

**TESTIMONY PROVIDED TO:** House Education Committee

**FROM:** Meagan Roy, Ed.D. (Chair, Commission on the Future of VT Education)

**TOPIC:** Commission Update

**DATE:** February 5, 2025

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide regular updates to the Committee regarding the work of the Commission. The ability of the Commission to remain present and engaged in its work as defined in the law is predicated on the legislature having a mechanism to hear from us on a more regular basis than simply through the Commission's official reporting requirements.

### **Summary of February 3rd Meeting**

The Commission focused its meeting on Monday in two areas, both in service of this question: How can the Commission be the most effective in the current context? Our work was to organize ourselves toward that end. The legislature convened this group to analyze the challenges in Vermont and make recommendations, and we've been proceeding in alignment with that charge. The Commission also acknowledged that in many ways this same conversation is going on outside of the Commission.

#### *Policy Considerations in Act 183*

There are twenty-nine distinct policy consideration areas outlined in Act 183 (see the attached blank document that was used to facilitate our discussion). The Commission recognizes that it will be difficult (if not impossible) to fully address each area without some form of prioritization. And, in order to provide the legislature feedback and recommendations about policy proposals that come out while we are conducting our work (such as the Administration's proposal), we may need to pause and reorder our work in response to what you need.

We began this discussion by attempting to look at each of the policy areas and identify the following:

1. What **information** do we need to gather to inform our discussion (and where might we find it)?
2. **Who** needs to be part of this discussion?
3. What is the **priority level** of this item, given the current context?

We began with a focus on the two policy areas that are required of us in Act 183 and also form the basis of the Administration's transformation proposal:

- "an analysis and recommendation for the most efficient and effective number and location of school buildings, school districts, and supervisory unions" and
- "Alternative funding models (including formula funding models)"

Starting the conversation here generated discussion that I believe is important for this Committee to be aware of. I would also say that the Commission did not finish the discussion, and the next steps outlined below will illustrate how we agreed to proceed.

- The Commission **agrees** with the perspective shared in this Committee that the Commission

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remains not only relevant but essential as a body that can generate and react to proposals that the legislature is considering (proposals that include, but are not limited to, the administration's proposal). The Commission **does not agree** that it should be disbanded. However, they understand that they may need to adjust based on direction provided by the legislature.

- There was some commentary about **ensuring the neutrality** of the Commission. Our task is to generate recommendations, but we are doing this in a context where the Administration has generated its own proposal and we also need to be able to respond to that proposal so that the legislature has our perspective. This is challenging, especially as we've identified that we believe **cohesion** in these discussions is critical.
- Specific to the two elements of the Administration's plan: Our conversation was not intended to be an analysis of either. However, in the discussion there was general consensus about the magnitude of investigation, modeling and implication analysis that would be required in order to first determine **whether/if** a foundation formula and consolidation are viable ideas to support the change needed in Vermont and then **if yes**, to determine a transition plan that would prevent disruption to students and educators in schools.

### *Communication & Engagement*

The second half of our meeting included a presentation and initial input session from Afton Partners, the communication and engagement firm the Commission has contracted with to help us refine our engagement plan. As we indicated in our preliminary findings report, there is a clear need for ongoing, productive engagement with Vermonters (all Vermonters, and specifically identified groups). This engagement will need to be flexible in its design and purpose. The engagement will sometimes be very targeted to gather input and reaction to proposals in a way that the legislature can't. Afton presented some initial [information](#) about their approach to the work as well as the need to be flexible and iterative as they design engagement opportunities.

### **Next Steps/Recommendations**

As discussed in the joint presentation with this Committee and House Weighs and Means, the Commission will need to have more regular and repeated engagement with the legislature in order to provide the analysis, input and (when appropriate) recommendations required to sufficiently inform the legislature's discussions. This is outside of the required reporting in Act 183, which requires that the Commission provide a formal report in December of 2025, with proposed legislative language. My goal is to create a cadence of legislative input and remain available to meet with you as needed.

The Commission identified the following next steps:

- Establish a cadence of viewing relevant testimony: The general assembly is proceeding with hearing from a variety of experts, and it is instructive for our Commission to be as informed as

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legislators themselves on key issues. This will also be helpful so that if the Commission requests additional testimony for our group (perhaps from those same experts), we can identify specific follow up questions. The Commission agreed to receive a summary of relevant testimony each week. This will also ensure that we don't need to use Commission meeting time for repetitive presentations.

- Foundation Formula: The Commission committed to engaging in this question: Is a shift to a foundation formula a viable idea for Vermont, and if so, what are the implications and considerations necessary for analysis? Dr. Kolbe will be invited to an upcoming meeting to provide additional, targeted information about best practices in funding models.
- Consolidation of School Districts: The Commission committed to engaging in this question: Is further district consolidation a viable idea for Vermont, and if so, what are the implications and considerations necessary for analysis? In addition, it was made clear that **these two policy considerations are linked**, and the Commission will need to engage in each separately and as joint policy areas.
- Continued analysis of policy considerations: Because we did not finish the prioritization and analysis in the blank document, Commission members were asked to capture their own thinking about each and submit to me by the end of this week. This information will be collated to inform the Steering Group.
- Steering Group: The next few meetings of the Commission will center around the two questions identified above. The Steering Group (responsible for developing the workplan and guiding the Commission) will be convening to plan the next several meetings around these questions. In addition, the Steering Group will need to review the remaining policy consideration areas and make a plan to address those as well.