



To: Senate Education

From: Jay Nichols , Executive Director

Date: Feb 22, 2023

Subject: NEASC Accreditation

The Vermont Principals' Association supports school leaders to improve the equity and quality of educational opportunities for all students.

Officially, for the record, Jay Nichols, Executive Director of the Vermont Principals' Association.

I listened to the testimony of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), Executive Director (I believe that was his title) Mr. Staples in the Senate Education Committee and also listened to the testimony of this same NEASC leader along with two of his colleagues, one in charge of the private school NEASC evaluation process and one in charge with public school NEASC evaluation process in the House Education Committee.

The VPA does not believe that all public schools, or frankly any public schools, should be required to participate in the NEASC Accreditation process. This is not a condemnation of the NEASC Accreditation process in any way. Some public schools in Vermont use NEASC and have found it to be helpful. Most do not use it for a couple of major reasons.

First is cost, requiring NEASC accreditation would essentially be yet another unfunded mandate passed on to the public schools. Now, I noticed that in the handouts provided at least for the record by NEASC there was no cost structure information provided. So I went to their website and they don't seem to provide information for how much they charge for Independent school dues and for fees and services in New England and within the United States. The only fee schedule they provided was for International Schools on their website and I assumed they would give a good old New England state a better deal than that. However, in testimony in front of House Education the Association of Independent Schools for New England which works

primarily with private elementary schools in the region has as its lowest fee amount \$1080 annually for schools who have less than a million dollar budget and another \$365.00 annually for having under 99 kids. In Vermont, we have roughly 297 schools. If every school had a budget of less than a million dollars and had less than 99 kids our cost would be \$429,165 every year. And of course, we have schools with a lot more than 99 kids and budgets much bigger than a million dollars. Now with NEASC, I could again only find the International School Accreditation rates. It appears that the lowest for those schools is \$3265 annually and I'm not sure about any additional fees. That would come out to \$969,705 annually in the state.

Fortunately, I was in a meeting with two principals that recently completed the NEASC process, and a few that had recently stopped using NEASC. First, I asked the two principals who used NEASC what they paid in Annual Dues. I figured it would be lower than the international rate that I found. I was wrong. The Woodstock principal said their annual dues are \$3600 yearly. The Rutland high school assistant principal said their annual fee was \$4340. Thus, the amount it would cost to require every school to do NEASC would likely be cost prohibitive.

Moreover, it is questionable as to what advantage educationally public schools would receive if they were required to have NEASC Accreditation. First of all, NEASC is strongly affiliated with colleges and high schools. They certainly serve as a bare minimum to look at the quality of education and private schools and that is an important function. However, the difference is that the private schools do not have traditional local and state oversight. Public schools are responsible for all Vermont laws and rules and regulations as set by the General Assembly, Agency of Education, and the State Board of Education. In addition, there are federal rules regarding quality and transparency of financial oversight that do not apply to private schools. Public schools are not for profit institutions and are transparent in all of their financial matters and have an elected school board that makes sure the schools are accountable to their local citizens. Private schools have no such obligation.

When I talked to principals that no longer use NEASC cost was not the only aspect of the process identified. Principals spoke of the massive amount of paperwork and pre-work that schools must do as part of the process. They also voiced that public schools already are accountable to the Agency of Education, to test scores, to financial restraints, to an elected school board, to continuous improvement plans that are open to citizens feedback and AOE oversight etc.

One principal seemed to sum up the overall feeling by saying that if Senate Education wants to really help all Vermont children and schools then come up with the same rules for everybody so that private schools are held accountable in the same way as public schools. A resounding point was if the General Assembly, U.S. Department of Education, and the VT Agency of Education removed all the other layers of things required of Vermont public schools that private schools don't have to do then we'd be glad to do something like NEASC, even though there are many other things that could be done that would be more effective in terms of school improvement and accountability.

AISNE Cost Structure

<https://education.vermont.gov/sites/aoe/files/documents/VT%20accreditation%20presentation.pdf>

NEASC Cost Structure

<https://www.google.com/search?q=NEASC+Accrediation+Fees&oq=NEASC&aqs=chrome.69j59j46i199i433i465i512j0i512i3j69i61i2j69i60.2158j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>