



LEGISLATIVE REPORT

Preliminary Findings and Recommendations

Commission on the Future of Public Education in Vermont

October 20, 2025

This Preliminary Report of the Commission will be subject to further refinement based upon public input and the continued work of the Commission in the next month.



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Legislation and Background

This report is submitted by the Commission on the Future of Public Education in Vermont (the Commission) pursuant to [Act 73 \(2025\) Section 1](#). This act modified the Commission's role as set forth in [Act 183 \(2024\)](#).

Act 73

Act 73 of 2025 narrowed the charge of the Commission from a broad request for recommendations set forth in Act 183 of 2024. The new direction to the Commission from the General Assembly included the following specific four areas:

- A. Recommendations for what roles, functions, or decisions should be a function of local control and what roles, functions, or decisions should be a function of state-level control.
- B. Necessary statutory updates to the roles and responsibilities of school district boards and the electorate.
- C. A process for a community served by a school to have a voice in decisions regarding school closures and recommendations for what that process shall entail.
- D. A process for monitoring the implementation of this Act in a manner that is transparent and public-facing.

Membership

Act 73 of 2025 made no changes to the membership of the Commission. The Act defines the membership as follows:

1. The Secretary of Education or designee.
2. The Chair of the State Board of Education or designee.
3. The Tax Commissioner or designee.
4. One current member of the House of Representatives, appointed by the Speaker of the House.
5. One current member of the Senate, appointed by the Committee on Committees.
6. One representative from the Vermont School Boards Association (VSBA), appointed by the VSBA Executive Director.
7. One representative from the Vermont Principals' Association (VPA), appointed by the VPA Executive Director.
8. One representative from the Vermont Superintendents Association (VSA), appointed by the VSA Executive Director.
9. One representative from the Vermont National Education Association (VTNEA), appointed by the VTNEA Executive Director.
10. One representative from the Vermont Association of School Business Officials (VASBO) with experience in school construction projects, appointed by the President of VASBO.

11. The Chair of the Census-Based Funding Advisory Group, created under 2018 Acts and Resolves No. 173.
12. The Executive Director of the Vermont Rural Education Collaborative.
13. One representative from the Vermont Independent Schools Association (VISA), appointed by the President of VISA.

At the conclusion of the 2025 Legislative Session, three members of the Commission announced their resignation from the Commission, including the Chair and Vice Chair. Two of these positions were filled by the organizations that were charged with appointing representatives. One position was not filled because it was the position of the Chair of the Census-Based Funding Advisory Group and there was no language in statute that allowed for the designation of another individual for that position on the Commission. Thus, since July 2025, Jay Nichols (VPA representative) has been serving as Chair and Peter Conlon (House representative) is serving as Vice Chair, and the Commission has 12 members.

Work of Commission Process

The Commission first convened on July 15, 2024. At first, the full Commission met monthly with subcommittees meeting more frequently. With the change in charge for the Commission after the 2025 Legislative Session, the Commission began meeting twice a month as a committee of the whole with a focus on providing a draft preliminary report to the General Assembly by mid-October 2025 and a final report by mid-December. The dual purposes of the report are to share recommendations as required by Act 73 and to share any Vermont citizen feedback submitted to the Commission over the past 18 months.

The Commission has conducted all work in an open and transparent manner. As required by Act 183, we have held in-person meetings in each county in the state, with virtual options for each. In addition, we are sharing public comment, minute meetings, statewide survey results and other information in full with the General Assembly to assist them in decision making as they implement Act 73.

Afton Partners

Early on in the work of the Commission, we contracted with the consulting group Afton Partners to assist us in our work. Attached to this report are materials from Afton Partners, including analysis from sessions that Afton organized or participated in as well as a Framework that can be used in Vermont with best practices for engaging with the community. Importantly, the Framework was designed when the charge of the Commission was much broader. Our hope is that the Framework will be a useful tool for Vermont governmental agencies, boards, and other organizations going forward when engaging with stakeholders since this engagement will be fundamental to the success of the entity's work.

Equally, if not more, important, Afton is supporting us as we complete the preliminary report in the development, wide distribution, and compilation of the results of a survey through as many Vermont sources as possible to receive as much information and general feedback as we can from Vermonters. This feedback will be used for consideration by Commission members prior to the issuance of our final report to the General Assembly in December. While this preliminary report reflects feedback from those Vermonters we have heard from in our meetings and public input sessions that were held this past spring, the Commission has been committed to hearing from a much wider audience of Vermonters and will review all information shared and update the final report's recommendations as deemed necessary. The survey results will also be shared with the General Assembly as they make decisions on how best to implement the key tenets of Act 73.

Preliminary Recommendations

A. Recommendations for what roles, functions, or decisions should be a function of local control and what roles, functions, or decisions should be a function of state-level control:

Recommendations

- Policy level decisions should continue to be made at the local school district level with the understanding that some mandatory policies will be established through legislation and/or rules. Those policies that are required must be approved by school districts with the understanding that those locally approved policies must be at least as stringent as the state's model policy.
- The vision for public education should be jointly set at the state level by the State Board of Education (SBE) and the Agency of Education (AOE) with opportunities for meaningful engagement by educators and members of the public. It is the responsibility of the General Assembly and the Administration to work in concert to ensure that the SBE and AOE are sufficiently resourced to co-lead this work.
- Local school districts should be provided with the autonomy and authority necessary to implement and adhere to the vision and standards for public education set by the state. The state should provide appropriate levels of oversight and provide the professional learning and resources necessary to help school districts meet the vision. The Commission recognizes that this is a significant consideration that warrants further exploration and discussion between the General Assembly and the AOE.
- The state should create a standardized simple ballot format for the electorate to use when voting on any budget amount in addition to the amount of funds provided to the District by the Educational Opportunity Payment from the state.
- Couple health insurance collective bargaining with negotiations on salaries and other compensation. **Although the Commission did not have time to take**

testimony on the issue, the majority of Commission members felt that compensation and benefits, including health insurance, should be negotiated collectively at the same level. The Commission did not conclude whether those negotiations should be at the state or local district level, just that they should be at the same level. The Commission recognizes that there will be technical challenges and statutory changes required to implement this change. Nevertheless, we strongly recommend that the General Assembly take action to couple health insurance and other collective bargaining at the same level.

- Throughout the history of the state, districts (as employers) negotiated with school employees in one form or another for all compensation. [Act 11](#) (2018) changed this dynamic and decoupled health insurance bargaining from other aspects of collective bargaining. A large part of the concept behind the act was that the state would be in a better position to negotiate with the school employees and that the scale of the two parties might lead to lower costs and more sustainable health insurance plans. Although the Vermont School Boards Association and the Vermont-NEA and many others have decried the rising costs of health insurance in the state in general and for employees of school districts specifically, it is impossible to ascertain whether the changes compelled by Act 11 have contributed to an increase in overall costs or have slowed the rate of increase of overall costs for health insurance for public school employees.
- When the Commission discussed this issue, it was clear that the majority of Commissioners felt that the most practical solution going forward would be to vest authority for negotiations over health care benefits and other compensation at either the state or local level. Although some members have strong opinions about at which level these negotiations should take place, the Commission does not have a recommendation on that. Rather, the clear majority simply recommends that negotiations for both health insurance benefits and other compensation take place at the same level. In other words, either health insurance should go back to being negotiated at the local level in direct negotiations between teachers unions and school districts OR other compensation should be negotiated at the state level similar to how health insurance for school employees is negotiated since the implementation of Act 11 of 2018.

B. Necessary updates to the roles and responsibilities of school district boards and the electorate:

Recommendations

Note: *It is the consensus of the Commission that, even under the provisions of larger systems as envisioned by Act 73, most of the current central functions of school boards and the electorate should stay the same. Listed below are recommendations that either require a change in law or we feel need to be emphasized.*

- The Legislature should examine the laws governing annual meetings and ensure they comport with changes that are contemplated in Act 73 while providing as much opportunity for citizen participation as possible.
- Districts should be required to meaningfully engage with voters on budget use and development. School boards with school officials should organize these opportunities in an accessible manner with the goal of maximizing authentic community engagement and feedback.
- Compensation for school board members should be established at the state level. This could be done by the legislature in consultation with appropriate stakeholders. Board member compensation should be separate from the foundation formula amounts provided to school districts as part of the Educational Opportunity Payments. To inform appropriate levels of compensation for board members in districts throughout the state, consideration should be given to the size and scope of responsibility.
 - E.g., school board members who serve a small single town with oversight of one school may receive different compensation than school board members who serve boards with oversight of multiple schools.
- School district boards should continue to determine the educational policies of the school district within the constraints of state and federal law.
- School boards should have student members so that student perspective is taken into account when making decisions for the school system.

C. A process for a community served by a school to have a voice in decisions regarding school closures and recommendations for what that process shall entail:

School closure on the basis of not meeting educational or financial standards established through Act 73 should follow a state-supported process that is formally warned and guided by a clear corrective action plan. In contrast, decisions initiated by the duly elected local board may occur separately when driven by strategic objectives to advance local priorities and community goals. The appropriate role of an appeal process should be further explored to ensure a balanced approach that upholds state priorities for quality and equity while preserving the autonomy of the local district. Where

a school board recommends that a school close or substantially change its operations on the grounds of equity, sustainability, or affordability, the Commission sets forth the following recommended process:

- The school board forms a steering committee to lead the work of considering potential school closure or repurposing. The steering committee may or may not have school board members as part of their body.
- The school board holds multiple meetings with the potential school closure discussion on the agenda. This should start as early as possible. Best practice is to begin these discussions at least 18 months in advance of a potential school closure or repurposing.
- At least one of the meetings takes place in the town/city in which the school that is being considered for closure or repurposing is located with strong outreach to local citizenry for their input.
- A public input survey is conducted, including in the school district at large, in the town/city in which the school is located, and of parents who have or will have students in the school.
- The steering committee should make a recommendation or recommendations regarding school closure to the school board.
- The decision as to whether or not to close a school should be made by the governing school board upon consideration of community input, input from the superintendent and other school officials, and the recommendation of the steering group. The ultimate decision should seek to ensure that students are afforded quality educational opportunities in an affordable, sustainable, and equitable system.
- The decision to close or repurpose a school under this section may be appealed by petition of the town in which the school is located. The appeal will first be submitted to the AOE, who will collect the complete record from the parties, including student opportunity information and financial information. Both the school board and the town must share what each believes are the pros and cons of the school board's decision. After considering the record, the AOE will submit it and a recommendation to the SBE, who will serve as the final arbiter of the decision pursuant to 3 V.S.A. Chapter 25. Members of the public will be able to address the State Board as part of the SBE's regular public comment process.

D. Process for monitoring the implementation of this Act in a manner that is transparent and public-facing:

Recommendations

- Despite the change in the Commission's charge, we still hold that our guiding principles of efficiency, sustainability, and equity, are paramount in any work related to implementation of Act 73. From the Commission's Guiding Principles:
 - Equity does not mean equal or the same.

- Solutions with an equity focus must be differentiated by need.
- Equity must be considered both in term of inputs (access) and outputs (outcomes).

In order for Vermont to truly provide a world class education system, we must hold these principles up to all decisions. We ask that the General Assembly consider these guiding principles as they make decisions on the future of public education in Vermont.

- The Commission recommends that the AOE monitor the implementation of Act 73 in a manner that is transparent and public-facing by:
 - Providing regular reports to the Legislative Committees of jurisdiction pertaining to Act 73 and the General Assembly at large.
 - Providing regular implementation reports to the SBE at its regularly scheduled monthly meetings.
- Any monitoring and future support—financial or otherwise—must acknowledge the substantial reliance on local officials to implement these changes effectively. Therefore, oversight of the law should actively incorporate feedback from those responsible for carrying out these local changes.

Other Considerations for the General Assembly

A major focus of Act 73 is to improve the quality of education in the state of Vermont while controlling increasing costs of funding our K-12 education system. Regardless of what governance structures we are utilizing (Supervisory Unions, School Districts, Supervisory Districts, BOCES), the Commission makes the following recommendations and notes that the General Assembly may need to update statute accordingly:

- Students who change their residence within a school governance structure should be allowed to stay at the same school if feasible unless the student's educational team decides that moving to another school in the system is likely to benefit the student.
- All licensed educators should be employees of the overall school governance structure—not of single school districts within a larger governance structure. This will allow superintendents to better deploy educators to meet student needs and will provide more job protections for teachers in small schools. This has already happened for special education teachers as a result of Act 153 (2010). We suggest this change should apply to all licensed teachers.
- The Commission recommends that the General Assembly not strictly adhere to the guidelines of 4000-8000 students per governance structure as indicated in Act 73. Although the Act speaks to “as practicable,” many Vermonters are very concerned that governance structures under 4000 students will not be considered even if they are more realistic in a given geographic region. The Commission recognizes that there is a link between scale and the ability to successfully implement a foundation formula.

Community Engagement Themes and Takeaways Summarized by Afton Partners in May 2025 Prior to Act 73's Enactment

- Vermonters envision a public education system that is equitable, inclusive, and student-centered—one that provides all learners with access to well-funded schools, strong relationships, safe environments, and opportunities for academic and social growth, regardless of geography or identity.
- Vermonters overwhelmingly felt that the initial education reform process was too rushed and disorganized, with inadequate time for deep community engagement, particularly from vulnerable or historically underserved groups and those with “boots on the ground” - educators, students, and local boards.
- Vermont’s education reform efforts must slow down and center the voices of those most impacted by the proposed changes such as students, families, and educators, by prioritizing equity, belonging, and local community identity over rushed structural changes that risk deepening disparities.
- According to the [Community Engagement Framework: Your Voice, Vermont’s Future by Afton Partners and the Commission](#) (pg. 11) there are three main groups of people to consider when designing a system and seeking to solicit and understand the needs and opinions of various stakeholders:
 1. The first is the group that is directly impacted by the proposed change or issue. This is the Direct Impact group. In terms of Act 73 implementation, the direct impact group consists of students (and their families) and educators. The needs and opinions of this group should be prioritized.
 2. The second group is composed of organizations directly serving or connected to those most affected. This is the Secondary Impact group. The needs of these groups should be considered.
 3. The third and final group is the Community Impact group. This is the broader community and systems that help shape long-term outcomes and cultural change. In Act 73, community impact groups include taxpayers, municipal leaders, and state policymakers. The opinions and needs of these groups should be acknowledged.

In the public input sessions and public comments of Commission meetings prior to the close of the 2025 Legislative Session, numerous concerns were raised about the Governor’s education overhaul plan. The concerns thematically were that the plan “is seen as top-down, inequitable, and lacking community input.” Nothing we have seen in further community conversations has indicated that those concerns have dispersed. There was broad opposition to the five district plan. Accordingly, as the General Assembly moves forward with Act 73 implementation, considering and responding to Vermont citizen input is critical. We (Vermont) must take our time to ensure educational system transformation is

transparent, upfront, and easily understandable for all Vermonters and will solve the issues that it was tasked with addressing.

Conclusion

This Preliminary Report of the Commission will be subject to further refinement based upon public input and the continued work of the Commission in the next month. The Final Report of our Commission will include an appendix of all public comments shared with the Commission, as well as results of a survey constructed with Afton Partners that has been widely distributed across Vermont. This survey is seen as a tool for Vermonters to give feedback to the General Assembly. We strongly encourage members of the General Assembly to carefully review all of these materials prior to finalizing their decisions regarding transformation of public education in our state. It is clear that any transformational decisions as contemplated by Act 73 are in the purview of the Legislature and the Governor. That said, Vermonters care deeply about public education and local control. In order for a major change to be successful, a critical mass of Vermont citizens must be supportive of that change. We encourage lawmakers to take the time to ensure that major policy pursuits have the positive overall intent they claim to. It is important to take the time to get it right as opposed to just getting it done.