
TESTIMONY

Testimony To: Senate Committee on Education
Respectfully Submitted by: Daniel M. French, Ed.D., Secretary of Education
Subject: **Independent Schools and Public Schools**
Date: March 2, 2023

The Committee asked me to provide some testimony on Vermont's independent schools as compared to our public schools.

1. Vermont has a tradition of independent schools that has served our students and our communities well over the years. We support the continued existence of our independent schools.
2. Our independent schools are regulated differently than our public schools. Some of this difference is a result of federal requirements. For example, public school districts receive federal funds that are highly regulated. Also, public school districts are responsible for supervising the education of their special education students even when they may contract with an independent school for the provision of specific special education services.
3. Unlike public schools, independent schools exist for a variety of purposes. Regulating them in a manner comparable to public schools would be inappropriate.
4. We do not support S.66. It would significantly alter the independent school landscape in Vermont.
5. The State Board has worked hard to improve its regulatory oversight of independent schools to meet the requirements of Act 173. We support this approach to regulation now established in State Board rules.
6. Recent court rulings around the religious status of independent schools do not justify a significant change in our regulations for independent schools. We would support, however, strengthening our oversight of anti-discrimination to ensure those independent schools that choose to accept public tuition dollars meet the non-discrimination requirements of Vermont's Public Accommodations laws.