

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 2016

**Report/Recommendations 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

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- (d) This section is repealed on July 1, 2017.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

Four supervisory unions were eligible for and applied for the funding pilot: Grand Isle Supervisory Union, Franklin Northwest Supervisory Union, Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union and Windham Southeast Supervisory Union. After learning more about the pilot, Grand Isle Supervisory Union and Windham Southeast Supervisory Union chose to take advantage of the funding flexibility. The other two supervisory unions did not. A summary of results from the participating supervisory unions follows as well as reasons why the others did not.

Participants

Windham Southeast Supervisory Union

Windham Southeast Supervisory Union (WSESU) used the funds to provide professional development to classroom teachers in two evidence-based behavioral practices, positive behavior supports and Applied Behavioral Analysis practices to teach replacement behaviors. This allowed more students to remain in their classrooms for core instruction with positive outcomes.

Outcomes for the students benefitting from the increased teacher knowledge were measured by benchmark assessments, individualized education plan (IEP) goal and objective review, analysis of behavior support plans, and data team review of academic progress for each student and classroom.

Changes in student outcomes were seen in improvement in literacy and math, increased time in the classroom, decreases in behaviors interfering with learning and decreases in out of district referrals for elementary schools.

This supervisory union saw a decrease in students eligible for special education from 477 (18.46%) in 2014 to 448 (17.65%) in 2015 (~1%). Enrollment dropped during that same time (2510 in SY '15 to 2453 in SY '16). Special education costs in WSESU increased by \$656, 827 in SY '15 when compared with costs for SY '14 which represents a 6% increase. WSESU's special education spending is average for the state. These changes should be interpreted with caution as other factors likely contributed to them.

Grand Isle Supervisory Union

Grand Isle Supervisory Union (GISU) used the block grant funds to strengthen tiered systems of support (MTSS- Education Quality Standards) in both academics and behavior in individual schools. Universal Design for Learning, increased use of technology and Positive Behavior Intervention and Support were practices that were used by the school system. The funds allowed individual schools to have special educators working with students who were not eligible for special education but who were struggling academically and/or behaviorally in addition to students with IEPs. This led to special educators spending more time in classrooms which led to stronger and more trusting relationships between special and general educators and as indicated by the decrease in Office Discipline Referrals contributed to building strong and positive school cultures. Core instruction for all students and interventions for students not necessarily eligible for special education were improved.

Academic outcomes for students were measured according to the GISU Assessment Schedule that sets out which assessments are used at each grade level and when they are administered. English language Arts assessments include the Primary Observation Assessment, Fry Sight Words, Sentence Dictation, Paragraph Dictation, Phonological Awareness Profile, a Spelling Profile and comprehension, accuracy, fluency and vocabulary assessments from the Fountas and Pinnell assessment system. Math assessments include a screening tool, local trimester assessments and the Smarter Balanced interim assessments. This allowed tracking of changes in student outcomes and identification of instructional gaps. Behavioral outcomes were measured using Office Discipline Referral information collected for each school's Positive Behavior

Intervention and Support system. For students eligible for special education progress towards meeting IEP goals were also measured.

Improved outcomes were seen in several areas. Office Discipline Referrals decreased which resulted in students spending more time engaging in classroom instruction and increasing the time teachers spent instructing rather than managing behaviors. Assessment results indicated that student comprehension of grade level material increased.

This supervisory union saw a decrease in students eligible for special education from 150 (16.11%) in 2014 to 139 (14.99%) in 2015 (~1%). Enrollment remained essentially the same during this time (931 in SY '15 927 in SY '16). Special education costs decreased in SY '15 by \$452,827 compared to SY '14, a 12% decrease. GISU's special education spending is average for the state. These changes should be interpreted with caution as other factors likely contributed to them.

Non- Participants

Franklin Northwest Supervisory Union

Franklin Northwest Supervisory Union (FNWSU) chose not to participate in the pilot after considering the advantages and disadvantages of the funding flexibility. There were two major reasons given for non-participation. One was that the practices the funding might be used for were already underway using current allowable funding. FNWSU has implemented co-teaching as a way to meet IEP requirements and provide benefit to all students. They also take advantage of the allowance for 20% of a special educator's time to be spent providing services to students with 504 or EST plans. The second concern was that using these special education funds for non-special education purposes would result in a shortfall of funds needed to provide the services required by IEPs for special education students.

Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union

Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union also decided not to participate in the funding pilot largely because of the administrative burden required to track time and services delivered. While they appreciated the flexibility allowed, they felt that the current time samples method of accounting was more efficient and effective than what they needed to do to meet the requirements of the grant.

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

Agency of Education SWIFT Contact: Karin Edwards, Director of ISL PreK-8, at karin.edwards@vermont.gov or (802) 479-1407.