

MEMORANDUM

TO: The General Assembly
FROM: State Board of Education
SUBJECT: State Board of Education Statement on Reform of the Special Education System
DATE: February 21, 2018

The Vermont State Board of Education notes and welcomes the General Assembly's needed attention on special education. We face two primary and urgent problems: children's needs are growing faster than our capabilities and the high costs of the programs are unsustainable.

We are pleased that two external evaluations have been conducted and that the House Education Committee has drafted a committee bill with strong bipartisan support. The move to a census-based system for students with mild and moderate needs, with or without an IEP, should make the system more efficient and economical while reducing bureaucratic loads at the state and local levels. Likewise, the threshold for extraordinary costs needs to be updated but the actual threshold should cover most out of district placements without burdening the districts. Incentives should be provided for servicing children in their home district.

Both issues are interwoven. We must better serve needy children in a more economical fashion. Each child in special education draws down almost \$22,000 above the average cost per pupil. This cannot be sustained.

We are pleased that the proposed bill includes training. For the program to succeed, teachers need sustained professional development in teaching children with special needs. This commitment must be sustained over the years or else, we regress. We also want to make sure there is money dedicated for staff at the Agency of Education to make sure there is support for systematic change at a centralized level.