



To: The Vermont Legislature
From: The Vermont Council of Special Education (VCSEA)
Re: Vermont Council of Special Education 2026 Legislative Priorities
Date: November 25, 2025

Vermont's has a long history of development of education frameworks through the legislative process. While VCSEA holds perspectives on many areas of importance for students with disability, we offer this policy statement on Act 73 as our legislative platform for the 2025-26 legislative session. We offer you five priorities to strengthen Vermont's commitment to all PreK-12 students, including students with disabilities.

Priority 1: Finish What We Started - Complete Act 173 Implementation

Why it matters: Act 173 laid the foundation for inclusive, tiered instruction to support every learner. Its promise remains unrealized due to uneven implementation, fragmented support, and a lack of accountability for monitoring and reporting across the state.

Legislative Asks:

- Provide multi-year funding for professional learning, Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) coaching, and guidance for implementation with fidelity.
- Require all districts to produce annual Act 173 implementation reports before new reforms are introduced.
- Require legislative boundaries in decision-making to ensure new mandates do not outpace field capacity.

Priority 2: Improve Implementation Through Building Capacity

Why it matters: Vermont's state level leadership capacity must be built to monitor or assist effectively with staff, data, and field-based expertise. Sustainable change depends on state infrastructure that can coach, not just regulate, within an environment of trust and collaboration.

Legislative Asks:

- Fund additional AOE field specialists in MTSS, inclusion, and fiscal oversight. Ensure quality use of national Technical Assistant centers where available.
- Modernize statewide data systems linking outcomes, finance, and program quality. Recognize common platforms already present and leverage their use toward improved data collection and reporting.
- Create a public accountability dashboard and a cross-sector implementation council with VCSEA, VSA, and LEAs. This should include assessment and accountability around the performance of the Agency of Education.

Priority 3: Ensure Fiscal Integrity Toward Protecting IDEA and Students with Disabilities

Why it matters: Changes in funding formulas and underfunding special education risk Maintenance-of-Effort (MOE) requirement failures, which could jeopardize every district's access to significant federal dollars that are critical for the operations of Vermont schools. Fiscal stability safeguards are both compliance and equity.

Legislative Asks:

- Require Act 73 funding of special education to meet all MOE requirements across the state in legislation.
- Recognize the role practice change plays in cost, and focus on Priority 1 above.
- Require legislative financial impact review to be used in decision on Act 73.
- Do not limit funding for high support needs students as a way to cut costs.

Priority 4: Improve Classroom Instruction and Reduce Paraeducator Reliance

Why it matters:

High-quality classroom instruction and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) reduces unnecessary services and expensive access supports. Overreliance on paraeducators fragments instruction and limits access to certified teaching.

Legislative Asks:

- Require high-quality UDL implementation and Invest in teacher preparation and professional development for evidence-based literacy, math, and inclusive design.
- Fund an Educator Workforce Development Initiative to recruit and retain highly skilled and adequately trained educators that can support all students in the classroom.
- Require annual reporting on paraeducator use and best practices including the development of reasonable ratios and exemplar models for the state.

Priority 5: Develop Clear, Inclusive Governance Structures and Policy

Why it matters: Constant restructuring of statewide policy by the legislature diverts energy away from students and teachers. Policy and governance changes must be rooted in data based decision making related to best practices and local voices of educators.

Legislative Asks:

- Conduct a policy-impact and overlap review for all new education legislation prior to passage and implementation.
- Pause broad governance changes until Act 73's strategic plan and data tools are complete. The current environment of policy-churn impedes progress and is detrimental to students.
- Protect representation of families and students with disabilities in any new governance model.
- Require equity and financial impact statements for major policy proposals.

In conclusion, Vermont's success will not come from new mandates but from **finishing the work, funding implementation, protecting federal dollars, investing in high-quality instruction, and legislating with coherence.**