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Sent: Sunday, December 8, 2024 8:07 PM

To: Roy, Meagan She/Her/Hers <Meagan.Roy@partner.vermont.gov>

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Subject: Public Comment to Share with the Members of the Commission on the Future of Public Education in Vermont

Commission on the Future of Public Education in Vermont

Attention: Dr. Meagan Roy, Chair

RE: Public Comment for the Commission

December 9, 2024

Dear Commission Members,

We ask the Commission on the Future of Public Education in Vermont to consider student literacy and mathematics proficiency as an important factor in reducing the cost of education and promoting academic equity. Schools that do not teach the majority of students to read, write, and do math proficiently are unsustainable, unable to attract new families and retain qualified educators. Such schools are also more costly, requiring disproportionate spending on remediation to address achievement gaps and behavioral and mental health needs, and are especially detrimental to disadvantaged students.

Literacy performance has declined overall in Vermont for over a decade, with widening performance gaps between students by income, race/ethnicity, and special education eligibility ([NAEP, 2013-2022](#)). Reversing this trend requires sustained leadership by the Commission, state, and school officials. The Commission's third principle of sustainability and affordability must address these disparities to ensure literacy for all, leading to thriving Vermont communities.

The Commission's Guiding Principles undergird the state's ultimate responsibility for educational equity, ensuring evidence-based instruction and achievement gap reduction so that all students learn to read, write, and perform in mathematics at or above grade level. Protecting equity in literacy and math is straightforward. The inputs are access to systematic, explicit instruction from highly-trained professionals. The outputs are students' level of proficiency in reading, writing, and math.

Fall 2024 began the first school year of Vermont's literacy law, [Act 139](#), requiring all K-3 students receive evidence-based literacy instruction, be assessed at least annually in foundational reading skills, and receive supplemental instruction to close achievement gaps. To meet these requirements, the law also requires teacher professional development in evidence-based literacy instructional practices. We ask the Commission to take steps to protect these Act 139 requirements at the state, district, and school levels and consider expanding these efforts to grades 4-12 to ensure every student leaves school a proficient reader.

As stipulated in Act 139, the Vermont Agency of Education will recommend ways to strengthen teacher preparation in literacy by July 2025. The Commission can also call upon Vermont higher-education leaders to shift to teacher preparation grounded in reading science, emulating programs like those at Mount Saint Joseph and West Texas A&M Universities. Changing teacher preparation would mean education funds would no longer be needed for district-level teacher training. Instead, Vermont's PK-12 teachers would arrive equipped to teach and assess literacy and math skills with valid, reliable materials on day one.

We cannot allow Vermont's education financial crisis to curtail our literacy efforts. Since grades K-3 are the optimal time for effective literacy instruction, full investment at this level will prevent expensive remediation later.

Big decisions lie ahead for the Commission and Vermont's leaders, those elected to office, and those entrusted by our school districts. The anticipated priorities of incoming federal leadership pose potential risks to improving academic outcomes for all students, particularly those with learning challenges. We implore you to support teacher training in

the foundations of literacy and mathematics. We request our state and schools to invest in high-quality curricula and assessments that have proven valid and reliable. We ask that all students receive highly effective instruction and intervention at all grade levels, equipping them to achieve proficiency at or above grade level. This crucial foundation will prepare them to access advanced learning and career opportunities and foster the next generation of healthy, productive, and involved citizens, who ultimately contribute to our state's economy and way of life.

Sincerely,

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[Gwen Carmolli](#), Vermont Advisory Council on Literacy

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