

1 Introduced by Committee on Education

2 Date:

3 Subject: Education; school construction; facilities; grant program

4 Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to:

5 (1) create the Facilities Master Plan Grant Program to support  
6 supervisory unions and independent career and technical education districts to  
7 support the development of a master plan that complies with State construction  
8 aid requirements;

9 (2) require the Agency of Education and Department of Buildings and  
10 General Services to work together to establish a list of prequalified architecture  
11 and engineering consultants; and

12 (3) create the State Aid for School Construction Working Group to  
13 study and design a plan for a statewide school construction aid program; and

14 An act relating to the development of an updated State aid to school  
15 construction program

16 It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

17 Sec. 1. 16 V.S.A. § 3441 is added to read:

18 § 3441. FACILITIES MASTER PLAN GRANT PROGRAM; REPORT

19 (a) Intent. It is the intent of the General Assembly that the Facilities  
20 Master Plan Grant Program established pursuant to this section shall enable

1 supervisory unions and independent career and technical education districts to  
2 develop a supervisory union level vision for all school buildings that meets the  
3 educational needs and goals of the supervisory union. The goal of a facilities  
4 master plan shall be to facilitate an evaluation of the capacity of existing  
5 facilities to deliver on identified 21<sup>st</sup> century educational goals. A facilities  
6 master plan shall also enable and require supervisory unions to engage in  
7 intentional and robust conversations with the larger community that will  
8 hopefully lead to the successful passage of bonds needed to support the  
9 renovation or construction needs of the supervisory union. It is the intent of  
10 the General Assembly that awards shall be granted in accordance with this  
11 section and in a manner that allows a maximum number of supervisory unions  
12 and independent career and technical education districts to successfully  
13 complete facilities master plans.

14 (b) Definition. As used in this section, “supervisory union” shall have the  
15 same meaning as in subsection 11(23) of this title and shall include supervisory  
16 districts and career and technical education districts.

17 (c) Establishment. There is established the Facilities Master Plan Grant  
18 Program to be administered by the Agency of Education, from funds  
19 appropriated for this purpose, to supervisory unions and independent career  
20 and technical education districts to support the development of educational  
21 facilities master plans. Grant funds may be used to hire a consultant to assist

1 in the development of the master plan with the goal of developing a final  
2 master plan that complies with State construction aid requirements

3 (d) Standards for the disbursement of funds. The Agency shall develop  
4 standards for the disbursement of grant funds in accordance with the following:

5 (1) Grants shall be awarded to applicants with the highest facilities  
6 needs. The Agency shall develop a prioritization formula based on an  
7 applicant’s poverty factor and average facilities condition index score. The  
8 Agency shall develop or choose a poverty metric to use for the prioritization  
9 formula. The Agency may give priority to applications with a regionalization  
10 focus that consist of more than one supervisory union or independent career  
11 and technical education district that apply as a consortium.

12 (2) Award amounts shall be commensurate with the gross square  
13 footage of buildings located within the applicable supervisory union or career  
14 and technical education district.

15 (3) The Agency shall develop minimum requirements for an educational  
16 facilities master plan, which shall include, at a minimum, the following  
17 elements:

18 (A) a description of the educational mission, vision, and goals of the  
19 supervisory union;

20 (B) a description of educational programs and services offered by the  
21 supervisory union;

- 1           (C) the performance of a space utilization assessment;  
2           (D) the identification of new program needs;  
3           (E) the development of enrollment projections;  
4           (F) the performance of a facilities assessment; and  
5           (G) information regarding the various design options explored to  
6 address the supervisory union’s identified needs.

7           (e) Report. Annually on or before December 31, the Agency shall submit  
8 to the House and Senate Committees on Education a written report with  
9 information on the implementation of the grant program created in this section.

10       Sec. 2. REPEAL; FACILITIES MASTER PLAN GRANT PROGRAM

11           16 V.S.A. § 3441 (Facilities Master Plan Grant Program) as added by this  
12 act is repealed on June 30, 2029.

13       Sec. 3. PREQUALIFIED ARCHITECTURE AND ENGINEERING  
14           CONSULTANTS

15           On or before October 15, 2024, the Agency of Education shall coordinate  
16 with the Department of Buildings and General Services to develop  
17 prequalification criteria for architecture and engineering firms specializing in  
18 kindergarten through grade 12 school design and construction. The  
19 Department shall assist the Agency in distributing requests for qualifications  
20 and in reviewing the resulting responses for approval and prequalification.

1 The Department shall maintain the list of prequalified firms and shall make the  
2 list available to school districts and supervisory unions.

3 Sec. 4. STATE AID FOR SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION WORKING GROUP;  
4 REPORT

5 (a) Creation. There is created the State Aid for School Construction  
6 Working Group to study and design a plan for a statewide school construction  
7 aid program.

8 (b) Membership. The Working Group shall be composed of the following  
9 members:

10 (1) three current members of the House of Representatives, not all from  
11 the same political party, who shall be appointed by the Speaker of the House;

12 (2) three current members of the Senate, not all from the same political  
13 party, who shall be appointed by the Committee on Committees; and

14 (3) the Secretary of Education, or designee.

15 (c) Powers and duties.

16 (1) The Working Group shall study and create a recommended plan for  
17 a statewide school construction aid program, including recommendations on  
18 implementation. To facilitate its understanding of school construction projects  
19 and other school construction state aid programs, the Working Group may  
20 travel to conduct site visits at schools or other state programs. In creating its  
21 recommendations, the Working Group shall address the following topics,

1 building from the recommendations contained in the report of the School  
2 Construction Aid Task Force, created in 2023 Acts and Resolves No. 78, Sec.  
3 E.131.1:

4 (A) Governance. The Working Group shall study other state  
5 governance models for school construction aid programs, including inviting  
6 testimony from school officials from those states, and make a recommendation  
7 for a governance model for Vermont that aligns with the other funding and  
8 programmatic recommendations of the Working Group. Governance  
9 recommendations shall include recommendations on staffing levels and a  
10 stable appropriation for the funding of the recommended governance structure.

11 (B) Prioritization criteria. The Working Group shall make  
12 recommendations on state aid prioritization criteria that will drive funding  
13 towards projects that are aligned to the State’s educational policies and  
14 priorities.

15 (C) Eligibility criteria. The Working Group shall consider, at a  
16 minimum, the following state aid eligibility criteria:

17 (i) appropriate maintenance and operations budgeting at the  
18 supervisory union level;

19 (ii) a requirement for eligible supervisory unions to have a five  
20 year capital plan;

1                    (iii) a facility condition index maximum level that would preclude  
2                    eligibility but may qualify a building for a State share percentage bonus to  
3                    replace the building;

4                    (iv) a requirement for a supervisory union master planning process  
5                    that would require consideration of the adaptive reuse of schools for housing or  
6                    other social infrastructure; and

7                    (v) a prohibition on exclusionary zoning regulations that would  
8                    preclude lesser resourced families from living in the applicable school district.

9                    (D) State base share. The Working Group shall make  
10                   recommendations as to whether to include a State base share and if so, whether  
11                   it shall be based on student or community poverty factors. The Working  
12                   Group shall consider factors such as local taxing capacity, student poverty  
13                   data, environmental justice metrics, and energy burden metrics.

14                   (E) Incentives. The Working Group shall consider the use of  
15                   incentives or State share bonuses that align with Vermont’s educational  
16                   priorities with the goal of efficient and sustainable use of taxpayer supported  
17                   school construction aid to improve student learning environments and  
18                   opportunities. The Working Group shall consider appropriate limits on  
19                   cumulative incentives and whether incentives shall be bundled for eligibility.

20                   Policy areas to consider for incentives include:

21                   (i) school safety and security;

- 1                    (ii) health;
- 2                    (iii) educational enhancements;
- 3                    (iv) overcrowding solutions;
- 4                    (v) environmental performance;
- 5                    (vi) newer and fewer buildings;
- 6                    (vii) major renovations to improve PreK–12 systems educational
- 7 alignment and capacity;
- 8                    (viii) replacement of facilities with a current facility condition
- 9 index of 65 percent or higher, in combination with other policy area incentives;
- 10 and
- 11                    (ix) schools identified with actionable levels of airborne PCBs and
- 12 other identified environmental hazards in critical education spaces.
- 13                    (F) Assurance and certification process.
- 14                    (i) The Working Group shall make recommendations for an
- 15 assurance and certification process and shall consider, at a minimum the
- 16 following:
- 17                    (I) a district’s commitment to adequate funding for ongoing
- 18 maintenance and operations of any State-funded improvements;
- 19                    (II) a district to assure to adequate training for facilities and
- 20 custodial staff to properly operate and maintain systems funded through State
- 21 aid;



1                    (III) a district to complete a full commissioning process as a  
2                    requirement to receive State funds at the end of the project; and

3                    (IV) a clerk of the works throughout the lifespan of the project.

4                    (ii) The Working Group shall also consider whether the assurance  
5                    and certification process shall be eligible for State funding support, as well as  
6                    whether a preferred vendor list for the commissioning process and clerk of the  
7                    works is advisable.

8                    (G) Environmental hazards and contaminants. The Working Group  
9                    shall make recommendations that approach environmental hazards and  
10                   contaminants in a comprehensive manner, incorporating existing programs into  
11                   the school construction aid program where possible.

12                   (H) Pre-program construction aid. The Working Group shall  
13                   consider whether and to what extent State aid should be made available to  
14                   school districts that begin construction projects prior to the establishment or  
15                   renewal of a State school construction aid program.

16                   (I) Current law. The Working Group shall review State statutes and  
17                   State Board of Education rules that concern or impact school construction and  
18                   make recommendations to the General Assembly for any amendments  
19                   necessary to align with the Working Group’s proposed construction aid  
20                   program.

1           (J) Efficiencies. The Working Group shall identify areas where  
2           economizations or efficiencies might be gained in the creation of the program,  
3           including consideration of the following:

4                   (i) a prequalification process for consultants with experience in the  
5           planning, renovation, and construction of kindergarten through grade 12  
6           schools; and

7                   (ii) cost containment strategies such as the use of building  
8           templates for new construction.

9           (K) Fiscal modeling. The Working Group shall align the proposed  
10          construction aid program with fiscal modeling produced by the Joint Fiscal  
11          Office.

12          (L) School Construction Planning Guide. The Working Group shall  
13          review the Vermont School Construction Planning Guide and make  
14          recommendations for any amendments necessary to align with the Working  
15          Group’s proposed construction aid program.

16          (M) Additional considerations. The Working Group may consider  
17          any other topic, factor, or issue that it deems relevant to its work and  
18          recommendations.

19                (2) The Working Group shall consult with the following entities in  
20          developing its proposed plan to ensure all applicable areas of Vermont law and  
21          federal funding opportunities are taken into consideration:

- 1           (A) the Agency of Education;  
2           (B) the Agency of Natural Resources;  
3           (C) the Department of Public Safety, Division of Fire Safety;  
4           (D) the Natural Resources Board;  
5           (E) the Agency of Commerce and Community Development,  
6           Division for Historic Preservation;  
7           (F) the U.S. Department of Education;  
8           (G) U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Development;  
9           (H) the Vermont School Boards Association;  
10           (I) the Vermont Superintendents Association; and  
11           (J) any other entity the Working Group deems relevant to its work.

12           (d) Assistance. The Working Group shall have the administrative,  
13           technical, and legal assistance of the Agency of Education, the Office of  
14           Legislative Counsel, the Joint Fiscal Office, and the Office of Legislative  
15           Operations.

16           (e) Proposed legislation. On or before December 15, 2024, the Working  
17           Group shall submit its findings and recommendations in the form of proposed  
18           legislation to the General Assembly.

19           (f) Meetings.

20           (1) The Office of Legislative Counsel shall call the first meeting of the  
21           Working Group to occur on or before August 1, 2024.

1           (2) The Working Group shall select co-chairs from among its members  
2           at the first meeting, one a member of the House and the other a member from  
3           the Senate.

4           (3) A majority of the membership shall constitute a quorum.

5           (4) The Working Group shall cease to exist on December 31, 2024.

6           (g) Compensation and reimbursement. For attendance at meetings during  
7           adjournment of the General Assembly, members of the Study Committee shall  
8           be entitled to per diem compensation and reimbursement of expenses pursuant  
9           to 2 V.S.A. § 23 for not more than 10 meetings. These payments shall be  
10          made from monies appropriated to the General Assembly.

11          Sec. 5. APPROPRIATION; STATE AID FOR SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION

12                          WORKING GROUP

13           The sum of \$15,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund to the  
14           General Assembly in fiscal year 2025 for the purpose of funding travel by the  
15           State Aid for School Construction Working Group pursuant to Sec. 4,  
16           subsection (c) of this act.

17          Sec. 6. EFFECTIVE DATE

18           This act shall take effect on July 1, 2024.