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Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 10:14 AM

To: Roy, Meagan She/Her/Hers <[Meagan.Roy@partner.vermont.gov](mailto:Meagan.Roy@partner.vermont.gov)>; AOE - Future of Public Ed VT Public Comment <[AOE.FutureofPublicEdVTPublicComment@vermont.gov](mailto:AOE.FutureofPublicEdVTPublicComment@vermont.gov)>

Cc: Saunders, Zoie <[Zoie.Saunders@vermont.gov](mailto:Zoie.Saunders@vermont.gov)>

Subject: Education is missing from Draft Report of the Commission on the Future of Education in Vermont

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Dear Commission Chair Dr. Megan Roy:

Background:

I am a generational Vermonter, a resident of Calais, and have been actively following education in Vermont for many years. I worked as a teacher in Vermont after earning my teaching certifications at UVM. Studying reading with Dr. Jeanne Chall at Harvard University in the 1980's, I earned my Master's degree. The parent of three gainfully employed adults with significant dyslexia, I presently work part-time as a Literacy Tutor in central Vermont.

Comments:

Though I am a member of the Advisory Council on Literacy, I want to be clear that my comments and observations are my own and not the Council's.

In the draft report for the Legislature, I am very surprised to see NO specific references to how improved educational instruction will lower costs (especially related to special education).

Thank you for your work to help lower taxes, while promoting policies to improve educational outcomes in Vermont. I hope the Commission is keeping in mind the reason

we have school: to give every child a fair and effective education! In addition to considering finance and tax structure, this Commission has the opportunity to focus on equity and effective instruction for our state's students. [Act 139](#), enacted by our legislators last year to improve reading outcomes, champions this. When we prioritize and implement evidence-based instruction, schools not only show improved educational outcomes, but also experience improvement in school climate and reductions in behavior problems and absenteeism. We need this!

I note that Act 46 consolidated schools. However, costs have continued to increase significantly, while residents are increasingly frustrated by the threat of further closures. At the same time, we still lack equity for students, particularly those eligible, and legally required to receive, special education services. According to the 2022 NAEP assessment, 94% of Vermont's special education students were "below proficient." Only 6% were "proficient!" Without a focus on the quality of our teachers, their training, and their academic instruction, unfair gaps in skills will continue to widen.

Act 139 can help with this problem as it relates to literacy, and needs the express support of this Commission. Poor educational outcomes have a negative ripple effect. Upon request I will provide citations for each of the following negative effects of not learning to read. Poor reading is associated with mental-health problems, a greater likelihood of failing and dropping out of school, reduced employment opportunities, greater need for public assistance, incarceration, poorer health outcomes, homelessness, and even shorter life expectancy. The recommendations of this Commission can help change this!

Would a brief presentation about the details of this legislation be helpful to the Commission? That could easily be arranged. I, along with other concerned citizens, welcome the opportunity to discuss education-related issues at any time.

Sincerely,

Cynthia Gardner-Morse, M.Ed.

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