

Commission on the Future of Public Education

2024 Acts and Resolves No. 183 Sec. 1

Background, Overview, and Deliverables

Creation

The Commission shall study the provision of education in Vermont and make recommendations for a statewide vision for Vermont's public education system to ensure that all students are afforded substantially equal and educational opportunities in an efficient, sustainable, and stable education system. *Sec. 1(a)*

Members

- Megan Roy, Former-Chair of the Census-Based Funding Advisory Group
- Zoie Saunders, Interim Secretary, AOE
- Craig Bolio, Commissioner, Department of Taxes
- Jennifer Deck-Samuels, Chair, State Board of Education
- Sen. Ann Cummings, Chair, Senate Finance Committee
- Rep. Peter Conlon, Chair, House Education Committee
- Nicole Mace, VSBA Appointee
- Jeff Francis, VPA Appointee
- Michael Leichliter, VSA Appointee
- Jeff Fannon, Executive Director, VT-NEA
- Elizabeth Jennings, President, VASBO
- John Castle, Executive Director, Vermont Rural Education Collaborative
- Oliver Olsen, VISA Representative

Steering Group and Subcommittees

- Zoie Saunders
- Craig Bolio
- Jennifer Deck-Samuelson
- Sen. Ann Cummings
- Rep. Peter Conlon
- Nicole Mace
- Provide leadership and work with a consultant or consultants.
- Develop and propose a work plan for the Commission.
- Form a subcommittee to address education finance topics in greater depth. This subcommittee may include non-Commission members.
- May form one or more additional subcommittees as necessary.

Duties of the Commission

- Shall conduct at least 14 public meetings.
- At least one meeting of the Commission, or a meeting of a subcommittee, shall be held in each county.
- Members shall receive compensation and reimbursement for not more than 30 meetings, including subcommittee meetings.
- Submit final recommendations on or before October 1, 2025 and receive public feedback:
 - Minimum 30-day public comment period
 - Process must include a public outreach plan
 - All feedback shall be included as an addendum to final report on December 1, 2025

Policy Considerations

- Education finance system; Recommendations geared toward an education funding system that affords substantially equal access to a quality basic education in accordance with State v. Brigham that includes:
 - Allowable uses for Education Fund; including impact of healthcare costs.
 - The method for setting tax rates and strengthening the understanding between budget votes and property tax. As well as, examining any adjustments to property tax credit thresholds.
 - A consideration of alternative funding models, including a formal base amount of per pupil education spending.
 - Adjustments to the excess spending threshold and spending caps with recommendations to target specific types of spending and services.
 - Ongoing monitoring system of the Education Fund and VT's education finance system; standing Education Fund Advisory Committee.
 - *(Act 183 Sec. 11. Active July 15, 2025).*
 - Additional considerations

Policy Considerations Cont.

- Education governance, resources, administration;
 - Structure and needs of Agency of Education.
 - Composition, role, and function of State Board of Education.
 - Roles, functions, and decisions of local control v. state control.
 - Integration of career and technical education.
- Physical size and footprint of the education system building upon the State Aid to School Construction Working Group;
 - Most efficient and effective number and locations of school buildings, districts, and supervisory unions.
 - Workforce retention & capacity driven by class-size data.
 - Town tuition program; role, designation, and tuitioning outside VT.
 - Use of private therapeutic schools; legal and financial impact.

Policy Considerations Cont.

- The role of public schools in both the provision of education and the social and emotional well-being of students;
 - How public education should be delivered.
 - Wraparound supports & collocation of services.
 - Strengths and opportunities of collaboration with postsecondary schools.
 - Consequences of recommendations on staffing, funding, and any other affected system.
- Additional considerations at the discretion of the Steering Committee and Commission.

Key Stakeholders to Consult With

- Department of Mental Health
- Department of Labor
- President of the University of Vermont or designee
- Chancellor of the Vermont State Colleges Corporation or designee
- Representative from the Prekindergarten Education Implementation Committee
- Office of Racial Equity
- Representative with Expertise in the Community Schools model in Vermont
- Vermont Youth Council
- Commission on Public School Employee Health Benefits
- An organization committed to ensuring equal representation and educational equity

Existing Laws, Policy, and Reports to Review

- 2015 Act 46 – District consolidation, Merger Support Grants, education funding, education spending, property tax rates.
- 2018 Act 173 – Special education funding (census-based funding model) and best practices.
- 2022 Act 127 – Pupil weighting change (income-based tax), education quality, funding oversight, amendments to EQS.
- 2023 Act 76 – "Child care bill."

State v. Brigham

166 Vt. 146 (1997)

- 1997 Acts and Resolves No. 60
 - Created the Education Fund to fund all school district education spending.
 - Established a uniform tax rate to support a minimum State block grant.
 - Created a revenue stream into a state-level share pool for redistribution based on approved per-pupil spending.
- 2003 Acts and Resolves No. 68
 - Created a homestead property tax based on education spending.
 - Created a nonresidential tax that is uniform across the state.
 - Each town's education property tax to be proportional to the spending approved by voting residents. (No more block grant)

Act 46 of 2015

- Key focus: Governance, funding, and spending
- Districts awarded accelerated tax breaks for forming districts with 900+ students.
- Tasked the SBE with reviewing and adjusting supervisory union boundaries, resulting in:
 - Merged 45 districts in 39 towns to form 11 new union school districts.
 - Enlarged 3 existing union school districts.
 - Net reduction of 34 districts.
 - Conditionally required 4 additional districts to merge with 4 existing union districts.

Act 173 of 2018

- Key focus: Effectiveness, availability, and equity of special education services - Rulemaking through Census-Based Funding Advisory Group.
 - UVM study to evaluate special education funding
 - Recommended a census funding model
 - DMG study to compare best practices for special education delivery
- Resulted in changes to:
 - Special Education Rules
 - Independent School Rules
 - Census-Based Funding Rules

Act 127 of 2022

- Key focus: Equity, school funding formula, funding oversight
 - Adjusted and added pupil weights; grade level, ELs, lower-income
 - Limited homestead property rates increases for FY 2025 through FY 2029.
 - Suspended the excess spending adjustment, the Hold Harmless provision, and ballot language requirements.
 - Tasked AOE with the development of a universal income declaration form.
 - Amended the Education Quality Standards (EQS)

Act 76 of 2023

- Key focus: Child care and early education settings
- Created the Prekindergarten Education Implementation Committee (July 2023 - February 2025)
- Resulted in changes to:
 - Child Care Financial Assistance Program
 - Child care licensing regulations
 - Charged Building Bright Futures with monitoring implementation.
- Tasked AOE with analyzing providing recommendations on PreK costs in a report submitted December 21, 2023.
- Allows the continuation of the Student Loan Repayment Assistance Program to continue past July 2026.

Resources Available

- Technical and legal assistance shall be provided by one or more consultants or facilitators contracted by the AOE.
- The AOE shall provide necessary educational and financial data.
- School districts shall comply with requests from the Agency to assist in data collections.

Commission Deliverables

- Meet for the first time on or before July 15, 2024
- Prepare and submit a formal, written work plan and communication plan that will maximize public engagement by September 15, 2024.
- Write a preliminary findings and recommendations report, including short-term cost containment considerations, for the 2025 legislative session by December 15, 2024.
- Write a final findings report with recommendations for a statewide vision by December 1, 2025.
- Propose legislative language to achieve a vision for VT's public education system by December 15, 2025.
- Cease to exist December 31, 2025