



To: Senate Education

From: Jay Nichols

Date: January 28, 2022

Subject: S. 249 Mandatory School Attendance Age

With this bill the first thing, I think of is what problem is it trying to solve? And, of course, the idea is that the longer students stay in school – especially if they graduate from high school, the more of a benefit they tend to be to society both economically and socially, and, of course, the better quality of life they are likely to have. Although there are certainly exceptions to the rule, the overwhelming statistically research supports the importance of an individual at least having a high school diploma or the equivalent thereof when they enter the world of work as adults.

So, I tend to like to look at research and data. And I began to wonder, what state has the highest high school graduation rate? Answer, Montana at 94%. What is the rule there in terms of school age requirements? As of July 2020 this was the rule:

If your child is 7 years of age or older before the first day of public school, your child must attend school until the later of the following dates: (a) his or her 16th birthday; or (b) the date your child completes his or her 8th-grade schoolwork.

Vermont was tied for second place with six other states for graduation rate according to the data I have linked for you in my written testimony at 93% as reported in World Population Review. I like this research because it really tries to compare apples to apples. So, if we have the second highest graduation rate in the nation, much higher than our friends in California who are at 83%; and who have the lowest high school graduation rate in the country; and have a law that requires mandatory attendance until children are 18 similar to the law change this bill is contemplating; why make the change?

Now, even having one student not graduate is harmful to society and to that student no question. But right now, we are very ineffective as a state in compelling students who don't want to come to school to actually attend. By and large, the courts stay out of this issue unless a student breaks some other law. What is the recourse if a student doesn't come to school and simply refuses to

attend? We have hundreds of elementary-age students that don't attend on a regular basis that schools are trying to compel to come to school. We have rules around this but most State's Attorneys will not take on a truancy case unless the child is breaking other laws, at least that is the experience principals and superintendents are sharing.

Unless you are going to have high quality supports available to these students and their families and real accountability to make sure they actually come to school this will simply become a feel good law that accomplishes very little. In fact, requiring students to come to school without the corresponding supports to make sure they are successful will simply take resources away from other students at the school and lead to more disruptive behavioral disturbances. In addition to support, if you are really serious about this type of bill there needs to be some type of accountability; for example tying drivers licenses to students being enrolled in school in good standing until a student is 18. If you drop out or are not attending school regularly -no driver's license. And, again the most important thing is to provide the social emotional supports students and their families need to stay in school and successful attain a high school diploma.

Finally, with the incredible issues schools and students are dealing with as a result of the pandemic, this is not a time to add something else on the plate of school leaders – especially when it is very unlikely without extra resources and accountability measures from outside the school that this change will have any measurable success. Adding this change right now doesn't make sense; let's get through the pandemic first.

Information on school mandatory age requirements by state from the National Center for Education Statistics.

https://nces.ed.gov/programs/statereform/tab5_1.asp

Graduation Rates all 50 states

<https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/high-school-graduation-rates-by-state>