

February 21, 2024

Committee on House Education Testimony regarding H.630 A bill related to the forming of Regional Boards of Cooperative Education Services

Testimony of Julie Regimbal, Superintendent of School for the Missisquoi Valley School District which serves the communities of Franklin, Highgate and Swanton.

Thank you for the opportunity to give our thoughts regarding this bill.

1. The regional collaborative structure is one that could fill a very important role in Vermont's system of support.
 - a. We have many hard to fill positions in our schools such as SLPs, Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists, Educational Psychologists, English Language Learner teachers. These hard to fill core services should be prioritized in each region.
 - b. Our school districts are already trying to find ways to partner and share employees and programs. This is difficult to do with individual districts.
2. The geographical regions need more consideration. Regional CTE districts are not sufficient. In Franklin county, for example, we have 4 School Districts; one serving Maple Run and MVSD, Cold Hollow that serves the Enosburgh-Richford District and Franklin West is part of the Chittenden County Region with Burlington and Essex. All over the state, our CTE districts differ significantly in the numbers of students that are served. In our case, a county wide region should be sufficient. That is not necessarily the case with all areas of the state. The cooperative regions would need to provide enough scale to create efficiencies.
3. It is important that these regions have a governing board and authority to act as an independent employer. These regions should be distinct from teacher bargaining to provide flexibility and efficiency.
4. The Agency of Education has oversight into the approval of independent schools and tutorial programs. Should a regional collaborative create a collaborative independent school or tutorial program, the AOE would be involved in the approval process. Beyond that, the regional collaboratives should have their own authority without Agency oversight. There would need to be collaboration with member school districts, or a process for teacher licensing if the BOCES provides services by educationally licensed professionals.
5. We have a system of designated mental health agencies that are also running independent day schools. In the future, there could be a potential transition from mental health run programs to a BOCES run program. It is important to understand the potential impact to these mental health run programs when considering any long term planning of a BOCES system.
6. The state is too small to have each region provide for every conceivable need. If the governance structure is created, it will still likely be several years of cooperative planning between regions before a functioning framework of services is put into place. In my opinion, every region should provide core related services, and then begin to identify regional specialized needs and expand programming. Only then we may be able to sustain more equitable programs for students across Vermont.