disciplinary exclusion practices that we know are problematic, and occur too often in Vermont schools.

Working with districts, we come across a lot of promising practice in Vermont schools. These need to be highlighted, and, as appropriate, required of all districts in the state. We also come across problematic practice from time to time that, although not in violation of any current state law or regulation, demonstrates we can and should do better by students.

We have some work that we are proud of and could bring to your committee if you are interested. I include a list below of some recent related initiatives that may be of interest or are responsive to some of the questions raised by members of the committee on Wednesday. We would be happy to follow up in writing with more information on any of these topics if desired.

I would like to briefly make a few comments on data and data collection requirements as reflected in the bill:

1. Because we agree that reliable and easy to understand data are critical to holding the system accountable, we are working to improve AOE data collection process, as well as with the field to improve their ability to collect and report data accurately and in a timely manner. Some of this work includes building capacity at both the Agency, and in individual school districts, to collect, process and report data in an accurate and timely manner. Some Vermont school districts still struggle with accurate reporting and on-time submission of required data collection, and we well underway in a multi-year effort to provide additional support and technical capacity to assist school districts in this work. This includes paying down technical debt in data systems, both at the Agency and in the field.
2. We are committed to providing quality data to support policymakers, leaders and educators, and are confident that we can work together with stakeholders to provide good quality, useful data that is respectful of federal student privacy requirements. We're looking forward to working with the task to find solutions that provide data that are meaningful and valuable to this work.

If the Committee is interested, we would be happy to provide some more specific feedback on the provisions of the bill related to data collection, in the interest of providing clarity and alignment to our ongoing data quality efforts, as Sec. French previously mentioned.

At this point we at AOE do not need to see any further data to be convinced that action is needed on the issue of suspension and expulsion. We think the bill reflected in Draft No. 1.1, is the next right step. We are ready to get to work, and looking forward to working with the task force to make progress on this important issue.

Recent AOE Work in Exclusionary Discipline, Racial Equity and Related Topics

The below is not an exhaustive list of AOE work and partnerships in areas related to this topic, but some areas that may be of interest to committee members. We can provide more information in writing, if desired.

- Our Student Support Services Division has worked to clarify and strengthen compliance with the prohibitions against improper restraint and seclusion of students in current law / regulation.
- AOE developed an internal [Equity Lens Tool](#) for use in evaluating programs to ensure proper attention to educational equity.
- AOE is participating in a regional [Diversifying the Educator Workforce Task Force](#) in a leadership capacity, and bringing that work specifically to the [Vermont context](#).