

TO: Senate Education Committee
FROM: Jeff Fannon, Vermont-NEA Executive Director
DATE: January 21, 2022
RE: S.211 - An act relating to creating the Vermont Teaching Careers Study Committee

Good afternoon. I'm Jeff Fannon, the executive director of Vermont-NEA, and I'm here today representing 13,000 educators across the state who are suffering not only from the effects of Covid, which are very significant, but they are also continue to suffer from a shortage of teachers and all school employees. This shortage pre-dates the pandemic, and solutions need to be both short and long term in nature.

To be clear, Vermont-NEA supports S.211.

NEA has been working with the Learning policy Institute ("LPI") for some time on this issue, and what we've found four key factors that influence teacher supply and turnover:

- The extent and quality of preparation
- The extent and quality of mentoring and induction
- The competitiveness of compensation
- The quality of working conditions

We also now know that we lack certain data that the Vermont Teaching Careers Study Committee could find and analyze, if it is available. For example, we lack data about the distribution and retention of high-quality teachers. We lack a statewide high-quality mentoring requirement that allows high-quality expert teachers the necessary time to mentor new teachers. What we do know is the high-quality mentoring of new teachers increases retention rates. Vermont-NEA does provide mentoring programs, but that is only where school districts allow it, and if we know mentoring works, and it does, that needs to be a statewide priority.

There are good models of quality mentoring programs, including:

- Mentoring/induction for beginning teachers
- Leadership opportunities for teachers
- Coaching for teachers
- Classroom autonomy, input in school decision-making
- Creating collegial and collaborative work environments

A supportive school culture and mentoring and/or coaching are identified as top factors that lead to retention, and the Vermont Teaching Careers Study Committee should examine focus its attention in this regard. LPI estimates that teacher turnover costs districts \$1,155 per teacher, and focusing on retention is the better and cheaper approach on which the Vermont Teaching Careers Study Committee should focus.

More generally, you asked about what teachers need to stay in the classroom and that is a complicated question. Certainly, teachers need more autonomy so they can return to the joy of teaching and we should get away from the test and punish system in place now. In the middle of a pandemic we still are preparing to administer standardized test. These tests won't give us any more information than what every teacher in the country knows already—kids need more support for the ongoing trauma they are suffering during a health crisis. Standardized testing takes time away from actual learning, including addressing students' social and emotional learning needs, which we know must be the top priority of every school.

In this pandemic moment, it would be helpful to all school employees if state leaders communicated more clearly the ongoing guidance and recommendation changes to students, families, and staff. The January 7th change regarding contact tracing may have been backed by science, but that message is still not effectively out in the larger school community. We need to get schools sufficient KN95 masks and test kits. Changing policy as we did two weeks ago without the resources in place added fuel to the anxiety fire, and that is driving educators to leave, which is exactly the wrong message—we need more experienced educators not fewer with even less experience. Support the pension solution that the Senate Government Operations Committee is reviewing now.

More long-term solutions should be developed in collaboration between teachers and administrators, but they are swamped right now. The Vermont Teaching Careers Study Committee should be given the authority to go where the information leads it.

Thank you for your attention today and thank you for your commitment to public education, the cornerstone of democracy in America.