

TO: Senate Education Committee
FROM: Jeff Fannon, Vermont-NEA Executive Director
DATE: February 8, 2022
RE: S.283 – Miscellaneous Education Bill

Good afternoon. Thank you for allowing me to speak with you about S.283, the miscellaneous education bill. Before I begin with that legislation, however, I wanted to make sure you received my February 2nd memorandum about a possible loan forgiveness proposal. I continue to follow-up with VSAC, as it would necessarily be included, but certainly student loan debt is crushing, and we support any efforts to address that burden.

Sec. 1 Determination of Residency for Tuition Purposes

Vermont-NEA supports the state's efforts to assist refugees, and this seems like a modest step towards that goal. We support it.

Sec. 2 Suspension or Expulsion of Students

Like others I am sure, Vermont-NEA believes entities that receive education fund dollars should be held to the same standards as do public schools, including around their discipline rules. Students with disabilities often suffer the greatest forms of discipline because of their disabilities, and rules protecting students should apply to all students regardless of the school they attend. This expanded language, as VSBA points out, is supported by Act 35's Task Force on Equitable and Inclusive School Environments' initial report. That task force examined issues of race, school suspensions and expulsions, and other "inclusive" issues in hopes of addressing systemic disciplinary issues found in our schools.

Sec. 3 Standardized Kindergarten Entrance Age Report

We support the AOE examining a standard kindergarten starting age, and we would work with the Agency in this regard.

Sec. 4 Statewide Uniform School Calendar Report

I am not exactly sure what problem is being addressed here, but we support the AOE examining the impact of a uniform statewide school calendar. Current law already requires a regional calendar approved by a majority of the superintendents in a tech center catchment area. 16 VSA § 1071(e). This issue came up several years ago, but perhaps a review of it again is in order and perhaps the start time issue could be added to this section and report.

Sec. 5 Remote Learning Report

As a general matter we support a review of the standards and delivery of remote learning. These past 3 school years demonstrate there is much to be learned and we would support such a review by the AOE.