

John Carroll
Chair, State Board of Education
22 January 2021
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In the past year, 2020, the State Board of Education has engaged in several initiatives to “*advance education policy for the State of Vermont*” (16 V.S.A §164). By statute, the Board’s roles and responsibilities consist in several discrete functions:

1. **facilitation and implementation of major education initiatives of the General Assembly** — most notably the development of rules to implement Act 173 of 2018, enhancing funding and services for Special Education;
2. **analysis and recommendation to the General Assembly for legislative reforms concerning education** — most recently bringing to the General assembly’s attention issues raised by the dissolution of the Halifax Readsboro Union School District;
3. **rule-making to guide the scope, quality, and accountability of pK-12 education** — this year the Board began the long-delayed process of updating its rules (several hundred pages!) govern public education and independent schools;
4. **convening public conversations about important developments, trends, and concerns in pre-K-12 education in Vermont** — a day-long all-comers discussion of Proficiency Based Learning, a series of public conversations with key stakeholders about distance-learning, continuity of essential student services, and re-opening schools, and a survey — developed and conducted by the Board’s two student-members — of students from nine Vermont high schools on the impact of COVID-19 on their education; and
5. **adjudicating Vermonters’ appeals of decisions of the Secretary of Education and of other educational entities** — ranging from an appeal of the Secretary’s decision in connection with an educator’s licensing, to an appeal of the Secretary’s decision in connection with tuition rate-setting at an independent school, and most-recently, receiving appeals under 16 VSA §828, regarding local school district denials of tuition to religion-affiliated approved independent schools.

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The year 2020 also saw unprecedented levels of collaboration between the General Assembly and the State Board of Education. The Board provided testimony and assistance to several legislative committees studying proficiency-based learning, implementation of special education reforms, and resumption of the state's program of school construction aid.

Moreover, in 2020 the Board worked closely with the Senate and House Committees on Education to shape much-needed reform of the roles and responsibilities of the State Board of Education. The goals of these reforms are:

- >> to enhance the Agency of Education's autonomy by repealing vestigial provisions of law that perpetuate the State Board's undue involvement with administrative duties of the Agency; and
- >> to strengthen the State Board's unique role as citizen overseers of education in Vermont, independent of partisan considerations and interest-group pressures.

In early 2020 the Senate Committee on Education crafted and unanimously approved S-166, which clarifies the authorities and limits of the State Board. The Committee's bill was approved unanimously by the full Senate and sent on to the House, whence it was referred to the House Committee on Education. However, as happened to many bills in the 'legislative pipeline' in mid-2020, further work on S-166 was stymied by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Accordingly, in this new biennium the Board will continue its close collaboration with the General Assembly to bring to fruition these vital reforms of the Board's role and authority, and to assist the Legislature in education initiatives, such as addressing the Weighting Study and school Construction Aid, which are of pressing importance to legislators and to their constituents.