
TESTIMONY

Testimony To: Senate Committee on Education
Respectfully Submitted by: Zoie Saunders, Secretary of Education
Subject: **H.887 – Sec. 1: Commission on the Future of Public Education**
Date: April 26, 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Section 1 of H.887, the Yield Bill, regarding the Commission on the Future of Public Education.

The Vermont Agency of Education believes that establishing a Commission on the Future of Public Education is a good idea and supports the long-term visioning and policy development efforts to strengthen and sustain Vermont’s public education system. As the Senate Finance committee explores short-and medium-range approaches to address the immediate financial challenges, it is imperative that we, as a state, do the critical work of crafting a long-term plan contemplated within Section 1 of the Yield Bill. The Agency recommends clarifying language around the governance structure, including membership and the role of the consultant. Additionally, the Agency suggests added emphasis on educational quality, including the incorporation of educational research, evidence-based practices, and a focus on outcomes. Lastly, the Agency suggests framing the discussion around the organizational structure of the Agency of Education and State Board of Education around the service delivery needs of the state, allowing the functional requirements, expertise, and scope to define the structure that is best suited to promote high outcomes from cradle to career.

Governance Structure

Clarifying roles and responsibilities of the overall governance structure will help to maximize productivity and participation by practitioners and policy experts.

- Role of Commission: Set direction and prioritize work deliverables.
- Role of Steering Committee: Operationalize and direct work of the consultant and sub-committees in alignment with the priorities set forth by the Commission.
- Sub-Committees: Evaluate content specific considerations around key policy areas. Sub-committee membership will be comprised of practitioners and leading experts.
- Consultant: Provides technical expertise in conducting research, gap analysis, and public engagement, including field visits, data collection, evaluation.



Membership

Additional members should be considered, either on the Commission or in consultation with the sub-committees, to encourage coordination of educational and support services from early childhood through higher education and training. Other entities to be directly included in the Commission structure, or to be mandated for engagement might include the Department of Children and Families, Department of Health, State Chief Prevention Office, Vermont After School, Vermont School Nurses Association, and the Vermont Curriculum Leaders Association, among other stakeholders.

I also strongly recommend that the commission be required to formally elevate student and parent voice, either by including students and parents as members or consulted groups, or by engaging in a robust process of outreach and engagement. We need a diverse set of problem solvers given the magnitude of what the Commission is being asked to achieve.

Education Quality

The Agency suggests adding a section to focus on the strategy work involved in analyzing current academic performance and developing consensus on shared education goals in alignment with the intent to prepare our students for academic and career success. This work should involve data analysis and practitioner engagement to build on successes and incorporate lessons learned from prior visioning and policy changes.

Organizational Form (Agency/Department)

The bill gives a binary option, contemplating an agency or department. However, the Agency suggests broadening this structural question to define how services should be organized to develop an integrated system from early childhood to career, including ways to optimize service delivery spanning multiple agencies. Agency or Department could be used as examples in the bill, however the question is framed as a binary choice. We suggest that the consideration should be broader. Instead, task the Commission with coming back with a recommended governance structure based on the established goals and vision.