

NEK Day 2026: House Education Testimony

January 22, 2026

Good afternoon Representatives. Happy Northeast Kingdom Day! I am Sean McMannon, superintendent of the Kingdom East SD serving the wonderful towns of Burke, Concord, Lunenburg, Lyndon, Newark, Sheffield, Sutton and Wheelock. I think that I bring a unique perspective since I spent the first 22 years of my educational career in VT in Chittenden County serving Charlotte, Hinesburg, Shelburne, St. George and Shelburne as the CVU principal and in Winooski as their superintendent. In my two and a half years in the Kingdom I have come to appreciate and love the people and the place. Kingdom Trails, Burke Mountain, Lake Willoughby, Newark Pond, Mt. Pisgah, VAST trails, I could go on forever about the beautiful natural spaces and variety of outdoor recreation opportunities that make the NEK a highly-sought after destination. NEK folks are family and community-centered and will do anything to help others in need, in fact their values are remarkably similar to the New American families I worked with in Winooski. And what I have noticed since being in the NEK is their so-called “resilience”, their rural toughness and self-sufficiency sometimes is used as a rationale to not provide the necessary or similar resources that other regions of the State receive. Today, I want to advocate on four fronts for the NEK: Housing, Access to Health Care, Flood Planning and Response and of course Education:

Housing

- Housing is the foundation of a strong Northeast Kingdom economy and community.
- We need abundant housing at all income levels to support jobs, employers, and new community members.
- Address homelessness by investing in prevention and pathways to permanent housing that provide stability and dignity.

Rural Health Care Access

- Rural hospitals, primary care, and human services serve as critical safety nets, especially for emergency and mental health crisis care.
- Sustaining rural health care including mental health supports is essential to healthy communities and a resilient Vermont.

Flooding Planning and Response

- Rural communities need stronger systems for emergency planning and response.
- Invest in rapid mobilization and access to resources so help reaches communities quickly during disasters.
- Support and strengthen local volunteer efforts that lead immediate relief and long-term recovery.
- Climate resilience requires infrastructure investment.
- Strengthen roads, water, wastewater, and food systems to withstand increasingly frequent and severe climate disasters.
- Build a climate-resilient workforce. Invest in workers who can design and build resilient housing and community resources located outside flood zones, ensuring safer, long-term recovery for rural regions like the Northeast Kingdom.

Education

- Strong rural schools, both public and independent, are essential for strong communities and a strong Vermont.
- Vermont's education funding system is one of the most equitable in the nation. Where a student lives matters less here than almost anywhere else.
- Act 73 is focused on “governance, quality and finance systems”.

- ❖ Governance: Good governance is required for any improvement in student outcomes but mega districts are not the answer and there is no research to support improved student outcomes by forming larger districts.
- ❖ Quality: Act 73 talks repeatedly about “opportunities for students” as a means to improve outcomes. If we do not solve the lack of people entering the teaching field with effective preparation none of these opportunities matter. The “Teacher Effect” is the most important lever for improved student outcomes. Right now Kingdom East SD has nearly 25% of our teachers on temporary licenses.
- ❖ Finance: Where are the savings?. No one can point to savings which was the primary driver for Act 73. In fact, at KESD where we do not operate a high school we pay tuition to independent schools with absolutely no regulation on what they can charge us each year for tuition.
- ❖ It reminds me of what I was told when we embarked on our \$55 million dollar construction project in Winooski. There are three overarching goals: High-Quality, Low-Cost & Fast Timeline. You can only have 2 of the three. We are moving too fast and too narrowly.

Lastly, I would urge all legislators to work with the Governor and his administration to articulate how the current situation in VT is not just about education, it is about all of our major systems: housing, healthcare, business, transportation, agriculture and education and how these systems interact together, not isolating education as the villain. And most importantly it is about the people of VT and “who do we want to be as a state?”. This broader and more complicated question needs to be addressed if we are to create a sustainable and effective plan for the future of VT. Thanks for your time, your leadership and please always consider the needs of our unique and incredible NEK region and most importantly, our NEK people!



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