

Testimony on Desired Qualities and Attributes of Vermont's Next Secretary of Education

Submitted by Jay Nichols, Executive Director for the Vermont Principals Association
Monday, October 2, 2023

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the State Board's Secretary Search Committee. I am authorized to speak for the Vermont Principals Association, as well as my colleagues Sue Ceglowski, Executive Director for the Vermont School Boards Association and Jeff Francis, Executive Director for the Vermont Superintendents Association.

The impending appointment of Vermont's preeminent educational leader is of great importance and we were reluctant to speak as one voice for our members. Instead, we sent out the following questions to our members - all of whom are active participants in Vermont's education delivery system:

- 1) What attributes does Vermont need in its next Secretary of Education?
- 2) Under the next Secretary, how would the Agency of Education best support your work?

We kept the survey open for two days and received nearly 100 responses. Following my testimony, I will submit a document that includes those responses. The responses to Question 1 directly answer the subject of tonight's hearing. The responses to Question 2 inform the context for Question 1 because so much of the work in local schools and school systems depends on the effective leadership of the Agency of Education. We urge you to read the responses we gathered in their entirety and believe that you will be impressed both by the thoughtfulness and the thoroughness expressed.

Speaking on behalf of the Executive Directors of our respective organizations, we believe:

- That the Secretary of Education must have the expertise and experience to hold the field accountable for delivering high-quality and equitable education to all Vermont students **and** the disposition and intentionality necessary to do so in a collaborative way.
- The most pressing priority for the new Secretary should be to improve the overall performance of the Agency of Education so that its personnel across the organization play an effective role in supporting school districts. We routinely hear from our members that the Agency performance needs to be stronger.

- The Secretary should have the leadership ability to craft and execute a vision for relevant, equitable and excellent education for all Vermont students.
- The Secretary must be a bold leader that ensures:
 - No entity delivering education at public expense receives special treatment or exemption from Vermont laws and regulations.
 - The General Assembly is fully informed on the impact and effect of all education-related legislation, including the necessary resources to implement statewide policies with fidelity.
 - The greatest needs of the public education delivery system are heard and prioritized by statewide leaders.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my perspective and that of the executive directors for VSA and VSBA this evening. I also want to reiterate our encouragement for reviewing the comments from our members in their entirety. It is those members and the children they serve who will be directly impacted by this important decision.

Respectfully,
Jay Nichols, Jeff Francis, Sue Ceglowski



October 2, 2023

Dear Members of the Vermont State Board of Education,

We write to share the perspectives of our members on what qualities and attributes they hope to see in the next Secretary of Education. As you know, our associations are made up of school building leaders, superintendents and school board members, all of whom will be affected by this appointment. The next Secretary of Education will have a profound effect on the future of Vermont's public education delivery system and the children, families and communities that it serves. For these reasons, we feel it is important for you to hear what our members value in a leader.

After careful consideration, we decided that a simple survey was the best way to quickly gather input from our members. We included the following two questions in the survey and provided an additional comment section:

- 1) What attributes does Vermont need in its next Secretary of Education?
- 2) Under the next Secretary, how would the Agency of Education best support your work?

We had nearly 100 people respond in just 48 hours. It is clear that our members care passionately about the system in which they serve and are looking for a Secretary of Education who is a strong leader and champion of public education, has a clear vision for education in the State of Vermont, and is an equity-driven systems-thinker. Improving the performance of the Agency of Education is also critically important to the field. The attached document is a collection of the responses we received.

Thank you for considering their valuable input.

Sue Ceglowski, Executive Director, Vermont School Boards Association
Jeffrey Francis, Executive Director, Vermont Superintendents Association
Jay Nichols, Executive Director, Vermont Principals, Association

Qualitative Survey Results Regarding the Appointment of the Next Secretary of Education

What attributes does Vermont need in its next Secretary of Education?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Genuine * Proud supporter of public education * Visionary - progressive thinker
<p>Someone who:</p> <p>possesses a clear vision or can work to develop a clear vision for K-12 public education in Vermont. Can work with stakeholders to implement a vision for public education in VT. Has been a practitioner in the K-12 public education system. Has a strong commitment to public education. Can create systems and structures within the AOE that can support the field. Works to remove inequities throughout the system.</p>
<p>We need someone who can set a clear direction for the State and lay out a road map for how we will get there.</p> <p>We need someone who is willing to engage diverse stakeholders in this work - while at the same time proceeding with a sense of urgency.</p> <p>We absolutely need someone with expertise (policy, teaching and learning) and REAL experience in K-12 Education</p>
<p>Flexibility, accountability</p>
<p>The ability to collaborate with those in the field who are working to carry out educational mandates. A willingness to problem solve concerns and to support good ideas. The ability to treat those in the field with courtesy and respect.</p>
<p>Big-picture understanding of the education system and all of its interrelated and often conflicting constituencies. Appreciation for the practical implications of legislation and ability to advocate for the field in Montpelier. Strong background as an educator.</p>
<p>Background in education, preferably some classroom teaching experience; ability to compromise and work with groups</p>
<p>A more visible presence and visiting various school districts with a possibility of holding a town hall forum for districts.</p>
<p>The Secretary must be a systems leader who understands all the major aspects of running public schools in Vermont's context. They must be able to advocate for decisions that will strengthen our schools. The successful candidate should also have the skills to reorganize and develop the Agency staff to better support the work of improving and strengthening the public school system. I would hope Vermont could find a Secretary who can hold the leaders within the agency accountable for quality performance. We need strong and competent leadership at the AOE in order to lead our districts with confidence. It would also be important that the Secretary can collaborate effectively with other Secretaries in the Governor's cabinet.</p>
<p>Great communication & teamwork</p>
<p>It'd be great if our Secretary of Education could be a person who has recently worked in a school, actually knows what the day to day life is like and has been on the front lines in the past 5 years.</p>

<p>*In touch with what happens in schools on a daily basis - an understanding of what education is currently contending with</p> <p>*A priority of how to address mental health issues in schools</p> <p>*An understanding of what is reasonable for schools/SUs to be able to implement</p> <p>*A good listener</p>
<p>A deep awareness of and belief in public education; a strong operational skillset to manage a diverse group of educational professionals in the Agency; an awareness of the role of the Agency as supporter of the schools</p>
<p>Organized, ability to connect with educators and the public, transparency</p>
<p>Good listener, Focus on equity, improving systems and services for low-income students, families, communities, understanding and commitment to addressing mental health, social-emotional learning (students and staff)</p>
<p>Someone knowledgeable about the realities of rural education and the need for support in schools to combat systems of oppression (poverty, racism, sexism). Someone who is supportive of small schools while supporting educators that can feel isolated.</p>
<p>Someone who is realistic about the current state of education in Vermont, someone with out of the box ideas, someone supportive of teachers and all staff within a school system, and someone who understands what being an educator is like. Many times it feels like they have no idea what it is like to be working in school and if initiatives can really work.</p>
<p>A willingness to allow flexibility and innovation in Vermont's schools. Understanding that all communities are different and that there should be individuality within the system. However, we need to recognize equity and diversity in all of our schools and their libraries.</p>
<p>Experience with Public Education, whether in Vermont or elsewhere</p> <p>Knowledge and support of CTE</p> <p>Credible</p> <p>Organized</p> <p>Strong leader who can build relationships</p>
<p>Systems thinker</p> <p>Communicator</p> <p>Strategic team builder</p> <p>Visionary</p> <p>Ability to unite stakeholders for a common purpose</p> <p>Ability to restructure agency of education and improve the competence of agency staff</p> <p>Unwavering commitment to public education</p> <p>Commitment to creating a more equitable educational system that focuses on improved opportunities and outcomes for all Vermont students</p>
<p>Someone who has the leadership abilities to help guide Vermont forward and address issues facing our education system in our state. Is visionary and can think outside the box to address the needs of our education system. Be an advocate and clear communicator for the students and staff of Vermont schools.</p>
<p>The capacity to engage meaningfully with the field; leadership and clear messaging about high priority areas (literacy, math); a focus on equity in public education (values all students); a strong advocate within the legislature and in DC for the aspirational principles of public education; someone who will restore trust in the AOE and its mission.</p>
<p>Education background in VT, listener, collaborator,</p>
<p>Connected with schools</p>
<p>Extensive background in Education, having worked as a teacher and then as an administrator in Vermont</p>

Awareness of systems, experience in public schools, ability and desire to collaborate and accept human frailty, social skills, an ability to anticipate unintended consequences, strong and balanced network with parents, school staff (all types) and AOE systems, an ability to lead (rather than follow) dynamically and nimbly.

We need a Secretary who understands our educational system in Vermont and understands the demographics of our communities. We need someone who is responsive to the needs of our schools, students and staff. We need a Secretary who understands the importance of looking at multiple data point to assess the effectiveness of our schools. We need someone who will be accessible, listen, collaborate and problem-solve together.

It will be important for the next Secretary to understand and communicate the challenges in even our best led schools to those who fund education. While effective systems with high quality staff will always be a more effective way to support all learners than just "more staff," the need for additional staff in different roles, especially in mental health, is necessary.

We need someone who is able to take a holistic look at education in Vermont. Right now there are too many siloed initiatives and needs without a clear path for how schools can weave them all together to innovate teaching and learning.

Strong public K12 experience; sufficient experience with special education and the purpose of title dollars to effectively support school systems; a willingness and ability to be the face of giving every kid a fair chance; an ability to oversee operations to be sure agency work is done well and in a timely way, so that school districts in turn can do their work well and in a timely way; an understanding of the differences between public and private institutions and the management of risk in each context; an understanding of the different policy impacts of focusing on individual interests as opposed to focusing on building strong community institutions that life up all children in all communities; a willingness to lead on improving public education as opposed to just protecting private schools, religious schools and vouchers to other countries and states; a fundamental understanding of economics in order to understand how unaffordable and inequitable the track we are on really is; an ability to operate in an evidence-based way; an ability to anticipate and proactively plan for future problems (e.g. PCBs and school construction, the impact on the DAs of schools bringing mental health in-house); an ability to evaluate the impact of the predilection for privatization on cost, data quality and incoherence of systems. All of this is kind of irrelevant, because policy decisions appear to be made by the administration - not the secretary. Unfortunately, when you don't believe in government or public institutions, you don't really care if they function well.

Knowledgeable about the challenges facing education, especially in rural Vermont

Caring

Kind

Compassionate

Well spoken

Well written

Has taught in Vermont

Has been a leader in Vermont

It is critical that our next secretary inspires hope yet is highly transparent with the issues that currently exist in the system. We pay more per-pupil than almost every state yet our data is not showing progress. We have issues around mental health, trauma, poverty, racism, substance abuse, etc... The bottom line is that we need to spend more time focused on teaching / learning and less time adapting to state mandates that don't move us forward.

Vermont has many strengths, most notably our small and tight knit groups of leaders. The next leader will build trust by providing a clear plan for how the system will be improved that is created with a great deal of educator input.

Attributes: A good listener, team player, and strategic thinker.

Management and staff recruitment and retention skills. Presently, that is more important than familiarity with

possible educational innovations.
Understanding of the future needs of VT education; staff shortages, crumbling facilities, lack of funding, solutions to PCB issues, lower enrollment, and ability to build up the VT teaching/admin profession.
Someone that is willing to make difficult decisions about what is best for Vermont students and stand up to the adults, individuals and communities to ensure that all students have equitable educational opportunities.
Must be able and willing to work with stakeholders to craft a robust, forward facing vision for Vermont Education.
Will have a strength that includes developing leadership within the Agency.
Must be able to work with mental health agencies to address the mental health crisis in children.
Willingness to address statewide issues at the state level. Desire to lead Vermont through the necessary change.
Current or former educator, champion of PUBLIC education, student centered, willing to speak truth to power (including interest groups like the VPA, VTNEA, and the Chief Executive).
Vision, experience in state as well as out of state . Someone who connects with those who are on the ground working
Visionary. Vermont is uniquely poised to be a leader in education innovation, equity, and more. Our size lends itself to a balance of creativity and ability to scale...and yet we have lacked, over the past number of years, the kind of singular vision and leadership to focus our work.
Ability to manage a government organization: It is rare to find a leader who can do both of these things, and yet they are both needed.
Resourceful, visionary, experienced in the field
Commitment to ensuring ALL students in VT have access to substantially equal educational opportunities and that all public schools have the resources they need to provide these opportunities.
Transparency, innovation, ability to foster change, leadership, vision.
The Secretary of Education should be a purpose-driven apolitical systems thinker.
Understanding how complex the world of education has become, and how good ideas in theory can have unintended consequences in the day to day work, someone who is collaborative and curious, someone who is a consensus builder and sees the benefits of bottom up innovation while working within a clear larger vision articulated by the agency.
A leader who is prepared to take on big issues facing education: ed funding, facilities, PCBs, Mental health
An experienced ed leader who is courageous, compassionate, understands the VT landscape. Is interested in partnering with superintendents/ed leaders and learning from and spending time in the field.
A leader who worked as an educator, is committed to public education and promoting lifelong learning and equity in education.
Grounded in actual current practice. Student focused. Boots on the ground.
Forward thinking. Supporting flexible pathways while also finding ways to keep schools at the center of each community.
Experience as an educator, Strong knowledge of Special Education; inspiring, strong advocacy and communication skills, innovative, 21st Century Skill mindset; Dedication to Social Emotional Learning and Literacy.

<p>Someone who will fight for educators, not politicians</p> <p>Someone who will stand up to the legislature and tell them to put the brakes on all of the new initiatives that keep coming down the pike</p> <p>Someone who will look out for the whole state and do what's best for the whole state, not just Chittenden County and the bigger school districts.</p> <p>Someone who will communicate with educators (we should not have to find out through WCAX, they should find out thorough us)</p>
<p>Someone with a strong vision and an ability to make some of the hard choices that need to happen in the state.</p>
<p>An individual who is well informed in current best practices, has a clear vision for education in Vermont and wishes to collaborate with school leaders on how to move educational opportunities in Vermont for our children.</p>
<p>Someone who knows the field and understands the modern constraints and issues in the system--short staff, more complex behaviors, trying to meet goals academically, aging facilities, etc.</p>
<p>Someone who puts students at the forefront of decision making, someone organized, confident (not afraid to back down), out of the box thinking (what might we do differently), strong communicator</p>
<p>innovation, understanding of current school climate and needs, creativity</p>
<p>Common Sense approach, can communicate to a wide variety of stake holders, strong understanding of issues facing VT schools</p>
<p>insightful, trustworthy, thoughtful, sincere, proactive</p>
<p>Committed to equity and belonging; understanding of the role standardized assessments play in student success; clear needs and plans to help support the mental health needs of our students; ability to lead and make changes within the legislative process; ability to navigate and advocate for Vermont at the national level; lead the AOE to create, implement, and support schools with consistency (within departments and across departments);</p>
<p>Leadership and ability to make tough choices. Transparency and "frank speak" to the realization that staffing shortages are an existential threat to public education.</p>
<p>An understanding of how the work in the field is done - preferably a former superintendent</p>
<p>Down to earth, evidence-based, strong academic focus, not "progressive"</p>
<p>Ability to establish and sustain rapport with all stakeholders. Ability to work as part of a team; flexibility. Organizational skills and effective communication skills. Ability to apply research and organizational leadership skills.</p>
<p>An Educational Visionary</p> <p>Has the ability to lead us to the future</p> <p>A servant leader</p> <p>Committed to and an advocate for Vermont students and educators</p> <p>Systemic thinker</p> <p>Ability to put systems into action</p> <p>Understanding the needs in VT schools</p> <p>Advocate for the AOE employees - able to attract competent people</p> <p>Approachable</p> <p>The ability to work with Superintendents</p> <p>Able to work with the legislators</p>
<p>Honest, empathetic to the needs of both students as well as educators & administrators, well organized, knowledgeable about current best practices in education, willing to take a tough stance when necessary</p>

The next Secretary of Ed has a cliff to climb. From the field's perspective, the agency of education is broken. The leadership skills needed to work towards a high impact organization:

1. analysis - take a hard look at how the agency is organized, what their proposed functions are vs their actual functions, the work people who work for the agency are doing, gather feedback from the field, etc... and then make the appropriate moves to create a more functioning organization;
2. communication & a preference for servant leadership - hold the mantle of high expectations for both the public education and how the agency is expected to support districts to get the outcomes we desire;
3. ability to intentionally build positive relationships - we need someone who is more than nice AND who does not use the power of their seat for command and control;
4. collaborative - face towards challenging problems and work with others to address them;
5. realistic - understand what the AOE has the capacity to do (eg. hold districts accountable to VT statute) and what they cannot do (provide professional learning). Be the gate check for their people regarding unrealistic expectations that sometimes come from bodies like the legislature;
6. hold hard conversations - there are people at the agency who are completely ineffective. This next secretary may need to clean house and build new.

Student centered, able to work effectively with the Governor, problem solver, accessible

Organized, the ability to see multiple perspectives, to make decisions with student learning/outcomes in mind, have a knowledge and understanding of PreK-12 systems

Must care about and support our local rural schools

A visionary leader who embodies the essence of a systems thinker. The next secretary should possess a profound understanding of the intricate web of challenges our organizations face, including budgetary constraints, understaffing issues, and the mounting mental health challenges within our educational institutions.

This individual should stand out by not just comprehending these complex problems but by offering a clear and transformative vision for overcoming them. They must be adept at mapping out the systemic interdependencies at play and discerning opportunities for synergistic solutions that break down silos and build improved collaboration among stakeholders.

They should have a solid capacity for innovation and problem-solving, and bring a wealth of experience and creative strategies to the table, aimed at optimizing resources, enhancing operational efficiency, and ensuring the holistic well-being of the system as a whole.

Someone who can serve as a catalyst for positive change, guided by a commitment to nurturing a collaborative, supportive, and forward-thinking environment. They should have a track record of transforming vision into action as a testament to their ability to lead our State towards a brighter and more resilient future.

Systems thinker, problem solver, accountability, and visionary describe the attributes needed in the next VT Secretary of Education.

True / genuine understanding of the challenges facing Vermont schools right now:
teacher shortage (especially special education / specialists)
buildings are beginning to fail
students falling behind at schools and never catching up
increasing role of schools in the success of the communities

The attributes that Vermont needs in its next Secretary of Education are kid-centeredness, and a willingness to consider the diversity in our local leadership and our geography.

Creativity, flexibility, knowledge of law and current education critical issues, relationship skills, communication skills,

Experience as an educational leader
Proven strong and effective leader
Someone who is able to see both the forest and trees
Someone who has a strong vision of an effective public educational system
Political savviness

Empathetic, Equitable, Diverse, Inclusive, Willing to take responsibility, Creative, Innovative, trustworthy

Experience as an educator in the state of Vermont, an understanding of the realities of the system, the demands, the challenges and the lack of resources to do all that we are asked to do. An understanding of the behavioral challenges, special education needs and mental health issues that schools are being asked to address. Someone with a vision for what a 'public school system' provides and a knowledge of when to say 'No. That is not the responsibility of our schools. That is not a need they can or should be expected to meet.' An advocate for being an educational system and not the sole social service agency for children and families.

VT needs a SoE who will support the learning of all students. VT needs a SoE who is willing to advocate on behalf of all SD/SU's for facilities that are environments conducive to the learning needs of students in the 21st Century. Also, someone who champions innovative programming and learning opportunities to ensure VT remains a leader in public education throughout the nation.

Strong vision/ mission/ purpose, pragmatism, proven morality / ethics/ integrity, focus, diplomacy skills, facilitation skills, flexibility, dynamism, the ability to inspire, COURAGE (not a politician and/or someone who is afraid to speak truth to power because they are more interested in keeping their position than serving students and educators)

Thank you for soliciting input on what the VPA membership is looking for in a secretary of education.

First and foremost, the secretary of education must look out for all Vermont students, recognizing that Vermont has a unique system for providing education. Certain communities have chosen to operate public schools, while others, often in less populated and more rural areas, have chosen a system of school choice served by independent as well as public schools. This approach has served Vermont well for almost two centuries.

A good secretary of education will set priorities that take into account the interest of the entire state of Vermont, the children served in each community, and the welfare of those communities.

A good secretary of education will respect and honor the Vermont tradition of local control.

A good secretary of education will help lead the Vermont education system in the post-pandemic era, facing the challenges of isolation, substance use and abuse, deficits in literacy and other academic disciplines, infrastructure needs, and more.

A good secretary of education will seek to unite, not divide, will honor teaching and learning, and will set a tone of respect.

Someone capable of bringing order and accountability to the AOE. Someone who will identify all of the required actions and data the AOE is mandated to provide and ensure full and timely compliance with those mandates. Someone who puts students over politics.

Not in order of importance.

1. A deep understanding of equity and its importance in VT's education landscape.
2. A commitment to reducing disparities and narrowing the achievement and opportunity gaps.
3. An understanding of the preeminent importance of public education to a functioning/thriving democracy.
4. A desire to fight for an excellent public school system, and to bring that fight to the Legislature and to the people of VT.
5. Dedication of time, leadership and resources to the AOE so it can be a thriving agency that can assess, support and hold schools accountable.
6. Dedication to the gathering and maintaining of relevant education data over years and decades.

A strong student-focused leader who looks to partner and support schools and school leaders. Someone who is willing and able to build relationships with the education community and stay grounded in the realities of the work that is happening in the field. Someone who is then able to advocate for students and schools to the legislator so that rules are practical, reasonable, and are supported with the right amount of time and funding to be successful.

Importantly the next Secretary of Education needs to be a leader who would look out for all of Vermont's students and understand the range of needs they have. They would be someone who understands and embraces the unique system for providing education that has successfully served Vermont for close to two centuries. It will be important that they are respectful and have a mindset to unite and not divide. The next Secretary of Education will need to understand the dynamic nature of teaching and how not all students access learning in the same way.

Visionary, strong communicator, organized and thoughtful in process, longitudinal planner with ability to identify the specific scaffolding to attain goals, personable, knowledgeable about needs of ok-12 education in VT

Big picture, the next Secretary of Education must be a systems thinker and change maker. Vermont students deserve someone who has a vision for our statewide education system and the organizational skills, experience, relationships, and passion to implement that vision. The status quo is unacceptable. The necessary softer skills include strong time-management, problem-solving, management, creativity, and communication. This next Secretary of Education must be able to point to examples in their career where they have demonstrated all of these skills.

Understand how to recognize, respect and act on the diverse peoples living in our state (based on race, SES,

political views, etc.)
Open mind . Creativity, outside box thinking
Someone who has significant experience in public education in both years and roles. A professional and effective communicator. Someone who will always consider how their leadership decisions benefit students.
Vocal advocate for public education, able to attract and retain qualified staff, responsive to local schools and school boards. Background in public education. Apolitical. A thorough understanding of Vermont's education system, in particular it's funding mechanisms, school choice options, history of school consolidation (Act 46), etc... Willing to challenge Governor and/or legislators when it's in schools/students best interest.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Someone who understands Technical Education *Someone who supports Technical Education *Someone who will have their boots on the ground and actually visit ALL schools to know better how they can be supported *Someone who prioritizes public education *Someone who prioritizes equity *Someone who is willing to take Vermont in bold directions with new accountability systems other than standardized testing
In terms of teaching/ learning, I think VT schools do an excellent job remaining current and progressive. But I think with significant declining population, the structure of the education system needs to be addressed. Having work in in Vermont schools for 27 years, I watched the class sizes in our region continue to decline, yet we still have the same schools in place, offering fewer opportunities and becoming more expensive per student. I believe that the next secretary needs to address this in order to consolidate districts and schools, and in the process, create larger schools that have the capability of a wider range of offerings.
Experience working in schools with kids, a holistic approach to teaching to the whole child, someone who has a strong understanding of trauma and social emotional learning and DEI
Someone that understands and believes of the importance of public education as the basis of our democracy. Understanding of the interconnection of our technical centers as part of multiple paths for education. Someone that is a life long learner, collaborative and with integrity.
The next Secretary of Education should be focused on what is best for all Vermont students. This person must recognize and appreciate the unique (and successful) educational system we have in Vermont of public, independent, and home schooled children.
The next Secretary should realize that public and independent schools are crucial to successfully educating Vermont students. In particular, this person must appreciate the vital role independent schools play in educating students from communities (generally rural communities) that do not operate public schools. The next Secretary of Education should also recognize the successful history of this system of education, reinforced by the folks in those rural communities who overwhelmingly want to preserve this educational ecosystem.
The next Secretary of Education should not focus on political squabbling but be free to focus on the crucial issues facing Vermonter students including youth mental health crisis, infrastructure needs, learning loss from the pandemic, and teacher shortages.
former public educator (preferably in VT) and should be a fierce advocate for Vermont public schools.

Continued Below

Under the next Secretary, how would the Agency of Education best support your work?
* Be a visionary leader of the state's education system
They would be clear structures and supports for schools. They and their staff would be able to answer questions with the appropriate technical support for schools. Communication would be timely and effective.
Regional alignment in best practices. Narrow the field and focus on what schools need most. There are so many initiatives, policy requirements, assurances and reporting measures that districts are shifting their focus from high quality education to management.
Stop unfunded mandates- school budgets get tighter and tighter with mandates that are not funded.
Whenever there is a mandate - setting up data systems that provide objective information on the impact of what's implemented so that initiatives can be tweaked and improved and to better inform future directives.
Look for ways to minimize the administrative burden of state compliance. ie: streamline state reporting.
clear guidance in implementing initiatives; no new mandates!
I would like to see a more collaborative effort with school boards.
A redesign of the agency staff and units within it to improve communication and develop expertise.
Working with existing administrators

It would be important to have our Secretary really listen to how education works in the classroom, really listen to what we need, really care about students and supporting students. Unfunded mandates have to go.

If the person has an understanding of what current issues are and an appreciation for what educators are dealing with, and has some ideas about how to mitigate those, I would feel supported.

The Agency currently lacks cohesion; the right and left hands need to be aware of each other. Willingness to set reasonable priorities for Agency staff and to ensure that all mandates consider school operational timelines and workloads - modulate demands to the field and avoid having two divisions work at cross-purposes with the field; it is better to do a few things well than to underperform on multiple, ill-considered programs and projects.

Leadership from the top to avoid longstanding habits of individuals in the Agency making up guidelines and demands without considering their impact on field operations; stopping the practice of setting mandates without underlying guidance - the Agency should establish standards and expectations for programs, and then leave it to the SUs/SDs to implement. Tell us what we need to do and then let us figure out how to do it, instead of expecting 50+ SUs/SDs to each figure out what something should look like. The current staff mindset is to disclaim responsibility for the "what" out of some imagined belief in individualism.

Answer questions in a timely manner and follow through when needed

More guidance/support/licensure for social-emotional learning

Continued grant opportunities for STEAM and SEL projects/curriculum. A message of support and protection for all educators from attacks about "indoctrination" when we are following state law and teaching truth.

We need to get more feedback from stakeholders in the field. When doing this, like VTCAP, there should have been more collaboration with practitioners. I really think we need someone to come in and create a strong vision and make this vision come alive. I think the Agency of Education has a lot of work to do to improve themselves, and I am really hoping the next secretary of education will do this. The AOE sometimes is hard to reach, are not able to come to meetings, and seem disconnected to our work. This at times makes you feel unsupported.

Become fully funded and staffed, and be able to respond quickly and effectively to all inquiries, supporting schools who want to try new and untested educational methods.

Moving forward with the recommendations from APA for CTE in Vermont

The Agency would be able to best support my work as a superintendent if they:

Were more aligned with their expectations and communications

Could provide useful, practical, timely, and relevant support to the field

Worked through ESSA , and other federal/state requirements in such a way that was clear and transparent to the field, and set the mission of the AOE staff to be of assistance to the field, to make clear expectations and coach systems through requirements rather than focusing on compliance and regulation

Take the lead where the agency should take the lead ex: Proficiency Based Learning - if something like that is legislated in the future - lead with models, don't default to Vermont is a local control state.

Create a vision for public education in Vermont

Be better organized and have clearer communication. The Secretary would build relationships with direct reports and employees. Hopefully, this would help with agency turn over. Consistency is key.

According to its logo, the AOE provides leadership, resources and accountability. But all we experience is accountability. The secretary should lead with integrity and passion for public education and the agency should be able to provide resources and supports to schools instead of operating solely as a punitive compliance entity. The agency has lost the trust of the field over the last 7 years. My work as a building leader would be supported by an agency that encouraged, followed through on its promises, and engaged educators and administrators in the work as a team.

Seek out opinions prior to making decisions that affect our students, staff, and profession

update the MTSS Field Guide post COVID

Revise policies to allow for more independent decisions. Our schools are separated by a variety of geographical features. It is not feasible to apply the same rules to all of the schools. Snow days, school closings, travel time, lack of transportation, and aging buildings are a few examples of how schools can be very different from one another in Vermont.

To best support the work in school, we need a Secretary who will advocate for the required resources and funding to support our students. We need more options in our state to support the mental health needs of our youth. We need someone who will make building the workforce in public education a priority.

Teachers are craving the "how to" portion of professional learning. The four levers of Act 173 have provided an articulated foundation and road map for our work. The ability to access professional learning that focuses on the "how" would be a welcome addition.

The ethos needs to change from one of compliance to stakeholder service.

Provide accurate and timely data. It is ridiculous that the 22 and 23 assessment data is not yet cleaned and available. It is ridiculous that data requests are ignored for months. It is ridiculous that they would rather pay outside vendors extortionate overhead to take on work that historically has been done in house, more coherently and equitably, at a much lower rate. It is ridiculous that they are not providing proactive recommendations to strengthen the public system on which the overwhelming majority of Vermont children and communities depend.

The creation of a task force to tackle the ever changing climate within schools. The task force would be tasked with creation, finding, implementation, training, etc... of ways to respond to misbehavior, bullying, hazing, harassment, that are evidence based, and effective. I often feel at a loss for what to do, as we are out of resources, yet required to educate the student.

Aside from our extensive funding challenges, we need to have a system that provides current data and a high level of support to school districts when needed. We need a leader that builds urgency and works collaboratively with superintendents, principals, and teachers. A quick glance at what is offered by the Department of Education in Massachusetts for data analysis is more telling than anything I could offer in a short response. Here is a good link: <https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/> - I mention this because data transparency is a way to build urgency and help districts understand what is working and where we should focus for academic progress. It also builds trust with the community. Releasing 2021-22 data 1.5 years after the assessment is not helpful and we've all heard enough of the excuses.

By simply doing its job competently. Present staff do not even interpret the BoE's own rules consistently and evade questions from superintendents.

Communicate, be in schools, understand the pressing needs, and work with superintendents and school boards to prioritize solutions.

Reforming the CTE funding formula, a statewide school calendar, CTE governance reform would impact my work in a very positive way. High school reform to better engage 21st century students instead of using a model that was developed by a small group of men in the 1890's would advance our students and improve our educational system - students need to spend more time engaged in real world problem solving, safe risk taking, and learning to develop new ideas and solutions. They need to understand how they learn, why learning is important, and how to develop ideas into reality. We live in a time that learning to learn is far more important than learning information that is not connected to anything you already know, or live on a daily basis. Vermont could be on the cutting edge of educational reform if they were willing to move away from the educational model of our traditional high schools and move instead to a model where students are learning through real world problem solving and the communication of solutions. We need someone that is willing to break with the old and push back against those that resist change. We need someone that is willing to stand up for students and what is going to make them successful in an ever changing world. We need a force for change that will draw families to the state because of the educational opportunities we can offer all students.

Clearly define a vision of an exceptional education for children who will join workforce in 2040.

Provide supports to achieve success.

Right size local school governance structures

Consistent graduation requirements across the state. Promote a forward looking vision for the purpose of education in VT.

Using their role to advance a narrative in the political sphere that values and celebrates education as an economic and social driver for VT. Asks a cynical population what that want beyond silly slogans like "affordability" and "career and tech ed."

Making sure educators have access to folks for face to face conversations around; licensing, retirement etc ... It is ashame that the very agency that wanted all staff back for face to face learning isn't doing the same .

The Agency is in need of a deep organizational "reset" - from understanding who is in the system, unifying, systematizing and connecting the work off all in the system around a singular vision. This will take time and space.

With this kind of deep organizational work, the Agency can become the support and (yes) accountability organization it should be.

ensure systems are in place to support prioritized work

Advocacy for public schools and equitable distribution of resources to support public school missions.

No unfounded mandates, staff the AOE to be able to support schools, change the authority of the AOE so there can be equity for all students. Actually provide guidance in a timely manner that is useful and relevant.

The Agency of Education needs support and a clear sense of purpose to support us. The work we (VT) did around Act 77 was inspiring and ground breaking. In addition, the spirit of Act 77 is perfectly aligned to Governor Scott's mission

Understand the implications of the theory on the day to day work.

Address facilities, PCBs, mental health, ed funding, the mental health crisis and support therapeutic alternative programming

Support the teachers and staff who are educating children by encouraging professionalism and professional development, continued support for best practices and research based methods, and recognition of successes and the challenges of educating children today.

Be visible. Stick with decisions. Ask questions and listen.

Improved guidance around key initiatives.
Elicit ongoing timely feedback from school leaders; seek out ways to better support schools
Get small schools the same supports that bigger schools have. If the state wants schools to become social agencies, we need the staffing to do so.
There is a need for the Secretary to take a strong lead in figuring out a better system for building renovations. This is a huge need in the state and there is no statewide funding or plan at the moment.
The would act as partners in education not as managers.
I think it would be wise to be present at school more. Do walkthroughs, talk with the field. How do you know how to support if you do not have a relationship with folks already?
Get out of the way- less red tape, Bring administrators and those in the field to the table regarding decision making
Work with school leadership to create mandates, suggestions, templates, etc. that are meaningful and relevant to the necessary work in schools.
Vision for all Vermont learners and communities. Sections of Vermont are dying on the vine and our next secretary has to enrich, support, and resource students, families, and communities with thriving educational centers, K-12 schools, and post-secondary learning that is not merely focused on workforce training. I don't want to see Vermont become the service class state for wealthy visitors. Vermonters love their communities and often want to live and thrive there. There are regions of Vermont that struggle and remote education is not helpful in those areas. Learners need to be engaged and inspired - not just checking boxes for a half promise of more box checking. Higher education needs to be affordable and attainable. We need to be creative with how we encourage and support access. Rather than cut program and faculty/staff at VTSU robust programs and campus culture should be built. A full relationship of support and collaboration should be forged with all of the Vermont colleges so all students have access points and successful, affordable experiences.
Find money for both infrastructure (building projects) and mental and family health so our schools can run effectively.
helping to provide a better understanding of the effects of Act46 and identifying administrative redundancies across our small state; studying the spending/budget developments and giving advice on how to better ensure students are directly benefiting; consider policies that are trauma-informed and antiracist and advise on how to build connections across agencies that center the whole student.
Provide a clear vision, and a gameplan to execute on that vision. How can we plan as an LEA not knowing if further rounds of consolidation are in the near future? What about PCB funding... we don't want to invest just to have our school closed down.
Certainly less regulation and more support. I think the AOE has to be brought back to capacity with respect to employees.
Support local governance at the SU and community level. Supports and recommendations and toolsets available from AOE, but decision-making retained as local as possible.
A willingness to put students first. Along with an appreciation for what it's really like on the front lines of today's schools.
Hire competent people that understand what it is currently like to be in VT schools. Raise the salaries so we can attract competent educators. If there were competent people that we could call then I would seek help from the agency when things arise. When there are mandates there needs to be competent people (and funding) to support the mandates. For example, if we had a road map for Act 173 and RTI - it would have been helpful instead of every District/SU figuring it out on their own.

Listen to the needs of administrators, advocate for those needs, and help find the funding to solve those needs; streamline the licensing process and support retention of licensed professionals
I am having a hard time answering this. Based on my past experience as a superintendent and curriculum director, the agency has done so little to support the work of my districts that it never serves as a place I look to for support. Literally doesn't cross my mind as a place to look to.
I hope that the next secretary would be able to move the agency towards an organization that matters to the field rather than an organization that the field, at best, tolerates when forced.
In addition, I hope that the Secretary and Agency hold the mantel for the vision of education in Vermont - balancing accountability and support through an understanding of local decision while not hiding behind this term when something difficult arises.
It would be great if the AoE had appropriate staffing to actually accomplish some of its initiatives. Find ways to reduce the paperwork for Superintendents and Principals.
Regular communication, ease of navigating the AOE website, updating technical aspects of the required online systems - ALIS, CIRS, MTSS Survey...
Advocate for monies to bring rural school facilities in to equitable situations with urban schools
The person I need to support my work is someone who is truly collaborative and forward-thinking. This individual should seek input and engage stakeholders before rolling out new ideas and solutions within our state education system.
They should possess an acute understanding of how the timing of communication can make or break an initiative, ensuring that information is shared effectively, aligning perfectly with our community's needs and readiness.
Operating with a keen sense of foresight is a critical to supporting Superintendents. He/She should excel at anticipating potential issues and challenges and take proactive steps to address them before they can become major obstacles.
They would be strong advocates for our work. Their advocacy efforts would be evidenced by securing the necessary resources, policies, and support to advance our overarching mission and goals. He/ she should be willing to "take the heat" on major issues when it is in the best interest of schools/ students.
The AOE could support my work by focusing on accountability, financial transparency, and equitable resource allocation across communities. Currently, the AOE's technological tools are out-dated, and can't communicate seamlessly with schools who rely on Google Suite. There is a ton of redundancy and fragmentation at the AOE making it difficult to lead and implement processes designed to enable continuous improvement at the school level.
Boots on the ground / connectivity with schools
Under the next Secretary, the Agency of Education would best support my work by considering the many struggles inherent in our small schools, and small districts, and small Supervisory Unions.
The system is so broken I am not sure how to answer this at this time.
Proactively seeking information Listening to and partnering with school and district leaders Hires strong and effective people, and pays them for the skill, experience and expertise Establishing and utilizing effective systems that provide efficiency, consistency and clarity
Loosen the paperwork around HHB investigations, adopt prekindergarten from DCF

Get itself fully staffed and all employees trained so that when one calls, you receive the same information regardless of who you speak to.

The agency has been very willing to provide "guidance" but that is not always helpful as it results in numerous and varying interpretations and often leading to confusion and stagnation.

The AOE needs strong leadership and someone who can advocate for the critical importance of the AOE's role in impacting student outcomes in VT. We need more central support in pretty much all aspects of our work, whether it be helping to get the myriad new educators we have in our systems licensed, or supporting our educators and students as they navigate a mental health crisis, visibly, vigorously and adamantly supporting our equity work, or testing, or MTSS, we need more human beings on the other end of the phone and keyboard to be responsive and supportive in furthering our work. We also need a coherent and cohesive vision to guide us in our moral and ethical obligation to serve ALL of our students by recognizing and validating their identities so they can be themselves and access their learning. Finally, we need someone who can help to think through how we can recruit and retain our educator workforce by working closely with all of the stakeholders.

Provide timely data. Provide relevant assistance and advice when such is requested. Establish policies that balance the nature of a mostly rural region that has a declining student population with the cost of education. Keep public taxpayer dollars in public schools.

See above. The agency would be staffed and resourced such that it could support all struggling schools with boots on the ground assistance. It could assess progress of districts and schools and provide meaningful assistance and guidance to superintendents and building leaders. It would gather, interpret and maintain data over years and decades that are comparable over time- this might mean using the same standardized test for decades. It would devise groundbreaking strategies to combat racism, harassment and bullying in schools and provide education leaders with tools and support.

The AOE needs to work as a partner with schools to better support the rollout of changes. For example getting a memo dated September 5 stating that there needs to be two drills in September, one of which is a new style of drill, is not leading with the field in mind. Rolling out special education rule changes with insufficient time and support is also not helpful. Last year's testing debacle of trying to rollout Cognia was embarrassing. The inequitable rollout of Act 173 is another example of poorly planned and executed changes that have a negative impact on schools. The AOE and its leadership need to keep the impact on the field as a central focus on all of their work and decisions. I recognize that it is a difficult, if not impossible job, but these examples of poorly supported changes highlight that the AOE has fallen short of this standard in recent years.

They will understand the importance how the different geographic areas of the state impact how the education systems in those areas operate. We have many parts of our state that are less populated and rural where communities have used school choice to provide education that meets the needs of their students, including offering the ability for families to send their children to independent schools with town tuition funding.

They will be able set priorities and address the post-pandemic needs of children, teachers, and parents. They will think about how to create communities of learning and inclusion. They will find ways to support teachers and administration instead of asking more of them when adding additional mandates or requirements.

They will work to adjust Vermont's requirements so that teachers, special educators, and mental health providers who are licensed or have years of experience in other states and move to Vermont or travel across state lines to work in Vermont are able to use their license and/or life experience to work in Vermont.

Partner not mandate, be thoughtful about process and not mandate several disjointed imitative say the same time, plan for the future of our youth and their needs, problem solve with districts to meet the needs of all of our kids

The Agency of Education would best support my work by stepping up and into their leadership role.

Spend more time in our individual schools, understanding how the needs in one county do not equate to the needs in another.

Create sensible policies that can realistically be implemented
Proactive measures around mental illness(alternative educational opportunities, more access to mental health professionals, SEL curriculum preK -12, mentors, etc.).
AOE website is very out of date. Data and statistics related to public education are severely outdated or missing. Better budgeting information on a more timely basis (i.e. each year we frequently get updated information regarding pupil counts well after the budget has been set). More timely response from agency to records requests - we have waited months for some information. A stronger relationship with the State Board of Education. The next Secretary needs to attract and retain more qualified staff to meet the needs of schools, school boards and Vermont families and communities. Next secretary should make it a priority to visit schools and school boards.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Come and listen to what we need as educators and not just Superintendents *Find someone who is willing to work with Tech. Centers on our needs rather than dictate what we do from the State Level - this disconnect has made it difficult to do what is best for our students *Recognize that the top down approach does not work *Visit all your schools - come see what we are doing and share what you see with those who are at the top.
Besides working toward SU/ SD consolidation, I think the secretary needs to convince the legislature to stop adding more to the plate of schools. Even during the height of COVID, when the legislature promised to rein back new initiatives, those still continued. Besides dwindling student numbers, the other driver in the cost of education is the ever-increasing scope of responsibilities for schools to cover, many far beyond the sphere of teaching and learning. Schools thus are required to hire more staff members and administrators to cover these responsibilities, driving up the cost of education. A new secretary needs to convince the legislature to minimize the growth of new initiatives. Even the AOE cannot keep up with the demands.
It would be in everyone's best interest if the AOE could work to streamline their communications, processes, interfaces and procedures. It is bureaucratic and cumbersome
By supporting and leading a comprehensive 21st century pre-k-12 education for all students. Someone that can keep us all accountable for the use of public funds to improve educational outcomes for ALL students.
Appreciate and honor the Vermont tradition of local control. Be someone who looks to unite not divide.
Advocacy and trust for current educators! A work to retain educators !