

VERMONT



SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION

.....

Great Governance, Excellent Education, Strong Communities

Officers

Flor Diaz
President
Washington Ctrl

Mark Clough
Vice President
Peacham

Jim Salsgiver
Treasurer
Taconic & Green

Bart Bezio
Member-At-Large
Lamoille North MUUSD

Nancy Russell
Member-At-Large
Hartford

Staff

Sue Ceglowski
Executive Director
sceglowski@vtvsba.org

Amy Callan
Director of Operations
acallan@vtvsba.org

Sandra Cameron
Associate Executive Director
scameron@vtvsba.org

Debbie Singiser
Director of Board Services
dsingiser@vtvsba.org

David Englander
Director of Legal & Policy Services
denglander@vtvsba.org

To: House Education Committee
From: Flor Diaz Smith, President, VSBA
Clare Wool, Chair, VSBA Task Force
Re: VSBA Task Force on Collaboration to Benefit All Students
Date: January 23, 2025

Introduction:

As the result of a VSBA member-adopted resolution, the Vermont School Boards Association (VSBA) formed the Task Force on Collaboration to Benefit All Students to address long-standing structural challenges within the leadership of Vermont's education system. These challenges hinder the implementation of equitable, high-quality public education as mandated by state law. The Task Force concluded its work in September, 2024 and issued a report identifying systemic issues and proposing actionable recommendations to improve leadership, governance, and outcomes in Vermont's public education system.:

Key Findings and Recommendations:

- 1. Access Comprehensive and Accurate Data:**
 - Vermont lacks thorough, timely, accurate, and publicly accessible educational data.
 - Recommendation: Develop and maintain a comprehensive data dashboard to ensure transparency and inform decision-making.
- 2. Strengthen Agency of Education (AOE) Capacity:**
 - Persistent underperformance in fulfilling statutory responsibilities, including policy execution and compliance monitoring.
 - Recommendations: Conduct an organizational review of the AOE to improve staffing, resources, and operational capacity.
- 3. Revitalize the State Board of Education (SBE):**
 - The SBE lacks the governance structure, independence, and resources necessary to meet its statutory obligations and to provide effective leadership and oversight.
 - Recommendation: Restructure the SBE to ensure non-partisan leadership and adequate support for its governance functions. Require the SBE to apply the DQS to their work and resource the SBE with legal and technical expertise.

4. Prioritize Existing Legislation:

- Frequent introduction of new laws without sufficient capacity to implement them has resulted in recurring policy failures.
- Recommendation: Focus on strengthening the implementation of current policies before advancing new initiatives. Require regular reporting on progress toward effective implementation of various policy initiatives.

5. Support the Commission on the Future of Public Education:

- The work of Act 183 is critical to creating sustainable education funding and governance systems.
- Recommendation: Align efforts with the Commission to ensure comprehensive improvements.

Conclusion:

The Task Force emphasizes the need for shared accountability, responsibility and collaboration among state leaders, school boards, and education stakeholders to address these systemic issues. The role of the Commission on the Future of Public Education in Vermont is evolving due to urgency but still important because it is a vehicle for public discussion and evaluation of education policy proposals. While we are in a very dynamic time, focusing on the Task Force recommendations can strengthen Vermont's public education system and its ability to deliver equitable and effective opportunities for all students.

This testimony underscores the urgency of implementing the Task Force's recommendations to ensure that Vermont's public education system thrives amidst ongoing challenges.

Resources:

[VSBA Report from the Task Force on Collaboration to Benefit All Students](#)

[VT AOE District Quality Standards \(Rule 100\)](#)

Summary of Recommendations from the VSBA Task Force on Collaboration to Benefit All Students

Priorities: *Vermont needs:*

- 1) *timely and consistent access to valid data*
- 2) *an Agency of Education and a State Board of Education that can uphold the statutory roles and responsibility to public education in a non-partisan, student centered manner*

Recommendations	Entity Responsible
<p>Expand and Maintain a Comprehensive & Accurate Data Dashboard by providing a publicly available, accurate and accessible data dashboard as a mechanism to ensure equity for all students and by utilizing data as the single most important way to effectively monitor the state’s ability to meet its education policy needs.</p>	AOE
<p>Improve the Capacity of the Agency of Education to Meet Statutory Responsibilities by conducting a comprehensive organizational analysis in order to understand why the AOE has been unable to meet its statutory responsibilities to oversee public education in VT. This analysis, inclusive of feedback from the field and an evaluation of the culture of the organization, should result in a redesign to support better Agency function.</p>	AOE
<p>Utilize the District Quality Standards to Conduct a Review of the Function of the State Board of Education The SBE should adhere to the governance standards outlined in Section 113 of the DQS and should be required to conduct an annual self-assessment on its own adherence to these standards.</p>	General Assembly, SBE
<p>Depoliticize the State Board of Education by restructuring to ensure that it can act in a non-political capacity. The appointment structure should be expanded so that the Governor does not have sole authority for appointing members. The SBE makeup should more proportionately represent local school board members from districts that operate a public school. SBE should have adequate resources to conduct its work, either through the budget allocation process or by leveraging AOE resources.</p>	General Assembly
<p>Prioritize Existing Legislation Attempts to implement new legislation without the underlying data and structures to support it will continue to put students and public education in jeopardy.</p>	General Assembly, AOE
<p>Acknowledge the work of the Commission on the Future of Public Education Recommendations to the General Assembly re: public education funding, delivery and governance will be addressed in the Commission’s work. This work needs to be completed in order for substantive improvements to be made.</p>	General Assembly, AOE