

Agenda for a World-Class Education

A resource from the



Vermont
Superintendents
Association

VERMONT
SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION

THE VERMONT SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION

VISION

The Vermont School Boards Association envisions a state where every student has access to and is engaged in a world-class public education, where local boards provide student-focused oversight of education systems, and where educators, families, and communities are engaged partners, ensuring that the futures of all Vermont children are driven by their aspirations, not bound by their circumstances.

MISSION

The VSBA exists to achieve Vermont's vision for public education by supporting all school boards to serve as effective trustees for education on behalf of their communities and by providing a strong collective voice toward enhancing the cause of public education in Vermont.

THE VERMONT SUPERINTENDENTS ASSOCIATION

VISION & MISSION

The Vermont Superintendents Association works to ensure that Vermont public education supports each and every student in acquiring the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed for success in a rapidly changing world.

To achieve that result, the Association:

- Promotes improvements to laws, regulations and practices.
- Engages partners to support a framework for transforming public education to meet the needs of 21st century learners.
- Supports superintendents through transparent, proactive analysis and communications specific to educational issues at the local, state, and federal level.
- Supports superintendents through high quality professional development and supporting the work of superintendents within the districts they serve.

A World-Class Education System

When compared to other states, Vermont's education system ranks high. In certain areas however, we do not do well enough.

For example, while we have among the best high school graduation rates in the country, we know that there are too many students who fall short of their potential or through the cracks because they are not fully engaged in their education or because they don't receive the supports they need from their schools, their families, or their community.

Our Associations – as representatives of our public education system -believe that we cannot, in this era of global competition and rapidlychanging economic conditions, be content with a good education system. We have much more work to do.

Vermont's children require a world-class education system, a system that responds to every learner's interests, aptitude and learning style in highly effective ways, a system that ensures all students have the opportunity to meet their full potential.

This task is not an easy one. But for Vermont's children - our future - we cannot be satisfied until we have the very best public education system.

To move our system forward, we have a five point agenda:

- ✓ **ASSURING SUCCESS FOR EVERY STUDENT**
- ✓ **SUPPORTING A NEW VISION FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING**
- ✓ **ENGAGING AND SUPPORTING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES**
- ✓ **DELIVERING AND USING WORLD-CLASS TECHNOLOGY**
- ✓ **PROVIDING EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP**

Some of our proposals will require strategic investments, but most can be accomplished by thinking differently about the way we do our work and changing our practice accordingly.

Assuring Success for Every Student

Research supports the value of investing in high quality pre-k education. We support the Governor's call for the Vermont General Assembly to enact legislation to provide every child with access to pre-k education.

Students learn best when they play an active and meaningful role in their education. The learning styles, interests, and aptitudes of each student must drive instruction and learning activities in every school. All schools must provide extensive and equitable access to meaningful and rigorous learning experiences.

To ensure we meet the above objectives, Vermont must complete the development of a proficiency-based system that gives credit for demonstrated learning, skills, and concept development that takes place inside and outside of school buildings. The State Board has appropriately recognized this need.

Furthermore, every single school system in Vermont must expand real-world learning opportunities for students. Schools must increase research-based virtual learning opportunities, access to technical and higher-education courses, internships and community-based or project-based learning initiatives.



To accomplish the objectives outlined above:

LEGISLATION

- ✓ The General Assembly should adopt legislation this year to provide universal access to pre-k education for every student.
 - ✓ The General Assembly should adopt legislation that provides for the expansion of, and more equitable access to, rigorous pathways for students such as dual enrollment, virtual learning, independent studies, vocational education and community- based learning.
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STATE POLICY AND SUPPORT

- ✓ The State Board of Education must ensure the timely development of a system that gives credit for learning based on demonstrated proficiencies, rather than seat time.
 - The State Board of Education should authorize the creation of Innovation Zones to exempt supervisory unions and/or districts from specific regulation and policy in order to create models of world-class education systems that can be scaled across the state.
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LOCAL ACTION

- School boards and superintendents will work together to ensure that every student has a personal learning plan focused on core academics, dispositions towards learning, and student aspirations.
 - Superintendents and principals must lead the efforts within school systems to assure that the learning needs of students and the professional development needs of teachers are met. The emphasis of the work must be on supporting the personal learning needs of students.
 - Regional superintendents groups should establish school calendars that provide for more continuity in learning and better reflect the needs of students.
 - ✓ Businesses, large and small, must engage schools in providing meaningful work study and internships to students.
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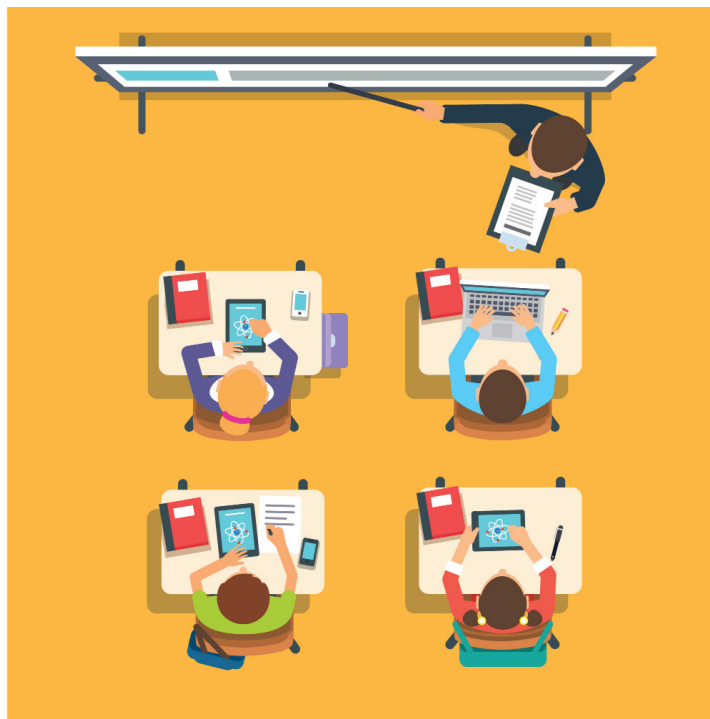
A New Vision for Teaching & Learning

Like students, teachers will benefit from a more flexible, dynamic, and responsive education system.

The transformation of public education is the responsibility of all - but it is teachers who are the faces and facilitators of change. We must do all we can to prepare, attract, support and retain committed teachers and to create working conditions that support creativity, innovation and collaboration.

Just as we must create flexibility for students, we must create flexibility for their instructors, with similarly high expectations for both. In a world-class education system, teachers will work as part of a highly specialized team, allowing them to apply the best of their skills to ensure all students master critical skills and concepts. Teaching will increasingly be characterized by greater variability in methods, scheduling, and location of learning.

This means that the traditional collective bargaining framework, essentially unchanged in Vermont since 1969, must be revised in order to best respond to contemporary expectations for education, to foster a greater sense of shared responsibility and mutual respect and to unleash the potential of students and teachers alike.



Therefore:

LEGISLATION

- The General Assembly should undertake a thorough review of the benefits and costs of negotiating compensation and benefits at the state level while leaving other facets of collective bargaining agreements to be negotiated more locally.
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STATE POLICY AND SUPPORT

- ✓ The Secretary of Education should lead a process to better align teacher preparation and licensing requirements with the new vision for teaching and learning.
 - The Secretary of Education must convene a council of experts and interested parties to determine how to best support teachers and their practice in responding to the emerging needs of Vermont learners. The council should determine how Vermont can update our statutes to reframe the purpose of collective bargaining agreements with teachers – to devise strategies that contribute to improving student learning and to create the professional employment conditions that enable teachers to be effective practitioners.
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LOCAL ACTION

- ✓ School boards should open discussions among board members, administrators and teachers regarding the evolving role of a teacher in a world class education system.
 - ✓ School boards and teachers should start collective bargaining discussions with an emphasis on the importance of changes in educational practice for the benefit of students and consider contract language to effectuate those changes.
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Engaging & Supporting Families & Communities

Research is clear that family engagement is essential to student success. Because every student is more successful when supported by families who are directly engaged in their learning, school districts should implement effective strategies to partner with families, such as directly involving families in the design of individual learning plans, providing regular opportunities for all families to participate in demonstrations of student learning and improving two-way communication between schools and families to give clear information about student growth and progress toward goals.

School, family, and community partnerships are essential to building an enduring new system of public education. School personnel, families and community members must forge new levels of understanding and mutual trust in order to move our systems forward together.

Finally, we know that families and children must be well-supported to maximize learning. In Vermont, we have a growing number of children and families living in poverty. We fully support the Governor's call to provide free lunches to eligible students because we know students cannot learn when they are hungry.

While education is the best antidote to a life in poverty, education systems alone cannot overcome the barriers to learning associated with poverty. Support for struggling families must come from education and human services systems working in partnership. Ideally, human service systems will be extended into school settings in order to provide the most comprehensive supports to children, much of whose lives are spent at school.



The following must be accomplished to engage and support our families and communities:

LEGISLATION

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- ✓ The General Assembly must enact legislation to provide free lunches to students who qualify for reduced-price lunches.
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STATE POLICY AND SUPPORT

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- The Governor must ensure that the Agency of Human Services is well-resourced and that it works in close collaboration with local human service delivery systems to provide leadership, support, and resources to those systems.
 - The Secretary of Education and the Secretary of Human Services must work together to build strong connections and reduce barriers, and to create models for human service systems within schools that support student learning.
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LOCAL ACTION

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- Our Associations will develop and offer training to administrators on the importance of family engagement and effective strategies to do so.

Delivering & Using World-Class Technology

In a world-class education system, modern technology must be as available as the electricity that flows when you flip on a light switch.

Every student needs readily available, up-to-date and equitable access to digital learning devices. Every student, family and school must have access to reliable, high-speed broadband connectivity. All teachers must be fully capable of teaching students how to use digital learning devices to enhance their learning.

Meaningful data concerning the learning challenges and successes for all students must be available to teachers, principals, superintendents and board members, and the data must be used to focus and improve the education services provided to those students.



To accomplish this, the following must occur:

LEGISLATION

- The General Assembly should establish funding mechanisms exclusively focused on the equitable procurement, development and utilization of technological assets – connectivity, hardware, data, professional development and support.

STATE POLICY AND SUPPORT

- Connect Vermont - Governor Shumlin's vision for high-speed broadband connectivity to every corner of Vermont - must be fully realized.
- The Agency of Education must successfully complete its work to create a longitudinal data system that will collect and distribute meaningful student data.
- The Agency of Education should establish an open professional development and learning management web-based platform accessible by all educators to enhance their ability to serve children more effectively.

LOCAL ACTION

- School boards must ensure that every school has reliable access to high-speed connectivity.
- ✓ School systems must ensure that every student has access to personal learning devices.
- Superintendents and principals must ensure that teachers have and demonstrate the skills necessary to support students in the full use of digital learning devices.
- Superintendents and principals, with support from the Agency of Education, must make certain that boards, school administrators and teachers know how to use the data that will become available to them through the longitudinal data system

Providing Effective Leadership

Our education systems must become nimble in their response to the needs of students and communities. School boards must attract and retain high quality educational leaders. Together, boards and administrators must be responsive, responsible and highly focused on effective decision making processes.

Vermont's school district and supervisory union boards and board members must improve their capacity to accomplish meaningful change. This requires clarity of purpose and role, availability of comprehensive, accurate, and meaningful information about district performance to inform decision making, and strong chairs to provide leadership for each board.

Improvements to public education in Vermont will, to a degree, be reliant on a high-functioning Agency of Education. Vermont needs a well-resourced and capable state Agency of Education that works in close collaboration with school boards and superintendents to provide leadership, support, and resources to local districts. The focus of all parties needs to be on student learning and adapting systems to meet the needs of every student in a rapidly changing world.



To accomplish this:

LEGISLATION

- The General Assembly must update legislation to clarify the roles and responsibilities for Supervisory Union and School District boards that will move this work forward.
 - ✓ The General Assembly must enact legislation to require joint training for superintendents and board chairs.
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STATE POLICY AND SUPPORT

- The Governor must ensure that the Agency of Education is well-resourced and that it works in close collaboration with school boards and superintendents to provide leadership, support, and resources to school systems.
 - The Secretary of Education should lead a process to better align administrator preparation and licensing requirements with the new vision for public education.
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LOCAL ACTION

- ✓ School boards and superintendents must work together to ensure principals have time, organizational supports, flexibility, and resources to fulfill their roles as instructional leaders.
 - School boards and superintendents will identify outcomes and indicators on system performance and will use that data to inform decision-making.
 - ✓ School boards in all districts and supervisory unions must work with superintendents, principals and business managers to design and implement structural changes that allow for greater student opportunity and more nimble decision-making, and that attract and retain high quality administrators.
 - School boards and superintendents will identify outcomes and indicators on system performance and will use that data to inform decision-making.
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Conclusion

Vermont's local education officials are committed to the success of all Vermont's students and the systems that serve those students. We have work to do, and we are ready to do it. And we need your help. We need all Vermonters to commit to building a world-class education system together.

From pre-k educators through college professors, families and businesses, the General Assembly, Governor Shumlin and our State Board of Education, educators and school boards – each Vermonter must own and deliver these changes. Our children deserve nothing less.

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