

Vermont State Board of Education

Annual Report to the Governor and General Assembly

16 January 2019

(This report is submitted in compliance with 16 VSA §164(21), which requires the State Board of Education to “report annually to the Governor and the General Assembly on the progress it has made on the development of education policy for the State”)

The State Board of Education is directed by statute (16 VSA §164) to “establish and advance education policy for the State of Vermont”.

The State Board of Education’s work in 2018

In the past year, 2018, the State Board of Education engaged in many initiatives to “*establish and advance education policy for the State of Vermont*”. However, the vast majority of the Board’s time and attention in 2018 was devoted to implementing directives of the General Assembly.

Two legislative directives in particular dominated the Board’s work in 2018:

- Small School Grants: The Legislature directed that “*the State Board of Education shall adopt and publish metrics by which it will make determinations whether to award small school support grants pursuant to 16 V.S.A. § 4015* ” (Act 46, Section 21); and
- School District Consolidation: The Legislature directed that “*the State Board shall review and analyze the Secretary’s proposal (for district consolidation) ... may take testimony or ask for additional information from districts and supervisory unions, shall approve the proposal either in its original form or in an amended form ... and shall publish on the Agency’s website its order merging and realigning districts and supervisory unions where necessary.*” Act 46 §10 (b)

Both of these directives provoked complex and contentious disagreements over public policy. Each directive, and especially the latter, demanded extraordinary amounts of the Board’s time and attention. In each instance the Board completed its work on a timely basis and filed its final report to the General Assembly on the date stipulated by statute.

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Looking ahead to 2019 and beyond

Looking ahead over the next several years the Board sees the challenges and opportunities facing education in Vermont in three dimensions: equity, excellence, and efficiency.

- By equity, we mean equity of opportunity – opportunity for all students, regardless of socioeconomic background or disability. Our goal is that each individual student attains sufficient knowledge and skills to pursue the post-secondary education/training and career path of her/his choice and to become active and contributing members of our communities.
- By excellence, we mean educational excellence – outstanding outcomes. Our goal is that young Vermonters are among the best-educated in America, well-prepared as young citizens, and ready to move on to post-secondary vocational/career preparation and education.
- By efficiency, we mean an educational system that integrates effectiveness and economy -- high value at an affordable cost. Our goal is a pK-12 educational system that delivers equity and excellence at a cost to Vermonters that is affordable and sustainable.

While these three dimensions may appear to be in competition, in fact they complement one another. For example, educational excellence for some students is a shallow achievement if youngsters with disadvantages or disabilities aren't also succeeding. Conversely, achieving equity of opportunity is a failure if weak schools remain unimproved or if the overall quality and performance of our schools are allowed to deteriorate. And none of these achievements will endure if their cost is so burdensome that families and communities are overwhelmed by education taxes.

The State Board is convinced that these dimensions – equity, excellence, and efficiency – are strategic imperatives. Moreover, we believe that it's essential to move forward on all three fronts simultaneously and synchronously. Failure in any dimension is unacceptable. We believe that Vermont can – and must – be preeminent among the states in achieving education for all children that is at once equitable, excellent, and efficient.

At the same time, the Board continues to be concerned about “new initiative overload”. In our travels around the state, meeting with teachers, school boards, and administrators, we hear repeatedly that new initiatives from Montpelier threaten to overwhelm schools' ability do the vital day-to-day work of educating Vermont's children.

Accordingly, the State Board advocates that, going forward, the Legislative and Executive branches of state government tread lightly. We urge that new initiatives or mandates, however well-intentioned, take into account the significant educational expectations and financial burdens already placed on Vermont schools and communities.