

Report on Act 179 of 2014

**An act relating to making appropriations for the support
of government;
Sec. E.500.7 Special Education Expenditures;
Pilot Program; Report**

REPORT

**January 15,
2015**

**Submitted to House Education and Ways and
Means Committees; and Senate Education and
Finance Committees**

**Submitted by Secretary of Education
Rebecca Holcombe**



Legislation

Act 179 of 2014. *An act relating to making appropriations for the support of government*

Link to complete text of legislation on Vermont Legislature website:

<http://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Documents/2014/Docs/ACTS/ACT179/ACT179%20As%20Enacted.pdf>.

Objective of Report

Sec. E.500.7 SPECIAL EDUCATION EXPENDITURES; PILOT PROGRAM; REPORT

- (a) *There is created a three-year pilot program designed to encourage reduced special education expenditures through the use of best practices to provide special education services in the general classroom setting. Pursuant to a process and criteria to be developed by the Secretary of Education and based upon the Schoolwide Integrated Framework for Transformation (SWIFT), the districts comprising the four supervisory unions currently engaged in implementing the SWIFT model may expend special education mainstream block grant funds received pursuant to 16 V.S.A. § 2961 in a manner other than as required by State Board of Education Rule 2366.2.*
- (b) *To be eligible for the pilot program, all districts within a supervisory union shall submit a joint application providing information prescribed by the Secretary on or before September 1, 2014. The joint application shall:*
- (1) describe how the districts' special education spending plan under the SWIFT model will be less costly than special education spending without using the SWIFT model;*
 - (2) describe how the districts will serve students on individual education programs in a general classroom setting using the SWIFT model;*
 - (3) describe the manner in which the districts shall measure student performance; and*
 - (4) demonstrate how the use of the SWIFT model shall result in fewer students found to be in need of special education services at the end of the three-year pilot program.*
- (c) *Beginning in 2015, annually on or before January 15 for the duration of the pilot program, the Secretary shall submit a report to the House and Senate Committees on Education, the House Committee on Ways and Means, and the Senate Committee on Finance regarding the results of the pilot project and any recommendations for legislative action.*
- (d) *This section is repealed on July 1, 2017.*

Summary of Results

The four supervisory unions referred to above are: Grand Isle Supervisory Union, Franklin Northwest Supervisory Union, Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union and Windham Southeast Supervisory Union. Applications were submitted by all four SUs and were reviewed by AOE staff involved with the pilot and the SWIFT project. All four supervisory unions are participating in the pilot. See <http://www.swiftschools.org/> for more information.

Discussion about the pilot took place at the Special Education Funding Training in the fall, at the SWIFT Professional Learning Institute in December, at a teleconference on January 9th and in individual phone calls with Agency of Education Director for Integrated Support for Learning PreK-8 Karin Edwards and/or Nicole Tousignant, Agency of Education Director of Special Education Finance. Topics covered include clarification of what funds are covered by the pilot, documentation of use of time for the block grant, types of activities the flexible funding can be used for, relation of the pilot flexibility to use of IDEA and reimbursement funding. The activities covered by the block grant must relate directly to the SWIFT domains and critical features.

The participating SUs focused on less costly special education services through a number of similar approaches. In a broad sense, these had to do with an emphasis on prevention and classroom-based intervention that would result in fewer students evaluated and found eligible over time, an emphasis on services for students with IEPs that took place in inclusive settings and a reduction in the use of paraprofessionals.

Specific activities included:

- a) more effective collection, analysis and use of student progress data;
- b) aligning systems of support and intervention provided by general and special education staff to make sure that efforts are not being duplicated;
- c) creating teaming structures that support this alignment;
- d) training staff and supporting implementation of evidence-based practices such as Universal Design for Learning, Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS) and Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS);
- e) and use of co-teaching instead of pull-out instruction in order to meet IEP goals.

Implementation of Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS) is the primary approach.

Performance will be measured with a combination of student-level and system-level assessments. The systems-level assessment utilizes the SWIFT system assessments that measure fidelity of implementation of the SWIFT domains and critical features.

Student-level progress is measured using a combination of state assessment results and local assessments results from screenings and progress monitoring. This was generally agreed upon to bringing together various initiatives to create one coherent approach based on the SWIFT domains and critical features.

For more information, visit <http://www.swiftschools.org/>.

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