

Regional Boards of Cooperative Education Services

House Ed Committee Testimony on H630

Experiences of the
Southeast Superintendents &
Directors of Special Education

Our testimony will address:

- Current and representative challenges in Student Programming
 - Windham Northeast SU
- Positive impact of Collaboratives on Student Outcomes
 - Hartford Area Regional Collaborative (model of service delivery)
- Formation of Vermont Learning Collaborative (VTLC)
 - Members, History, Vision, Identification of Needs, Accomplishments, Challenges
- Benefits of H630 to districts



Current Challenges



Windham Northeast Supervisory Union

Students

- 1,073 total students PreK through 12
- Two-Thirds of students are on some type of intervention plan
 - 28% on Individualized Education Plans (IEP)
 - 19% on 504 Plan
 - 19% on Educational Support Team Plan (EST)

Special Education Funding

- Lost \$468,545 in State Funds due to Census Block Grant
- \$350,000 for FY25

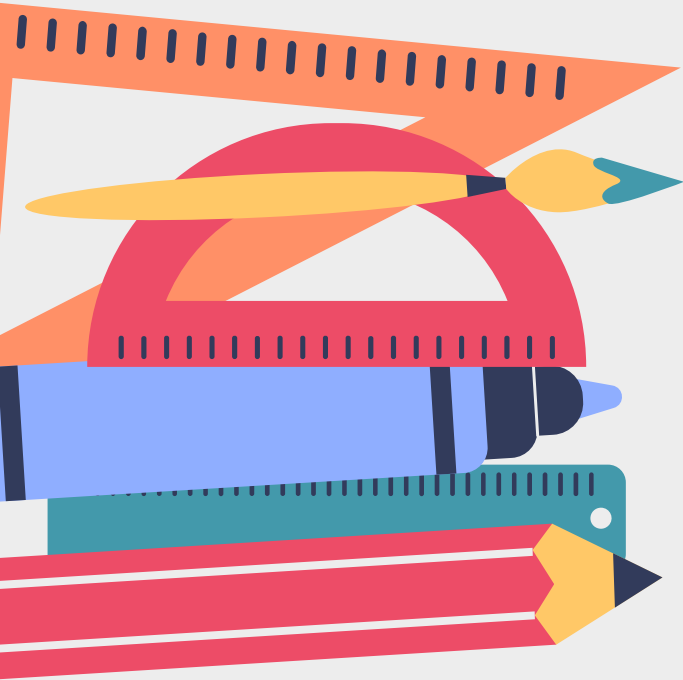
Unfilled Positions

- 5 Unfilled Special Education Teacher Positions
- 7 Unfilled Paraprofessional Positions
- 2 Unfilled Related Services Positions

Mission Creep

- School-Based Clinicians
 - 6 to local budgets
- Social-Emotional Coaching
- Act 264 / Coordinated Services Plan Meetings
- Home-to-School Supports
- Additional Administration
- Reconnect / Planning Room
- Restorative Practice Coaches

What are our STRESSORS?



- Finding qualified staff to fill open positions (not just a body)
- Lack of quality Out-of-District placements
- Lack of Transportation
- Specialized Programming for Students not in special education
- Lack of quality (nearby) Professional Development for ALL staff
- Funds to develop systems and in-house programming to support ALL students
- Increasing costs to support students in Special Education
- Decreasing funding for students in Special Education Students
- Lack of space to create specialized programs for ALL students
- Lack of support/access to partner agencies
 - HCRS
 - DCF
 - Substance Abuse

Stress Reliefs

Vermont Learning Collaborative:

- Recruitment of qualified Special Educator
- Regional Professional Development
- Job Alike Cohorts
- Discussions to develop programming with BFUHS





Lessons from Hartford Area Regional Collaborative

The Hartford Area Regional Collaborative

In District Programs

- **Regional Alternative Program** - Wilder School (19 students)
- **Hartford Regional Autism Program**
- **Regional Resource Center** (14 students)

Consultation to member schools

- ABA consultation and assessment
- Wrap-around community-based planning
- FBA observations in home school

Professional Development

Offered training and graduate course work for teachers of member schools



HARC

Serves the following districts/SUs:

- Hartford School District
- Springfield School District
- Lebanon School District
- Mascoma School District
- Dresden School District
- Rivendell Interstate School District
- Orange Southwest SU
- Orange East SU
- Mountain Views SU
- Windham Northeast SU
- Windsor Northeast SU
- White River Valley SU

Mountain Views SU

Benefits of being part of a Collaborative:

- Provided models for addressing needs of students with intensive needs within the school community
- Consultation with experts on creating effective programs
- Meet students' needs closest to home school
- Significantly reduced the number of out-of-district special education placements, therefore reducing budgets



Current MVSU Programs

Working with Hartford Collaborative, MVSU created:

- **Options Program** for students with challenging behaviors who did not experience success in a full school day program in the High School
 - Reduced number of students withdrawing from school
 - Program built on student successes
- **PALS Program**
 - Meets needs of elementary students with communication needs and intellectual disabilities
 - Students engage in classes with same age peers based on success
- **Community Classroom**
 - Meets needs of middle & high school students with communication needs and intellectual challenges
 - Provides a peer social group



***All of our students are
all of our students!***





Highly Qualified Educators

VTLC offers professional staffing and service providers who are highly qualified and experienced in their speciality area. Contact us now to learn more about these services or to request staffing.

Building Capacity

Whether you are looking for job-alike groups, leadership coaching, direct services, assessment and evaluation or professional development opportunities, call VTLC first to meet your district needs. Virtual services, training and coaching options available to meet your busy schedules.

Program Development

Whether you are looking for a specialized placement out of district or have space in your district to house one of our programs, we have you covered. Call us to discuss your needs and options.



VTLC Board of Directors



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VTLC: History

- VTLC was in existence as a **non-profit**, providing districts with **professional development** and **fiscal agent** services **since 2014**
- Approximately **6 years ago**, Superintendents (Lyle Holiday and Zach McLaughlin) were invited to be on the VTLC Board (with intention to shift to be a **regional services** organization)
- Zach shared information about the **SEEM Collaborative** in MA and arranged tours
- Sherry Sousa initiated discussion with the regional Superintendent group
- Regional Superintendent group discussed **regional programming** for specialized programs to be run by the Collaborative, housing programs within districts to provide Least Restrictive Environment
- The **VTLC Board of Directors** planned to retire and offered the non-profit entity and liquid assets to Superintendents
- Superintendents **engaged** other stakeholders (Directors of Student Services/Special Education, Directors of Curriculum & Instruction, and others)
- Zach McLaughlin and Stephanie Betit-Hancock **joined the VTLC Board** and began the transition
- **Regional SUs/SDs provided seed money** & additional **members** joined from **8 SUs/SDs**
- Contracted with NewSolutions K12 to hire an **Executive Director**
- VTLC currently has **11 Board members**, an **Executive Director**, part-time Administrative Assistant, and other contracted employees!

VTLC: Vision

The Vermont Learning Collaborative has recently been transformed with representatives from **8 supervisory unions/districts** in Vermont. Our **aim** is to provide **regional, effective, and efficient** support around **solutions** for challenges including but not limited to:

- addressing hard to fill positions
- coordinating placement into existing district-run, substantially separate programs that have capacity
- developing and managing school-based, collaborative run programs for high need, low incidence disabilities
- professional development
- and more!

VTLC: Identification of SU/SD Needs

- Specialized programming for social/emotional profile at all levels
- Re-engagement programming for grades 5-12
- Alternative high school programming for students to connect to academics and vocational training
- Transportation support for students placed in out of district placements
- Grant funding for regional initiatives (SEL work, wrap around supports, vocational training, school safety, reading/literacy)
- Cooperative purchasing (paper, school supplies, transportation, fuel, athletic equipment)

VTLC: Accomplishments

- Provided professional development on implementation of the new VT special education regulations with a focus on legal obligations (2 sessions)
- Recruitment and placement of hard to fill positions (special educators, paraprofessionals, speech and language pathologists, program leaders)
- Created job alike groups for SEL leadership, principals, clinicians, SLPs, OTs
- Developed an assessment team to provide evaluation support to districts (autism, psycho-educational, speech & language, reading)
- District consultation for specific training, needs assessment, and program development
- Secured school safety consultant to work with districts on needs assessments and implementation plans
- Online modules for annual mandated staff training
- Mentoring/Coaching and consultation to school district leaders



VTLC: Challenges

- Requires flexibility in thinking and commitment to utilizing collaborative services over already-established resources
- Geography - vast area to service
- Lack of facility space options - need to identify classroom space opportunities within existing district buildings
- Funding sources
- Competing with well-established specialty agencies

What H630 offers districts:

- Provides the infrastructure to develop a Regional Board
- Addresses many of the financial challenges faced in forming VTLC
- Supports using current available space within districts for program development
- Encourages creative collaboration, maximizing efficiency, reducing costs, and expanding offerings to students

Q&A



Contact Information



Stephanie Betit-Hancock
Director of Student Services
Windham Central SU
802-365-9515 Office
802-380-0861 Cell
sbetit-hancock@windhamcentral.org



Andy Haas
Superintendent of Schools
Windham Northeast SU
802-463-9958 Office
603-913-3991 Cell
andrew.haas@wnesu.com



Sherry Sousa
Superintendent
Mountain Views SU
802-457-1213 Office
802-269-1699 Cell
Sherry.Sousa@mntnviews.org