

**Vermont State Senate
Vermont Senate Education Committee**



Vermont
Superintendents
Association

**Testimony of Jeffrey Francis, Executive Director for the Vermont
Superintendents Association**

January 28, 2022

**S. 249 Increasing the mandatory age of school attendance to 18 years of age in
half-year increments, beginning on July 1, 2023 and ending on July 1, 2026**

The Vermont Superintendents Association is committed to equity of opportunity for all learners and recognizes the merits of useful policy and approaches effective in supporting students in completing their secondary school education.

That stated, my testimony today will center on the fact that the Vermont Superintendents Association does not support S.249, in its current form, for reasons that I outline below.

First, this proposal falls into the category of a new initiative at a time when superintendents and others in the education community have seen the compelling need to request a reprieve from additive requirements imposed by the General Assembly.

It is imperative that educators have the time and space to focus on COVID-19 response and recovery and to implement existing education policy, such as Act 173, with fidelity.

We want to take this opportunity to reiterate that request, which was initially conveyed to you in testimony¹ provided by superintendents Jeanne Collins and Libby Bonesteel on January 4.

Second, irrespective of our appeal to stem the flow of new legislative initiatives, when and if the Senate Education Committee pursues this policy direction, VSA recommends considering research indicating that, in and of itself, a mandatory increase in school attendance age is insufficient to meet the intended goals.

I listened to Senator Nitka's presentation of the bill to the Committee and while there is certainly merit to the underlying intentions of the bill, it falls short of addressing the

¹ [VSA Testimony - How Schools Are Contending and How The General Assembly Can Help 01/04/22](#)

system requirements and supports that should accompany a change in compulsory attendance, if that is to occur.

Without the necessary supports, such as the resources to foster stronger engagement through expanded student services, simply changing the mandatory age of attendance will not accomplish the desired outcomes.

Likewise, simple requirements for mandatory attendance do not meet the complex needs of struggling students and their families and the consequences of enforcing those requirements have the potential to exacerbate inequities.

For your reference, here are two research studies that we identified in the course of preparing this testimony that delve into relevant issues:

[Does Raising the State Compulsory School Attendance Age Achieve the Intended Outcomes?](#)

[Compulsory School Attendance - The New American Crime](#)

Finally and less importantly, with respect to the language and mechanics of the bill as written, the proposal to increase the mandatory age in half-year increments over a three year time period would be logistically and administratively burdensome and, in our view, add unnecessary complexity.

In summary, we do not support pursuing S.249 at this time and would advise that if, at another time, the General Assembly wishes to systematically focus on the matter of school completion (which VSA would support), it look at the issue more comprehensively than is suggested in S.249.

Thank you.