



Two Prospect Street, Suite 3
Montpelier, Vermont 05602-3555
802-229-0547
<http://www.vpaonline.org>

To: Senate Education Committee
Date: February 10, 2026
Subject: House Education First Draft of Maps
From: Jay Nichols, Senior Executive Director Vermont Principals' Association

For the record, Jay Nichols, Senior Executive Director, Vermont Principals' Association. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the initial map draft presented by House Education Chair, Peter Conlon, last week. I want to first of all, thank Representative Conlon for putting out a thoughtful map for his committee (and obviously many other Vermonters including Senate Education) to consider. It is hard to tell where we are going to end up in terms of governance constructs related to Act 73; and, I've heard many times, including from members of this committee, that maps have to come before other aspects of the transformational change. Although I am not sure that is necessarily the case, having a map to react to certainly is a place to start.

I am not going to comment on whether the preliminary proposed districts are the right combination of merged districts. Representative Conlon asked his committee to think about it over the weekend and I'm really interested to hear their conversation prior to sharing any thinking. Therefore, I'll share some thoughts about the language that Representative Conlon proposed. I will say that it appears that he tried to provide district sizes of 2000-4000 which from our perspective is much more aligned with research data than original proposals that were promoting much larger districts.

Below are comments on the sections thus far with the understanding that plenty of changes are probably in store for the future.

Section 1:

We do agree that school districts should be the ones to establish policies and procedures for delivery of instruction to the students they serve. We believe in local control and local school boards. Obviously, for districts that don't have schools at certain grade levels we are supportive of contracting with public or approved independent schools either within or outside of the district as the Board deems appropriate.

Sec. 2 A):

This section provides some clean up language as we move to bigger districts and provides language to require these new school districts to provide the opportunity to designate students when there isn't a locally available public school close by. Of course, parameters

need to be established as to what reasonable means. The language three or fewer is in current law regarding designation for Board's. From the VPA perspective, we are not sure if the number three is appropriate or not. As districts become larger, we are strong believers that local communities through their duly elected representatives – school board members – should have a lot of flexibility in these decisions.

Sec. 2 B 1):

Having a contract makes sense to us. A contract spells out the obligation and responsibilities of both the sending district and the receiving school. We believe clarity is key. We have no issues with any of the prerequisite requirements for the contract required in this section.

Sec. 2 B 2):

We have come a long way in Vermont in making sure that Approved Independent Schools that receive public funds follow most of the same rules as public schools. This is especially important as we are trying to make sure our educational finance system is responsible and accountable to all Vermonters and that we as a state take appropriate responsibility for all Vermont children as a common good.

- A) They must enroll any student who is sent to them that requires special education services. This of course is a simple fairness procedure and ensures that Vermont children are not discriminated against simply because they are special education qualified students
- B) Attendance reports allows for schools to work closely together to make sure students are actually attending school – with the increased issue of chronic absenteeism that we are trying to address as a state we need to have quality measures for attendance
- C) Sending districts should know of the academic progress of the students for whom they are paying educational services. That is a major flaw with the current system in which Board's simply pay the bill and are not privy to how well or not their students are doing academically
- D) We have had cases in which students were simply not going to school and sending districts were paying for services that were not occurring. Under these new contracts receiving schools would have to let sending/paying districts know if their students were actually physically enrolled at and attending the school
- E) Suspension and expulsion is another area that needs to be adjusted. If I'm the superintendent of a sending district, I should know if a student I'm responsible for has been suspended or expelled from the school

-
- F) We fully support the Vermont Public Accommodations Act and the Vermont Fair Employment Practices Act
 - G) We agree that admission processes for students should be a blind process. Students should not be denied based on academic entrance exams, interviews, ability to pay etc. Again, it must be about the common good and all Vermont children deserve to be treated with basic dignity in areas in which the state is paying the bill
 - H) Knowing how well students do on State or federally mandated assessments is one critical aspect to understand how an independent school is doing. We often “grade” public schools on test scores and although that should be only one measure, we should certainly hold independent schools that are receiving public funds to the same standard
 - I) We should not be charging students any fees for being a student in any school that receives public funding
 - J) We have no problem with assurances for independent school leaders – this is consistent with what public schools already do to demonstrate that they are following applicable law. We have a great deal of confidence that school leaders of independent and public schools all want to provide the best education they can for the students they serve

We support statements of nondiscrimination and assurances that state that schools are following the Vermont Public Accommodations Act and fair employment practices; and of course, we agree that an assurance signed by the head of school that no public funds are being used to subsidize the tuition of private payer students is an appropriate safeguard.

Finally, the VPA doesn't see a path forward in our educational delivery system without partnership with our four historic academies. We need them as part of our system.