

Good afternoon members of the committee,

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak with you all about class size minimums and the future of education in Vermont. My name is Lydia Cochran. This is my 15th year as an educational leader and I just finished my doctorate through Antioch University focused on equity in rural education. I am currently the principal of the Peacham Elementary School. Previous to this year, I spent seven years as the principal for grades PreK-3rd grade at the St. Johnsbury School. St. Johnsbury serves 650 students PK-8, and Peacham serves 62 students PK-6. Before moving to Vermont, I was an educational leader in the Chelsea Public School system, based in a middle school (Grades 5-8) of 700 students. As a middle school educator, I have taught classes of 19-33 students. As a leader in Vermont, I have seen classes of 10-19 students. This is all to say that I have seen a lot of different class sizes, grade sizes and school sizes. With my educational and professional experience in mind, I'm here to advocate for class size minimums being enforced starting in 2030, instead of 2027.

First, class size minimums alone are not a cost saving measure. Nor are they a measure of the adequate education promised to all Vermont students. Enforcing class size minimums without the other measures of Act 73 will cause disruptions to student learning, anxiety and stress for all constituents involved and force schools to make closure/consolidation decisions amidst confusing and changing state policy. This will fuel distrust between schools, communities and government making future change harder.

Next, the lack of defined terms will cause confusion and further debate delaying any actual change. My doctoral research found that a lack of clarity around key terms repeatedly led to ineffective education policy, especially the term rural and equity. I don't want this to happen here. When I read Section 7 from my practitioner lense, there are a lot of questions that come to mind. Most importantly:

- Is a class the same thing as a grade?
- What about multi age classes?
- Are there specific ages allowed in each grade?

In Peacham, I have 5 classes; prek, k, grade ½, grade ¾ and grade %. We meet the class size minimums right now. If I have to meet the minimum for the group of 5th graders (10) and then the group of 6th graders (3), we would not meet the minimum. For at least the past 10 years, Peacham has had classes of alternating sizes like this, bigger then smaller and so on. As a school that regularly scores over 60 % proficient in Literacy on the VTCAP (last three year scores: 79,62,65), this structure is working for Peacham. We are getting closer to meeting the needs of all of our students and ensuring an equitable education. Without clarity, Peacham's future would be even more unknown than it is right now.

I am advocating for the class size minimum to start in 2030 instead of 2027. I hope this will give you all time to provide clarity and allow schools to make thoughtful and tough decisions after the other parts of Act 73 start to take effect.