

House Education and Ways and Means Hearing
Rep. Melanie Carpenter-Lamoille 2

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, to share ideas and continue this important conversation concerning the current state of public education and how we may move forward. I am not an expert in school policy or education finance--I come to you today as a representative of my community, as a mother of a student with special needs, and as a former middle school teacher and principal.

You asked for specific and actionable recommendations. I will focus on a 5 key areas and try to be brief.

My first recommendation is that Policy Leads and Funding Follows

Public education in Vermont needs to serve **all** children---affording our students educational opportunities that are equal in quality, that are equitable, inclusive, standards based, and affordable. This is a big ask and because it is, this redesign needs to be led by experts in education policy-whether it be by our education committees, a task force, informed local and national experts or some combination of these groups. Recreating a unified mission and vision for public education in our state is the first step.. then our funding formulas should be developed or reworked to operationalize this vision. The order of operation matters.

My second ask is for re-examining our educational programs and priorities. Ask any teacher or school leader and they will tell you that there are so many needs, mandates, and competing priorities. The strain this puts on our people and our pocketbooks is tremendous. I would ask that our task force re-examine what programs comprise our current system with an eye to prioritizing and with a consideration of what could be removed from the public education domain. I don't want to be misunderstood. I'm not asking simply to shift things out of the education fund to be funded by the general fund.

I am asking to look for efficiencies and ways we can better use our human and fiscal resources. One example that illustrates this point is how we address the mental health care needs of students in public school. If we prioritize and strengthen mental health care services through partnerships with our designated agencies--the designated agencies can provide services to students, wrap supports around families in flexible ways and draw down federal medicaid money. This could decrease the burden on schools and eliminate redundant service models that often compete for the same pool of workers. And we would not leave federal money on the table. BOCES is another

example of possible ways to build efficiencies and we should continue to look for others like these.

Third I would ask that-- as we look towards consolidation, we adopt a policy of school designation. If a school district closes an existing school it should provide education for its residents by designating other public schools to serve in this capacity. This keeps our precious state dollars in the public school system. It also provides receiving or designated schools the opportunity to plan for incoming students. This type of stability and predictability is essential for educators to meet the needs of the children they serve--strengthening our system rather than draining it.

Fourth, if we are going to have a strong statewide system, we need to re-articulate what we want for every student, define our measurable outcomes, and collect data from every school that receives public money. How else will we know if we are making progress and where we need to make changes? There is so much good work being done in our schools--we should highlight and build upon existing models of success. Data will help inform this process.

Finally, we should find ways to provide short-term fiscal help for our communities- Our communities are asking for help and I feel it is imperative that we provide some fiscal aid now-in this legislative cycle.

Some things we should not do is:

- race to fix the funding formula ahead of policy work,
- or buy down the tax rate, which just digs us deeper into this hole.

Things we could explore:

- using revenue like the cloud tax or streaming tax (and perhaps others) to pay for some of the initiatives we have instituted--like universal meals.

A robust and high quality public education is the backbone of democracy. It touches every child in Vermont and must be a top priority of this body--just like housing, just like climate resiliency. I look forward to working together to bring the best that we have to all children in Vermont.

Thank you for your time and consideration.