



February 28, 2025

Dear Chair Kornheiser and Members of the House Ways and Means Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony regarding the Scott Administration's Education Transformation Proposal. As one of the first Vermont school districts to voluntarily unify under Act 46, Addison Central School District (ACSD) board members have a critical perspective to offer as legislators contemplate such a seismic shift in educational funding, governance, and delivery across the state. As board members, we have a front row seat to the impacts that policy and funding changes have on our students and families, and how even well-intentioned legislative proposals can challenge the very foundation of the communities we serve.

Our Board discussed the details of the Governor's Education Transformation Proposal during our [February 10, 2025 Board meeting](#). And while the general consensus is that action is needed to improve the efficiency and ensure the economic sustainability of Vermont school districts, **we have substantial concerns about the current proposal and strongly oppose any action to codify it.**

The ACSD Board objects to the Administration's rushed timeline, lack of local input in this process, and the ambiguity around if/how stakeholders will be involved in determining how new Districts may be created. Board members also question the feasibility of the proposed foundational funding model, with specific concerns about the lack of analysis of local financial data and proper attention to delivery of adequate student services. **We urge you to uphold Vermont's tradition of providing greater transparency in the legislative process, and ensure that any proposed reforms are well-planned and student-centered.**

In the interest of expediency, we offer the following additional points regarding the Scott Administration's Education Transformation Proposal:

#### 1. Financial Impact & Budget Cuts

- Preliminary estimates suggest that the ACSD learning community would see a 17% (~\$9 million) reduction in education funding, likely requiring deep cuts to programming, staff, and student services. Student enrichment also does not appear to be a component of the funding formula.
- Local taxpayers would have no authority or power over how foundational education spending is decided in their communities.



- The proposal suggests that communities may be able to raise funds for additional services, but it's unclear what qualifies as an "extra" expense beyond the foundation formula. Board members are concerned that wealthier communities could fundraise for better services, while lower-income areas would struggle, increasing inequities across the state.
- The proposal has no clear plan for capital improvements such as funding future school construction or repairs.
- The proposal does not appear to provide any flexibility for schools to address variations in the availability of educational or support service professionals, or costs of necessary services, including food services, substitute teachers, and other contracted services.

## 2. Loss of Local Control & Governance Issues

- Under the proposed plan, ACSD would become part of a Champlain Valley District, a massive entity with 34,000+ students spanning multiple counties. Instead of local school boards, there would be a single district-wide board overseeing all schools in the region.
- The proposal suggests only 5-7 board members would oversee the entire Champlain Valley District, raising significant concerns about representation:
  - Small towns would lose representation.
  - A few board members could make decisions for dozens of communities.
  - Local voices would be drowned out in a mega-district.
  - The breadth and magnitude of board member responsibilities in such large districts effectively limits the spectrum of Vermonters who could realistically serve in that role (e.g., only the privileged would be available to serve).
- Instead of school boards, the plan proposes local advisory councils that would provide input but have no actual decision-making power. The ACSD board feels these councils would be powerless, reducing community influence over school policies, staffing, and budgets. The proposed model is not conducive to meaningful service and input.
- Under the proposal, the Agency of Education (AOE) would take over curriculum development, instructional materials, and graduation requirements. ACSD Board members are concerned that:
  - The curriculum for Vermont school districts could become easily subject to and vulnerable to inconsistent delivery with changing political appointees.



- Vermont schools could be forced to adopt pre-packaged, one-size-fits-all curricula from third-party vendors to accommodate large-scale districts.
- The state may eliminate local academic programs like ACSD's International Baccalaureate (IB) program, which is not aligned with standardized, state-controlled curricula.
- The flexibility for districts to develop their own learning models could be lost.
- The Governor's plan does not address legal and contractual concerns, including:
  - How existing school charters would be dissolved.
  - How to manage the disparities for districts whose collective bargaining agreements currently pay above the statewide average.
  - Whether certain regions have sufficient capacity to provide contracted services for a District operating at a larger scale (e.g., food service providers, contracted mental health providers, etc.).

### 3. Impact on Students & Schools

- The proposal both reduces education resources and re-distributes those resources in the interest of equity across the state, but does not assure educators and administrators that the overall quality of education and curriculum delivery will be maintained.
- The proposal intentionally reduces funding for small schools, leading to forced closures of schools that are not considered "small by necessity." ACSD board members are concerned that some of its schools could be shut down without any local input or democratic process.
- No transportation funding plan has been provided for students who may have to travel much farther to attend school.
- The plan expands public school choice, allowing students to apply to multiple schools within their district. However, the state has not committed to funding transportation for students attending a school outside their town. This could create an equity gap, where only families with transportation options can take advantage of school choice.
- The Governor's plan does not guarantee funding for essential student resources, including:



- Mental health services (not at the level currently required to address acute needs in Vermont learning communities)
- Student intervention programs (that are sufficient to improve student academic growth under current circumstances)
- After-school activities & sports (the level of funding and support is unclear)

#### 4. Career and Technical Education (CTE) Governance Changes

- The proposal completely removes local governance from CTE centers and consolidates all 18 centers into a single statewide district. A centralized governing body (modeled on BOCES in Colorado) would control program offerings, funding, and hiring decisions. This structure runs counter to the mission of local CTE centers, which is to train enrolled students in technical skills that are in-demand in their local areas.
- Under the proposed funding model, \$8,000 per student would go to the statewide CTE authority instead of local centers. Preliminary estimates suggest that the proposed funding for CTE in the Patricia A. Hannaford Career Center's service area is only 74% of its current funding level, which implies significant program cuts to our learning community's options.
- ACSD board members are very concerned our career center would lose funding, making it harder to maintain high-quality programs – this represents a significant hit to our learning community's flexible pathways to graduation programming.
- Currently, CTE programs partner with local employers and economic development groups to design courses that meet workforce needs. Under the new model, all decisions about which programs to offer would be made at the state level. Board members are concerned that the proposed governance model would result in a Board that may not understand local job markets, leading to cuts in essential training programs.

#### 5. Unrealistic Timeline & Lack of Transparency

- The proposed plan has an extremely compressed timeline, calling for elimination of existing school districts by July 1, 2027 and closure of schools not meeting "small by necessity" criteria in 2028-29. The ACSD board agrees that this timeline is unrealistic. Act 46 district consolidation took years to implement, and that governance change was far less drastic.



- Lack of Public Input & Transparency: Unlike previous school reforms, this plan was developed behind closed doors with no input from local school boards or educators.
- The ACSD Board is also concerned that the legislature had already commissioned a study on education reform, but the governor bypassed that process with his own plan.
- Many board members also feel that the current proposal has too many gaps, raising significant concerns about poor planning and rushed policymaking.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide input into the legislative process. Please do not hesitate to contact us at [Board@acsdyt.org](mailto:Board@acsdyt.org) if you have any questions or would like to hear additional thoughts.

Sincerely,

ACSD Board

Barb Wilson, Chair

Suzanne S. Buck, Vice Chair

Mary Heather Noble, Secretary

Tricia Allen, Board Member

Jason Chance, Board Member

Joanna Doria, Board Member

Laura Harthan, Board Member

James Malcolm, Board Member

Jamie McCallum, Board Member

Ellie Romp, Board Member

Ellen Whelan-Wuest, Board Member