
TESTIMONY

Testimony To: House Committee on Education

Respectfully Submitted by: Heather A. Bouchey, Ph.D., Interim Secretary of Education

Subject: **S.56 - An act relating to childcare and early childhood education**

Date: April 25, 2023

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on S.56 - An act relating to childcare and early childhood education. We all have a shared goal of expanding options for PreK and we appreciate the General Assembly's continued work on getting it right for Vermont students and families. We are grateful that we have an opportunity to testify on this latest version of S.56, and value the committee's deep understanding of and support for PreK-12 education in Vermont.

Organizational Structure

We are hopeful that the General Assembly will provide AOE the space and time needed to determine how best we should be staffed for leading and elevating PreK work. Of note, the current version of the bill gives latitude to DCF in terms of its organization to meet the legislative goals of S.56 but mandates that the AOE plan for a new exempt position (deputy or commissioner). We have concerns about this approach.

The Agency of Education is an incredibly lean, flat organization. Absent a significant change in the way AOE is currently staffed, AOE's success is highly dependent on our ability to reorganize ourselves to meet the needs of the work as it currently stands and as it evolves. Viewed in this light, our concerns about our organizational chart, while they may appear to be trivial, are actually very important because they have implications for the ability of a future Secretary to organize the Agency in the way they determine necessary to achieve the Agency's mission and purpose. AOE must also balance the elevation of PreK, an important goal, with work on the other "grades" in education (i.e., K-12; see attached org chart). This does not mean we do not highly value PreK.

I would also like to note that much has been made in some quarters about the fact that PreK is buried deep within the organizational structure of AOE, whereas it is relatively elevated as a DCF Deputy Commissioner on the AHS side. Given our very different organizational structures, I wanted to offer another way of considering the issue, by looking at the chain of command between the person responsible for PreK in each agency and the Governor. By doing this we



can look at degrees of separation or links in the chain as a way of understanding how elevated PreK is from a leadership perspective.

For the AHS side, the chain of command looks like this, with three degrees of separation between the CDD Deputy Commissioner and the Governor:

DCF Deputy Commissioner > DCF Commissioner > AHS Secretary > Governor

On the Agency of Education side, the chain of command has four degrees of separation between the Early Education Program Manager and the Governor:

Early Education Program Manager > Division Director > Deputy Secretary > Secretary > Governor

Despite differences in title, method of appointment or hire, and organizational structure, there is currently only one additional degree of separation on the AOE side.

As an alternative to what is in S.56 currently, we are hoping the language would look something like this:

“On or before ~~November~~ January 1, 2023, the Agency of Education shall submit to the House Committees on Education and on Human Services and to the Senate Committees on Education and on Health and Welfare to implement a ~~2~~ ~~second deputy secretary position within the Agency of Education~~ a plan to elevate the standing of PreK within the PK-12 education system, using a combination of exempt and classified positions such as directors, commissioners, chiefs, and/or deputies, by examining current classification status of employees; maintaining equity in workload across divisions, teams, and positions; and considering agency size and complexity; in accordance with sections 4 and 4a of this act.”

Mixed Delivery and Three-Year-Olds

As I’ve testified before this session, we support a mixed delivery system for PreK; this provides the flexibility that parents and communities need. We again raise concerns about removing three-year-olds from the state PreK funding and conceptual model. We do not believe that taking state-funded PreK away from three-year-olds is the right approach for either children or families. As I’ve testified previously, there are serious developmental implications for children and concerns about EEE services being delivered in least restrictive environments at scale if we eliminate three-year-old eligibility. We support improving our existing mixed delivery system but implore the General Assembly not to move backwards by taking the benefit away from three-year-olds and their families.

After School Funding

Finally, multiple agencies and stakeholders have worked together to successfully deploy ESSER and ARP dollars for improved and expanded after school options throughout Vermont. We have collaborated to come up with language for funding after school via cannabis funds that is currently in the Budget (Big) bill (as directed in Act 164 of 2020). We support that language rather than what is currently in S.56. Supported language in Budget bill:

Sec. E.500.1 UNIVERSAL AFTERSCHOOL AND SUMMER 8

(a) Pursuant to 2020 Acts and Resolves No. 164, which dedicates the cannabis sales tax revenue to support grant programs for the expansion of summer and afterschool programs, with an emphasis on increasing access in underserved areas of the State, a Universal Afterschool and Summer Special Fund is created, to be managed by the Secretary of Education. The cannabis sales tax revenue shall be transferred to the Universal Afterschool and Summer Special Fund. The Secretary shall use the assets in the Fund as follows:

(1) To set up programs to support the expansion of universal afterschool and summer programs with a focus on underserved areas of the State.

(2) Cannabis sales tax revenue shall be used to support a mixed delivery system for afterschool and summer programming. Eligible recipients can be public, private, or nonprofit organizations.

(A) Grants may be used for technical assistance, program implementation, program expansion, program sustainability, and related costs.

(B) Funds may be used to directly target communities with low existing capacity to serve youth in afterschool and summer settings.

(C) The Agency may use up to \$500,000 for administrative costs to allow for the support of the grant program and technical assistance to 6 communities. This could include subcontracts to support the grant program.

(b) Advisory Committee. An Advisory Committee is created to support the Secretary of Education in administering the funds. The Agency will provide administrative and technical support to the Committee. The Committee is to be composed of:

(1) State's Chief Prevention Officer;

(2) DCF Commissioner or designee;

(3) VDH Commissioner or designee;

(4) DMH Commissioner or designee;

(5) ANR Secretary or designee;

(6) ACCD Secretary or designee;

(7) Vermont Afterschool Executive Director or Designee; and

(8) a Representative from the Governor's Office.

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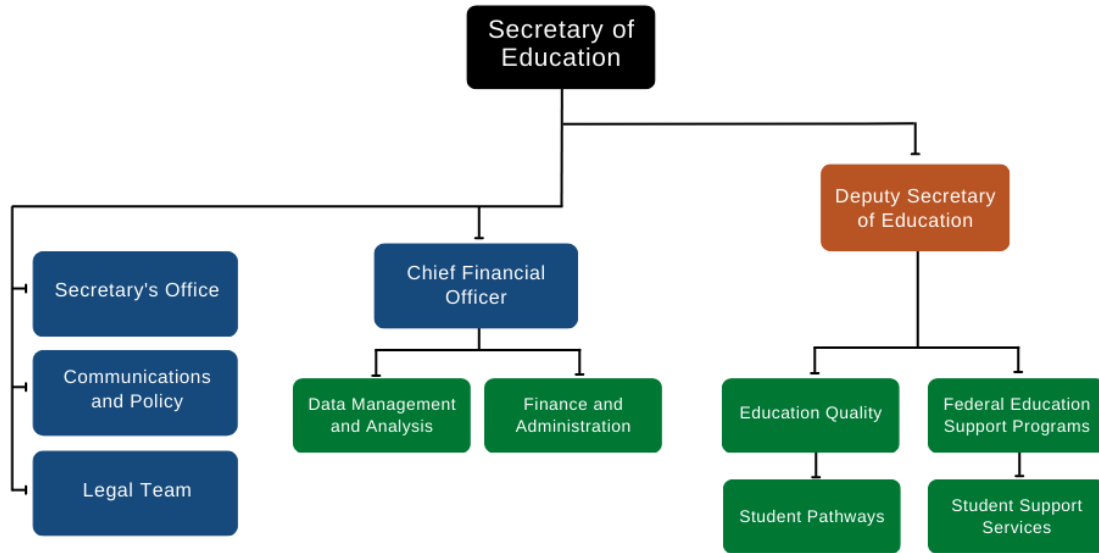
Sec. E.500.2 2020 Acts and Resolves No. 164 (Cannabis Regulation), Sec. 17d is amended to read:

Sec. 17d. ANNUAL BUDGETING OF SALES AND USE TAX
REVENUE

On or before November 15, 2021, and on or before each subsequent 5 November 15, the Agency of Education shall submit to the General Assembly a plan to fund grants in furtherance of the purposes of Sec. 17c of this act, and report outcomes data on the grants made during the previous year. The Agency will also report on the number of programs, slots, weeks or hours, geographic distribution, and what is known about costs to families. The report should be inclusive of 21C programming. The grants shall be in an amount equal to the official forecasted revenues to be raised from the sales and use tax imposed by 32 V.S.A. chapter 233 on cannabis or cannabis products in this State. The provisions of 2 V.S.A. § 20(d) (expiration of required reports) shall not apply to the plan to be made under this subsection.

Organization Charts

Vermont Agency of Education Organization Chart



AOE Organization Chart Student Support Services

