



Supporting Learners & Leaders

Vermont Principals' Association
Two Prospect Street, Suite 3
Montpelier, Vermont 05602-3555
Telephone: 802-229-0547 – Fax: 802-229-4801
<http://www.vpaonline.org>

PRESIDENT: Beth O'Brien

PRESIDENT ELECT: Erica McLaughlin

PAST-PRESIDENT: Bob Thilbault

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Jay Nichols
jnichols@vpaonline.org

ASSOCIATE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Bob Johnson
bjohnson@vpaonline.org

ASSISTANT EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Mike McRaith
mmcraith@vpaonline.org

To: Senate Education Committee

From: VPA, Mike McRaith

Testimony: S211, An Act Relating to Creating the Vermont Teaching Careers Study Committee

Date: 1/21/22

Dear Senate Education Committee,

Thank you very much for your interest in supporting the educator workforce. My name is Mike McRaith, I work as the Assistant Executive Director at the Vermont Principals' Association and it is my honor to represent the hardworking school leaders around the state of Vermont today.

The Current Educator Workforce Landscape From Our Perspective

Recruiting and retaining school employees has always been a challenge, particularly in the most rural areas of Vermont. We believe this issue has gone from challenge to crisis. It is not new for principals to need to work hard at filling open educator positions, particularly for specialized areas in more remote locations. With that said, beginning in the winter of 2021, we began to hear a higher level of concern from our members than usual about the challenge of hiring. Stories and anecdotes began to pour in from our members about the number of vacancies. We started to routinely hear about the one or sometimes zero applicants for teaching positions. The issue really hit-home when a principal shared that their district was considering closing a school, a school with rising student enrollment, because of a shortage of staffing—not a shortage of students. Based on members' expressed needs, we decided to put together a survey in order to get some numbers to go along with the stories. We've attached the complete results from our [May 2021 Educator Workforce Survey](#). Here are a few of the highlights from the 111 respondents:

- *More than 60% of respondents reported likely or very likely to have positions go unfilled in the 21-22 school year.*
- *89% of the respondents reported that their given districts would benefit or very much benefit from a statewide campaign for recruiting and retaining educators.*
- *92% of respondents reported that their given districts would benefit or very much benefit from a statewide campaign for recruiting and retaining a more diverse educator workforce.*

One respondent wrote, "We have a very high turnover for special education positions district-wide. This is creating significant challenges for us when thinking about meeting the needs of our students. I'd say it's the number one concern."

Another poignant story was shared with me by a director of one of our Career and Technical Education Centers. They shared that they are without a school counselor and without an advanced manufacturing teacher this year, and hence—without an advanced manufacturing program.

This particular case is underscored by the fact that just a few miles away from that CTE center, Vermont has 1 of only 3 companies in the entire country that is actively developing electric airplane manufacturing—Beta Technologies. As is well known now, Beta Technologies will need to hire hundreds of advanced manufacturing jobs in short order, and is also actively recruiting engineers and other specialists from around North America to move to Vermont. This example is illustrative of the crucial connection between public school investments and our economy. Not only for the direct connection to industries like the advanced manufacturing example—but also for the importance of high quality schools as a vital piece of any recruitment strategy that a company like Beta Technology engages in when encouraging new employees to move their families to Vermont.

And one more example, just this week we heard from a principal in the southern part of the state—asking if we had any ideas about where they might find help for the positions that they have had open all year: paraprofessional, literacy interventionist, school-based mental health counselor, and school counselor. This example is indicative of the open positions around the state.

What We Can Do Right Now

- Continue to name the issue publicly. This helps to validate what the educators in the field are experiencing everyday.
- Publicly ask for applications and help for local schools and launch an actual marketing campaign encouraging people to sub and help in schools
- The flexibility to "count" remote days for schools that had to go remote because of COVID-19
- Use ESSER funding to cover the cost of peer review process for potential teachers
- Pension advocacy in the legislative session this year is crucial
- Take anything off the plate for schools that we can, reduce any administrative burdens possible
- Public support for the existing and ongoing *Diversifying the Educator* workforce efforts.
- Help ensure current efforts are synchronized and not duplicitous
- Consider appointing this issue to someone not as an add-on in role, but as their primary role—at least to help coordinate and connect things across the field and government efforts. Perhaps a project manager to help with the facilitation in combining the different organizations and efforts who are engaged already.

What We Can Do in The Future

- Ensure that we are accurately tracking data of open roles and retention rates
- Support the ongoing CTE centers' efforts to build out the pathway for "grow your own".

- Support could be in the form of incentives for students, curriculum leadership/review, and licensing
- Support Adult Education Programs with the same as above and leverage community colleges
- Interface and help lead collaboration with state colleges to have an earn and learn program for people changing careers, a clear pathway for professionals to take 4-6 courses while working within a district.
- Develop a new role at the AOE and/or Department of Labor and hire a full time recruiter to build out clear pathways to education (new website dedicated to that, get active in web presence on job sites, etc.)
- Advocate for financial incentives for moving to and staying in regions, perhaps working with loan forgiveness or helping with housing costs

We are appreciative of Secretary French's *Work Group* that he put together to begin problem solving on this topic last November, and we are grateful for the ongoing Diversifying the Educator Workforce efforts that the Agency is engaged in. We are also appreciative of Governor Scott's attention to the overall workforce issue as highlighted in his *State of the State Address*. While Vermont ages and has workforce issues across all sectors, we encourage our legislative leaders to consider the risks of not attending to the evolving educator workforce crisis as a necessary and important investment that impacts all other sectors. Thank you again for the time and attention to this.