

Report

KEY THEMES FROM THE LISTEN AND LEARN TOUR



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Prepared by the Vermont Agency of Education

LEADERSHIP

SUPPORT

OVERSIGHT

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Message from the Office of the Secretary

Dear Vermont Educators, Families, and Community Members,

As we conclude the Listen and Learn Tour, I am filled with gratitude and inspiration after traveling across our beautiful state. I had the privilege of hearing directly from many of you – students, parents, educators, and community members - about your hopes, concerns, and priorities for the education system in Vermont.

Several key themes emerged throughout the Tour. Vermonters expressed the need for a balance between local autonomy and statewide consistency, particularly around curriculum and standards, to ease the burden on school districts and ensure high-quality academic outcomes. We heard a strong call for equitable access to educational opportunities, including flexible pathways and enrichment programs, mental health services, and updated facilities, especially in rural and underserved areas. When describing student success, Vermonters emphasized the need for a holistic approach to support both academic achievement and emotional well-being. The growing demand for special education services, coupled with staffing shortages and budget pressures, highlighted the need for innovative solutions like resource sharing and regionalization. The financial challenges facing our education system were acknowledged as a result of a complex set of factors that will require strong state leadership and collaboration to resolve. Vermonters emphasized that this work should prioritize enhancing opportunities for students while preserving the unique qualities that make our schools and communities special, all while building a stronger foundation for our future.

I am proud to share some of the significant strides that the Agency has made over the last few months in response to your feedback. We have expanded budget support and training opportunities to better equip our educators, administrators, and school boards as they face another difficult budget season. Our commitment to transparency has led to improved data reporting, including the rerelease of the State Education Profile Report. We have enhanced state assessment reporting and training, ensuring that our educators have the tools they need, and are making changes to publish results much earlier to support continuous improvement. Also, we have increased student support through Read Vermont to ensure that we are fostering improved literacy outcomes in every school across the state. This is just the beginning.

I want to thank every single staff member at the Agency for their engagement and investment in this initiative. Together, we will turn these insights into action as we embark on the next phase of this work, developing the Agency's strategic plan. This plan will be a roadmap for the future, informed by insights and priorities captured through the Listen and Learn Tour. We are committed to continuing this dialogue and

working collaboratively to create an education system that reflects the values and aspirations of all Vermonters and supports our most important state resource, our children.

This work would not have been possible without our partners, Augenblick, Palaich and Associates Consulting and UP for Learning, who helped facilitate meaningful and generative discussions with stakeholders across our state. Most importantly, I want to thank all the Vermonters who shared their passion and commitment for education. Your voice and participation have been integral to this process and in shaping our path forward.

Sincerely,

Zoie W. Saunders, M.Ed.

Secretary of Education

Listen and Learn Tour Background

The mission of the Vermont Agency of Education (AOE) is to ensure that each student has access to high-quality educational opportunities. We work toward this goal by providing leadership, support, and oversight to our partners in the education system. As a statewide education leader, the Agency believes in working with and in support of supervisory unions/district, schools, and partners in the field, as well as the broader community.

The Agency's Listen and Learn Tour engaged education leaders, teachers and staff, parents and families, community members, and students to identify educational priorities of communities across Vermont. Input was gathered to help the Agency develop a strategic plan that will be responsive to the needs of the field and supportive of the future vision of education. Grounding these conversations in data was important as we explored how state, regional, and district decisions can improve educational outcomes for all students.

The Listen and Tour included three phases. In the first phase, AOE met with superintendents to share and hear feedback on AOE's approach and discuss priorities. In the second stage of the tour, AOE engaged in planning sessions with education leaders, including curriculum directors, business managers, principals, special education directors, and school board members, to take a more granular look at student outcomes in each region while parsing out complexities in the data. In the third phase, AOE conducted a series of public engagement sessions with educators and members of the public across the state. When there was less participation from students during public listening sessions than the AOE had hoped for, AOE asked a local organization, Up for Learning, to conduct additional youth engagement sessions to hear from middle and high school students.

A graphic on the next page summarizes all the different regional planning and engagement opportunities convened, followed by a map of the different locations where sessions were held.

Listen and Learn Tour BY THE NUMBERS

REGIONAL
PLANNING
SESSIONS WITH
EDUCATION
LEADERS

6



EDUCATOR
ENGAGEMENT
SESSIONS

13



PUBLIC
ENGAGEMENT
SESSIONS

12

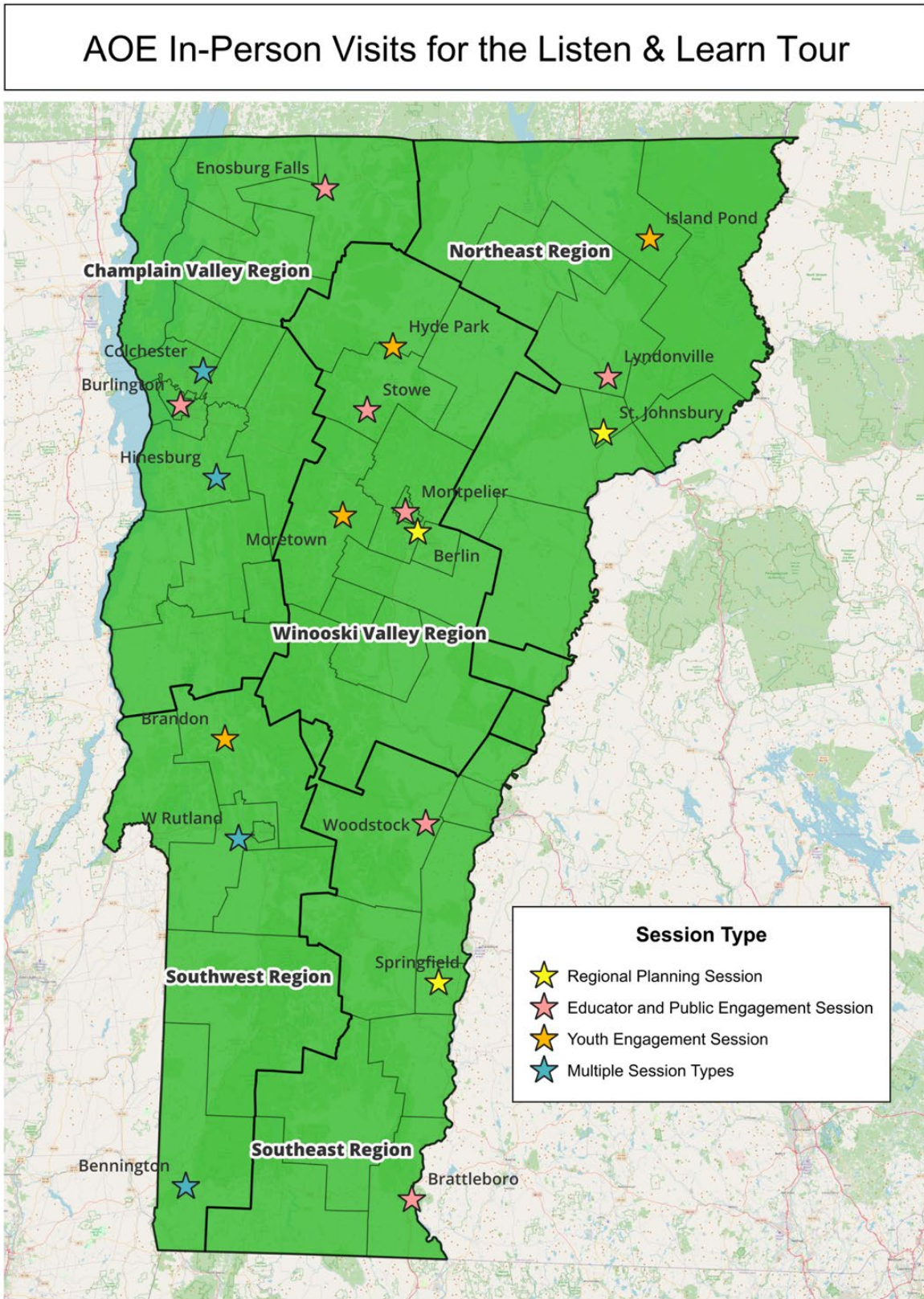


YOUTH
ENGAGEMENT
SESSIONS

8

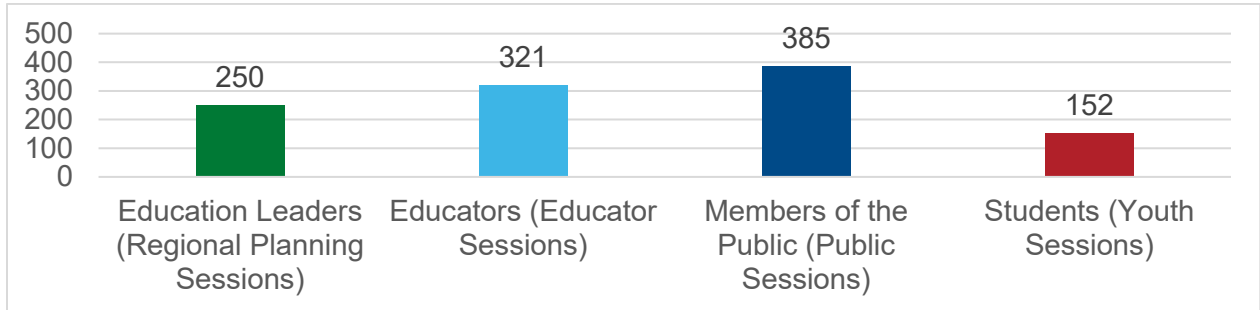


Map 1. Planning and Engagement Session Locations



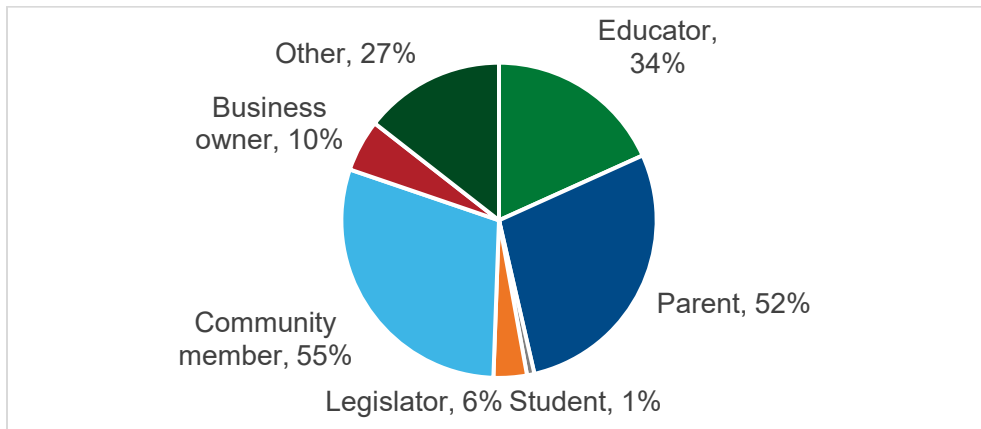
Participants included 250 education leaders during regional planning sessions, 321 educators during educator engagement sessions, 385 members of the public during public engagement sessions, and 152 students during youth engagement sessions. Over the course of four months, the Agency met with over 1,100 Vermonters.

Chart 1. Number of Listen and Learn Tour Participants



During public listening sessions, attendees were also specifically asked about their role in the community (and allowed to select all options that applied). A large percentage of participants indicated they were community members (55%), parents (52%), or educators (34%). A quarter selected “other” which could include school board members or other roles. Ten percent identified themselves as business owners, six percent as legislators, and one percent were students.

Chart 2. Roles of Members of the Public Attending Public Engagement Sessions



This report summarizes the overarching themes that emerged across planning and engagement sessions. A summary of each individual session is included in the appendices. The AOE is also working with trusted community partners to increase engagement and participation from diverse populations and is committed to establishing a regular community outreach approach to support the implementation of its multi-year strategic plan.

Education Leader Regional Planning Sessions

Regional planning sessions began with a discussion of each region’s unique context, including assets and challenges, and then split into breakout sessions organized around four topics: Academic Performance and Accountability, College and Career Readiness, Mental Health Costs and Systems of Support, and Data Review and Budgeting Support for Boards. Additional regional context is described in [Appendix A](#). Below are the key themes in each area:

Regional Assets and Challenges

Education leaders expressed pride in their schools and communities, including strong local partnerships, family and community engagement, and access to community resources. Participants in many regions highlighted strong partnerships with local businesses, non-profits, and mental health providers. These collaborations expand opportunities for students, including internships and other work-based learning opportunities, afterschool programming, and mental health support. Several communities noted strong family and community engagement including active volunteers. Community assets include access to outdoor resources, cultural and recreational opportunities, higher education, industry, and infrastructure. It is important to note that in this area, and other subsequent areas described below, there were strong regional differences in which communities have access to these types of assets, particularly contrasting urban versus rural communities.

Communities are facing different challenges across the state. Communities in several regions are struggling with declining enrollment and maintaining small schools, which often prompts discussions around consolidation. However, there are concerns about losing community identity and access to local schools that are important to their communities. Transportation was also highlighted as a challenge in more rural communities, with a concern around increased transportation costs should schools consolidate and limited access to programs like CTE, work-based learning, and regional collaborations.

[Our] youngest learners are coming in with more challenging behaviors [and] too many are legitimately qualifying for special education – a huge population with social trauma, needs not met, [who are] less ready to learn with increased expectations of rigor.

Northeast Regional Planning Session, October 2, 2024

More urban communities were in contrast to the rest of the state, with conversations instead focusing on how to support a growing population. Most regions also reported affordable housing shortages that impact both family and staff recruitment compounding the teacher shortages, especially in rural areas.

Communities near the border with other states also face additional competition with out-of-state districts for staff.

Some communities noted economic hardships for their families, lack of access to community resources, and issues with drug addiction. Education leaders noted the growing role that schools are serving for students and communities, with schools often serving as hubs for mental health, social services, and community events, and again, challenges for rural communities in accessing outside resources. Serving these additional functions, though important, places strain on school resources and budgets in all communities, regardless of how much access they have to community supports.

Academic Performance and Accountability

Education leaders stressed that state data needs to be reliable, transparent, and easy to understand. Education leaders discussed their long-standing concerns about

state data quality, describing prior reports as inconsistent, unreliable, and not timely enough to be useful. Specifically discussing assessment data, education leaders said they relied on local assessment data that were better aligned with instruction and more readily available.

Education leaders were also particularly concerned about the reliability of the 2022-23 Vermont Comprehensive Assessment Program (VTCAP) results since it was a new assessment and there were technical issues with the first administration. Overall, participants emphasized the need for earlier data availability and more granular data to improve decision-making. Data suppression due to data privacy requirements for small settings also created challenges in measuring school quality and continuous improvement planning for small schools as a cohort.

There needs to be clear and reliable data. [AOE should] improve data reporting and [provide] training on data literacy.

**Winooski Valley
Regional Planning
Session, September
17, 2024**

Education leaders recommended holistic measures to assess student success. Education leaders said that standardized assessments alone were not sufficient to measure student success and other metrics needed to be considered such as qualitative assessments, social emotional learning (SEL) data, attendance, behavior/discipline data, and graduation rates. Education leaders indicated that it was important to have a complete picture of the whole child and their progress over time.

Education leaders shared their desire for both local autonomy but also increased direction and centralized support from AOE to improve student outcomes. Education leaders recommended state-level supports including better teacher professional development and regional collaboration opportunities, sharing of evidence-based strategies for academic improvement, and statewide alignment on best practices for curriculum and instruction, particularly in math and science which has received less of a focus than literacy (via Read Vermont). While intended to promote creativity and local customization, a lack of direction and guidance from AOE is burdensome for districts, by creating more work for districts to research, identify and/or develop any necessary resources on their own. Further, this results in inefficiencies and variability in how districts implement state laws.

*Creating coordinated curriculum “from scratch” is laborious, expensive, and time consuming...a statewide curriculum could serve as a foundation. LEAs could focus resources on **how** curriculum is implemented.*

Southwest Regional Planning Session, September 24, 2024

College and Career Readiness

Communities face barriers to expanding access to flexible pathways and students face barriers to participating. Barriers include transportation logistics and costs, scheduling conflicts between CTE centers and schools, and variation in local

graduation requirements. Schools often lack counseling and advisement capacity to provide the individualized support needed to help students navigate all flexible pathways options, as well as communication challenges between schools, families, and CTE centers that lead to insufficient awareness of available programs and benefits. Further, programs sometimes compete for enrollment, forcing students into an “either/or” decision. In rural areas, limited broadband and unreliable internet access prevent equitable participation in virtual opportunities. Students from low-income families, who might benefit the most from involvement in flexible pathways, face additional barriers like the need for paid employment and family responsibilities that impact their ability to engage in after-school work-based learning opportunities.

Implementing robust flexible pathways requires – staff to coordinate, vans to transport students.

Winooski Valley Regional Planning Session, September 17, 2024

Education leaders would like to expand student access to flexible pathways, including career and technical education (CTE), early college, concurrent enrollment, and AP courses.

Education leaders recommended regional comprehensive high schools that combine traditional and CTE offerings, expanding virtual opportunities, and improving collaboration among schools and districts. It was suggested that expanding access to CTE could be a means of improving student engagement. Participants highlighted the challenges they are facing with student engagement, particularly in grades 8-10. They recommended offering CTE earlier in middle school and early high school grades, as well as integrating career exploration into traditional settings. There is concern about the equity of existing access to flexible pathways and a perception that some options- like concurrent enrollment, dual enrollment, or work-based learning- favor affluent, motivated, and college-bound students. For example, not all districts are able to provide transportation to opportunities outside of the school building, so only students who can provide their own transportation are able to participate. Participants expressed a desire to ensure these options are accessible to underserved populations.

[We] need to shift from tech vs. high school- students can succeed in both. We need to work towards comprehensive high schools with tech programs.

Champlain Valley Regional Planning Session, September 20, 2024

Mental Health Costs and Systems of Support

Mental health and social-emotional needs are out of proportion with available resources.

Champlain Valley Regional Planning Session, September 20, 2024

Schools are overwhelmed with growing student mental health needs and have a lack of resources to sufficiently address these issues. Education leaders shared that addressing student mental health needs, including anxiety, trauma, and behavioral issues, is an increasing challenge that has only gotten worse since the pandemic. They also shared that younger students are often entering school unprepared and displaying dysregulated behavior. Education leaders reported staffing shortages for mental health professionals (nurses, psychologists, interventionists), leading to burnout and turnover. Schools are often left to provide services that education leaders feel should be managed by community agencies. Due to support being fragmented, schools face cost inefficiencies to provide services.

It is difficult to identify the cost of providing mental health services with current expenditure reporting structures. In response to phase 1 input, during regional planning sessions, the AOE shared a preliminary methodology for identifying the costs of mental health services and sought feedback from education leaders. Based on these conversations it was determined that more work is required to arrive at an accurate cost

estimate, as it is difficult to isolate mental health services from other student support services given the current accounting framework.

Education leaders recommend state and regional solutions to reduce cost pressures for schools and better address student mental health and overall well-being. Participants called for a streamlined continuum of services and stressed that the cost burden of mental health services should not be borne by schools. Proposed solutions included regional collaborations, therapeutic classrooms, early intervention, professional pay scales for mental health providers, and stronger and more accessible community partnerships to alleviate the burden on schools. Rural regions in the state have suffered due to a lack of access to community services, impacting teacher attendance as well as student absenteeism.

Data Review and Budgeting Support for School Boards

School board members need access to timely and accurate data. Consistent with the feedback of education leaders in the academic outcomes and accountability breakout group, school board members also stressed the need for consistent, reliable data to support budgeting decisions and public communications. Concerns were raised about data suppression, outdated information, and inconsistent reporting.

School board members recommended more state resources for community members to learn about the budget. Participants discussed the complexity of the state’s funding system and how it has created challenges for school boards to be able to communicate effectively with their communities. School board members recommended the state develop educational materials on education finance, tax calculations, and the impact of spending decisions to help communities understand budget proposals. They also recommended the state look at streamlining the funding system in order to be more transparent and understandable to the public.

[We] need AOE’s help to represent the data accurately to help boards use information. Current state – information is being used to “attack”. [We] spend time defending budget and can’t get to a point where we can accurately use data to set goals that connect to a classroom.

Northwest Regional Planning Session, October 1, 2024

Education funding has become a backstop for all funding needs in Vermont – the system is fundamentally flawed.

**Northwest Regional
Planning Session, October
1, 2024**

Districts are facing significant budget pressures due to rising costs and expanding expectations for what services schools are expected to provide to students. Increasing cost pressures include unfunded mandates, rising costs (e.g., mental health, special education), and declining enrollments which strain school budgets. Board members also suggested that the cost of providing social services, an area of increasing expectations and burden for schools, should be examined and funded separately.

Educator Engagement Sessions

The educator session questions were designed around three broad topic areas: the academic supports needed for students and educators; non-academic supports needed for students and educators; and areas where additional support from AOE or local districts would be beneficial to educators.

Academic Supports

Educators were asked about the academic supports provided by the AOE, what other academic supports are needed to ensure academic success, and about barriers to achieving success. Themes from the educator sessions included:

Educators want consistent guidance from AOE on supports and standards. As AOE rolls out new initiatives to increase student achievement, educators want to ensure it takes prior initiatives into consideration, to avoid simply layering additional expectations onto teachers' already full plates. Specific to the implementation of Read Vermont, educators said that ensuring out-of-date materials are removed from the Agency's website is important to avoid confusion. Additionally, distributing information to all educators statewide, including those in technical centers, is needed. Educators expressed a desire for additional support in the form of vetted options for curriculum, assessments and instructional practices, developed with educator input. This could save districts time by narrowing the research they each do when choosing materials and may increase the consistency of educational programming statewide. Independent school educators expressed a desire for more awareness of and access to AOE academic support resources, even though they are not required to use them, and they may not be aligned with each independent school's unique model.

Educators are concerned about the impact of budget cuts.

Educators feel districts and schools are often asked to do more with less, and some expressed a belief that there is a lack of equity across the state, including in the resources available to implement Personalized Learning Plans (PLPs). The physical conditions of some school buildings require additional resources, and educators are concerned about the impact of increasing health insurance costs reducing funds available for academic instruction and student services. Public school educators expressed concern about public funding being used to educate students at independent schools, while independent school educators expressed the importance of educational choice and for public funding being available for

[There needs to be] less negative state-level messaging regarding funding- it drives negative perceptions of educators.

*Enosburg Falls
Educator Engagement
Session, October 30,
2024*

families that do not otherwise have the resources to send their children to independent schools.

Professional development serves multiple purposes: continuous improvement, supporting academic learning gains, and educator retention. Educators value high-quality professional development opportunities where they can apply professional learning in the classroom immediately and consistently and see impact on student performance. They highlighted the importance of including non-classroom teaching staff and substitute teachers in trainings for maximum impact on student academic growth. While virtual professional development opportunities are sometimes needed, educators believe additional in-person sessions, including job-embedded professional development, are preferred. Educators hope the newly established Boards of Cooperative Education Services (BOCES) will allow for more regional professional development opportunities/ training for substitute teachers at a more reasonable cost.

High quality prekindergarten (PreK) programs are important to students' academic success. The availability of publicly funded PreK spots is seen as positive and something educators hope the state will maintain. Educators noted that PreK deserts – areas where there is a lack of PreK program availability – impact students' readiness for school, socially and academically.

Support for special education students and educators is needed. Educators across the state noted challenges and areas where additional support could benefit special education staff and students. Educators shared the need to support early identification

of special education students to ensure students receive the related services they need as early as possible, while advocating for more consistency in identification processes across school systems. Literacy tools, including at the secondary level, were identified as an area that additional resources from the AOE are needed to support continued academic gains for special education students. Additional tools related to special education monitoring were also identified as a need. Educators highlighted the ongoing staffing shortage and the desire for additional special education staff, including teachers and paraprofessionals. Educators also stressed it is important to ensure special education students are served in the appropriate setting that is best for their learning, whether in the general education classroom, in a program setting, or a combination thereof. They also expressed concern about the availability of therapeutic settings for high-acuity students, leading to long waitlists.

Examine special education practices, structural (staff) considerations, service delivery, etc. Help us build programs in-district with appropriate resources, curriculum, etc.

Bennington Educator Engagement Session, October 23, 2024

Multiple pathways are needed to provide student success beyond K-12 education.

Educators recognize the importance of flexible pathways for student engagement and academic success, but noted traditional pathways are the default for most students. There is no one-size-fits-all in education, some students may need five years of high school to graduate, others will move on to college, and others will go into the workforce. The CTE centers are seen as an important pathway option, but educators identified varying requirements for students to access centers across the state, and some challenges in providing additional support services to students in CTE center settings. Educators noted the academic rigor of CTE centers has increased over the years, but a misconception often remains that the CTE pathway is for students who are not successful in traditional schools.

Non-Academic Supports

Educators were asked about the non-academic supports needed to ensure student success, including the mental health, emotional and behavioral needs of students. Several key themes emerged including meeting students’ basic needs, providing behavioral and mental health support, special education identification, and the impacts of small schools, and of decreasing versus increasing enrollment:

Schools must meet students’ basic needs, often partnering with community services, before they can focus on academic needs.

Educators noted that schools today do so much more than simply provide an education for children. Schools are providing additional support to students and families to meet basic needs such as food, safety, housing, hygiene, health and wellness, and transportation. As a direct service example, schools now provide universal free meals, which educators value, but some questioned if the funding for school meals should come from the Education Fund or from another funding source. Educators from independent schools noted that SU/SDs are not required to include independent schools in their Universal Free Meals programs, so some independent schools are paying for meals for all students. Further, schools also connect students and families to other resources outside of school, such as counseling services. Creating systems of support requires coordination with community partners and other agencies – the community schools pilot program was an identified example of coordinated support. Educators noted schools can’t do this alone and need communities and other state agencies to provide support particularly around homelessness and drug use. Educators also noted differential access to community and agency support, depending on the region of the state and often the rurality of the community.

All community agencies need to be involved in solutions.

Bennington Educator Engagement Session, October 23, 2024

Student behavioral support is needed in virtually all school settings. Student attendance and chronic absenteeism were identified as key barriers to student academic success, and they also require staff intervention, reducing the time available to students in the building. Educators report many students come to school with a lack of listening skills, respect, executive function, and communication skills. These create extra things teachers have to teach in addition to the curriculum. Negative student behaviors in the classroom can be a barrier to academic success, as a lack of emotional

More mental health supports to reduce strain on teachers who don't have proper mental health training.

Stowe Educator Engagement Session, October 23, 2024

regulation can lead to disruptions in the classroom and decreased instructional time for all students. Educators said they need more training in evidence-based practices and resources such as restorative practices to address student's behavioral needs.

Schools are providing mental health supports to students.

Educators consistently identified the need for comprehensive mental health supports for students, so they are able to be engaged in the classroom. The post-pandemic trend is that schools are seeing an increased need for student mental health supports. In addition to the counseling and social emotional support schools are providing to

students, there is also a loss of planning time and sometimes instructional time, as educators and staff are participating in additional meetings focused on student mental needs. School Educational Support Teams (ESTs) could use additional support and there is a need for additional community-based mental health resources as well as better inter-agency collaboration. For those severe mental health needs that schools cannot meet, outplacement costs and transportation costs have a real fiscal impact.

How do we meet these increasing needs, especially in rural areas where we have less access to community resources?

West Rutland Educator Engagement Session, October 28, 2024

There is a need for additional resources and support from the AOE specific to student mental health, and social emotional learning (SEL).

Existing AOE resources, including the counselor framework and SEL intervention framework, are not always implemented with fidelity statewide. Some educators indicated a preference for approved SEL curriculum vendors, vetted by the state, while others suggested coordinated SEL curriculum across the state would be beneficial, especially for students that move districts. Educators discussed how students' use of cell phones contributes to behavior and mental health concerns, and that it takes energy and resources from schools to address. It was suggested that a state policy regarding student cell phone use could be beneficial.

The impacts of small school/communities and increasing/decreasing enrollment vary across the state. Small schools in Vermont serve many different roles, and rural communities often need different solutions than more populous areas. Smaller

Housing and affordability impact demographic trends [and enrollment].

Brattleboro Educator Engagement Session, December 3, 2024

communities often struggle to offer the range of educational opportunities larger communities can, particularly as it relates to flexible pathway opportunities for high school students. Educators in small schools identified the relationships staff have with students, really knowing all students in the building, as a positive impact of small schools that may be more difficult to achieve in a larger school setting. For schools with decreasing enrollment, it is harder to provide the level of staffing needed as enrollment decreases to meet students' academic, mental and social emotional needs. Educators in

schools with decreasing enrollment expressed concern about maintaining staffing levels if enrollment continues to decline. Although there are significantly more schools with decreasing enrollment than increasing enrollment in Vermont, educators in schools with increasing enrollment shared concerns about the lack of school space and the challenge of maintaining student relationships as class size increases.

Educator Supports and Additional AOE Supports

Educators were also asked about their needs as educators, and what types of support and/or guidance from the AOE would most impactful. Educators identified a number of areas additional support from the AOE would be helpful, including:

Educators want to see the AOE as a partner in education. Schools often feel they are on the receiving end of negativity from the public and are requesting strong leadership from the AOE to promote the education sector. Educators would like to see more positive messaging from the state around respect for educators and communication that highlights good programs/practices around education in Vermont. Additionally, they expressed a desire for the AOE to have more authentic participation in the community rather than a top-down approach and believe this can help build trust between districts and the AOE. AOE should help bring other state agencies and community partners to share in the responsibilities schools are managing (supporting basic needs, student mental health, other family and community challenges).

[AOE should] tighten expectations and offer limited choices though vetted assessments and curriculums.

Lyndonville Educator Engagement Session, October 29, 2024

AOE should provide consistent guidance on supports and standards. Educators are seeking clarity on the lines between state decisions, district decisions, and school decisions. In some areas, additional requirements could be beneficial, especially around proficiency standards and personalized learning plans – districts interpret these differently and more statewide consistency makes sense. As previously noted, educators suggested that AOE identify a small number of recommended research-based curriculum options, with educator input as part of the process, to save districts the time and effort of trying to evaluate the options and increase consistency statewide.

AOE could help promote family engagement in education.

With the recent AOE initiative Read Vermont, the AOE could provide support and tools for families to better engage in their students' education outside of school hours, helping them to connect with their role in student success. Beyond providing literacy resources, the Agency should explore ways it can encourage better connection and collaboration between families and the education system.

Parents and families are disconnected from their role in students' success.

Brattleboro Educator Engagement Session, December 3, 2024

The balance between local control and statewide consistency should be revisited.

Some decisions that have been traditionally made at the local level, such as curriculum, school calendars, and schedules, could be made more consistent to support meaningful learning opportunities for students and free up time for staff. For example, having access to evidence-based curriculum resources that have been identified and vetted by the AOE would allow schools and districts to have choice, but reduce the burden to identify and develop resources in isolation. Educators also want to ensure they have adequate time to collaborate with other teachers regularly built into the schedule as a way to improve instructional practice and increase student learning gains but noted variability in the availability of such time across SU/SDs.

AOE should provide meaningful professional development opportunities for educators. Educators expressed a desire for meaningful professional development opportunities, something educators fear will be reduced with the expiration of federal pandemic relief funds. Embedded coaches in schools and all-day immersion/demonstration sessions were identified as effective professional development practices. Along with professional development comes the need for substitute teachers, if trainings are offered during the school day. With the current shortage of substitute teachers, teachers must have contracted time to attend training.

Bring back “network meetings.” This was done in the past to foster collaboration and knowledge among colleagues about math, ELA, etc.

West Rutland Educator Engagement Session, October 28, 2024

Teacher recruitment and retention remain an issue in Vermont. Educators suggested streamlining the licensing process for new educators and those seeking to transfer from other states. Teacher salaries remain a concern, both with the variability of salary schedules within the state (which some educators suggest could be solved with a statewide teacher contract) as well as competition from bordering states. Availability of housing was noted as a key barrier to recruiting educators; the AOE should work with other state agencies on strategies to increase housing availability. Educators are concerned with the high number of teachers with provisional licenses, noting that they do not have sufficient training, which can impact job satisfaction of existing teachers who feel they must provide additional support to those educators. Better coordination with teacher prep programs to ensure prospective teachers are well prepared, including in the science of reading, would reduce district costs to fill knowledge gaps.

Public Engagement Sessions

The public session questions were designed around three broad topic areas: what educational success looks like, in schools, districts and statewide; the educational opportunities and experiences Vermont students should have access to; and discussion of education budgets.

Student Success

When asked what it means for Vermont students to be successful, community members offered a holistic picture of success that integrates academic, social-emotional, and life skill development. According to public session participants, key indicators of student success are:

Students are safe, happy and healthy. To be successful, community members shared that students need to have their basic needs met, such as access to food and housing, as well as having their emotional well-being supported. Students need to be in a safe, inclusive environment where they feel a sense of belonging and have trusted relationships with caring adults as well as connections to their community.

Students are curious, excited, and engaged. To be successful, students need to be present and actively engaged through meaningful, relevant instruction that is student-centered, providing opportunities for students to engage in their individual interests and take ownership over their own education. Success is also students staying curious, finding their passions, and developing a lifelong love of learning.

Students have mastered core academic competencies, as well as developed critical “life skills” such as critical thinking, collaboration, communication, time management, resilience, confidence, self-agency and financial literacy. Core academic competencies include proficiency in reading, writing, and math, particularly grade-level literacy by Grade 3. Participants also stressed that students need more than just academic content mastery to be successful, they also need to develop crucial life skills.

Students have found their own path and are postsecondary ready. Through having diverse learning opportunities, successful students have identified their individual interests, strengths, and options in order to find the right path for them following graduation. Successful students have developed the needed skills for postsecondary and workforce success no matter what that path may be.

[Successful] students are able to access the future they see for themselves.

Woodstock Public Engagement Session, October 22, 2024

Measures of student success beyond state assessments are more meaningful to parents and students.

Hinesburg Public Engagement Session, December 4, 2024

Measuring the above criteria for success requires using holistic metrics. Community members shared that beyond standardized tests, measuring success should include metrics like student engagement, attendance, behavior, community involvement, and social-emotional growth. It should also include looking at postsecondary metrics such as graduation rates, college completion, workforce participation, and community contributions. Community members stressed that understanding student growth and progress over time was essential.

Student Opportunities and Experiences

Emerging themes across public sessions in the area of necessary student opportunities and experiences included: (1) ensuring equitable access to education opportunities for all students, (2) meeting the basic needs of students, (3) providing social-emotional learning and mental health supports, (4) expanding access to real-world, hands-on instruction, and career exploration and preparation, (5) stronger school, family and community connections, and (6) a more unified, state-level approach in key areas.

All students should have equitable access to educational opportunities. Community members emphasized that all students needed access to similar education resources and offerings regardless of where they lived. This included access to:

- High-quality teachers
- Universal PreK programs
- Art, music, STEM, physical education, and outdoor education
- Extended learning opportunities, such as afterschool and summer programming
- Advanced coursework, such as higher-level electives and Advanced Placement courses
- Flexible pathways, including concurrent enrollment, Career and Technical Education (CTE) opportunities, and work-based learning
- Extracurriculars, including sports, clubs and enrichment opportunities

Opportunities [should be] awarded and offered to all students, regardless of socio-economic status or abilities.

Bennington Public Engagement Session, October 23, 2024

Students need to first have their foundational needs met to be ready to learn.

First, community members stressed that students need to be in safe, welcoming and inclusive environments to ensure that their physical and psychological safety needs are met. Second, they described the increasing role that schools are taking on to meet the

Every student should be safe, fed, and loved.

West Rutland Public Engagement Session, October 28, 2024

other basic needs of their students that went far beyond education to include providing broader social services, such as providing meals, clothing, and connections to housing services. They questioned if this should be the role of schools, or if there were other state agencies or outside funding sources that could be providing these resources.

Students need to be supported in the areas of social-emotional learning, mental health, and behavioral needs.

Community members described the growing mental health and behavioral needs of students and that this was another area where participants felt that schools were having

to take on a much larger role and cost burden. They stressed that students needed access to services and that the availability of community resources varied across the different regions of the state. Suggestions for the additional resources that are needed in this area include: embedding SEL into curriculum across all grades, expanding access to counselors, interventionists, clinicians, and wraparound mental health services, and providing behavioral supports through teacher training, consistent behavior policies, and systems like Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) to manage disruptive behaviors.

Students need differentiated, individualized instruction to best meet their unique needs.

Community members emphasized the importance of recognizing and nurturing students' unique talents, interests, and learning styles. This included developing personalized learning plans (PLPs) starting by 7th grade to allow students to explore individual interests and strengths, fostering a sense of ownership over their education. While this practice is required by law, PLPs are implemented

variably across the state with differing levels of relevance.

Community members also discussed supports needed for special education students, including timely and accessible Individualized Education Program (IEP) resources; integrating special education in general education; universal design principles were suggested as a means of creating inclusive classrooms that work for all students. Challenges around the current capacity and long waitlists for therapeutic schools for special education students that would be best served in these settings were also identified.

Community members also encouraged support for gifted and

Student engagement and working with each student to help them get a spark. We do project-based learning and that helps students find a spark.

Virtual Public Engagement Session, December 10, 2024

academically advanced students, highlighting the need to ensure that all students are challenged and pushed to meet their full potential.

Students need expanded access to real-world, hands-on instruction, as well as career exploration and preparation. Community members said that students need to be able to see the real-world, practical applications of what they were learning in the classroom, including through experiential and project-based learning. The inclusion of civic and life skills education, including financial literacy and home economics was important. They encouraged early exposure to career possibilities and pre-tech CTE programs starting in middle school. It was identified that students often have to choose between opportunities. Having additional CTE offerings in earlier high school grades and available through comprehensive high schools (not only at CTE centers), would allow for students to have more opportunities. They wanted to see expanded access to other flexible pathway options, such as concurrent enrollment, as well as work-based learning opportunities such as internships and apprenticeships to align education with workforce needs. Strengthening guidance and advisement for students will allow them to develop a sense of agency, purpose, and allow them to find the right postsecondary path.

Schools need to have stronger connections with families, communities, and outside partners. Community members described the need to increase parent involvement through improved communication, outreach and programming. Some community members don't feel welcome in schools, a shift since the pandemic closures, and want to be involved again. Others noted the school security measures can be a barrier to increased community involvement. They felt that schools should develop strong community partnerships, such as with volunteers, local businesses, and outside agencies to support learning and address the diverse needs of students. The need for community partnerships and connections with outside agencies was also related to the need to connect students with other resources such as the mental health, nutrition and housing resources noted above. They also suggested that students need to be connected to their community through place-based learning, service projects and work-based learning opportunities through local employers and in local industries.

AOE needs to be creative and courageous and focus its efforts... lead based on research.

Montpelier Public Engagement Session, October 28, 2024

There needs to be a more unified and state-driven approach in key areas. Community members valued local autonomy but also shared some suggestions where a more unified approach would be beneficial. This included state-level policies such as mandated cell phone policies, consistent curriculum standards, and guidance on

proficiency-based learning, as well as state-level direction to improve the coordination, alignment, and collaboration between schools, agencies, and community programs. Participants stressed that schools cannot do everything on their own, and that schools were just one piece of the larger state system needed to support students and families.

Budget Sustainability

Public sessions also discussed the challenges that communities are facing in terms of budget sustainability and identified potential solutions.

Communities are facing budget challenges due to factors like declining enrollment and rising costs in different areas. Community members highlighted the challenge of declining student enrollment, particularly in small or rural schools. Schools are bearing increased costs for mental health services for students, health care costs for staff, and special education. Participants suggested that costs for social services (e.g., mental health personnel, social workers) should be pulled out of the Education Fund and coordinated more effectively through other state agencies.

Consolidation, either at the system or school level, was discussed as a way to achieve efficiencies and improve access to opportunities; however, concerns were also raised. At the system-level, some community members advocated for restructuring the system by consolidating supervisory unions (SU/SDs) or creating a single district model for services like transportation, teacher contracts, and CTE programs. Consolidation of schools was also discussed. They discussed the benefits of small schools, particularly in the lower grades, but also discussed that high schools need larger student populations to offer more opportunities. Concerns about the loss of community relationships and the difficulty of closing small schools were shared. Some advocated for maintaining elementary schools in every community center and then regional comprehensive high schools. Community members encouraged that decisions about school closures should be informed by data, not solely driven by cost considerations, and also recommended that past policies like Act 46 be considered to determine their impact on school mergers and whether goals of previous consolidation efforts were achieved. Building capacity and capital improvement and infrastructure needs were also highlighted as important considerations for any discussions of consolidation.

[Consider] consolidation to ensure access to opportunities. Focus on having regional comprehensive high schools; allow smaller elementary schools.

**Woodstock Public
Engagement Session,
October 22, 2024**

[We need] more regionalized decision making [to] break out of hyper local systems that are not working.

Burlington Public Engagement Session, December 3, 2024

Increased resource sharing and regionalization for some services were also recommended as potential means of decreasing costs. Community members recommended sharing resources across districts, such as teachers (arts, special education), food services, and transportation, to reduce costs, and leveraging joint purchasing and shared administrative services (e.g., curriculum directors, SPED services) to create better economies of scale. Options like centralized services statewide or implementing a regional approach, like one SU/SD per county or developing regional Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) were also suggested. Many emphasized the need to stop incentives for small-scale systems that are costly and inefficient, while acknowledging how hard that would be for the state and local communities to do.

Additional systemic considerations included improved state-level capacity and leveraging community partnerships and collaboration between state agencies. Community members recommended the Agency of Education (AOE) provide stronger leadership and support, particularly in special education and resource allocation. For example, participants suggested statewide standards for budgeting, performance measures, and data reporting to better support decision-making. Leveraging community partnerships and sharing resources were also suggested as a means to address budget gaps. Improving the teacher pipeline by working with teacher preparation programs, supporting retaining educators, and providing better professional support were also identified as other potential areas of system improvement.

Systems issues - mental health, economic challenges - need state agency coordination.

Hinesburg Public Engagement Session, December 4, 2024

Youth Engagement Sessions

Youth sessions with middle and high school students discussed what strengths and challenges they saw in their schools, what experiences and resources they thought all students should have, and what success looks like to them.

School Strengths and Challenges

Students identified teachers and staff, access to learning opportunities, and a sense of community and inclusivity as school strengths. Students appreciate teachers and other adults in their schools who are welcoming and create a positive school culture by building strong relationships with students, as well as who are passionate and knowledgeable about their content area. They valued having access to

a variety of different education opportunities, including school programs, like music, art, and theater; advanced courses, like AP and honors classes; electives; athletics and extracurriculars; and college and career prep opportunities, like internships, early college, tech centers, etc. Students also discussed personalized learning and flexible pathways programs as a strong point of their schools. Finally, they said the sense of community and inclusivity was a strength of their schools, noting the relationships between peers, and between students and adults.

Students also identified a number of challenges at their schools. Challenges included behavior issues and unclear rules/ inconsistent discipline responses, and the need for more effective restorative responses to harm and conflict. Students desired expanded learning opportunities, including internships, real-world experiences beyond the classroom, exposure to career possibilities, advanced courses, and project-based and personalized learning. Students would also like to have more opportunities to have their voices heard. They also noted challenges related to available mental health supports and resources, and would like to see more counselors, mental health professionals, and spaces for students to regulate. Finally, students shared issues related to the quality of school facilities including mold, lack of ventilation, lack of windows in rooms, leaking ceilings, general disrepair, and the need for greater accessibility.

Resources Needed in Schools to Support Student Success

Students identified essential resources needed in all schools. The resources that students felt were needed in all schools included:

- High-quality, skilled teachers who build strong relationships with students
- Access to a wide variety of learning opportunities and choices that challenge students and support their interests
- Real-world connections to learning and opportunities to see what is out there
- Academic and mental health supports
- Well-maintained schools that are welcoming, accessible, inclusive, and safe
- Close relationships and a strong sense of community
- Chances to be a kid and have fun

“We’re still kids and we still deserve to have fun at school sometimes and still get to be a kid. It doesn’t always have to be ‘what’s the next topic, when’s the next test.’”

**Colchester Youth
Engagement Session,
December 6, 2024**

Students felt the most important experiences for students in elementary schools were building strong connections and community, having supportive and caring teachers, engaging in experiential, project-based, and hands-on learning, and having time for play, creativity, and relaxation.

Students emphasized the importance of building relationships and a sense of community through shared activities, field days and other events, buddy systems, and small schools where everyone knows each other. They felt it was important to have teachers who know students personally, are supportive, and provide individualized help, who care about students' emotional

and academic well-being. Field trips, outdoor activities, and hands-on learning experiences were frequently mentioned as memorable and impactful parts of elementary school by helping make learning more engaging and real for students and allowing them to connect classroom lessons with the world outside. Students highlighted the need for breaks, recess, and time for creative expression in school which supported overall well-being and learning.

At the secondary level, students aspire to college and careers after graduation with the goal of making a decent living while pursuing their interests, being independent and self-sufficient, and being happy. Students value opportunities to explore career options and personal interests, including ensuring equitable access and awareness of pathways that exist. They would also like to have support to develop practical life skills as part of the high school curriculum, including personal finance. Students also report feeling the pressure of the college and career preparation process and wanting to find balance between that pressure and their own well-being.

“Being able to support yourself and have financial independence and a job that you enjoy, not just because you have to work to survive.”

**Hinesburg Youth
Engagement Session,
December 4, 2024**

Conclusion: Cross-Cutting Themes

A number of themes emerging across the regional planning and engagement sessions, including:

It is important for the state to strike the right balance between unity and freedom. Stakeholders value local autonomy but also desire closer collaboration and consistency across the state in key areas, like curriculum and standards, to reduce burden on schools and districts, and promote consistency in crucial areas.

Vermont needs to ensure equity and expanded access to high-quality educational opportunities for all students in the state. There is a consistent call for equitable access to a variety of different educational opportunities including flexible pathways and rigorous coursework, mental health services, and updated facilities, especially for rural and underserved communities.

Vermonters believe in a holistic definition of student success. Schools must balance academic goals with meeting the needs of the whole child, including physical and emotional well-being, which often requires additional resources and support.

Support and services for special education students is a growing need. Schools are facing an increasing number of students identified for special education, higher costs to provide required services, staffing shortages, and limited availability of spots in therapeutic school settings. These factors place increased pressure on staff and school budgets. Behavior management challenges, particularly since the pandemic, have also been highlighted by educators and families, but these challenges are not limited to special education students.

Resource sharing, regionalization of services, or consolidation should be considered as means to increase educational opportunities for students and to address budget sustainability. Schools and districts are facing increased cost pressures, and consolidation or regionalization of services, while not without significant concerns, were highlighted as potential solutions to be considered. Especially at the secondary level, the benefit of increased access to diverse educational opportunities in larger school settings was noted.

Schools are increasingly serving as a hub for community and social services which goes well beyond their traditional role to educate students. Schools are struggling to provide additional services, including mental health support, and it is placing a strain on their budgets. The state should explore how these services could be provided through other agencies or funded outside of the Education Fund.

There is a need for greater state leadership and an intentional focus on building stakeholder trust in the AOE. Participants emphasized the need for stronger state guidance, streamlined systems, and consistent policies to address regional disparities and systemic challenges. They also highlighted a lack of trust in the AOE, citing limited support and direction around key legislation and state initiatives. However, they welcomed the AOE's engagement through the Listen and Learn Tour and appreciated the renewed focus on collaborating with the field. Educators in the Northeast, Southeast and Southwest regions said they often feel they don't get the attention from the state that the Montpelier and Chittenden County areas do. They expressed appreciation for

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the in-person presence from the AOE and its willingness to hear about the strengths and challenges of the region. As one participant shared in an exit ticket following an engagement session, “Keep doing these, it makes a difference.”

As the AOE develops a strategic plan that’s intended to respond to the needs of the field and support the future vision of education, it should consider the input of all stakeholders, including the key themes from the Listen and Learn Tour put forward in this report.

Appendix A: Summaries of Regional Planning Sessions

Champlain Valley Regional Planning Session with Education Leaders

September 20, 2024

Background

The Champlain Valley Regional Planning Session on September 20th. After opening remarks, listening session participants were asked to participate in a short icebreaker activity where they were given the opportunity to tell the story of the region in the areas of community assets, population shifts, industry, the geography of the region, and school identity. Next, there was a short presentation on statewide trends and regional comparisons, based upon data from the initial State Profile release (which was since updated and revised based upon education leader feedback and data validation in Phase 2) where participants reflected on what they noticed, wondered, and how their SU/SD compared to their region. Participants highlighted the need to understand the vision of the department better. As well as for AOE to provide access to equitable reporting, tighter communication, and support to the SU/SDs. Listening session participants then joined one of four breakout groups: Academic Performance and Accountability, College and Career Readiness, Mental Health Costs and Systems of Support, or Data Review and Budgeting Support for Boards.

Highlights from the regional story activity and each breakout session are briefly summarized below.

Regional Story

Community Assets

The participants highlighted the robust community support and partnerships that the SU/SDs have established with local organizations, which provide numerous opportunities for schools across the Champlain Valley region. They noted the accessibility to local emergency service teams (firefighters, SROs, EMTs), the proximity to career centers, and collaborations for afterschool activities. The community is rich in arts, culture, and science, and offers access to outdoor activities and higher education learning.

Population Shifts

The Champlain Valley region has maintained stable enrollment, with some SU/SDs even experiencing growth. Additionally, the region is witnessing an increase in student needs, with a high number of students on individualized education plans (IEPs). There

is a significant range of multilingual learners (ML) across the region, with one SU/SD having 400 ML students, while another has only six.

Industry

Participants emphasized the Champlain Valley region's diverse workforce, which spans various industries such as technology and tourism. However, the region faces several challenges, including a high cost of living, a housing shortage, and younger generations leaving. Additionally, the lack of transportation makes it difficult to recruit for various jobs, especially from areas further away.

Geography of Region

The participants highlighted the Champlain Valley region's diverse geography, encompassing urban and rural areas. Staff recruitment to the region is challenging, particularly in rural areas. The region accounts for 40% of the state's student population, which includes a wide range of diverse student needs.

School Identity

The schools in the region are similar to those across the state; however, the Champlain Valley has been developing more magnet schools. These schools provide unique opportunities to leverage community resources for learning and offer diverse environments to meet the needs of various students. Additionally, schools in the region provide expanded learning opportunities through summer and after-school programs, as well as schools of choice.

Breakout Sessions**Academic Performance and Accountability**

The break-out group for "academic performance and accountability" included superintendents, directors, and principals. They were asked to share thoughts on the data, metrics for quality, AOE support guidance, and priorities for improving math and science.

The participants cited the need for statewide assessment data to be reported earlier. The earlier reporting would allow alignment with budgets and Continuous Improvement Plans (CIPS) so that districts can make better-informed decisions. Participants mentioned that a holistic approach to measuring student outcomes need to be considered. They cited many other metrics for quality, such as transferable skills, VTCAP (the statewide assessment), local assessment, social-emotional learning, and student stories.

Additionally, participants provided feedback on the need for AOE support and guidance. They discussed the need for the state to explain what data metrics are valued and why. Participants would also benefit from the research on best practices provided by the state, how to assess transferable skills, and assistance with the teacher pipeline.

Participants were asked what their two priorities were for improving math and science. They had a variety of ideas. To improve math, participants recommended focusing on math in the earlier grades (K-3), improving instructional practices, and adapting testing to better reflect current teaching practices. To improve science, participants recommended adding content standards by grade level, building more time into the schedule to teach science, especially in elementary, and prioritizing authentic science instruction.

College and Career Readiness

The breakout group identified student engagement (or disengagement) as the biggest barrier to achieving higher graduation rates. Current models of instruction are not aligned to the experiences of students, as young adults, in life after high school. The current model puts too much emphasis on talking at students versus focusing on complex problem-solving. A number of approaches could be used to increase engagement including increasing work-based learning, starting CTE in 9th grade, and embedding CTE courses within traditional schools, breaking down the either/or choices that students must make. Flexible pathways are great for students, but there are barriers to delivery, especially in more rural settings. As students try to gain access to more opportunities, transportation becomes an issue. Students also face misalignment with schedules between the various centers offering pathways forcing students to either choose CTE or another pathway; rather being able to participate in both.

When students go to CTE, it can impact the students remaining at their high school, as programming might need to be reduced due to the lower student numbers. Ideally, the system can find a way to reduce the tension between sending districts and CTE centers. One approach that could solve some of the scale problems would be to have more regional comprehensive high schools that provide both traditional and CTE coursework. This would mean the loss of some smaller local high schools.

The participants in this region did not generally support the idea of a separate CTE district. This approach seemed to help address issues with CTE while not necessarily having a positive impact on the rest of the system. Regional leaders identified that the issues of size and scale throughout the whole system need to be addressed, not just for one sector of the system.

Mental Health Costs and Systems of Support

The break-out group for “mental health costs and systems of support” included superintendents, directors, and principals. The group was asked to provide feedback on a methodology for capturing the costs of delivering mental health in schools and were asked to provide qualitative descriptions of the current challenges and successes they have found in addressing the increased demand for mental health services in schools. They were asked to share how they identify need, what student needs look like daily, and regional consideration for improved delivery.

The participants utilized various tools to identify and evaluate student needs, such as the SEL survey, MTTs, and behavior data. Additionally, educators are observing on daily basis additional behavior needs from students which as required additional energy from staff. Staff are becoming burnt out and not receiving the training they need to serve these students. This has led to staff taking more absences. Staff is also seeing a decrease in parent engagement and more intense needs in the younger ages.

Participants across the region face both successes and challenges in addressing the need. The SU/SDs have created protocols and processes for students and families to access support, have provided additional professional training and support for staff, and worked to develop alternative placement for students and partnerships with mental health providers. However, SU/SD are facing challenges with building relationships with families and having the appropriate staff to address student needs.

The participants recommend regional supports to help with students' increased needs. They recommended regional collaboration with mental health services and therapeutic schools. Additionally, a continuum of services for students instead of “taping together” multiple staff or teams to support a single student would be beneficial. Lastly, participants cited the need for more transportation services to get support access to more resources, as well as providing high-quality early childhood learning at a young age.

Data Review and Budgeting Support for Boards

The breakout group for “Data Review and Budgeting Support for Boards” included board members and superintendents. They were asked to share their thoughts on the data, how it would support their work, strategies for a successful budget process, and desired presentations from the AOE to the boards and communities.

Participants raised questions about which datasets were used and identified that they use different datasets when completing their own analysis. Specific issues included the categories for staffing and salary data, as well as the timing of the data. Participants

stated the staff groupings are done differently locally and would be difficult for comparison purposes. They felt the salary data was too generalized because it was not paired with tenure and contracts. Many participants believed the data lagged too much to be helpful for the budgeting process, which could start as early as September. Due to these concerns, many participants felt they would not use this data for budgeting and decision-making.

Participants recommended additional materials to accompany the data, such as raw data and weighted per-pupil numbers, a script from AOE on appropriate data use, a data dictionary and process, and comparisons between SU/SDs of similar sizes and national trends. They also suggested further analysis to see how each dollar is spent across the state.

Participants highlighted various strategies for a successful budget process and the supports from AOE that would help. Strategies implemented across the SU/SDs in the Champlain Valley region include starting the process earlier, holding community forums, breaking the budget down by line item, and creating community advisory groups to provide recommendations. The top three areas participants wanted to see support from AOE were presentations from AOE to the board and community, help with translating budget considerations into practical choices for taxpayers, and strategic budget development training. For presentations, participants emphasized the importance of covering statewide trends, tax calculations, weighted pupils, and education spending.

Subsequent Steps Following Regional Planning Sessions

Regional Planning Sessions occurred in Phase 2 of the Listen and Learn Tour and were an important step to review and validate the state's data and reporting. The Agency asked education leaders to review the reports (State Profile, regional presentation and SU/SD reports) and provide feedback to ensure accuracy. In response to the helpful feedback received by our partners in the field, the agency has re-released the State Profile Report to better contextualize the data and to make adjustments as suggested during the regional planning sessions.

Since Phase 2, the AOE has also prepared a series of topical reports to explore the topics discussed during the regional sessions more deeply and will continue to partner with education leaders to validate and improve Agency reporting. Additionally, in Phase 3 the AOE held a series of public engagement sessions in late October through early December to leverage the knowledge and experience of teachers and school staff, as well as students, families, taxpayers and the larger school community. The goal of these sessions was to share out what we have learned so far and to further deepen the AOE's understanding of key priorities for schools, families, and the larger community.

Northeast Regional Planning Session with Education Leaders

October 1, 2024

Background

The Northeast Regional Planning Session on October 1st in St. Johnsbury, VT. After opening remarks, listening session participants were asked to participate in a short icebreaker activity where they were given the opportunity to tell the story of the region in the areas of community assets, population shifts, industry, geography of region, and school identify. Next, there was a short presentation on statewide trends and regional comparisons, based upon data from the initial State Profile release (which was since updated and revised based upon education leader feedback and data validation in Phase 1) where participants reflected on what they noticed, wondered, and how their SU/SD compared to their region.

Participants wondered about the availability of data of the number of teachers with provisional and emergency licenses; the lack of available data on the cost and impact of school mental health and SEL supports for students; and how different the expenditures per student and per equalized student would look with FY25 data and the implementation of new weights in the funding system. Participants shared the importance of sharing data that locals feel accurately represents them, otherwise the data feels punitive. In the Northeast Kingdom, due to tuitioning to the academies and school choice, participants urged AOE to use ADM rather than enrollment in the SU/SD reports to ensure the public sees the number of students the SU/SD is responsible for educating, not just those enrolled in the SU/SD schools. A concern was raised about the level of data suppression, noting that performance data for 1/3 of the region's schools is suppressed due to schools' small size, making comparisons difficult. Listening session participants then joined one of four breakout groups: Academic Performance and Accountability, College and Career Readiness, Mental Health Costs and Systems of Support, or Data Review and Budgeting Support for Boards.

Highlights from the regional story activity and each breakout session are briefly summarized below.

Regional Story

Community Assets

The Northeast region holds a variety of community assets, including the outdoor and natural beauty of the area, and the region's hospital. Public services are available in some towns, though it was noted that some agencies are not adequately prepared or

resourced to serve the entire region. Housing prices in the area are more affordable than some other areas of the state, which is bringing in new residents, however other impacts were noted as well, such as increased pressure on local agencies and service providers.

Population Shifts

The Northeast region has seen increased population shifting within the communities, noting that as one community decreases in population, nearby communities grow as residents resettle in another town. Participants highlighted that they have seen an increase in the SEL needs of their students, noting that the level of SEL needs vary from temporary to intensive, as well as an increase in the basic needs of their students not being met. The homeless population of the region has also increased, resulting in the location of homeless shelters playing a larger role in driving enrollment change.

Industry

The region fosters a successful tourism industry, stemming from the natural beauty of the area, as well as the Caledonia County Airport and the growing manufacturing industry. However, many limitations regarding industry growth were highlighted, including transportation limitations and the lack of available affordable housing, which limits available staffing.

Geography of Region

The region's natural assets were highlighted in their encouragement of outdoor education and experiential learning. However, the rurality of the region has resulted in broadband and cell service issues, a concern emphasized specific to emergency response. The large distances between schools and SU/SDs were also noted as a limitation on collaboration, as well as geographic isolation in the region causing specific challenges for Pre-K.

School Identity

Participants emphasized the importance of schools within their communities, often serving as a community hub. Schools in these communities provide services not otherwise available, though necessary, and schools struggle to sustain these services. The role school choice plays in the identity of a school was emphasized as a positive, given the Northeast Kingdom Choice School District, as well as the number of students tutored to independent schools for high school.

Breakout Sessions

Academic Performance and Accountability

In response to preliminary data shared from the AOE, this breakout session discussed key changes to the ESSA State Plan, current issues with the data and assessments, concerns with school quality metrics, considerations for school improvement planning, support needed from the AOE, and priorities for academic improvement.

Regarding the ESSA State Plan, participants widely agreed on the need for earlier reporting to improve timeliness of information for schools, which the AOE shared they are working to implement. The AOE also emphasized their goals of providing better quality and transparency to provide clearer, more useful data, focusing on addressing issues like coding errors and cohort data availability. Finally, improved stakeholder communication was also mentioned as a priority of the AOE, ensuring schools receive better guidance on communicating assessment results to stakeholders.

There are a variety of issues regarding current data and assessments, including late and unhelpful data, inconsistent notifications of when data are released, the impact of assessments on instructional time, challenges accessing cohort data, and ineffective use and alignment of assessment data with student proficiencies. At the high school level, students are often tested before completing the necessary coursework. With inadequate data from the AOE, SU/SDs are often left to rely on other tools to gather useful data, leaving an imbalance between the amount of time spent on state and local assessment and instructional time.

Participants of the session offered many considerations for school improvement planning, including data timeliness, access to cohort data, improved alignment with proficiency-based standards, and tailored professional development with evidence-based recommendations for academic improvement. It was agreed that more support from the AOE was needed, especially regarding guidance and tools. There is a need for clear and timely guidance on assessments and data utilization, including evidence-based practices and a unified academic and social-emotional screener for the state.

College and Career Readiness

The College and Career Readiness breakout session had one participant. The session began by reviewing data from AOE on indicators of college and career readiness in the region and statewide, such as graduation rates and flexible pathways offerings. The topics discussed included barriers and challenges to achieving higher graduation rates, access to career and technical education, and challenges to equitable access to flexible learning opportunities, such as transportation and lack of alignment of district calendars.

Mental Health Costs and Systems of Support

The Mental Health Costs and Systems of Support breakout session was designed to both receive feedback on the methodology and resulting expenditure data the AOE has created to quantify the costs of providing mental health services in schools and to understand local successes and challenges related to student mental health, and how improved delivery of services in the region could be supported.

When looking at the state’s preliminary methodology for calculating the costs of mental health, the group pointed out a variety of missing elements. Behavioral interventionists were mentioned as a specific category of staff that are not typically coded to special education, so they may not be appearing in selected categories. There was also an absence of educator mental health costs, as well as tuition for state-placed students, primarily but not exclusively children in foster care, as some of these students are placed in therapeutic day programs. Transportation to day programs was missing from the calculations, as well as other job titles that do not match specific licensing endorsements, such as “Social Emotional Content Specialist,” “Special Education Consultant Advisor,” and “Family Outreach Coordinator.”

In regard to staffing mental health, the region faces competition and staffing shortages. Salaries were increased to encourage retention and increasing benefit costs are driving up overall staffing costs. Despite improved staffing shortages from increased salaries and benefits, the schools of the region still find themselves competing over the same small pool of staff.

After evaluating a figure displaying the average mental health expenditures per pupil (based on total enrollment) by region, comparing FY20 to FY23, the participants offered a variety of changes to more accurately display their situations and expenditures, including comparing expenditures per student by LSU/SD, not region, and to do a correlation with the designated agencies (DA) and hospitals around the state. As their DA is not able to provide all the services they need and there aren’t many other social/mental health service providers in the region, SU/SDs must provide more services in and through their schools. Participants also highlighted that they are hiring behavior interventionists because there are a limited number of School Based Clinicians (SBC), noting that new/inexperienced teachers need assistance from someone with experience or they often leave, and kids need support while awaiting placement or time with the SBC.

A few different methods of identifying, defining, and evaluating the mental health needs of their students were provided. Child Count, SWIS data, BEST universal screener data, 4500 data, hours of behavioral intervention and instruction that behavioral specialists must provide, and the number of students who receive the intervention and instruction

were all cited as such methods. These needs are evident in schools as roles change, with nurses shifting their focus from providing health education to responding to mental health crises, and principals shifting from instructional leaders to dealing with staffing and behavior. Schools are also seeing increased Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI) costs; Hazing, Harassment, and Bullying (HHB) investigations and plans; and emphasis on attendance and truancy work. These needs are also evident in the youngest children displaying dysregulated qualities and there were questions about pre-kindergarten quality.

Participants discussed a multitude of efforts to address these needs, with the agreement that interventions need to begin at a very early age. Efforts mentioned included accessing the NEK Learning Services to create an alternative program for students aged 16+, as well as Community Schools hiring from NCSU to do 1:1 tutoring with chronically absent students. Barriers to more shared intervention included geography/distance and a lack of services to share across the region.

When asked what support could help improve the delivery of mental health services in the region, participants mentioned state support to Train the Trainer in CPI. Participants also cited other regions with successful Success Beyond Six programs and DAs, wondering if the AOE could help in this area.

Data Review and Budgeting Support for Boards

In reviewing the data shared in the main session as well as SU report, school board members stressed that whenever state, regional or SU data is shared publicly, it's essential that it provides an accurate view. The primary job of the school board is to get the district budget passed, and that requires accurate data. When budget or expenditure data is shown, it shouldn't be shown alongside enrollment figures, but ADM. Especially for the Northeast Kingdom, which has both a lot tuitioning for high school students, and school choice, enrollment figures do not account for students the SU is paying for but attend schools outside the SU. Since members of the public are likely to divide the total district budget by number of students, it's important that enrollment figures include all students the district is paying for. NEK board members expressed the need for better predictions of student enrollment, particularly as it relates to birth data. Many Vermont students are born in the hospital in New Hampshire; without data sharing from the Department of Health, local school districts are therefore unaware of the births until the students register for kindergarten, creating planning and budgeting challenges.

School mental health resources are a source of concern when it comes to the impact on school district budgets. Board members suggested additional data that would allow them to see the amount of funding being spent on school staff and support services for these important, but non-educational, student needs would be helpful. Board members

said there is less access to state- and agency-provided services in the Northeast Kingdom than other parts of the state, leading to a belief that school districts in the Northeast may be spending a larger portion of their budget on mental health supports than other regions.

When asked how AOE could support school boards, school board members relayed that educational materials for the general public on “Education Finance 101,” on the Common Level of Appraisal (CLA) and the tax calculation would be greatly appreciated, as would help translating budget considerations into practical choices for taxpayers. Strategic budget development training for superintendents and school boards would also be welcome. Additional data on general statewide trends, comparison of SU/SDs to like SU/SDs (even if not within the same region) on indicators in the SU reports were suggested. Finally, the AOE’s Three Prior Years Comparisons worksheet is something some board members have found particularly useful in their work with the public around education spending.

Subsequent Steps Following Regional Planning Sessions

Regional Planning Sessions occurred in Phase 2 of the Listen and Learn Tour and were an important step to review and validate the state’s data and reporting. The Agency asked education leaders to review the reports (State Profile, regional presentation and SU/SD reports) and provide feedback to ensure accuracy. In response to the helpful feedback received by our partners in the field, the agency has re-released the State Profile Report to better contextualize the data and to make adjustments as suggested during the regional planning sessions.

Since Phase 2, the AOE has also prepared a series of topical reports to explore the topics discussed during the regional sessions more deeply and will continue to partner with education leaders to validate and improve Agency reporting. Additionally, in Phase 3 the AOE held a series of public engagement sessions in late October through early December to leverage the knowledge and experience of teachers and school staff, as well as students, families, taxpayers and the larger school community. The goal of these sessions was to share out what we have learned so far and to further deepen the AOE’s understanding of key priorities for schools, families, and the larger community.

Southeast Regional Planning Session with Education Leaders

October 8, 2024

Background

The Southeast Regional Planning Session was held on October 8, 2024, at River Valley Technical Center in Springfield, Vermont. After opening remarks, listening session participants were asked to participate in a short icebreaker activity where they were given the opportunity to tell the story of the region in the areas of community assets, population shifts, industry, geography of region, and school identify. Next, there was a short presentation on statewide trends and regional comparisons, based upon data from the initial State Profile release (which was since updated and revised based upon education leader feedback and data validation in Phase 2) where participants reflected on what they noticed, wondered, and how their SU/SD compared to their region. Listening session participants then joined one of four breakout groups: Academic Performance and Accountability, College and Career Readiness, Mental Health Costs and Systems of Support, or Data Review and Budgeting Support for Boards.

Highlights from the regional story activity and each breakout session are briefly summarized below.

Regional Story

Community Assets

Community members in the Southeast Region are actively engaged in education and maintain high expectations for students. SU/SD leaders characterized voters as "community-minded," expressing a willingness to adopt budgets to support educational initiatives. Families in the region value higher education, favor smaller school environments, and strongly desire local control over their schools. Additionally, the region boasts a vibrant arts scene that offers resources for arts education and enrichment.

Population Shifts

The Southeast Region has an aging population and is experiencing declining school enrollment. In recent years, efforts have been made to attract younger families through public Pre-K programs. However, insufficient housing remains a key barrier, particularly a shortage of homes for first-time buyers. An increase in the number of second homeowners in the region contributes to the housing shortage. Participants noted that the Southeast Region serves as a center for social services, including transitional housing, homeless shelters, and affordable housing. They also described an increase in poverty rates throughout the region.

Industry

Agriculture is the leading industry in the Southeast Region, offering employment opportunities in farming and food sustainability. Parts of the region have proximity to large employers Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center, Dartmouth College, and Hypertherm just over the border in New Hampshire. Participants also noted growth in the service and small business sectors. Tourism contributes significantly to the economy, attracting visitors for fall foliage and winter skiing. The regional economy also includes a range of miscellaneous professionals including remote workers, executives, and property managers.

Members of the local business community value education and have established collaborative partnerships with schools and districts. Students graduating from Career and Technical Education (CTE) centers are quickly employed.

Geography of Region

The Southeast Region is characterized by its geographical diversity, bordered by forests to the west, the Connecticut River/New Hampshire to the east, and Massachusetts to the south. The region is predominantly rural, with higher population density along its eastern border with New Hampshire. Inter-state collaboration is a notable aspect of the region, especially in education; for instance, students from both states can enroll in CTE programs across state lines. Prominent institutions in the vicinity include Dartmouth College and the Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center.

In urban areas like Springfield, neighborhoods are walkable, and schools are conveniently accessible by car or bus. Although the region has access to both I-89 and I-91, transportation poses a greater challenge in rural areas, where unpaved roads and sparse populations complicate access. Additionally, participants highlighted a general lack of housing throughout the region.

School Identity

Community members in the Southeast Region often feel a strong connection to an affiliated high school, whether it's one they attended or one nearby. Many residents have familial ties to local schools, and school pride significantly influences their perceptions of family history. School community members in Southeast Vermont are deeply engaged, aspirational, and collaborative. In response to community feedback, SU/SDs have made changes to offer more personalized learning and extended learning opportunities for students. In collaboration with community organizations, many SU/SDs provide robust extracurricular activities, outdoor education, and agricultural programs that foster environmental stewardship.

Breakout Sessions

Academic Performance and Accountability

Participants highlighted several challenges associated with administering the Vermont Comprehensive Assessment Program (VTCAP). Some felt that the training provided for administering the assessment was inadequate, and that the AOE PowerPoint presentations were ineffective. Schools also faced technical issues such as computer failures that went unresolved until the final day of testing. Consequently, some participants expressed decreased confidence in sharing VTCAP results with families due to concerns about the inconsistent implementation of the assessment. Participants stressed the need for improved guidance and technical support, and they requested more scaffolding resources to better prepare both students and teachers.

Some SU/SD leaders voiced skepticism regarding the relevance of the VTCAP assessment, noting a lack of coherence and alignment between the curriculum being taught and the content being assessed. Several participants challenged the validity of data that compare districts, pointing out unique differences among school communities and limitations posed by small sample sizes. Overall, SU/SDs expressed the belief that certain characteristics of schools cannot be quantified and preferred more qualitative assessments of school quality.

SU/SD leaders held different perspectives on the usefulness of statewide assessment data. Some rely heavily on VTCAP data for decision-making, while others either do not use it at all or fall somewhere in between. Several districts use VTCAP assessments to communicate student performance to parents, and some dive deeper into VTCAP data to track growth within specific subgroups of students over time.

Participants identified several ways in which AOE can support districts to improve student achievement in the near term, including:

- More time for tasks that carry consequences if not completed
- More opportunities to calibrate testing in advance to ensure statewide assessments are administered consistently
- Regional professional development sessions to break down silos and promote collaboration
- Funding for LETRS Training and other evidence-based professional development that districts may not always be able to afford
- Shared models and case studies of successful strategies at various scales and sizes within Vermont
- Guidance on recruiting and preparing new teachers, such as the establishment of a New Teacher Academy

College and Career Readiness

SU/SDs experience numerous barriers to optimizing College and Career Readiness programming. CTE centers are often unable to offer competitive salaries to teachers compared to their respective industries, which can deter potential candidates from applying to teaching positions. Transportation is a significant expense, and CTE centers generally lack the funding required to expand their program offerings.

For students, certain CTE and flexible pathways programs may conflict with local graduation requirements, and poor communication between CTE centers and school staff can lead to missed opportunities for students. Many students are occupied with family responsibilities or work commitments, which can discourage their participation in CTE or other flexible pathways. Additionally, the region lacks resources for students facing poverty and trauma, which can further restrict their access to and motivation for engaging in flexible pathways opportunities.

In some instances, Early College courses may negatively impact a student's academic standing if they are unprepared for college-level work. Other times, scheduling considerations prevent students from enrolling in one or more pathways. SU/SD leaders emphasized the need for “more shepherding of students” to facilitate greater career exploration and more effective counseling.

Participants proposed several solutions to enhance program delivery, including:

- Simplifying the flexible pathways programs by defining expectations and funding streams
- Creating a separate, non-competitive funding stream for CTE
- Aligning graduation requirements across the state
- Starting career exploration in 7th and 8th grade and expanding CTE to all students in grades 9-12.

Mental Health Costs and Systems of Support

SU/SDs in the Southeast Region desire additional funding and resources to effectively address student mental health. District leaders believe the current funding model does not capture the full costs or complexities of mental health treatment.

Due to a lack of funds to hire full-time mental health professionals, schools often share nurses and psychologists with other schools in the same district. These split-time staff members are unable to adequately address current needs, while full-time personnel may take on mental health responsibilities without the appropriate training or expertise. This dynamic contributes to staff burnout and turnover. Additionally, rising levels of

student anxiety and trauma increase costs for districts as they strive to meet 504 and IEP requirements.

SU/SD leaders advocated for the establishment of a board of cooperative services (BOCES) to coordinate mental health services in the region. Other suggested regional solutions include:

- Aligning job titles, job descriptions, and job codes
- Aligning calendars for professional development
- Improved requirements of Educational Support Team (EST) processes
- Increasing collaboration with local mental health agencies
- Building therapeutic classrooms
- Adopting professional pay scales for mental health service providers

Data Review and Budgeting Support for Boards

School board members in the Southeast Region viewed AOE's data management practices as inconsistent, unclear, and in need of reform. Participants discussed discrepancies in AOE data formats and voiced concerns regarding the validity of student assessment data. The lack of reliable data has caused tensions between the public and local school boards, as boards struggle to effectively communicate budget outcomes to the community. Data are also reported inconsistently across districts, partly due to frequent changes to the state's data reporting systems.

Board members requested timely reporting of data, a breakdown of fund revenue and usage by source, and more granular data that shows how funding impacts student performance. Board members also requested additional AOE supports for the upcoming budget cycle including education finance resources for the public, training on strategic budgeting, and support translating budget considerations into practical choices for taxpayers.

Subsequent Steps Following Regional Planning Sessions

Regional Planning Sessions occurred in Phase 2 of the Listen and Learn Tour and were an important step to review and validate the state's data and reporting. The Agency asked education leaders to review the reports (State Profile, regional presentation and SU/SD reports) and provide feedback to ensure accuracy. In response to the helpful feedback received by our partners in the field, the agency has re-released the State Profile Report to better contextualize the data and to make adjustments as suggested during the regional planning sessions.

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Since Phase 2, the AOE has also prepared a series of topical reports to explore the topics discussed during the regional sessions more deeply and will continue to partner with education leaders to validate and improve Agency reporting. Additionally, in Phase 3 the AOE held a series of public engagement sessions in late October through early December to leverage the knowledge and experience of teachers and school staff, as well as students, families, taxpayers and the larger school community. The goal of these sessions was to share out what we have learned so far and to further deepen the AOE's understanding of key priorities for schools, families, and the larger community.

Southwest Regional Planning Session with Education Leaders (West Rutland)

October 2, 2024

Background

Two Southwest Regional Planning Sessions were held, including one on October 2nd in West Rutland, VT. After opening remarks, listening session participants were asked to participate in a short icebreaker activity where they were given the opportunity to tell the story of the region in the areas of community assets, population shifts, industry, geography of region, and school identify. Next, there was a short presentation on statewide trends and regional comparisons, based upon data from the initial State Profile release (which was since updated and revised based upon education leader feedback and data validation in Phase 1) where participants reflected on what they noticed, wondered, and how their SU/SD compared to their region. After reviewing the data, participants wondered about whether displaying average expenditures per student by region masks the variation of SDs within the region; wondered about the impact of Early College (EC) on the data, as students are unenrolled from the LEA to participate in EC; asked for more region by region data as it could be helpful data during negotiations; and voiced concern about messaging regarding school district budgets coming from state leaders. Listening session participants then joined one of four breakout groups: Academic Performance and Accountability, College and Career Readiness, Mental Health Costs and Systems of Support, or Data Review and Budgeting Support for Boards.

Highlights from the regional story activity and each breakout session are briefly summarized below.

Regional Story

Community Assets

In the Southwest Region, Rutland serves as a community hub, offering a Boys and Girls Club, recreation center, a variety of mental health services, refugee support, and homeless support, to name a few. Although the city services extend to neighboring districts, the distance between some may lead to difficulty accessing such services.

Population Shifts

The region has seen increasing enrollment in their schools, as well as an increasing homeless population, often leading to higher transportation costs for students being transported to their home school. There has been a lot of mobility among the region's

residents, and moving towns within a region often shifts enrollment at SU/SDs. The percentage of students eligible for special education has also increased.

Industry

The Southwest Region has a large ski industry due to its proximity to ski areas but does not typically see an influx of seasonal workers from outside the region. GE Aerospace in Rutland is a major employer in the area. There is also the potential for the expansion of Beta Tech to the area.

Geography of Region

The Southwest Region includes two counties: Bennington and Rutland. The region borders New York, which may contribute to staffing and services inequities of the SW region. Within the region, there are some structures of a city within a town, where a city is in the “donut hole” surrounded by a town, and there is often some separation between two very close entities. Due to the large distances between schools, the region faces transportation challenges.

School Identity

High schools in the region often serve as a community center, housing walking paths, sporting events, and other events in the area the community gathers for. Schools often serve as a source of history and pride, contributing to the difficulty and reluctance of the consolidation of schools in the area. The proximity of the cities and towns within the common structure of “city within a town” offers opportunities to work together but also presents challenges due to municipal separation and conflicting community identities. Within the region, some towns are very vibrant, while others seem that they don’t have their own identity

Breakout Sessions

Academic Performance and Accountability

The Academic Performance and Accountability breakout session discussed upcoming state plans and their potential impacts, additional considerations missing from the plan, metrics used to communicate school quality, and what support from the AOE would be most helpful going forward.

The need for item analysis for the state assessment was raised, as access to this significantly increases the staff’s ability to help students, especially pertaining to curriculum work. Participants also noted that practice tests were only available in three languages: English, Spanish, and ASL. With frequent changes of state assessments, there is difficulty obtaining teacher and student buy-in, as schools are trying to encourage the students to do well despite the overwhelming feeling from students that

the scores do not matter. With no other statewide benchmark, it is hard to rely on such data. Participants reported that good information is gathered from screeners and work done in the classroom as that is what is currently informing instruction. The hope is that eventually there will be a well-connected system, emphasizing the importance of unity across the state.

Beyond assessment data, schools in the region use student attendance, staff attendance, and staff retention rates at all levels to communicate school quality to the community, educators, and other stakeholders. Regarding staff attendance, participants discussed the increasing responsibilities of teachers contributing to teacher burnout - the lack of resources for special education and FRL students are additional stressors on teachers. Such stressors were emphasized specifically in areas with new teachers and a high number of first-generation students. Students' at-home life and struggles, such as homelessness or lack of food, make it difficult to focus on test scores. Participants emphasized the importance of starting with the fundamentals, getting teachers and students to school, before taking on bigger issues in Vermont education.

When considering the support needed from the AOE, participants discussed the idea of freedom versus unity: when and where the state should take control instead of delegating local control. The AOE can provide support in this regard by being clear about what is required (distinguishing among recommendations for implementation, funding, and what is aspirational) as it is hard to get momentum for changes. Participants noted that they do not want top-down management, but rather how to work together in a smart and efficient manner. Strictness from the AOE in requirements and leniency in recommendations would be most beneficial. There was acknowledgement of the need for school consolidation, and a willingness to do this, but the participants noted that is not likely to happen at the local level. They will need the support of the governor and legislature to implement a consolidation plan. Finally, participants believe that too much of the current conversation revolves around money, highlighting the importance of shifting it back to students and their success.

College and Career Readiness

The session began by reviewing data from AOE on indicators of college and career readiness in the region and statewide, such as graduation rates and flexible pathways offerings. Discussion focused on barriers and challenges to achieving higher graduation rates, access to career and technical education, and challenges related to equitable access to flexible pathways.

Participants expressed that 8th through 10th grade provides an important window of fostering engagement in students by exploring and finding value in schools. To maintain high graduation rates, students need motivation to keep going to school. For many this

is often sports, arts, or a relationship with staff. However, these programs are often the first released in budget cuts and harder to supply in smaller settings. Although consolidation of schools offers a solution for this, in SDs with multiple small high schools, it is very difficult locally to close schools, resulting in many small schools with lack of programs and offerings.

Participants offered a few explanations for the declining graduation rates within the region, noting that the increasing cost of college does not encourage persistence through graduation nor the exploration of college as an option for many students – it seems an unattainable option. Some educators noted a generational aspect as well - when there is no example of high school graduates in the family, it makes it difficult for students to see the value.

Regarding the intent of flexible pathways, school leaders noted a disconnect between high-stakes exams and the goal of flexible pathways, observing that the accountability metrics are in direct contrast with goals of the program. Furthermore, while flexible pathways are working for motivated, middle-class, college-bound students, those who might benefit from the program the most do not seem to be accessing it. Moving some offerings online requires reliable internet connection and support from family, something not all students in the region have access to. Furthermore, the pathways often mean that high schools are losing motivated students from their population to Early College programs, resulting in fewer Advanced Placement courses being offered in the school, even though Early College credits transfer less frequently than AP credits.

In terms of regional collaboration, participants noted that there is some existing collaboration, but that there could be more. Currently, there is no financial incentive for towns to consolidate as they are not feeling the burden of a failed budget and high taxes; this may be an area the legislature could help this incentivize and build community buy-in.

When discussing the data showing higher graduation rates for students in CTE centers than overall graduation rates, the group emphasized that CTE alone will not solve declining graduation rates. For students leaving their home campus for full day CTE programs, these facilities can also create a sense of disconnect between students and their high schools. Participants noted that expanding CTE alone will not solve the declining graduation rate issues; it is a systemic problem.

Mental Health Costs and Systems of Support

The AOE has created data to quantify the costs of providing mental health services in schools. The Mental Health Costs and Systems of Support breakout session was designed to receive feedback on the methodology and resulting expenditure data, to

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understand local successes and challenges related to student mental health, and to discern how improved delivery of services in the region could be supported. The designated agency (DA) for the area is limited, leading to districts serving needs locally, with limited outside services and personnel. In some regions, ESSER dollars are used to support mental health, while in others it is not, possibly resulting in regional differences in mental health expenditures.

Participants identified a variety of methods that they use to identify, define, and evaluate mental health needs. Schools utilize resources such as FBA, Student Level, and SWISS to gather behavior data, as well as a universal screener via SABER. Student reporting surveys and surveys for parents were also discussed as a tool for measuring the mental health needs of their students. In-school counts can be used as a measurement for mental health needs, looking at attendance, Suspensions, and available school nurse data. Participants wondered if the FTE data presented represented only filled positions, or available positions as well, and if data exists to show the “costs” saved in mental health services well-trained educators.

Mental health needs often present themselves as reduced capacity of students, a result of dysregulation from lack of food, sleep, etc., that prevents learning in classroom settings. Schools often treat these mental health needs reactively rather than proactively, emphasizing the need to start addressing mental health at a much younger age. With rising homelessness and lack of available foster programs, schools are finding the need for a higher level of care within the community to support their students outside of school. Furthermore, the session emphasized the importance of county lines, emphasizing the difference it can make in DCF approaches and law enforcement-access, intensity, and skill level.

Participants suggested a consortium of local schools/districts built to serve the needs of all students in the area would help relieve schools of the heavy burden that has been placed on them. However, mental health needs require a certain amount of attention and individuality, meaning that these hubs should not be too big, with multiple hubs existing in the region to properly and adequately serve their students. For those implementing the community school model, questions were raised on how to Sustain them long term.

For schools to achieve their goals and serve the mental health needs of students, support from the AOE is needed. Participants expressed their desire for flexible requirement systems, the prioritization of data points that are meaningful and not rigid, and support in conceptualizing how to structure out their buildings.

Data Review and Budgeting Support for Boards

In reviewing the data shared in the main session as well as SU report, school board members stressed the importance of receiving accurate data in a timely manner in order for superintendents and the School Boards to have the information necessary for planning and negotiations. Board members have heard that earlier release of the VCAP assessment data would be particularly helpful for instructional purposes. If possible, additional breakdown to show what percentage of students in the “Approaching” category are closest to proficient in order to communicate to the public what portion of their approaching students are nearly proficient and need some targeted support to move up.

School boards often find themselves building budgets as they await important information such as long-term weighted pupil and CTE tuition rates. Furthermore, unfunded and defunded (where levels of funding are declining over time) mandates from the legislature put further pressure on these budgets, something that should be communicated to the legislature before the mandates are passed. Additional analysis of unfunded and defunded mandates to communicate what schools are required to provide and what is funded by the state would be particularly beneficial, providing clarity on how much of the monetary burden falls on the school board.

When asked what additional data analysis would be beneficial, school board members noted the increasing mental health/SEL burden falling on schools, and that an analysis of the costs associated with these services could lead to partnerships with other agencies to allow schools to refocus back to education. An analysis of the Education Fund, displaying revenue in and expenditures out of the Fund could work to dispel myths about the use of the Education Fund and build trust between the community and school board. Finally, a district profile, similar to the SU profile shared at the session, would allow school boards to get an in-depth look at performance within the district.

The group discussed additional support the AOE could provide school boards and districts, including educational materials for the general public on “Education Finance 101” and help translating budget considerations into practical choices to taxpayers. The messaging from state leaders around school budgets is also critical. School board members noted that announcing that it will be “another challenging budget year,” is unproductive and makes passing budgets more difficult. School board members thought that AOE providing an informational series on what education spending is, optimized categorical aid, the tax calculation, and ballot language with understandable language and achievable goals, would be particularly helpful. School board members emphasized the importance of achievable expectations and consistent objectives.

Subsequent Steps Following Regional Planning Sessions

Regional Planning Sessions occurred in Phase 2 of the Listen and Learn Tour and were an important step to review and validate the state's data and reporting. The Agency asked education leaders to review the reports (State Profile, regional presentation and SU/SD reports) and provide feedback to ensure accuracy. In response to the helpful feedback received by our partners in the field, the agency has re-released the State Profile Report to better contextualize the data and to make adjustments as suggested during the regional planning sessions.

Since Phase 2, the AOE has also prepared a series of topical reports to explore the topics discussed during the regional sessions more deeply and will continue to partner with education leaders to validate and improve Agency reporting. Additionally, in Phase 3 the AOE held a series of public engagement sessions in late October through early December to leverage the knowledge and experience of teachers and school staff, as well as students, families, taxpayers and the larger school community. The goal of these sessions was to share out what we have learned so far and to further deepen the AOE's understanding of key priorities for schools, families, and the larger community.

Southwest Regional Planning Session with Education Leaders (Bennington)

September 24, 2024

Background

Two Southwest Regional Planning Sessions were held, including one in Bennington on September 24th. After opening remarks, listening session participants were asked to participate in a short icebreaker activity where they were given the opportunity to tell the story of the region in the areas of community assets, population shifts, industry, geography of region, and school identify. Next, there was a short presentation on statewide trends and regional comparisons, based upon data from the initial State Profile release (which was since updated and revised based upon education leader feedback and data validation in Phase 1) where participants reflected on what they noticed, wondered, and how their SU/SD compared to their region. Listening session participants then joined one of three breakout groups: Academic Performance and Accountability, College and Career Readiness, or Mental Health Costs and Systems of Support.

Highlights from the regional story activity and each breakout session are briefly summarized below.

Regional Story

Community Assets

Participants emphasized the positive partnerships that SU/SDs have formed with local businesses and non-profits, describing a collaborative community supportive of K-12 initiatives. For example, SU/SDs have recently built strong relationships with mental health providers in the region to expand student access to counseling and resources.

Population Shifts

The Southwest Region has experienced significant population decline in recent years and, simultaneously, an increase in student needs. SU/SDs report having higher percentages of ELL students. Homelessness has steadily increased with more recent spikes, according to participants.

Industry

Key industries in the Southwest Region include healthcare, education, and manufacturing. Other common employment opportunities include work in retail services, social services, skilled trades, or seasonal tourism.

The Southwest Region has a diverse workforce with many teachers coming from non-traditional teaching backgrounds. However, participants report that the current workforce is not large enough to fill current needs, which results in employers hiring less qualified candidates. Additionally, a housing shortage in the region further restricts workforce growth.

Geography of Region

Geographical remoteness limits SU/SDs access to resources and additional learning opportunities for students. Transportation is a primary driver of costs, an obstacle for CTE programming, and an impediment to school/district consolidation. Participants expressed interest in collaborating to reduce inefficiencies such as sharing transportation services rather than having separate, identical routes for different SU/SDs.

School Identity

In the Southwest Region, elementary school affiliation is tightly tied to town identity – a mindset that participants say influences school board priorities and decision making. School identity is also shaped by communities' access to resources.

Participants reported that unified school boards also have identities of their own based on shared resources and collaborative administrator and teaching teams.

Breakout Sessions

Academic Performance and Accountability

Participants emphasized the need to improve data collection and reporting processes, starting with the state agency. Participants requested that AOE report data sooner and incorporate more qualitative methods to help contextualize quantitative data. They also requested that all AOE guidance and support be multi-modal, or accessible in more than one format. Participants felt that local data is more reliable than AOE's statewide data, and SU/SDs are more comfortable asking one another for data interpretation support rather than contacting AOE.

Participants identified additional barriers and solutions to academic performance and accountability. One challenge for educators is incorporating new initiatives while still adjusting to previous changes. School leaders and staff need more time to implement curriculum, training, and strategies before new ones are introduced. Schools also face challenges achieving high expectations for students while relying more heavily on inexperienced teachers. Participants discussed the need for better communication and alignment with teacher preparation programs and for teacher contracts to be renegotiated to include professional development time.

Other factors cited as harmful to student performance include a lack of substitute teachers, which results in staff having to cover classrooms, and schools being forced to cut costs in key areas to comply with unfunded mandates.

College and Career Readiness

SU/SDs in the Southwest Region experience logistical and instructional challenges related to College and Career Readiness. Long bus routes and misaligned calendars between CTE centers and sending schools increase costs and restrict students' access to career learning opportunities.

Instructional barriers include a lack of clearly defined best practices for flexible pathways programs and difficulty inspiring students to engage in academics when many students prioritize paid jobs outside of school. Attractive wages for lower-skill work in the region cloud some students' perceptions of the long-term importance of their education. Participants also described a "conflict of opportunities" between Career and Technical Education (CTE), Advanced Placement (AP), and Early College (EC), which tend to compete for enrollment.

Possible solutions to these challenges include engaging students in CTE programming at earlier ages, disseminating best practices for the flexible pathways, establishing collective transport systems between SU/SDs, and adopting statewide curriculum, standards, and teacher training.

Mental Health Costs and Systems of Support

Access to local mental health resources and social services varies by SU/SD, affecting staffing decisions. For example, schools in the Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union (SVSU) have established strong relationships with community organizations that provide various services for students and their families. In contrast, the types of community partners found in SVSU are less common in the Bennington-Rutland Supervisory Union (BRSU), so BRSU schools rely more on hiring the right personnel to meet students' needs with available resources.

Participants reported innovative partnerships such a grant-funded initiative to reduce the number of emergency room transports in SVSU by providing intensive outpatient mental health services.

SU/SDs use data on students' perception and sense of belonging to evaluate student needs. Data sources include mental health screeners, SWIS (PBIS) data, and the PBIS Belonging/Climate Survey.

Additional challenges for schools in the Southwest Region include providing adequate support for homeless students and dealing with school safety threats.

Subsequent Steps Following Regional Planning Sessions

Regional Planning Sessions occurred in Phase 2 of the Listen and Learn Tour and were an important step to review and validate the state's data and reporting. The Agency asked education leaders to review the reports (State Profile, regional presentation and SU/SD reports) and provide feedback to ensure accuracy. In response to the helpful feedback received by our partners in the field, the agency has re-released the State Profile Report to better contextualize the data and to make adjustments as suggested during the regional planning sessions.

Since Phase 2, the AOE has also prepared a series of topical reports to explore the topics discussed during the regional sessions more deeply and will continue to partner with education leaders to validate and improve Agency reporting. Additionally, in Phase 3 the AOE held a series of public engagement sessions in late October through early December to leverage the knowledge and experience of teachers and school staff, as well as students, families, taxpayers and the larger school community. The goal of these sessions was to share out what we have learned so far and to further deepen the AOE's understanding of key priorities for schools, families, and the larger community.

Winooski Valley Regional Planning Session with Education Leaders

September 17, 2024

Background

The Winooski Valley Listening Session on September 17th in Montpelier. After opening remarks, listening session participants were asked to participate in a short icebreaker activity where they were given the opportunity to tell the story of the region in the areas of community assets, population shifts, industry, geography of region, and school identify. Next, there was a short presentation on statewide trends and regional comparisons, based upon data from the initial State Profile release (which was since updated and revised based upon education leader feedback and data validation in Phase 1) where participants reflected on what they noticed, wondered, and how their SU/SD compared to their region. Participants asked for clarification of the enrollment data source and how the educator retention data was calculated. Listening session participants then joined one of four breakout groups: Academic Performance and Accountability, College and Career Readiness, Mental Health Costs and Systems of Support, or Data Review and Budgeting Support for Boards.

Highlights from the regional story activity and each breakout session are briefly summarized below.

Regional Story

Community Assets

Participants identified a number of community assets in the region. The region is a health hub, with access to primary care, dental, social/emotional and physical health providers. It has designated mental health agencies, in the Clara Matin Center and Washington County Mental Health. Internet connectivity is seen as a community asset, as is the Tri-Valley Transit public transportation system.

Residents in the region have access to recreation, such as cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and ice skating. Vermont Law School, Turnbridge World's Fair, and fairgrounds in general were seen as regional community assets. While the region has more job opportunities than other areas, housing is limited.

Population Shifts

The group identified general population shifts and shifts seen in school populations. A lack of housing prevents new families from moving into the region. Some areas of the region have an increase in new Americans. Many families who have lost their homes in

recent years are living in hotels; the group wondered if this may account for some of the population decline.

Within schools, the region is seeing an increase in the number of special education students; it is unclear if these are new students or if they are just newly identified as special education. The region is also seeing increases in student need/poverty at the school level, however the FRL data does not reflect the increases seen in schools.

Industry

Within the region, there are more opportunities for remote workers, and some new companies have started in the region, while the service industries have been consistent. There is an increased internal population. Several factors were identified as impacting the workforce and industry, including the housing shortage, which decreases workforce availability, and the impact of flooding and climate change. Specific to schools, there is decreasing availability of teachers and paraprofessionals, as well as food service and transportation staff in the region.

Geography of Region

Participants described the region as large and rural. Flooding has been a defining concern throughout the region. While the mountains create boundaries in the region, the high school connects the region. Barre is one area of the region that is not as rural, with higher poverty and more homeless students. There are many small schools that are often not far apart from each other, raising concerns about the viability of small schools and challenges with mergers. The opioid crisis, lack of cell phone connectivity, safety concerns, and issues with bus transportation were identified as regional challenges.

School Identity

Different perspectives were shared related to school identity. Some felt there are unique identities in each school and town (school pride/town pride) – this is a positive and may also be a potential barrier to consolidation. Others saw the blending of culturally diverse communities as a strength. With high school choice, students choose the high school they wish to attend, which means towns may lack a central high school identity. Others saw school identity connected to school activities such as capstone projects, extracurricular activities, school climate data, and educator/administrator tenure.

The distance between schools and districts is seen as limiting collaboration and the building of common identities. Individual school/community identity is also seen as a barrier to the development of a regional high school. With CTE, the co-location of a tech center and high school sometimes causes confusion in the community. CTE students are labeled as “tech kids,” which is slowly becoming a positive label.

Breakout Sessions

Academic Performance and Accountability

Participants discussed benchmarks and the relevance of the state (VTCAP) data and identified the need for benchmarks to compare students' and schools' state and local assessment results to standards and to compare performance with other demographically alike schools, not just regional or state comparisons. Data needs to be clear and reliable. Participants sought AOE leadership in providing professional development around data analysis related to VTCAP, including how they map to standards, what performance levels really mean, and item analysis. Similarly, when AOE used to provide statewide, content-specific in person professional development, that had the benefit of saving money for districts because of economies of scale.

Discussion also centered on VTCAP rollout, timing of data release, and use of VTCAP. There is some confusion in the field about what assessment data can be shared and what can't – particularly for discussions with school boards and principals, the state VTCAP results are needed for comparison and to help make meaning of local results. The timing of VTCAP data release means it doesn't have relevance for instructional purposes because it is released too late. Participants shared that the rollout of VTCAP was difficult, and teachers are seeking to understand why the assessment dates moved to earlier in the spring.

Participants identified several ways AOE could be helpful. These included more consistency and support on graduation proficiencies to reduce inequities, have more clarity when students move schools/districts, and to help colleges better understand; doing an alignment study between state and local assessments, VCAP, and standards; more timely AOE guidance on implementing new legislative requirements and advocacy for longer timeframes for implementation with legislators; and more prescriptive direction from AOE, rather than guidance, to ensure consistency when appropriate statewide.

College and Career Readiness

The college and career readiness breakout session began with a discussion of what it means to be college or career ready in Vermont, with a question of it is clearly defined statewide. This session focused on graduation from high school and access to flexible pathways as indicators of college and career readiness. The group also had some concerns about the data shared regarding the percentage of high schools offering flexible pathways opportunities, as it seemed low. The group thought the course coding might not capture the full range of offerings.

Barriers or challenges to achieving higher graduation rates statewide included high homeless populations, attendance challenges, reporting for students in transition programs results in lower 4-year graduation rates, and a belief that intervention and MTSS are often not as strong in secondary grades as elementary. Discussion around flexible pathways included that the legislative intent was to expose students who might not otherwise have access to these opportunities. Still, participants said data shows that affluent students access these options the most. Districts that have robust flexible pathways options said it requires significant investment in staff and transportation, as well as availability of community partners. Participants believe there is great variation in the flexible pathway offerings by district. Additional virtual opportunities were one strategy that might increase access, and one negative identified is that some options for postsecondary credit take high school seniors out of the school building, which can change the school culture.

There was broad agreement that group members don't believe comparing CTE center students' graduation rates to statewide graduation rates was fair or meaningful, as those students are purposefully choosing a specific course of study that interests them. They suggested comparing the graduation rates of students who applied to CTE centers but didn't get into those of other students statewide, which would be a fairer comparison. Participants believed there wasn't much will to explore shared regional offerings between SU/SDs. In conversation about potential new governance for CTE, with fewer CTE districts but all existing sites, participants believed that could result in increased student choice, strategic placement of resources, and aligned admissions processes. Still, they cautioned that it may require statewide or regional calendar adoption, a statewide teacher contract/salary schedule, and potential impact for centers with out-of-state students attending.

Mental Health Costs and Systems of Support

The breakout session included both a discussion of the current landscape and challenges with student mental health services, as well as one of AOE's methodology for collecting mental health cost data. The group discussed how schools are struggling to meet the mental health needs of students, including that they are hiring bodies just to survive and that students are often wait-listed; the difference between available supports and needs leaves schools treading water. They are seeing challenging changes in the way that mental health needs are being displayed in schools with more extreme/explosive behaviors, more significant numbers, and more students internalizing and not engaging. They also see that increasingly younger students are arriving at school unprepared – potty training, socialization, etc. Overall, they felt that mental health and SEL needs are way out of proportion for available supports.

The group also added that there are cost inefficiencies in how mental health services are currently provided due to there not being a streamlined continuum of support, meaning that schools need to hire many staff to fulfill the mental health needs in a single student's portfolio instead of referring them to one center that can manage all of it. Additionally, school staff burnout and absences contribute to costs. They added that the necessary attention being given to mental health is sucking resources from regular education needs.

Group members also shared that they feel like they are managing symptoms through school budgets, whereas schools can't treat root causes, and that schools are becoming substitutes for professional treatment of community sickness. They added that mental health issues in schools are a reflection of dysregulation in the system and doctors being at max capacity. The group shared the need for more community partnerships, AHS-led efforts, and community services so schools can focus on educational needs and trust others to support the emotional needs of students.

Reflecting on the proposed methodology for identifying the costs of mental health services, the group expressed concerns and highlighted its limitations. They shared that the scope of mental health services is difficult to define and quantify in data sets. Further, they felt that AOE cost data points were mediocre due to inconsistent and broad spending coding. They strongly recommended that the methodology be redefined and that AOE ask the experts on the ground to get into specifics. Additional recommendations for refinement included adding SEL and opportunity costs.

Data Review and Budgeting Support for Boards

During this session, it was shared that the provided data and comparisons to their region were not helpful to them; more granular data or comparisons to settings that were similarly sized or had similar need would be more useful. They shared that there was an ongoing distrust of AOE, and that data was unreliable and unusable. They questioned what was being hidden by only showing expenditures by weighted pupil and did not specifically highlight equity in how data is presented. The data and reporting that would be most helpful to them is what they need to show their communities in order to be able to pass a budget. They have concerns about reporting that would be at odds with this purpose or conflict with other information they have shared publicly.

Concerns with the funding system and budgeting process were also shared during the breakout. They expressed that the current funding system provides a disincentive for districts to control spending and that there needed to be clear guidance and available data about reserves. They felt that spending differences between districts had not improved noticeably since Act 60. Further, they shared concerns about the state's tax structure (homestead vs non-homestead) and its impact on towns with high numbers of

renters. Additionally, they felt that the current method for education funding feels like a manipulation of data and suggested that, instead, there should be a set baseline of money to provide for basic student needs. Towns can then opt to spend more, but this would ensure base needs are met. They expressed strong concerns with the new student weights.

When asked how AOE could support districts, they felt the most important thing would be improving data quality and timelines. Communities need to receive sound data and the necessary contextual information to understand the data. Communities need to receive sound data and info to understand. Further, data delays in the current timeline are not actionable for budgeting timelines, so they need to be improved. Second, additional support for boards to build their understanding of the current funding system, tax structure, and historical changes that got Vermont to where they are today would be helpful. They also wanted the state to break down education fund costs to analyze what is outside K-12 spending and quantify unfunded mandates.

Subsequent Steps Following Regional Planning Sessions

Regional Planning Sessions occurred in Phase 2 of the Listen and Learn Tour and were an important step to review and validate the state's data and reporting. The Agency asked education leaders to review the reports (State Profile, regional presentation and SU/SD reports) and provide feedback to ensure accuracy. In response to the helpful feedback received by our partners in the field, the agency has re-released the State Profile Report to better contextualize the data and to make adjustments as suggested during the regional planning sessions.

Since Phase 2, the AOE has also prepared a series of topical reports to explore the topics discussed during the regional sessions more deeply and will continue to partner with education leaders to validate and improve Agency reporting. Additionally, in Phase 3 the AOE held a series of public engagement sessions in late October through early December to leverage the knowledge and experience of teachers and school staff, as well as students, families, taxpayers and the larger school community. The goal of these sessions was to share out what we have learned so far and to further deepen the AOE's understanding of key priorities for schools, families, and the larger community.

Appendix B: Summaries of Educator Engagement Sessions

Bennington Educator Engagement Session

October 23, 2024

Background

An Educator Engagement Session was held on October 23, 2024, at Mount Anthony Union High School in Bennington from 4:00-5:30pm. The session began with opening remarks about the Listen and Learn Tour and its contribution to the development of AOE's strategic plan. Next, a data presentation showcased statewide data trends, including trends in student enrollment, student performance, education spending, and an overview of Vermont's education funding system. Following the data presentation, educator session attendees participated in a facilitated discussion to provide feedback to AOE on education in Vermont.

Educator Session

The educator session questions were designed around three broad topic areas: the academic supports needed for students and educators; non-academic supports needed; and areas where additional support from AOE or local districts would be beneficial to educators.

The following summary provides session participant perceptions shared during the session. Comments are provided in relatively raw form, without validation, substantiation, interpretation, or comment from the AOE.

Academic Supports

Educators described the academic supports that would be beneficial, including:

- Some students come in with no prior learning experience, other with 2 years of Pre-K; the range in experience is challenging
- Add more teaching supports when students are younger
- There is a lack of equity since some districts have the resources to do PLPs, but others do not.
- Breakout participants identified specific supports around special education, including:
 - Support the local administrators/central office and let them know that special educators also need literacy tools, especially at the secondary

level. I.e., the curriculum should be used across tiers 2 & 3 (as well as tier 1)

- Inconsistency in Special education monitoring/responses from AOE staff
- There is a need to examine special education practices, structural (staff) considerations, service delivery, etc. Help us build programs in-district with appropriate resources, curriculum, etc.
- At the primary level, more staff is desperately needed including special educators

Non-Academic Supports

Educators shared the non-academic needs they see and additional supports that could be helpful, including:

- Important to keep universal free meals
- Some training and resources provided to parents/families are only offered in some parts of the state
- All community agencies need to be involved in this solution
- There is a need to look at how emotional disturbance (ED) is diagnosed. Some systems require clinical diagnosis while others do not. ED impacts reading, writing, and math so we write IEPs with content-related goals, but do not address the underlying challenges around emotions
- CTE centers struggle with five different sending schools with five different schedules. Need more consistency
- Need for behavioral and mental health supports, including:
 - Elementary barriers to learning – behavior challenges, physical aggression, students hurting self/adults/peers, destroying classrooms. Need more resources like restorative practices
 - General Education teachers do not have classroom management practices/skills to support students with high trauma, physical aggression
 - Attendance challenges- how is that being measured and looked at? How many missed testing? Success measure is higher percentage of kids coming to school
 - Students coming in with lack of listening skills, respect, executive function, communication skills- extra things teachers have to teach in addition to the curriculum
 - Social Emotional Learning – mental health, behavioral needs
 - Educators need more instruction on mental health and behaviors. Educators don't have the training they need.

Educator Supports and Additional AOE Supports

Educators identified the following areas where additional support – from the AOE or from local districts – could benefit educators, including:

- Facilities assessment/needs- how can we afford to keep our schools open? And reduce carbon footprint?
- Undergraduate teacher education/prep PK-12 – new teachers must have a sense, be taught about what good reading instruction is. With so many teachers on provisional licenses or taking the fast track/peer review, these teachers do not even get this type of reading instruction for literacy or classroom management
- Problem with so many people on temporary licenses not getting support- kicks the can down the road, plus other teachers have to compensate for those teachers who don't know how to teach.
- Bring back the important role of parents/families. How can AOE encourage more connection and collaboration with families?
- Local control is good but looking for more consistency across the state and being able to learn from each other.
- More consistent guidance and support from AOE, including:
 - Need more direction, guidance, and support with PLPs; PLPs should be a common resource for all students
 - Students move from school to school, district to district and there are no consistent practices.
 - Will there be an initiative around math like there is for literacy? Such as OGAP in nearby states.
 - How to assess literacy at HS level? Legislation is around K-3, but we are looking at K-12.
 - Would be good for the AOE to look at the way different districts around the state are handling the behavior issues- what's working?
- Professional development, including:
 - Limited professional learning available with lack of resources post-ESSER.
 - Lack of time to collaborate with other teachers. Needs to be added to schedule.
 - Could there be more mental health PD at the beginning of the school year like the annual Safe School training? Need strategies.
 - Teachers need contracted time to get training, Lack of subs so can't happen during the school day.
 - More literacy training needed
- Special education resources, including:

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- Add resources (toolkit, strategies, resources for special educators as well (not just classroom teachers)
- Special educators have a heavy burden with required paperwork, post-transition plans, etc. Would like a review of the administrative requirements so special educators can spend more time with students.
- Allow special educators to be tier 2 teachers (targeted intervention earlier) vs. later in IEP
- Ensure the interpretation of Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) is access to a safe learning environment, whether that is in a general education setting or other setting, based on that specific student's needs.

Brattleboro Educator Engagement Session

December 3, 2024

Background

An Educator Engagement Session was held on December 3, 2024, at Brattleboro Union from 4:00-5:30pm. The session began with opening remarks about the Listen and Learn Tour and its contribution to the development of AOE's strategic plan. Next, a data presentation showcased statewide data trends, including trends in student enrollment, student performance, education spending, and an overview of Vermont's education funding system. Following the data presentation, educator session attendees participated in a facilitated discussion to provide feedback to AOE on education in Vermont.

Educator Session

The educator session questions were designed around three broad topic areas: the academic supports needed for students and educators; non-academic supports needed; and areas where additional support from AOE or local districts would be beneficial to educators.

The following summary provides session participant perceptions shared during the session. Comments are provided in relatively raw form, without validation, substantiation, interpretation, or comment from the AOE.

Academic Supports

Educators described the academic supports that would be beneficial, including:

- Provisional licenses and peer review process is a struggle
- Challenges with co-teaching in Special Education
- Public perception of education today, not understanding how different education is
- Act 173 Implementation, post-covid, is a challenge
- Carson v Makin court decision and its impact on funding (public funds for private schools)
- Challenges providing support services to students based on school setting (ex, CTE centers, can't pull kids out and miss CTE minutes for support)
- Budget and funding concerns, including:
 - Health care cost impact on budgets
 - Impact of public funding to private schools
 - Social services impacting public school budgets

Non-Academic Supports

Educators shared the non-academic needs they see and additional supports that could be helpful, including:

- Behavioral and mental health supports:
 - Chronic absenteeism/truancy requires school staff going to homes - framework is inconsistent
 - Student Mental Health is a major cost driver - outplacement costs and transportation for severe needs schools can't meet
 - Educator/staff taking on additional demands - meetings/teams to address individual student mental health needs, losing planning time, covering others' classes
 - Education Support Teams (ESTs) operating without supports
- Teacher Retention - Early career teacher supports to help prevent burnout are needed

Educator Supports and Additional AOE Supports

Educators identified the following areas where additional support – from the AOE or from local districts – could benefit educators, including:

- Mandates without supports (example, adaptive driver's education) don't work
- Community services, including:
 - More state interagency collaboration is needed
 - Teen substance abuse treatment - need state/community program
 - Community partnerships require resources at the school level
 - Community schools model and network w/ community - kids need services in school (medical/dental, etc.)
- Family engagement, including:
 - Literacy focus - need family engagement and buy-in outside of school hours
 - Parents/Families disconnected from their role in student success
- PreK weighting and needs (child development clinics absent)
- Housing availability and housing affordability impacts demographic trends
- Multiple pathways for students, including:
 - Barriers to CTE access driven by funding disincentives
 - Workforce pipeline - private partnerships and work-based learning opportunities
- AOE support and guidance, including:
 - AOE could support the connection to community values and skills, address family stress

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- Better statewide alignment of curricula, with educator input
- Align skills to graduation requirements, adapt to student needs
- Licensure: need to streamline and simplify the process. Maybe do more in the summer?
- Special Education needs stronger state standards and guidelines regarding service delivery (Act 173) - too many choices/recommendations, not enough standardization

Enosburg Falls Educator Engagement Session

October 30, 2024

Background

An Educator Engagement Session was held on October 30, 2024, at Enosburg Falls High School from 4:00-5:30pm. The session began with opening remarks about the Listen and Learn Tour and its contribution to the development of AOE's strategic plan. Next, a data presentation showcased statewide data trends, including trends in student enrollment, student performance, education spending, and an overview of Vermont's education funding system. Following the data presentation, educator session attendees participated in a facilitated discussion to provide feedback to AOE on education in Vermont.

Educator Session

The educator session questions were designed around three broad topic areas: the academic supports needed for students and educators; non-academic supports needed; and areas where additional support from AOE or local districts would be beneficial to educators.

The following summary provides session participant perceptions shared during the session. Comments are provided in relatively raw form, without validation, substantiation, interpretation, or comment from the AOE.

Academic Supports

Educators described the academic supports that would be beneficial, including:

- Intervention options
- Alternative school supports
- Measure growth and other assessment options (student and school)
- Teacher prep (pre-service)
- More training and use of literacy modules
- Staff vacancies
- Pipelines
- Having vetted resources available: curriculum, instructional practices (vary for subgroups, gamify)
- Multiple pieces of evidence to show student success

Non-Academic Supports

Educators shared the non-academic needs they see and additional supports that could be helpful, including:

- Physical safety for educators
- Attendance supports
- Accountability, in education and in other systems
- Safety concerns
- Community services, including:
 - Wraparound needs - lack of social services
 - Basic need supports (hygiene) for student, families
 - Lack of community partners/programs available
 - Education is an agency of yes - need to fund it, explain multiple roles to public
 - Availability (and quality) of non-academic resources in communities
- Mental health supports, including:
 - Mental health supports for students
 - Drug abuse
 - Need for comprehensive mental health supports so students are available to engage
- Data collection systems statewide (pull vs create)
- State assessment – challenges during first year of administration lead to distrust in data for that year
- Employers seek transferable skills
- Can we have grad requirements that match industry needs?
- State supports for schools who want to start this route
- Regional difference in family/community expectations of school experience, low spending districts continuing to struggle

Educator Supports and Additional AOE Supports

Educators identified the following areas where additional support – from the AOE or from local districts – could benefit educators, including:

- Ways AOE could better support educators, including:
 - Messaging from the state around respect for educators
 - Champion educators and partners to share responsibility (DCF, AOE, health care)
 - Less negative state-level messaging regarding funding- it drives negative perceptions of educators

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- Education marketing campaign that highlights positives of our schools and educators
- Measure staff turnover (flow data)
- Professional development, including:
 - Educator autonomy for professional development (lit modules)
 - Teacher mentoring/coaching (very effective)
 - Teaming structure (supports retention and academics)
 - Professional development for secondary/middle literacy, cohesion between district and state supports
- Teacher recruitment and retention, including:
 - AOE needs to understand barriers to resources and licensure
 - Impact of hiring untrained teachers
 - Statewide teaching contract- impact on districts who lose teachers to higher paying districts
 - Bonuses for resigning contracts early (10% retention)
 - Teacher pipeline improvement
 - Retain support staff in buildings
 - Data collection system for licensing system
 - Physical safety for educators
- Other, including:
 - Higher education alignment with needs of schools and necessary skills, "reteaching on the job," look into EdTPA
 - Living document of student's needs, continuum of understanding of needs
 - Brigham - equity if you want it, meaning that equity is possible through tax capacity, but local districts have to choose to exercise
 - Legislature reacting versus investigating

Champlain Valley Educator Engagement Session

December 4, 2024

Background

An Educator Engagement Session was held on December 4, 2024, at Champlain Valley Union High School from 4:00-5:30pm. The session began with opening remarks about the Listen and Learn Tour and its contribution to the development of AOE's strategic plan. Next, a data presentation showcased statewide data trends, including trends in student enrollment, student performance, education spending, and an overview of Vermont's education funding system. Following the data presentation, educator session attendees participated in a facilitated discussion to provide feedback to AOE on education in Vermont.

Educator Session

The educator session questions were designed around three broad topic areas: the academic supports needed for students and educators; non-academic supports needed; and areas where additional support from AOE or local districts would be beneficial to educators.

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Academic Supports

Educators described the academic supports that would be beneficial, including:

- Measures of student success beyond state assessments are more meaningful to parents and students
- Teacher preparation and licensure, including:
 - Heavy reliance on non-licensed or under-prepared educators can undermine "professional reputation"
 - Teacher licensure gets in the way of breaking silos and more interdisciplinary teaching
 - Teacher Prep programs are not aligned to prepare new teachers for the work – schools today are different than in past decades

Non-Academic Supports

Educators shared the non-academic needs they see and additional supports that could be helpful, including:

- Budget pressures have led to cut in critical programs and services
- Behavioral and mental health supports:
 - Schools are serving all student needs - need for more community resources (mental health) and inter-agency collaboration
- Budget pressures led to cut in critical programs and services
- Cell phone use contributes to behavior and mental health concerns; takes energy and resources from schools
- Act 127 Implementation Challenges

Educator Supports and Additional AOE Supports

Educators identified the following areas where additional support – from the AOE or from local districts – could benefit educators, including:

- Funding formula Concerns:
 - Need easy to understand explanations of education funding, taxes, etc.
 - Recognition that teachers and school staff are taxpayers too, they also feel the pain of taxes
- Equity is more than just money
- Teacher licensure can be a barrier to more interdisciplinary teaching, consider streamlining the process for teachers licensed in multiple content areas
- Future-facing assessment (non-traditional): one local benchmark; one state assessment; and one future, skill-oriented assessment
- Caution around teacher ratios - what do we lose?
- Teacher Prep programs are not aligned to prepare new teachers for the work
- AOE should find good programs and spotlight them
- Heavy reliance on non-licensed or under-prepared educators can undermine "professional reputation"

Lyndonville Educator Engagement Session

October 29, 2024

Background

An Educator Engagement Session was held on October 29, 2024, at Lyndon Town School from 4:00-5:30pm. The session began with opening remarks about the Listen and Learn Tour and its contribution to the development of AOE's strategic plan. Next, a data presentation showcased statewide data trends, including trends in student enrollment, student performance, education spending, and an overview of Vermont's education funding system. Following the data presentation, educator session attendees participated in a facilitated discussion to provide feedback to AOE on education in Vermont.

Educator Session

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The following summary provides session participant perceptions shared during the session. Comments are provided in relatively raw form, without validation, substantiation, interpretation, or comment from the AOE.

Academic Supports

Educators described the academic supports that would be beneficial, including:

- Extreme behaviors are barriers to success - need support staff to address behavior
- Inequitable opportunities
- PreK deserts - impacts K-12 academics and socials
- Balancing academic standards with need for play at younger ages (doesn't see this in state standards)
- Improve socialization, "play with constraints/purpose"
- Professional development, including:
 - Professional development or coaching pushed out to SU/SDs
 - Training for non-classroom teacher staff
 - Sustainability of ongoing trainings and resources from AOE

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- Be able to apply new learning immediately and consistently
- Establish culture of continuous improvement
- How can we rethink groupings to address data suppression (n sizes)
- AOE supports and guidance, including:
 - Consistency from AOE on fidelity/accountability
 - Tighter expectations (limit choices): vetted assessments and curriculums

Non-Academic Supports

Educators shared the non-academic needs they see and additional supports that could be helpful, including:

- Meet basic needs for students
- Behavior and mental health supports, including:
 - Barrier to academic success - emotional regulation and disruption in classrooms
 - School readiness (academic and social) early intervention
 - Priority on supporting younger students to prevent escalating as they are older - targeted interventions
 - Statewide behavior/SEL resources and supports
 - How to support students that are not successful in traditional classrooms - mental health support
 - Counselors need more time to meet with students and don't have access to community resources
- Non-academic opportunities are inequitable in small communities - CTEs, flexible pathways
- Rural communities need different solution than more populous areas
- Transportation awareness
- AOE supports and guidance, including:
 - Counselor framework better implementation
 - Social emotional learning intervention implementation fidelity and framework resources

Educator Supports and Additional AOE Supports

Educators identified the following areas where additional support – from the AOE or from local districts – could benefit educators, including:

- Consideration for adult literacy / learners (AEL)
- School schedule - consider year-round, 4 school days (rural areas) w/ 5th day for planning/collaboration
- Professional development, including:

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- Embedded coaches in schools
- Demonstration sessions / all day immersion
- Preserve planning time
- Training for paraeducators (Adult Learning workforce development)
- Physical safety in classroom
- Staff shortages, including:
 - Paraeducator no cost teacher pipeline
 - Impact of housing and cost of living
 - Support staff wages and supports
 - Streamlining renewal of licensure
 - Teacher prep: coordination with higher education
- AOE as a partner to districts/educators, including:
 - Continuous partnership/trust of AOE / maintain partnership
 - How to ensure that AOE supports reach classroom educators and Sustained:
 - Statewide SEL supports - teachers feeling isolated, impacts retention
 - Counselor framework implementation support

Montpelier Educator Engagement Session

October 28, 2024

Background

An Educator Engagement Session was held on October 28, 2024, at Montpelier High School from 4:00-5:30pm. The session began with opening remarks about the Listen and Learn Tour and its contribution to the development of AOE's strategic plan. Next, a data presentation showcased statewide data trends, including trends in student enrollment, student performance, education spending, and an overview of Vermont's education funding system. Following the data presentation, educator session attendees participated in a facilitated discussion to provide feedback to AOE on education in Vermont.

Educator Session

The educator session questions were designed around three broad topic areas: the academic supports needed for students and educators; non-academic supports needed; and areas where additional support from AOE or local districts would be beneficial to educators.

The following summary provides session participant perceptions shared during the session. Comments are provided in relatively raw form, without validation, substantiation, interpretation, or comment from the AOE.

Academic Supports

Educators described the academic supports that would be beneficial, including:

- Provide 8 weeks of summer school
- Preventative education (ex: PreK)
- Follow the Picus report recommendations on literacy and special education funding
- AOE support and guidance, including:
 - Remove all non-science of Reading material from AOE website
 - Academic guidance for career technical centers educators, (ex: READ VT, ensure information is provided to all teachers, including at CTE centers)
 - Vetted research-based programs/curriculum
 - Changing state assessments makes it difficult to self-improve teaching practices

- How are we measuring growth statewide?
- Staff shortages, including:
 - Vacancies: SPED, specialists, STEM instruction, coaches
 - Housing is a barrier to filling vacancies
- Special education: 96% of students with IEPs can't read and it is a barrier to the rest of their learning

Non-Academic Supports

Educators shared the non-academic needs they see and additional supports that could be helpful, including:

- School impact of 1-1 aide vacancies (Special education and paraprofessional vacancies)
- School impact of other (non-educational) department reductions (e.g., healthcare)
- Access to agency supports (schools can't do it all)
- Increase in cost of healthcare on its impact on school budgets
- Funding formula - requiring local budget approval

Educator Supports and Additional AOE Supports

Educators identified the following areas where additional support – from the AOE or from local districts – could benefit educators, including:

- Teacher retention: allow teachers to focus on teaching, less focus on administrative tasks, documenting, paperwork
- Systemic funding problems
- Provide supports for massive academic gaps
- Supports educators' mental health
- AOE support and guidance, including:
 - Ensure universal instruction for special education instruction
 - With the shift to the Science of Reading, a whole generation of teachers practiced Balanced literacy (disproved literacy program), large professional development effort for existing teachers

Stowe Educator Engagement Session

October 23, 2024

Background

An Educator Engagement Session was held on October 23, 2024, at Stowe High School from 4:00-5:30pm. The session began with opening remarks about the Listen and Learn Tour and its contribution to the development of AOE's strategic plan. Next, a data presentation showcased statewide data trends, including trends in student enrollment, student performance, education spending, and an overview of Vermont's education funding system. Following the data presentation, educator session attendees participated in a facilitated discussion to provide feedback to AOE on education in Vermont.

Educator Session

The educator session questions were designed around three broad topic areas: the academic supports needed for students and educators; non-academic supports needed; and areas where additional support from AOE or local districts would be beneficial to educators.

The following summary provides session participant perceptions shared during the session. Comments are provided in relatively raw form, without validation, substantiation, interpretation, or comment from the AOE.

Academic Supports

Educators described the academic supports that would be beneficial, including:

- Encourage full alignment of content standards in local environment
- Shared services, including:
 - BOCES - regional PD trainings
 - Better state substitute training through BOCES
- More mental health supports to reduce strain on teachers who don't have proper mental health training
- Professional Development, including:
 - Work with licensing institutions and colleges/ed prep programs
 - Providing incentives for PD initiatives (Adolescent needs training/Dyslexia training)
 - Support teacher onboarding

LEADERSHIP • SUPPORT • OVERSIGHT

- Expanding training outside class time to allow participation without sub costs
- Job embedded training to better reach the whole system
- Better training for interventionists
- Practicum hours
- Bigger substitute pool to relieve administrators from overseeing classrooms

Non-Academic Supports

Educators shared the non-academic needs they see and additional supports that could be helpful, including:

- Pre-K programs with play-based curriculums and parent choice
- High quality instructional materials
- Knowledgeable IT departments that understand tech-driven initiatives
- More early intervention opportunities accessible to all
- Training in evidence-based practices
- Supporting early identification of SPED students
- Assessments are not a valid way to judge student performance; need a more holistic view of students and their growth
- Support from AOE, including:
 - AOE resources are not implemented with fidelity and not rolled out in a way that encourages educators to use them
 - Curriculum directed from the state down (approved vendors)
 - Coordinated curriculum around Social Emotional Learning

Educator Supports and Additional AOE Supports

Educators identified the following areas where additional support – from the AOE or from local districts – could benefit educators, including:

- BOCES for smaller SU/SDs
- Full pupil weights for Pre-K students
- Time and scheduling, local control
- Calendar restructuring to support meaningful learning and teacher training (i.e., six weeks intense instructional summer training or two weeks of professional development)
- Mental health and behavior support, including:
 - Focus on Social emotional learning in MTSS
 - Whole school training on responsive teaching

LEADERSHIP • SUPPORT • OVERSIGHT

- Need to teach communication skills to reduce need for behavioral interventionists
- Hiring behavioral interventionists to help retain teachers
- AOE support and guidance, including:
 - AOE uses the phrase "The Science of Reading" vaguely. Educators would like more specific terminology such as structured literacy
 - Guidance on staff restructuring
 - Raise the profile of support positions and early education

West Rutland Educator Engagement Session

October 28, 2024

Background

An Educator Engagement Session was held on October 28, 2024, at West Rutland School from 4:00-5:30pm. The session began with opening remarks about the Listen and Learn Tour and its contribution to the development of AOE's strategic plan. Next, a data presentation showcased statewide data trends, including trends in student enrollment, student performance, education spending, and an overview of Vermont's education funding system. Following the data presentation, educator session attendees participated in a facilitated discussion to provide feedback to AOE on education in Vermont.

Educator Session

The educator session questions were designed around three broad topic areas: the academic supports needed for students and educators; non-academic supports needed; and areas where additional support from AOE or local districts would be beneficial to educators.

The following summary provides session participant perceptions shared during the session. Comments are provided in relatively raw form, without validation, substantiation, interpretation, or comment from the AOE.

Academic Supports

Educators described the academic supports that would be beneficial, including:

- AOE could support educators by:
 - Bringing back “network meetings” - this was done in the past to foster collaboration and knowledge among colleagues about math, ELA, etc. Network meetings helped teachers feel more supported
 - Need to find a balance between local control and AOE giving direction (defining the guard rails), on curriculum and proficiency system, for example
 - Looking for more in-person professional development; substitute teachers should also go to the professional development that is offered
- Budget cuts and concerns, including:
 - Due to budget cuts, schools are trying to do more with less

LEADERSHIP • SUPPORT • OVERSIGHT

- Some staff are shared across buildings to leverage resource capacity - they currently switch every 6 weeks between schools (ELA, Math then alternate).
- Multiple pathways for students, including:
 - Technical centers – serve students from around the county but there are different requirements to access those resources, very different student abilities, etc. (equity issue)
 - Concern with tech centers needing to deal with large variation in how prepared students are to enter those
- Looking for more in-person PD and need the subs to go to the PD that is offered

Non-Academic Supports

Educators shared the non-academic needs they see and additional supports that could be helpful, including:

- How do we meet these increasing needs, especially in rural areas where we have less access to community resources?
- Post-pandemic trends: more student need, comprehensive mental health supports are needed; increased number/need of English language learners
- With decreasing enrollment, school staffing is getting harder with more difficult needs, mental health, and the impact if staffing is decreased as enrollment decreases
- Shared services and consolidation, including:
 - Difficulty with geographically spread-out districts with low enrollment. Takes one hour to drive from one school to another, means it's difficult to even share staff between buildings.
 - Transportation takes longer in a rural setting, need to consider bus time with consolidation
- Small schools, including:
 - The small schools in Vermont have to fill many different roles
 - Small schools also need to fill community needs. If a school needs a school clinician, that's a cost that's going to push up budgets but may be a need
- Special education, including:
 - What percent of students are on a waiting list for outside placements? That is not reflected in data on special education
 - There are a number of students in the general setting (due to lack of programming), but that is not the best setting for their learning

- There has been a loss of trust in the education system, evidenced by the challenges of passing budgets (there is a need to develop a sense of trust with communities to pass future budgets)

Educator Supports and Additional AOE Supports

Educators identified the following areas where additional support – from the AOE or from local districts – could benefit educators, including:

- AOE as a partner to districts/educators, including:
 - Representing educators positively in the legislature
 - The AOE and legislature changes are creating extra work
 - Schools are on the receiving end of negativity from the public. Without strong leadership from the AOE, schools are left to defend it. With a strong AOE and guardrails in place, it would help with this challenge
 - AOE representatives should be at town meetings to explain the budget vs. an administrator or district fending for themselves with the public. It would be beneficial to have AOE visibility at Rutland County meetings, etc.
 - Want AOE more authentic participation in the community rather than a top-down approach
 - Schools left to deal with problems themselves
 - Teachers are jaded and don't believe there is genuine support, nor will there be follow through after these meetings
- AOE supports and guidance, including:
 - Need to have more guardrails established by the AOE - proficiency system interpreted differently by SU/SDs
 - AOE needs to be clear when it is an AOE decision, school or classroom decision.
 - AOE should identify a small number (3) of research-based curriculum options, but get educator feedback first
 - Not receiving support or direction from the AOE on student mental health
 - Agency has a hands-off approach to curriculum
 - It feels unfair to be judged on student outcomes when there isn't a lot of support in implementing expectations
 - Current lack of guidance on how to serve students with IEPs
- Professional development, including:
 - Grounded PD to support teachers who come in with provisional licenses, especially with comprehension and vocabulary
 - "Don't tell me I'm doing it wrong, tell me how to do it right"
 - There are no subs (enabling teachers to go to professional development). Can the AOE help?

LEADERSHIP • SUPPORT • OVERSIGHT

- Teacher recruitment and retention, including:
 - Can't hire staff and can't compete with \$20k+ salaries from schools across the state border in NY (same role)
 - New Teachers – increased number of provisional licenses, these teachers have less experience than those who have received a degree in education, they do not know the science of reading and need additional professional learning from the system making individual schools financially responsible for training them and this cycle is significantly impacted by high turnover
- Lack of trust with communities

Woodstock Educator Engagement Session

October 22, 2024

Background

An Educator Engagement Session was held on October 22, 2024, at Woodstock Union High/Middle School from 4:00-5:30pm. The session began with opening remarks about the Listen and Learn Tour and its contribution to the development of AOE's strategic plan. Next, a data presentation showcased statewide data trends, including trends in student enrollment, student performance, education spending, and an overview of Vermont's education funding system. Following the data presentation, educator session attendees participated in a facilitated discussion to provide feedback to AOE on education in Vermont.

Educator Session

The educator session questions were designed around three broad topic areas: the academic supports needed for students and educators; non-academic supports needed; and areas where additional support from AOE or local districts would be beneficial to educators.

The following summary provides session participant perceptions shared during the session. Comments are provided in relatively raw form, without validation, substantiation, interpretation, or comment from the AOE.

Academic Supports

Educators described the academic supports that would be beneficial, including:

- Highly qualified educators are the key
- Support educator mental health and well-being
- Professional learning and teacher preparation
- Professional development and training occurring outside to take the burden off districts
- Equity and pay parity between regions
- Support from AOE, including:
 - Financial reimbursement and sustainability for early district adopters, differentiation of support based on need
 - Schools experience “initiative fatigue” - take prior initiative investments into consideration before rolling out new initiatives and expectations
 - Adequate staffing for support at AOE

Non-Academic Supports

Educators shared the non-academic needs they see and additional supports that could be helpful, including:

- AOE to help celebrate Vermont educators and schools
- Universal meals support student success
- Mental health community and education communication and coordination supports and partnerships
- Community involvement and collective action
- Crosswalk of other areas (music, art, etc.) with literacy
- Family involvement and buy in at Pre-K level
- Awareness of student strengths and balance to not tax mental health

Educator Supports and Additional AOE Supports

Educators identified the following areas where additional support – from the AOE or from local districts – could benefit educators, including:

- Accountability: Putting teeth in what is required by AOE
- Educating the whole child/student (and not concentrating on reading only - for example)
- Valuation of equity for all students
- Buy in and family engagement from beginning for all families (e.g. newcomers, preschool, etc.)
- Small schools, including:
 - Celebration and recognition of successes in small schools
 - Measuring the breadth of offerings at small schools

Virtual (November) Educator Engagement Session

November 6, 2024

Background

A virtual Educator Engagement Session was held on November 6, 2024, from 4:00-5:30pm via the Zoom online platform. The session began with opening remarks about the Listen and Learn Tour and its contribution to the development of AOE's strategic plan. Next, a data presentation showcased statewide data trends, including trends in student enrollment, student performance, education spending, and an overview of Vermont's education funding system. Following the data presentation, educator session attendees participated in a facilitated discussion to provide feedback to AOE on education in Vermont.

Educator Session

The educator session questions were designed around three broad topic areas: the academic supports needed for students and educators; non-academic supports needed; and areas where additional support from AOE or local districts would be beneficial to educators.

The following summary provides session participant perceptions shared during the session. Comments are provided in relatively raw form, without validation, substantiation, interpretation, or comment from the AOE.

Academic Supports

Educators described the academic supports that would be beneficial, including:

- Curriculum for early education that reflects the reality of young children's developmental needs
- Additional capacity for alternative school settings, some students in need of alternative settings were unable to access a site due to long wait lists
- Support from AOE, including:
 - Help with the identification of high-quality curriculum and materials
 - General direction so everything isn't developed entirely locally, but with teacher input, as the AOE has previously recommended practices that were not well vetted
- Counselors need to be protected in school budgets, all schools need a counselor
- Schools are assigned to tech centers, but students aren't always able to attend the programs they are interested in

Non-Academic Supports

Educators shared the non-academic needs they see and additional supports that could be helpful, including:

- Need more support from the AOE on what falls into Hazing, Harassment, and Bullying (HHB) Prevention and how to address
- School systems are overwhelmed by mental health services, spending more on mental health services dilutes the overall quality of education
- Resources to serve homeless students
- The harmful mental health impact of technology on students – need resources on this
- School safety was a theme:
 - Need to emphasize the safety of students, specifically LGBTQ and students of color
 - Safety solutions across districts are inconsistent
 - Increase in safety and security issues in recent years, even in younger grades

Educator Supports and Additional AOE Supports

Educators identified the following areas where additional support – from the AOE or from local districts – could benefit educators, including:

- Literacy/reading network for teachers: Vermont is one of three states that does not have a reading group (network for teachers to connect, ask questions, offer webinars)
- With universal preschool, small schools can't afford to purchase high quality curriculum
- On staff shortages:
 - It is too easy to become a teacher now, with provisional and alternate routes
 - Teacher turnover is a problem - constant revolving of teachers
 - Lack of housing affects the availability of teaching staff
 - Staff shortages are impacting the agencies schools are partnered with to provide mental health services to students as well, makes getting support hard
 - Educators could use access to mental health support as well, without having to take time off work

Virtual (December) Educator Engagement Session

December 10, 2024

Background

A virtual Educator Engagement Session was held on December 10, 2024, from 4:00-5:30pm via the Zoom online platform. The session began with opening remarks about the Listen and Learn Tour and its contribution to the development of AOE's strategic plan. Next, a data presentation showcased statewide data trends, including trends in student enrollment, student performance, education spending, and an overview of Vermont's education funding system. Following the data presentation, educator session attendees participated in a facilitated discussion to provide feedback to AOE on education in Vermont.

Educator Session

The educator session questions were designed around three broad topic areas: the academic supports needed for students and educators; non-academic supports needed; and areas where additional support from AOE or local districts would be beneficial to educators.

The following summary provides session participant perceptions shared during the session. Comments are provided in relatively raw form, without validation, substantiation, interpretation, or comment from the AOE.

Academic Supports

Educators described the academic supports that would be beneficial, including:

- Every classroom needs to be more engaging: teamwork and hands-on opportunities for greater sense of belonging
- More engaging classroom requires more from teachers, how do we find a balance?
- The literacy bill being implemented has been developed for larger systems, compliance with the bill does not fit with the methodology and therefore is not really leading to improvements in literacy

Non-Academic Supports

Educators shared the non-academic needs they see and additional supports that could be helpful, including:

- Student preparedness for receiving instruction is a challenge - absenteeism and sense of belonging
- It is difficult for families/caregivers to engage with schools, need to make connecting with schools easier and more comfortable
- Educational Equity was a theme:
 - Concern of pull away from public education in VT
 - Lots of focus on affordability right now, but need to also focus on equity and quality
 - What is best for students must be at the center
- Teacher retention, including:
 - Let our staff do what they love and support them in that so they can stay in the field safely, happy, at peace and serving Vermont's children
 - How do we create the working environment that makes teachers want to stay

Educator Supports and Additional AOE Supports

Educators identified the following areas where additional support – from the AOE or from local districts – could benefit educators, including:

- Literacy/reading network for teachers: Vermont is one of three 3 states that does not have a reading group (network for teachers to connect, ask questions, offer webinars)
- With universal preschool, small schools can't afford to purchase high quality curriculum
- Para educators deserve to be given adequate training for their role to successful start the year with students
- There is an extreme substitute shortage; how can the AOE help?
- On staff shortages:
 - It is too easy to become a teacher now, with provisional and alternate routes
 - Teacher turnover is a problem - constant revolving of teachers
 - Lack of housing affects the availability of teaching staff
 - Staff shortages are impacting the agencies schools are partnered with to provide mental health services to students as well, makes getting support hard
 - Educators could use access to mental health support as well, without having to take time off work

Independent Schools Educator Engagement Session

December 12, 2024

Background

The Educator Engagement Session on December 12, 2024, was held virtually via the Zoom online platform from 4:00-5:30pm and was designed for educators at Vermont independent schools. The session began with opening remarks about the Listen and Learn Tour and its contribution to the development of AOE's strategic plan. Next, a data presentation showcased statewide data trends, including trends in student enrollment, student performance, education spending, and an overview of Vermont's education funding system. Following the data presentation, independent school educators participated in a facilitated discussion to provide feedback to AOE on education in Vermont.

Educator Session

The educator session questions were designed around three broad topic areas: the academic supports needed for students and educators; non-academic supports needed; and areas where additional support from AOE or local districts would be beneficial to educators.

The following summary provides independent school educators' perceptions shared during the session. Comments are provided in relatively raw form, without validation, substantiation, interpretation, or comment from the AOE.

Academic Supports

Educators described the academic supports that would be beneficial, including:

- On AOE support to independent schools:
 - Communication from the state is often late and lacks full guidance and implementation resources
 - Helpful resource: Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) small school template was more accessible to smaller schools
 - Access to the AOE subject experts is helpful
 - Request that when the AOE is developing/proposing new work, a dialogue is supported before anything is implemented
 - Equitable shares related to funding: Independent schools are trying to align professional development with Read VT, can't do anything with contract until LEA side is finalized, independent schools are subject to their public LEA operations

- Frequent breakdown in communication
- On AOE accountability/oversight:
 - Vermont requirements are sometimes challenging to understand, need stronger communication to new independent school heads of school
 - Volume of email is overwhelming, may be helpful to categorize communications
 - Backlog of reaccreditations - would love to see this improve and represent independent school that are truly and relevantly accredited
 - AOE does not have staff or resources to support all the regulations applicable to independent school
 - Duplicative efforts with conflicting regulation (ex: duplicative agency requests for fire drills)
- The legislature needs to provide more resources to AOE, or expectations on schools needs to be reduced

Non-Academic Supports

Educators shared the non-academic needs they see and additional supports that could be helpful, including:

- Reluctant to seek help from state, often strings attached that, though justified, might interfere with ability to work with kids and families
- SU/SDs are not required to include independent schools in their Universal Free Meals programs, have to pay for meals for all students
- Funding model needs to be reflective of the expectation for wraparound services beyond just education
- Need to recognize that schools are no longer being asked to just educate, expected to add human services supports on to the original model of just education.
- Where can policies and supports support the variety of independent schools' delivery methods and practices across Vermont?
- So much attention of the deficiencies of children, need to support and celebrate their strengths
- Policy suggestion that requires screen-free school days to improve mental health
- On mental health supports:
 - Social emotional learning should be a huge priority for all educators, perhaps embedded time each day.
 - Teacher turnover is a problem - constant revolving of teachers
 - Students need breaks to avoid information overload

LEADERSHIP • SUPPORT • OVERSIGHT

- Local mental health supports are full, backlogged, struggle for families and hard on kids
- What has worked well: securing local counselors, allowing flexibility for students on how they can access counseling services during the school day

Educator Supports and Additional AOE Supports

Educators identified the following areas where additional support – from the AOE or from local districts – could benefit educators, including:

- Social emotional learning needs have increased, need to give staff dedicated time to talk through SEL needs
- All things impacting students are impacting staff, need to be mindful of this
- Concern about costs and responsibilities rising more rapidly than time and money
- Independent schools are used to operating on razor-thin budgets, fundraising, etc. Feels more important than ever to educate communities about how independent schools are financed and the impact of perceived small changes to budget

Appendix C: Summaries of Public Engagement Session

Bennington Public Engagement Session

October 23, 2024

Background

A Public Engagement Session was held on October 23, 2024, from 6:00-8:00pm at Mount Anthony Union High School in Bennington. The session began with opening remarks about the Listen and Learn Tour and its contribution to the development of AOE's strategic plan. Next, a data presentation showcased statewide data trends, including trends in student enrollment, student performance, education spending, and an overview of Vermont's education funding system. Following the data presentation, public session attendees participated in a facilitated discussion to provide feedback to AOE on education in Vermont.

Public Session

The public session questions were designed around three broad topic areas: what educational success looks like, in schools, districts and statewide; the educational opportunities and experiences Vermont students should have access to; and discussion of education budgets.

The following summary provides session participant perceptions shared during the session. Comments are provided in relatively raw form, without validation, substantiation, interpretation, or comment from the AOE.

Student Success

Members of the public discussed what student success looks like to them, comments included:

- Disconnect between AOE and School Boards - No direction/lack of long-term planning
- Success can look different for different kids
- School can foster innovation
- The "system" needs to change measures of "success" to align with modern work and diversity
- Differentiated learning, including:
 - Focus on student interests
 - Identify and nurture what students are good at
 - Honor VT's history with the student portfolio - learner centered teaching

LEADERSHIP • SUPPORT • OVERSIGHT

- Differentiation, targeted/intensive instruction to meet students' needs
- Experiential Learning / Field Trips
- Measure of success included:
 - Standardized tests ~ not for all
 - Reading proficiency (elementary)
 - Measures of success beyond ELA/Math including responsible decision making, social skills, etc., at secondary level- college/career readiness
 - Assess their own progress
 - Safe school environments
- Student communication included:
 - Clear communicators
 - Ability to collaborate
 - Student engagement/voice
- Students are confident, curious and engaged:
 - Accepted for who they are - a sense of belonging
 - Students Feel successful
 - Students - happy, willing to take risks and can identify how they learn best
 - Curious Learners
 - Love of Learning, nurture kids' curiosity
 - Present
 - Excited to learn
 - Engagement
 - Positive Experience

Student Opportunities and Experiences

Members of the public shared how their schools support students to be successful, resources they would like to see but may not be available, and barriers to providing educational opportunities. Comments included:

- Need for additional space/capital funding:
 - Funding moratorium - build new schools(s)
 - Space to teach/accommodate student needs
- Additional guidance or support from AOE, including:
 - Clubs (i.e. climate change) - Need guidance from AOE, little alignment with science standards
 - Consistent policies
- Community services, including:
 - Other states- "social services" not lumped into education spending but they are in VT

LEADERSHIP • SUPPORT • OVERSIGHT

- Include social services costs more but there is a lack of understanding about this
- Cultural diversity and learning, including:
 - Understanding cultural diversity
 - Embrace who enters our classroom
- Diverse course offerings and programs:
 - Also need science, field trips, experiential learning, gifted and talented program (not just for SEL) (across state)
 - World language at pk-6 level - bi-language schools
- Mental health supports, including:
 - Social-emotional skills (teachers need training)
 - Check-ins
 - Create community
 - Integrating Social Emotional Learning within core curriculum
- Other comments:
 - Opportunities awarded and offered to all students, regardless of student's status, abilities
 - Public versus private (publicly funded) education in VT was discussed in terms of equity
 - PreK (if available) - economic factors may pressure families to start earlier than developmentally ready
 - Challenge- having specialists work with all students (not just those being evaluated) (SU v SD resources)
 - Scheduling can be a barrier to equal opportunities
 - Rural challenges (town to town) w/ education costs and equity in education

Budget

Breakout group participants discussed the impacts of declining enrollment, balancing small settings with the educational opportunities desired, and areas where there may be advantages to working together to improve educational opportunities at a cost that is sustainable. Comments included:

- Local control: share curriculum, competent leadership, opportunity, teacher/salary benefits - equalization
- Should schools be paying for mental health related services?
- Additional space/capital funding, including:
 - Tax rates and local resources - disparity in school facilities
 - Modern facilities give kids a sense of pride

LEADERSHIP • SUPPORT • OVERSIGHT

- Lack of state funding for facilities is a challenge needed to transform education
- Higher needs rising
- Look at health insurance expenses that are increasing - impact school budgets
- Shared services and consolidation, including:
 - Consolidate or share program costs/services (not sharing people) across schools or regions - joint purchasing? (can AOE coordinate?) (like state police)
 - School consolidation is a challenge in some large geographic areas
 - What is lost as we consolidate? How to measure? i.e., community relationships
 - Consider regional consolidation
- Increasing/decreasing enrollment, including:
 - Declining enrollment exists in Bennington
 - Families moving to adjacent towns to access schools with "more" opportunities
- Special education, including:
 - How special education services are delivered - what are the trends?
 - Some "consultants" due to staff shortages have increased costs (approach proactively?)

Brattleboro Public Engagement Session

December 3, 2024

Background

A Public Engagement Session was held on December 3, 2024, from 6:00-8:00pm at Brattleboro Union High School. The session began with opening remarks about the Listen and Learn Tour and its contribution to the development of AOE's strategic plan. Next, a data presentation showcased statewide data trends, including trends in student enrollment, student performance, education spending, and an overview of Vermont's education funding system. Following the data presentation, public session attendees participated in a facilitated discussion to provide feedback to AOE on education in Vermont.

Public Session

The public session questions were designed around three broad topic areas: what educational success looks like, in schools, districts and statewide; the educational opportunities and experiences Vermont students should have access to; and discussion of education budgets.

The following summary provides session participant perceptions shared during the session. Comments are provided in relatively raw form, without validation, substantiation, interpretation, or comment from the AOE.

Student Success

Members of the public discussed what student success looks like to them, comments included:

- Food, housing, caring teachers: 3 main requirements
- Personalized learning based on student interest, project-based
- High expectations for all - who is getting access (or not) to educational opportunities?
- Media literacy guidelines/support from AOE is needed
- Need to go back to in-person Harassment, Hazing, and Bullying training from AOE
- Measures of success, including:
 - Statewide measure for student performance in high school
 - Conflict resolution - bullying, micro-aggressions, normalizing restorative justice practices
 - Graduation rates

- Broad participation in activities and events
- Sense of direction post-high school
- Being prepared/having the skills to do what they want post-high school
- Skills needed for whatever the future holds
- Reading on grade level by Grade 3
- Prepared to move to next grade
- Attendance
- Low chronic absenteeism
- Basic life skills
- Thriving arts programs
- Family engagement
- Student ownership of learning, including:
 - Seeing self as a learner
 - Connection of future goals to the "why" of what they are doing now
 - Each kid achieving their best (individuals)
 - Making progress on personalized learning plan
 - Competence and mastery as learners, elementary
 - Seeing school/knowledge as a path forward and to opportunity
- Staff retention (exit interviews to understand why leaving)
- Students are confident, engaged, and have a sense of belonging:
 - Showing a love of learning- connected to teacher quality and engagement
 - School culture: High sense of belonging (panorama surveys are one indicator), safety, inclusion
 - Emotional regulation
 - Compassion, kindness, and well-being
 - Communication skills
 - Conflict resolution skills
 - Active part of community
 - Critical thinking skills
 - Students engaged, interested, on task
 - Adaptability

Student Opportunities and Experiences

Members of the public shared how their schools support students to be successful, resources they would like to see but may not be available, and barriers to providing educational opportunities. Comments included:

- State priorities/agencies need to be rolled out more consistently across regions
- Public PreK - a positive, keep it!
- Meeting student basic needs:

LEADERSHIP • SUPPORT • OVERSIGHT

- Universal free meals - vitally important, keep it!
- Universal meals (snacks for younger kids)
- Community services, including:
 - Success Beyond 6, Act 264 - coordination between initiatives and agencies
 - Better communications pathways. From school boards - shared calendars, shared news
- Differentiated learning and diverse course offerings, including:
 - Multiple pathways and modalities for learning
 - State supported program to support parents of teenagers
 - Lessons from virtual learning - is that a way to engage more w/ home life
 - "How to engage" orientation
 - All parts of school can be learning opportunities
 - Project-Based Learning - scoring can be confusing, doesn't align with assessment results
 - Project-Based Learning - more qualitative in elementary grades, local assessments are more informative
 - Project-Based Learning standards can be a barrier for special education students to access General Education classroom
 - Project-Based Learning can give more context on student strengths and weaknesses
 - Whole child approach - building skills, sequencing is not well understood
 - High school - get students out of classroom and into community programs
 - Outdoor education - working to create outdoor learning spaces
- Educational equity, including:
 - How to meet the needs of all students - those with anxiety? Smaller schools within schools? More/different afterschool opportunities?
 - Supplies provided for students in need, or for all students (ex, cold weather gear for outdoor ed)
 - Respect for all/multiple identities
 - Support for growing ELL population, across state agencies
- Family engagement, including:
 - Supports for teachers - how can parents/community help?
 - Family engagement - need a response or to be heard
 - Lack of time/stress: think outside of the box to engage families
- Behavior and mental health supports, including:
 - Targeted Social Emotional Learning - extend up through middle and high school

LEADERSHIP • SUPPORT • OVERSIGHT

- Supports to get students into schools (home-school liaisons, social workers)
- Re-engagement supports
- Professional development, including:
 - Great principals invest in training
 - Time for teacher collaboration, especially at elementary
- Safety, including:
 - Have a mentor/trusted adult
 - School safety protocols can be a barrier to community engagement
- Access to transportation for extracurriculars
- Volunteers in schools, including:
 - Committed adults in the community support schools (seniors reading w/ kids)
 - Welcoming community back into schools post-covid
 - Community engagement opportunities

Budget

Breakout group participants discussed the impacts of declining enrollment, balancing small settings with the educational opportunities desired, and areas where there may be advantages to working together to improve educational opportunities at a cost that is sustainable. Comments included:

- Adding space/capital improvements, including:
 - Capital improvements for schools are needed
 - Capital improvement funding for schools
- Budget cuts and the budget process, including:
 - Health care cost impact on budgets
 - Health insurance cost controls
 - Timely data from the state for budgeting purposes
 - Pull out social services from Ed Fund (mental health, social workers)
 - More statewide standards for performance to support budgeting decisions
 - Tuitioning to independent schools (equity of choice; fiscal impact; and frustration when independent school options aren't available)
 - CTE funding in competition with traditional schools
- Shared services and collaboration, including:
 - Collaboration that allows for alternative, engaging settings for students leaving/not attending traditional schools
 - Districts could work together on food service
 - Districts could work together on transportation.

LEADERSHIP • SUPPORT • OVERSIGHT

- Look at results of Act 46 before considering more mergers - did it accomplish the goals?
- Small schools - look at their data/results before making decisions to close solely based on money
- K-8 students benefit from small schools, high schools benefit from being larger - more scale for student opportunities
- Increasing/decreasing enrollment, including:
 - Districtwide declining enrollment
 - PreK impact to increases in enrollment at some schools
 - Young people leaving the state - tax rates, closing of nearby schools, travel distance to schools impacting families' decisions to move away
 - Number of 2nd homes/Airbnb's - reduces housing available to young families
 - Teacher/staffing ratios
- Safe & Healthy Schools Program at AOE supporting school culture - want it back

Enosburg Falls Public Engagement Session

October 30, 2024

Background

A Public Engagement Session was held on October 30, 2024, from 6:00-8:00pm at Enosburg Falls High School. The session began with opening remarks about the Listen and Learn Tour and its contribution to the development of AOE's strategic plan. Next, a data presentation showcased statewide data trends, including trends in student enrollment, student performance, education spending, and an overview of Vermont's education funding system. Following the data presentation, public session attendees participated in a facilitated discussion to provide feedback to AOE on education in Vermont.

Public Session

The public session questions were designed around three broad topic areas: what educational success looks like, in schools, districts and statewide; the educational opportunities and experiences Vermont students should have access to; and discussion of education budgets.

The following summary provides session participant perceptions shared during the session. Comments are provided in relatively raw form, without validation, substantiation, interpretation, or comment from the AOE.

Student Success

Members of the public discussed what student success looks like to them, comments included:

- Connecting low performance with missing resources
- Connecting curriculum to what matters to students and workforce needs
- Students being appropriately challenged - productive struggle
- Work-based learning opportunities
- Opportunities for paid internships
- Skills needed for adult life after school:
 - Personal finance
 - Digital and financial literacy
 - Future planning
 - Financial independence
 - Grit/productive struggle
 - Public speaking

- Measure of success included:
 - Data or info to measure school success: Attendance, suspensions, "street data" from students and staff
 - Community perception the school
 - Test scores
 - Grade level literacy, writing, and math skills
 - Critical thinking, time management, relationships, "soft skills" or "professional skills"
 - Feedback from hiring entities
 - Ready/successful in the workforce (transferable skills)
 - Ability to collaborate, initiate, plan, and follow through
 - Social-emotional expression, regulation
 - Civil conversations even when disagreement
 - Student perception of school
 - Feel part of the community
 - Self-confidence and hope
 - Curiosity
 - Student engagement, enjoyment
 - Active listeners and engaged learners
 - Students are happy to go to school, curiosity and excitement

Student Opportunities and Experiences

Members of the public shared how their schools support students to be successful, resources they would like to see but may not be available, and barriers to providing educational opportunities. Comments included:

- If we leave it up to individual districts, we won't get there. Needs to be a state-level solution to education issues/barriers to student success
- Financial barriers to equitable opportunities/experiences
- Student enrollment - school consolidation
- Students seeing themselves reflected in their learning
- Technology understanding/programming/prep
- Barrier of systematic racism, issue for recruiting diverse educators
- Provisional teachers - need more quality teachers
- Differentiated learning, including:
 - Seeing kids as individuals
 - Community-based/project-based learning
- Diverse course offerings and programs, including:
 - Arts are a need!

LEADERSHIP • SUPPORT • OVERSIGHT

- Daily P.E.
- Push in tech opportunities
- Extracurricular opportunities (instruments, art supplies, foreign languages)
- Parent and community involvement, including:
 - Parent engagement/involvement - has been a struggle
 - More teacher feedback to families
 - Schools being welcoming to community volunteers
- Mental health and behavior support, including:
 - Interventionalists, SEL professionals, support staff
 - More supports for dysregulated/behavioral needs
 - Access to programs for mental health and other special needs services
- Multiple pathways for students, including:
 - CTE centers with lots of opportunities
 - Expand technical centers - physical availability, earlier access
 - Comprehensive high schools with tech centers (more AND, less OR)

Budget

Breakout group participants discussed the impacts of declining enrollment, balancing small settings with the educational opportunities desired, and areas where there may be advantages to working together to improve educational opportunities at a cost that is sustainable. Comments included:

- Provide wide opportunities for all students
- Full school choice - can private schools educate kids more economically?
- Funding issues, including:
 - Not seeing declining enrollment here, but paying for it everywhere else
 - Property ownership
 - Will only be equitable when budgeted and funded at state-level
 - Stop funding 2 systems - sending public school money to private schools
 - Local zoning impacts enrollment (need 10-25 acres to build)
 - Some regions increasing student population while others decreasing
 - High % of transient kids can make budgeting trickier
 - Need more funding for mental health personnel in schools
 - Budget differences = ability to attract high-quality teachers
 - Less funding = more teachers on provisional licenses - not trained - takes more resources for school to train them, then they leave for more money in another SU
- Shared services and consolidation, including:
 - Share arts teachers, food services, SPED, and expand with additional SU/SDs (neighboring SU/SDs)

LEADERSHIP • SUPPORT • OVERSIGHT

- Seeing the benefit for all SU/SDs helps build trust to share: name how it increases opportunities
- "We operate too many schools for the number of student that we have" (in the state)
- Need the state to make the hard move to school consolidation
- Opposing view: Need schools in every town, they are the center of communities

Champlain Valley Public Engagement Session

December 4, 2024

Background

A Public Engagement Session was held on December 4, 2024, from 6:00-8:00pm at Champlain Valley Union High School in Hinesburg. The session began with opening remarks about the Listen and Learn Tour and its contribution to the development of AOE's strategic plan. Next, a data presentation showcased statewide data trends, including trends in student enrollment, student performance, education spending, and an overview of Vermont's education funding system. Following the data presentation, public session attendees participated in a facilitated discussion to provide feedback to AOE on education in Vermont.

Public Session

The public session questions were designed around three broad topic areas: what educational success looks like, in schools, districts and statewide; the educational opportunities and experiences Vermont students should have access to; and discussion of education budgets.

The following summary provides session participant perceptions shared during the session. Comments are provided in relatively raw form, without validation, substantiation, interpretation, or comment from the AOE.

Student Success

Members of the public discussed what student success looks like to them, comments included:

- Measures of success, including:
 - Skills that prepare students for life, like collaboration, public speaking, etc.
 - Create scale for the entire state
 - Readiness for kindergarten
 - Not just defined by test/grade level standards
 - Graduation rates and persistence after graduation
 - Kids find their path after graduation - outcomes/livable wage/employment
 - Career readiness
 - Basic skills in reading, math, etc. foundational at elementary level
 - Graduation rates
 - Educate the whole child

- Measure not just through standardized tests
- Cradle to career approach- long term supports across lifespan
- Qualitative measures of "soft skills" - redefine as wellness constructs
- Look at mastery of multiple skills
- Absenteeism rates - engagement
- Mental health supports
 - Mental health and social skills
 - Mental health and wraparound support
 - Trusted, healthy relationships
- Students are curious, engaged, and excited, including:
 - Community-minded, curious students
 - Students are happy
 - Engaged with curriculum and subjects
 - Connections to supportive adult and community resources
- Community services, including:
 - Need to address basic needs first
 - Additional costs are addressing other system shortages
 - Schools are the hub/community resource center
 - Schools cannot do it all, more system-wide supports required
- Differentiated Learning and diverse course offerings, including:
 - Ability to explore multiple learning paths - find your place
 - Tech Education
 - Early exploration
 - Offer an array of courses
 - Diversity of educational opportunities
 - Balance core academic courses with electives

Student Opportunities and Experiences

Members of the public shared how their schools support students to be successful, resources they would like to see but may not be available, and barriers to providing educational opportunities. Comments included:

- Importance of family engagement in schools
- Support and guidance from AOE, including:
 - Cell phone ban policy at the state level would be helpful
 - More state-level, evidence-based standards (ex. Curriculum, technology/data), with state level professional development
- Differentiated learning and diverse course offerings:
 - Schools bring students along
 - Differentiation of educational opportunities

LEADERSHIP • SUPPORT • OVERSIGHT

- Early (middle school) exposure to CTE Pre-tech
- Student Scale for secondary schools, for greater opportunities
- Leverage technology to provide opportunities in rural areas
- Get high school students out into the community
- Multiple pathways for students, including:
 - College/career aspirations
 - Work-based learning - paid opportunities
- Teacher quality, including:
 - High quality teachers - able to fill all needed positions/stability
 - Higher quality teacher preparation programs, coaching for new teachers

Budget

Breakout group participants discussed the impacts of declining enrollment, balancing small settings with the educational opportunities desired, and areas where there may be advantages to working together to improve educational opportunities at a cost that is SU/Sustainable. Comments included:

- Budget and funding concerns, including:
 - Standard cycle for property re-assessments
 - Stop pitting local against local, change the funding structure
 - Impact of Carson V Mason - funding to independent schools
 - Leverage community partnerships
- Shared services and consolidation, including:
 - Fewer SU/SDs to increase efficiencies
 - Single district for certain education delivery needs (CTE, teacher contract, transportation)
 - Stop incentivizing small scale in the funding system
 - Central services statewide
 - One SU per county or other regional approach
 - Sharing resources
- Support afterschool programs - addresses mental health and academics
- Local control, including:
 - Expand definition of "local"
 - Keep curriculum flexibility
- Professional development and teacher recruitment, including:
 - State support to Invest in teacher instruction/quality
 - Statewide professional development
 - Improve teacher pipeline/help promote the professional
- Special education, including:

LEADERSHIP • SUPPORT • OVERSIGHT

- IEP system
 - Stay true to the goal of inclusion
- AOE guidance and supports:
 - Systems issue - mental health, economic - need state agency coordination
 - More AOE leadership around special education
 - Improve systems - better data, better reporting would allow the state to drive/draw more funding
- Adding space/capital improvements, including:
 - Capital improvements for schools are needed
 - Capital improvement funding for schools
- Budget cuts and the budget process, including:
 - Health care cost impact on budgets
 - Health insurance cost controls
 - Timely data from the state for budgeting purposes
 - Pull out social services from Ed Fund (mental health, social workers)
 - More statewide standards for performance to support budgeting decisions
 - Tuitioning to independent schools (equity of choice and fiscal impact)
 - CTE funding in competition with traditional schools
- Shared services and collaboration, including:
 - Collaboration that allows for alternative, engaging settings for students leaving/not attending traditional schools
 - Districts could work together on food service
 - Districts could work together on transportation
 - Look at results of Act 46 before considering more mergers - did it accomplish the goals?
 - Small schools - look at their data/results before making decisions to close solely based on money
 - K-8 students benefit from small schools, high schools benefit from being larger - more scale for student opportunities
- Increasing/decreasing enrollment, including:
 - Districtwide declining enrollment
 - PreK impact to increases in enrollment at some schools
 - Young people leaving the state - tax rates, closing of nearby schools, travel distance to schools impacting families' decisions to move away
 - Number of 2nd homes/Airbnbs - reduces housing available to young families
 - Teacher/staffing ratios
- Safe & Healthy Schools Program at AOE supporting school culture - want it back

Lyndonville Public Engagement Session

October 29, 2024

Background

A Public Engagement Session was held on October 29, 2024, from 6:00-8:00pm at Lyndon Town School. The session began with opening remarks about the Listen and Learn Tour and its contribution to the development of AOE's strategic plan. Next, a data presentation showcased statewide data trends, including trends in student enrollment, student performance, education spending, and an overview of Vermont's education funding system. Following the data presentation, public session attendees participated in a facilitated discussion to provide feedback to AOE on education in Vermont.

Public Session

The public session questions were designed around three broad topic areas: what educational success looks like, in schools, districts and statewide; the educational opportunities and experiences Vermont students should have access to; and discussion of education budgets.

The following summary provides session participant perceptions shared during the session. Comments are provided in relatively raw form, without validation, substantiation, interpretation, or comment from the AOE.

Student Success

Members of the public discussed what student success looks like to them, comments included:

- Measures of success, including:
 - Reduced behavioral incidents
 - Better academic outcomes (performance scores)
 - Additional measurement to measure nonacademic success
 - Post grad - active member in community
 - Early connection / understanding "why"
- School culture, including:
 - At least one "safe" person for each student in school
 - Continuous improvement/growth mindset
 - Community connection
- Students are confident, engaged and excited to learn, including:

LEADERSHIP • SUPPORT • OVERSIGHT

- Self-advocacy / self-capability / confidence / resilient / curious / imagination
- Engagement and participation in classroom
- Academically challenged - leading to disengagement
- Problem solvers / creative solutions
- Enjoy learning
- Differentiated ed programming - opportunity to feel and be successful

Student Opportunities and Experiences

Members of the public shared how their schools support students to be successful, resources they would like to see but may not be available, and barriers to providing educational opportunities. Comments included:

- AOE as a partner to support partnerships with state and other outside agencies
- AOE supports and guidance, including:
 - Accountability and fidelity of services
 - Minimum mins on math/ELA - core education
 - Minimum class sizes (10+)
 - Educator autonomy in administering curriculum
- Supports for students impacted by other student behaviors
- Diverse course offering and programs, including:
 - Project based learning
 - Experiential learning and outdoor education pros
 - Specials - body movement, art expression, whole child
- Raise expectations for all students
- Wrap around services: mental health
- Education and training for educators to meet needs
- School choice at all levels, gives kids more opportunities
- Small schools, including:
 - Personal relationships with teachers/staff and students help move resources along (small schools)
 - Small schools create community
- Foundational education for teachers of learners (teacher preparation)
- Special education, including:
 - Student needs met in a timely manner (special education/IEP resources)
 - Readily available SPED support staff (budget and workforce access)

Budget

Breakout group participants discussed the impacts of declining enrollment, balancing small settings with the educational opportunities desired, and areas where there may be advantages to working together to improve educational opportunities at a cost that is sustainable. Comments included:

- AOE should provide AOE vetted curriculum options, will save district staff time and money
- Shared services and consolidation, including:
 - Multi-grade classes work well
 - School consolidation: when it happened here, it was hard on adults, okay on students, and students had more opportunities, socially and academically
 - BOCES provide efficiency and additional shaped opportunities
- Universal design and instruction - change everything to work for all kids
- Services to ensure all students receive adequate attention and education
- Impact of declining enrollment - combined grade levels, not replacing teachers, teachers changing grades every year
- Quality educators - salary
- "General" educator weaving in specials (small school solution)
- Reliable staffing throughout the year

Montpelier Public Engagement Session

October 28, 2024

Background

A Public Engagement Session was held on October 28, 2024, from 6:00-8:00pm at Montpelier High School. The session began with opening remarks about the Listen and Learn Tour and its contribution to the development of AOE's strategic plan. Next, a data presentation showcased statewide data trends, including trends in student enrollment, student performance, education spending, and an overview of Vermont's education funding system. Following the data presentation, public session attendees participated in a facilitated discussion to provide feedback to AOE on education in Vermont.

Public Session

The public session questions were designed around three broad topic areas: what educational success looks like, in schools, districts and statewide; the educational opportunities and experiences Vermont students should have access to; and discussion of education budgets.

The following summary provides session participant perceptions shared during the session. Comments are provided in relatively raw form, without validation, substantiation, interpretation, or comment from the AOE.

Student Success

Members of the public discussed what student success looks like to them, comments included:

- AOE should provide clear and consistent expectations across levels
- Universal school meals meet basic needs for participation
- Measure of success included:
 - Opportunities to explore special interests
 - All students successful, including low income and special education
 - Able to read at or above grade level
 - Able to write / complete math at or above grade level
 - Standardized test scores: consistency in tests conducted - trend data and measure same thing if changing tests
 - Reading and math at grade level
 - Students involved in extracurriculars/community participation

- Experience beyond community
- AP course, higher grad rates, college acceptance
- College completion
- Post graduation success measurement
- In college/career K-12 modeling CTE
- Students are confident, curious, and engaged:
 - Self-advocate
 - Mutual respect
 - Can positively integrate into community and/or workforce
 - Students are curious / ask questions
 - Curious
 - Making connections - enjoy school (attendance rates)
 - grad requirements to appropriately define success/ "grad ready"

Student Opportunities and Experiences

Members of the public shared how their schools support students to be successful, resources they would like to see but may not be available, and barriers to providing educational opportunities. Comments included:

- Difficulty hiring - exacerbated by limited housing
- Strong teacher prep programs
- Students need to be well fed
- Community involvement, including:
 - Community and parent involvement and supports, ex: Community member available to support special needs
 - Safety changes - a deterrent to community involvement with schools
- Smaller class ratios - more opportunities for individualized learning
- Diverse course offerings and programs, including:
 - P.E. enrichment, music, are academic
 - Home economics: basic living skills and financial literacy
 - Farm to school programming
 - Minimum need - PE, health, art, languages
 - Embed multi-disciplinary curriculum
- What we think we're meeting (VT min standards) may not be reality
- Strong foundational reading and math
- Multiple pathways for students, including:
 - Tech centers
 - Apprenticeship
 - CTE opportunities available sooner than 11th grade

LEADERSHIP • SUPPORT • OVERSIGHT

- Do projects about topics of interest K-12
- Professional Development, including:
 - Teachers have resources and knowledge to deliver high quality instructions (mentor and coaches)
 - MTSS teacher Training
 - Investment in evidence-based teacher training, should be a min requirement for all schools
 - School admins/leadership need to be trained on same initiatives - ex: Read VT and literacy
- Small schools, including:
 - Connection to a teacher/educator - small schools are more equipped to support this, esp. for elementary, HS-TAs can support
 - Micro schools can be a burden financially
- Special education should not be separate from standard education – it should be in addition to, not instead of
- Students are involved in the community, including:
 - Connection to community
 - Community engaged learning
 - Citizenship skills
- AOE supports and guidance, including:
 - Consider Minimum class sizes
 - Need consistency in State/AOE supports in multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), Read Vermont, special education, math and science Curriculum
 - MTSS field guide not practical, not research based
 - Need comprehensive agency supports
 - AOE needs to be creative, courageous and focus efforts -lead based on research

Budget

Breakout group participants discussed the impacts of declining enrollment, balancing small settings with the educational opportunities desired, and areas where there may be advantages to working together to improve educational opportunities at a cost that is sustainable. Comments included:

- More resources for school boards - guidelines from AOE or school board association, regulations and trainings
- Budget cuts and the budgeting process, including:
 - Outside agencies i.e. healthcare
 - Unfunded mandates

LEADERSHIP • SUPPORT • OVERSIGHT

- Economies of scale in PreK
- Communities want to be involved in budget cycle and are well informed on budget prep and presentation
- Need to be able to explain the whys- all the way back to Brigham decision
- Shared services and consolidation, including:
 - Declining enrollment closed small schools - Worcester and Calais
 - Larger schools with declining enrollment not closed - Middlesex
 - More shared administrative services among/across districts - ex: curriculum dir., sped ed director
 - To affect spending statewide, will need more merging at the local levels
- Increasing/decreasing enrollment, including:
 - As enrollment declines, the number of teachers and admins does not
 - Enrollment can fluctuate through time - should not lead to closing schools
 - Decrease enrollment - higher costs
- Teacher recruitment, including:
 - Pay teachers, reduce administration
 - Teachers are leaving (retirement), and remaining teachers are doing more

Stowe Public Engagement Session

October 23, 2024

Background

A Public Engagement Session was held on October 23, 2024, from 6:00-8:00pm at Stowe High School. The session began with opening remarks about the Listen and Learn Tour and its contribution to the development of AOE's strategic plan. Next, a data presentation showcased statewide data trends, including trends in student enrollment, student performance, education spending, and an overview of Vermont's education funding system. Following the data presentation, public session attendees participated in a facilitated discussion to provide feedback to AOE on education in Vermont.

Public Session

The public session questions were designed around three broad topic areas: what educational success looks like, in schools, districts and statewide; the educational opportunities and experiences Vermont students should have access to; and discussion of education budgets.

The following summary provides session participant perceptions shared during the session. Comments are provided in relatively raw form, without validation, substantiation, interpretation, or comment from the AOE.

Student Success

Members of the public discussed what student success looks like to them, comments included:

- Measure of success included:
 - Attendance
 - Discipline incidents
 - EOY assessments (different for each district vs. state assessment)
 - District reports on AP participation
 - Concerns w/ Proficiency Based Learning (PBL) - does not appear to be a reliable measure
 - High levels of proficiency in literacy
 - Absent consistent test administration, hard to see growth patterns
 - Conversations with teachers demonstrates students are good citizens
 - Parents observing student learning/SEL
 - Student evaluation of their education

- Developmental growth, personal growth, academic growth, engagement and resiliency
- Involvement w/ extracurriculars
- Ready to learn (fed, well-rested)
- Students are confident, engaged, and excited to learn:
 - Each student able to access and achieve their potential
 - Mental health and sense of belonging - identity as a learner
 - Comfortable in environment/safe and healthy schools
 - Excited to learn
- Use of data, including:
 - Large "n" size but small classes contribute to data suppression
 - Want better access to data to measure success
- AOE support and guidance, including:
 - Lack of confidence with State ability to set correct/appropriate standards
 - Need standard grad requirements to appropriately define success/ "grad ready"

Student Opportunities and Experiences

Members of the public shared how their schools support students to be successful, resources they would like to see but may not be available, and barriers to providing educational opportunities. Comments included:

- Positive community experiences for students/teachers
- Universal student meals
- Diverse course offerings and programs, including:
 - All secondary students have access to advances or honors courses
 - Consistent access to extracurriculars (small communities)
 - Need equitable access to AP classes/robust learning opportunities
- High quality Pre-K programs, including:
 - Access to PreK programs having positive impact on transition to K
 - Funding is a disincentive for PreK
- Mental health supports, including:
 - Psychological safety
 - Cost on mental health services shouldn't fall on schools
- Behavioral supports, including:
 - Educators supported to manage and address disruptive behaviors (admission support and policies)
 - Consistent systems for addressing behavior so that teachers can focus on teaching

- MTSS is working well
- Multiple pathways for students, including:
 - System seems to disincentivize CTE programming
 - CTE seems like an "OR" option - hard to do CTE and traditional high school
- Recruitment and retention, including:
 - Community prioritizes high-quality teachers
 - Institutional stability (maintain key staff, especially for special educators)
 - High-quality educators - well paid, prepared, and involved in the community
- Safety, including:
 - Safe and healthy schools - facilities, educational programming, security
 - Need more school resource officers
- Staff shortages, including:
 - Literacy and math interventionists making a positive impact - hard to find w/o COVID funds
 - Hard to find mental health clinicians, SPED professionals

Budget

Breakout group participants discussed the impacts of declining enrollment, balancing small settings with the educational opportunities desired, and areas where there may be advantages to working together to improve educational opportunities at a cost that is sustainable. Comments included:

- Budgeting process, including:
 - Need guidance on reserve funds - what is the right balance?
 - More transparency in how funds are spent (How are local decisions on budgets held accountable)
- Funding issues, including:
 - Compounding weights on some students
 - Foundation formula for budget transparency
 - ADM weights feel arbitrary
 - Vote on budgets before yield is set and before CLA is shared by state
 - Differentiated need should be addressed in a funding system
 - Foundation formula plus local control
- Additional space/capital needs, including:
 - Infrastructure needs can't be met
 - How are we going to address high costs of school facilities needs?
- Increasing/decreasing enrollment, including:

LEADERSHIP • SUPPORT • OVERSIGHT

- Enrollment - tied to housing shortages and affordability. Impacts ed workforce and young families.
- Invest in communities that are growing
- Local control, including:
 - "Local control" feels like a myth
 - Bond votes impact people differently
 - Tax incentive system creates varied impacts

West Rutland Public Engagement Session

October 28, 2024

Background

A Public Engagement Session was held on October 28, 2024, from 6:00-8:00pm at West Rutland School. The session began with opening remarks about the Listen and Learn Tour and its contribution to the development of AOE's strategic plan. Next, a data presentation showcased statewide data trends, including trends in student enrollment, student performance, education spending, and an overview of Vermont's education funding system. Following the data presentation, public session attendees participated in a facilitated discussion to provide feedback to AOE on education in Vermont.

Public Session

The public session questions were designed around three broad topic areas: what educational success looks like, in schools, districts and statewide; the educational opportunities and experiences Vermont students should have access to; and discussion of education budgets.

Student Success

Members of the public discussed what student success looks like to them, comments included:

- Meeting students' basic needs, including:
 - Showing up to school requires transportation and food
 - Ready to learn
- Differentiated Learning, including:
 - Tapping into how individual students learn best
 - Individual strengths
 - Equitable access & opportunity (individualized access)
 - Timeline varies by student (moving target)
- Measure of success, including:
 - Skill development & growth in reading and math
 - Performance metrics
 - Students can access the next stage of life (prepared to) the next grade-level/school
 - Social emotional skills - conflict resolution, complex decision making, relationships, emotional management

LEADERSHIP • SUPPORT • OVERSIGHT

- Examples for measuring - climate/SEL surveys, student reflection, student led resolution
- Multiple measures of success (beyond ELA/Math) i.e. wellness, empathy, communication
- All students have attained skills to be successful in whatever path to contribute to community
- Choice of learning path (CTE, hands-on, etc.)
- Students prepared to own their learning
- Teachers can be a lever for student success and positive life outcomes
- Students are confident, curious, and engaged:
 - Encouraging risk
 - Curiosity in learning
 - Love of learning, curiosity
 - Active and engaged learner
- Academics, social emotional, relationships (varies - elementary, secondary)
- AOE can help with consistent curriculum methods i.e. math changes

Student Opportunities and Experiences

Members of the public shared how their schools support students to be successful, resources they would like to see but may not be available, and barriers to providing educational opportunities. Comments included:

- Buildings need repair, facilities need upgrades
- AOE can provide support, including:
 - Modeling implementation expectations & accountability statewide
 - Expressed that there is not statewide enforcement related to the expectations
- School meet student basic needs, including:
 - Every student should be safe, fed, loved (in 6 hours/day)
 - Staff provide care, nurturing, parenting sometimes
- Behavioral support: restorative justice practices and conflict resolution
- Community services, including:
 - Community partnerships and relationships w/ school
 - Schools are providing sleep, shelter, mental health, medical/dental care, education and family support
 - Non-school supports
- Our systems need to meet the needs of all students with diverse needs
- Diverse course offerings and programs, including:
 - Civics education varies by SU/SD and school

LEADERSHIP • SUPPORT • OVERSIGHT

- Need enrichment opportunities - academic challenge, life skills, home financials
- Arts and theater education is critical to student confidence and success
- How many potential offerings do students have?
- Art, music, theater - diverse opportunities for students
- Funding concerns, including:
 - Unfunded mandates" must be implemented, many unfunded mandates
 - Disconnect in understanding of how Ed. Finance operates
- Interventions, including:
 - Reading/math intervention (targeted) - not just special education
 - Need block intervention & enrichment
- State support for teachers, including:
 - Balance between state guidance and teacher autonomy
 - State led professional development
- Measure of proficiency, including:
 - All students must learn to Read, need access to science of reading resources
 - Performance Based Learning (authentic opportunities)
- Student mental health supports, including:
 - Social-emotional learning (SEL) instruction & mental health services at school
 - Online learning impacted student resiliency and SEL
- Multiple pathways for students, including:
 - Internships, work-based learning - program openings ebb and flow
 - How are we communicating about personalized pathways? (visit middle schools)
 - Explore pre-tech program (pilot planned for next school year)
 - Complexities related to flexible pathways and state alignment

Budget

Breakout group participants discussed the impacts of declining enrollment, balancing small settings with the educational opportunities desired, and areas where there may be advantages to working together to improve educational opportunities at a cost that is sustainable. Comments included:

- Budget cuts and the budgeting process, including:
 - Unfunded mandates
 - Need reliable information to inform budgeting
 - Engage local districts in the budgeting cycle
 - Very difficult for school boards/neighbors to close community schools

LEADERSHIP • SUPPORT • OVERSIGHT

- Overall assessment of funding systems
- Ed Fund - public money to out of state schools (some services should not be in the Ed Fund)
- What's best for kids vs. what's best for taxpayers
- Financial experts - disentangle school funds from taxes?
- Teacher quality and impacts on student outcomes
- Student population and impacts on offerings
- Survey graduates to see what was helpful for them
- Attracting newcomers to our state
- Expressed concern about salary, job responsibilities, and overall misunderstanding about the competition in the field
- Is "school choice" an option?
- Small schools, including:
 - Having very small schools limits access to grade-level peers - lose economies of scale, access to services, extracurriculars etc.
 - Recent Picus report shows students in larger schools have greater access to resources - difficult when thinking about VT schools
 - Vermont will always have smaller than average schools. Compared to ND, MT, ME (other small school settings)
 - Small, accessible schools attract families (we need residents)
 - What is a reasonable transportation time for kids?
- AOE supports and guidance, including:
 - Expressed a need for more support from the AOE
 - Transparency during a time of uncertainty - Leads to distrust

Woodstock Public Engagement Session

October 22, 2024

Background

A Public Engagement Session was held on October 22, 2024, from 6:00-8:00pm at Woodstock Union High/Middle School. The session began with opening remarks about the Listen and Learn Tour and its contribution to the development of AOE's strategic plan. Next, a data presentation showcased statewide data trends, including trends in student enrollment, student performance, education spending, and an overview of Vermont's education funding system. Following the data presentation, public session attendees participated in a facilitated discussion to provide feedback to AOE on education in Vermont.

Public Session

The public session questions were designed around three broad topic areas: what educational success looks like, in schools, districts and statewide; the educational opportunities and experiences Vermont students should have access to; and discussion of education budgets.

The following summary provides session participant perceptions shared during the session. Comments are provided in relatively raw form, without validation, substantiation, interpretation, or comment from the AOE.

Student Success

Members of the public discussed what student success looks like to them, comments included:

- Engaging students in cross-curricula learning
- Parent participation is more prevalent in elementary
- Measure of success included:
 - Reduce dropout rates
 - Students can read
 - Progression measured through standardized test - Don't have to be smart in school to do well in life
 - Education quality standards measured and standardized
 - Coordination and integration between employers, schools, students, and parents

LEADERSHIP • SUPPORT • OVERSIGHT

- Students connecting with community outside school
- Graduation rates
- Post-graduation preparedness (college attrition or workforce preparedness and life skills)
- Students are able to access the future they see for themselves
- Define - post-secondary: finding a passion with success
- Playing
- Multiple pathways for students, including:
 - Secondary: Learning what is out there, options, feel that school is for them, place to go after school
 - CTE prepare for trades/workforce opportunities
 - Pathways to engage students starting in middle school (ex: CTE and other paths)
- Students are confident, engaged, and excited to learn:
 - Confidence leaving each grade
 - Self-expression - student who found their voice
 - Engagement and participation
 - Positive relationships with learning and opportunity
 - Excited to be there
 - Elem: fun, exploratory, safe, joy, learning routine
 - Different at different levels
 - Students drawing connections with peers and families from school learning

Student Opportunities and Experiences

Members of the public shared how their schools support students to be successful, resources they would like to see but may not be available, and barriers to providing educational opportunities. Comments included:

- Schools are a respectful environment, and students have clear rules and boundaries, prepared to learn
- Equitable access to community engagement
- High standards for all students to improve achievement
- Remove the culture of bringing work home (homework)
- Community programs tied to school
- Students have more say in their schedule and what they want to learn
- Consistent direction to teachers on quality instruction
- Shared goals/vision of success across all schools
- Community buy-in and support

LEADERSHIP • SUPPORT • OVERSIGHT

- AOE support and guidance, including:
 - Trained, high quality teachers that we keep in the profession (AOE can provide more support)
 - Consistency on Proficiency Based Learning scores for students, families, and teachers
 - Support a strong professional pipeline
- Differentiated learning, including:
 - Staff that can engage and challenge students
 - More individualized learning opportunities and internships
 - Personalized learning plans for every student (7th grade)
- Diverse course offerings and programs:
 - Access to a lot of opportunities - choice of course offering
 - Access to AP classes - Parents are less likely to fill out a form for free access
 - Mandatory minimum for Art, STEM, music, and PE
 - CTE offered in earlier grades - more real world experiences
 - Provide more access points to parents
- Multiple pathways for students, including:
 - More coaching around Career Pathways - staff doesn't have the support or time
 - Every high school has career and academic guidance
 - Flexible pathways implemented consistently
 - Additional access to Tech schools - distance and scheduling are barriers

Budget

Breakout group participants discussed the impacts of declining enrollment, balancing small settings with the educational opportunities desired, and areas where there may be advantages to working together to improve educational opportunities at a cost that is SU/sustainable. Comments included:

- Budget cuts and the budgeting process, including:
 - No one wants to make the hard call of cutting
 - SU/SDs are overloaded on management
 - Focus budget priorities on teacher/student supports
 - Only look at budget for one year at a time
- Funding issues, including:
 - Use other revenue sources to support education as a priority for investment
 - Foundation formula that allows for local property tax to support small schools

LEADERSHIP • SUPPORT • OVERSIGHT

- Second homes pay lower rate and take houses for younger families
- Tax on income vs. property - readdress property cap.
- Shared services and consolidation, including:
 - Consolidation to ensure access to opportunities (focus on high schools - regional comprehensive, address elementaries in a very close proximity)
 - May need to consolidate and cut schools and SU/SDs - not always cost effective at school level
 - Commission looking at restructuring
 - Areas are asking to close their schools - are they better off?
 - Consolidation of purchasing accounting/HR
- Increasing/decreasing enrollment, including:
 - School/education connected to other affordability challenges (housing, workforce, etc.)
 - Declining enrollment
 - Area is unaffordable for a lot of residents
 - AOE including Pre-K in total enrollment doesn't show true enrollment loss
- Local control and small schools, including:
 - Think about your neighbor's kids (we have a state system)
 - Local control makes people pay attention to schools
 - Small schools
 - Small school lead to less social interaction
 - A lot of small schools are cost effective

Virtual (November) Public Engagement Session

November 6, 2024

Background

A Public Engagement Session was held virtually on November 6, 2024, from 6:00-8:00pm via the Zoom online platform. The session began with opening remarks about the Listen and Learn Tour and its contribution to the development of AOE's strategic plan. Next, a data presentation showcased statewide data trends, including trends in student enrollment, student performance, education spending, and an overview of Vermont's education funding system. Following the data presentation, public session attendees participated in a facilitated discussion to provide feedback to AOE on education in Vermont.

Public Session

The public session questions were designed around three broad topic areas: what educational success looks like, in schools, districts and statewide; the educational opportunities and experiences Vermont students should have access to; and discussion of education budgets.

The following summary provides session participant perceptions shared during the session. Comments are provided in relatively raw form, without validation, substantiation, interpretation, or comment from the AOE.

Student Success

Members of the public discussed what student success looks like to them, comments included:

- Measure of success included:
 - Are students showing up to school, all student groups?
 - Reports of bullying have gone down
 - How well a student can work independently and communicate
 - Inequitable testing often reflects bias towards certain populations, not measuring achievement
 - Give educators authority to gauge student success outside of testing
 - Meet students where they are, address needs of the whole child
 - Need radical transparency, have parents, state ed officials, and school staff come together to discuss data and solutions

LEADERSHIP • SUPPORT • OVERSIGHT

- Stakeholders, including students, should be included in creating measures of success
- Lack of open communication between board, schools, parents, public
- College acceptance as an indicator of success
- Is there trust between students and staff
- Sense of community and safety in school
- School safety, including:
 - SU is only looking at students in own schools instead of all students, making it difficult to provide a safe education
 - Many students are in unsafe situations
- Use of data, including:
 - Concerns about data drive "corporatization" of education
 - Infinitely long check list of data that teachers must collect, do nothing with it
- Students are confident, engaged, and excited to learn:
 - Kids need a sense of belonging and confidence
 - Student aspirations beyond education
 - student success: fulfillment, interest, pride, find something about school rewarding
 - Teachers are able to get immediate response/feedback from students
 - Student engagement in resources
 - Meaningful engagement
 - Love of learning
 - Sustained love of learning
 - Need to be flexible learners, have applicable skills, and able to adapt
- Other comments included:
 - Want to see achievement gaps close (test scores), particularly between advantage/disadvantaged students
 - Simplify language and make resources more understandable
 - Schools need to address spectrum of needs, such as a student with autism learning to brush teeth and a student applying to college
 - Difficult to raise test scores and academics when students are struggling with basic needs
 - Lack of parental understanding/involvement in curriculum and school opportunities
 - Parents feeling unheard by the schools and the impact on student performance

Student Opportunities and Experiences

Members of the public shared how their schools support students to be successful, resources they would like to see but may not be available, and barriers to providing educational opportunities. Comments included:

- Complaint process to AOE is not accessible to parents
- Meeting basic needs of students; drug use, homelessness, poverty, all real issues affecting students
- Concern over oversight and staff training at alternative and therapeutic schools
- Behavioral supports for students, including:
 - Behavioral issues leading to chaotic environments inhibiting learning
 - Use of calm down rooms - supportive approach
 - Need wraparound services to support students in a loving and kind way
 - A lot of cases tie into mental health needs, placement changes can lead to anxiety, isolation
 - Wraparound services - trained staff ins schools to remove burden from teachers
 - Need to look at the outcome of budget cuts on the increase in behavioral issues in schools
- Educational equity, including:
 - Uneven educational experiences across districts/schools
 - Science of Reading - learning to read in a more accessible way that doesn't divert students to needing special services
 - Equity- multiage classrooms - parent participant likes them and finds it helpful
 - Equity of access to internet
 - Current Vermont approach appears to overlook students who are on the gifted/talented track - no supports or awareness
 - Rural schools need more support
- Family engagement, including:
 - Awareness (parents., community members) of calm down rooms in schools
 - Parent involvement and communication is critical
 - Changes in funding have created uncertainty
- Multiple pathways for students, including:
 - need to provide students with opportunities inside and outside the classroom
 - Provide vocational schools
 - Flexible pathways - AOE wants to continue it, funding has dropped

- Special Education, including:
 - Lack of availability and support for families of students with disabilities
 - State needs to develop regional or local solutions for students with disabilities
 - Too much focus on closing equity gap and not enough on quality of education
 - Opportunities for students with disabilities
 - When schools don't identify a disability, parents have to pursue their own evaluation and push for support
 - Special education support staff - families leaving schools because their student's needs are not being met
 - Schools need the resources to meet every Individualized Education Plan (IEP)
- Technology, including:
 - Possible correlation between the increase in behavioral issues and use of technology
 - Students exhibit constant need for attention
 - Need to accept and acknowledge and start to work on the impact of tech on kids

Budget

Breakout group participants discussed the impacts of declining enrollment, balancing small settings with the educational opportunities desired, and areas where there may be advantages to working together to improve educational opportunities at a cost that is sustainable. Comments included:

- The budgeting process, including:
 - Concern about the per student costs increasing
 - It's expensive to upgrade small schools – focus budget priorities on teacher/student supports
- Funding issues, including:
 - Larger schools have their needs better met than smaller schools
 - Need to look across the state to make funding truly equitable
 - Small remote/rural schools have high needs, how to prioritize resources
 - High property taxes are a deterrent to appropriately funding major infrastructure needs, can be misleading about wealth of a community
 - Taxpayers are not willing to learn the "boring" aspects of funding formula
 - Simplify the finding formula. Nobody understands it, allow taxpayers better understanding on how funding education is an investment
 - Have to encourage parents to be good citizens and vote

LEADERSHIP • SUPPORT • OVERSIGHT

- Public misconception of local control and connection to property taxes
- Shared services and consolidation, including:
 - School settings are important for communities, what happens if they close?
 - Closing a school does not necessarily save money, stability is more important
- Other comments, including:
 - More preschool needs in the state
 - Virtual PreK programs to provide kindergarten readiness
 - Declining enrollment over time

Virtual (December) Public Engagement Session

December 10, 2024

Background

A virtual Public Engagement Session was held on December 10, 2024, from 6:00-8:00pm via the Zoom online platform. The session began with opening remarks about the Listen and Learn Tour and its contribution to the development of AOE's strategic plan. Next, a data presentation showcased statewide data trends, including trends in student enrollment, student performance, education spending, and an overview of Vermont's education funding system. Following the data presentation, public session attendees participated in a facilitated discussion to provide feedback to AOE on education in Vermont.

Public Session

The public session questions were designed around three broad topic areas: what educational success looks like, in schools, districts and statewide; the educational opportunities and experiences Vermont students should have access to; and discussion of education budgets.

Student Success

Members of the public discussed what student success looks like to them, comments included:

- Measure of success included:
 - Strong knowledge of phonics and being able to read. Without it, it is harder to learn in later years
 - A diversity of course offerings: math and reading are important but there are also a variety of class needs
 - Kids come home excited about school
 - Students understand the point of school and learning – that is not always true today
 - There are mental health supports for students
- Other comments included:
 - In Europe the flexible pathways start early and are individualized - student was dedicated to being a ski instructor and he received geometry credit by showing the math and angles in skiing
 - Students are experiencing too much screen time

- Younger learners need smaller classes and more support staff

Student Opportunities and Experiences

Members of the public shared how their schools support students to be successful, resources they would like to see but may not be available, and barriers to providing educational opportunities. Comments included:

- Students waiting for access to alternative schools with a three-year waitlist
- Let our children learn in safe and supported schools
- Behavioral supports for students, including:
 - Concerned and disappointed by the highest need students who bolt or are aggressive and how they can be supported well
 - Concerned that peers who are traumatized by behaviors may not get the support they need to succeed
 - The impact of budget cuts on the increase in behavioral issues in schools
- Differentiated learning and diverse course offerings, including:
 - Student engagement and working with each student to help them get a spark. We do project-based learning and that helps student find a spark
 - Drawn to students' social and emotional well-being – Teacher has nine students with a lot of different needs, and it is very challenging to keep them all engaged
 - We took our Kindergartens and split our kids up and let them spend half of the day outside learning
- Family engagement, including:
 - Family involvement is key- if they only see the school as a babysitter
 - Parents who struggle to help their child learn at home such as the new math where they struggle to help their child
 - Parents face consequences for their child's behavior
 - English Language Learner families struggle to read all information sent home let alone tackle homework
 - Surprised by the disengagement of some families
 - Parent night with my families and I feel like there is liability, but it has led to connection with and between families
 - Need to meet families where they are - variety of different backgrounds and needs families are facing. Do they have the language skills, housing, transportation?
- Mental health supports, including:
 - Thinking about the whole child and that we are meeting all of their needs: Mental health needs

LEADERSHIP • SUPPORT • OVERSIGHT

- Most support goes to the students with highest need and even then, sometimes they are not enough.

Budget

Breakout group participants discussed the impacts of declining enrollment, balancing small settings with the educational opportunities desired, and areas where there may be advantages to working together to improve educational opportunities at a cost that is SU/sustainable. Comments included:

- Budget concerns, including:
 - Vermont has a lot of small schools and that impacts our high expenditures
- Staff shortages, including:
 - Support staff and the livable wage - there is a high need for sub teachers.
 - All the interventionists get pulled to be subs
- Teacher recruitment and retention, including:
 - Make it easier for people to come out of retirement and work in schools would be helpful
 - There are a lot of hurdles to prove yourself for a job in the schools
 - Paraprofessionals should be paid more and allowed to help as bus assistants or after school staff
 - There are drastic differences in school districts as far as training for paraprofessionals
 - Stop pulling interventionists to be substitutes; need more substitutes

Appendix D: Summaries of Youth Engagement Sessions

What do students identify as the strengths of their schools?

Based on the responses to the questions “What do you value about your school right now?” and “What is one of your school’s greatest strengths (something you are proud of)?”

- Teachers and other adults:
 - Especially those who are welcoming and create a positive school culture
 - Those who are passionate and knowledgeable about their content area
 - Those who create strong relationships with students
- Access to learning opportunities:
 - School programs like music, art, and theater were highly valued
 - Advanced classes, like AP and Honors classes were noted as a source of pride for many students
 - The variety of courses and having lots of electives was valued
 - Students mentioned personalized learning and flexible pathways programs as a strong point of their schools
 - There is a strong sense of pride in school athletics
 - Students value having many diverse opportunities for extracurriculars beyond athletics as well
 - Access to college and career prep opportunities, like internships, early college, tech centers, etc.
- Sense of community and inclusivity:
 - Students highlight the inclusive culture in their schools
 - Staff and peers who worked to make everyone feel welcome
 - Connection and relationships between peers, between students and adults

What do students identify as challenges for their school?

Based on the responses to the questions “What specific thing would make your school better?” and “What is the greatest challenge for your school that provides an opportunity for change?”

- Clarity and consistency around school rules and discipline:
 - In particular, students across schools mentioned continuing challenges with behavior like vaping in bathrooms and skipping classes

- Students felt that the response to those issues was often inconsistent or unclear, and that it did not result in a change in behavior
- Effective restorative responses to harm and conflict:
 - Students expressed the need for appropriate and timely responses to harm, particularly focused on aspects of students' identities (e.g. harassment, use of slurs, hate speech, etc.)
- Clarity and refinement of grading systems:
 - Students critiqued schools' approaches to proficiency-based grading practices, in particular noting the lack of consistency between different teachers in their school
- Expanded learning opportunities:
 - Opportunities for internships and real-world experiences beyond the classroom.
 - Exposure to career possibilities
 - More emphasis on project-based and personalized learning that gives students the opportunity to learn about topics of interest to them
 - Students across schools noted a desire for more opportunities for higher-level coursework (like honors or AP classes)
- More student voice and leadership:
 - Students noted that more opportunities like the Listen and Learn session itself would be valuable
- Increased mental health supports and resources:
 - Counselors
 - Mental health professionals
 - Spaces for students to regulate
- Improved physical spaces:
 - Students noted concerns about school infrastructure such as mold, lack of ventilation, lack of windows in rooms, leaking ceilings, general disrepair
 - Students expressed concerns related to the accessibility of different spaces in their schools (e.g., flexible seating for different body types and learning styles)
 - Improved lunch quality was brought up across schools
- Increased school spirit:

- Noted lack of school spirit and community, especially with divisions between grades or other structures within schools (teams, houses, etc.)
- Students noted a desire for more opportunities to meet new peers and build relationships as a school

What did students value about the elementary school experiences?

Based on the responses to the question “Think back to when you were in elementary school – what experiences did you have then that you would want to make sure all students have?”

- Building strong connections and community:
 - the importance of socializing and building relationships
 - feeling a sense of community through shared activities, small schools where everyone knew each other, and opportunities to connect with peers and teachers
 - activities like field days, bonding events, buddy systems, and school gatherings all contributed to a supportive and inclusive environment
- Supportive and caring teachers:
 - The importance of having teachers who know students personally, are supportive, and provide individualized help, who care about students' emotional and academic well-being
- Experiential, project-based and hands-on learning:
 - Field trips, outdoor activities, and hands-on learning experiences were frequently mentioned as memorable and impactful parts of elementary school (helped make learning more engaging and real for students, allowing them to connect classroom lessons with the world outside)
- Time for play, creativity, and relaxation:
 - Responses highlighted the need for breaks, recess, and time for creative expression in school
 - Students appreciated the flexibility to play, relax, and be creative as a way to balance the academic pressure, which helped with overall well-being and learning

What do students aspire for after graduation, and how can school help them get there?

Based on the responses to the questions “What does success mean to you after high school? What types of supports, experiences and opportunities do you want to have in school to make sure you’re prepared for that?”

- Students’ aspirations center on college and careers, with the goal of making a decent living while pursuing their interests, being independent and self-sufficient, and being happy.
- Opportunities to explore career options and personal interests:
 - Ensuring equitable access to the pathways that exist
 - Clarity and information around what options exist (e.g., internships, early college, college and career prep opportunities)
 - Having experiential opportunities to explore options (job shadowing, college visits, etc.)
 - Increased emphasis on paths other than college
- Support and development of practical life skills in high school curriculum:
 - Many students want school to provide more practical and real-world education in areas like personal finance, budgeting, and understanding taxes and retirement to prepare them for adult life
- Openness to experimentation and emphasis on students’ emotional well-being:
 - Students expressed acutely feeling the pressure of the college and career preparation process and wanting to find balance between that pressure and their own well-being

What are the most important resources for schools to have? What do they need?

Based on the responses to the questions “What are the most important resources for you to have (staffing, materials, physical space, classes, experiences) at your school?” and “Are there other resources (staffing, materials, classes, physical space, experiences) you would like to see for students that aren’t currently available?”

- High-quality, skilled teachers who build strong relationships with students
- Wide variety of learning opportunities:
 - Challenging curriculum that supports students’ interests
 - More voice and choice in curriculum
 - Including extracurriculars and sports
- Mental health supports:
 - Access to trained staff who can support student mental health needs

- Dedicated space for students to regulate and decompress
- A school that is welcoming and accessible to all students:
 - Special education supports and services
 - Physical spaces that are accessible to all
 - Transportation available to students
 - Well-maintained and beautiful facilities that reflect the community
 - Safe spaces for students in marginalized communities (LGBTQ+, BIPOC)
 - Staff who are dedicated to supporting diversity, equity and inclusion work

Dot-mocracy Overview

Based on the responses to the question “What is most important for all Vermont students to experience in school?”

Groups came together following the small circle conversations to “vote” on their responses to this final question. Each participant wrote their response on a separate piece of paper, which were then placed around the room. Each participant got 3 dots to put on their top three priorities.

Top voted items included:

- Opportunities and choices for learning
- Access to emotional and academic resources/supports
- A strong community
- Real-world lessons that we can use later/Education being connected to the world around you
- Ethnic Studies/Global Studies
- Mental health resources and education
- Breaks in learning and chances to be a kid, have fun
- Education about relationships
- Feeling heard, like you’ll be listened to
- Strong bonds between staff and students
- Options for peoples’ specific, individual learning needs
- “Travel experiences so we can see what it’s like in other states and other countries”. Get to know places outside of Vermont – for college, career, skill-building or just for fun