

Legislative Lunch Topics
Barre UUSD Legislative Lunch
November 20, 2019

A. Education Funding

- The weighting study contracted to UVM is due to the legislature by late November and to the public by early December. The legislature then needs to act (or not) to implement any changes during the upcoming session. There are two aspects to the study, both with potentially harmful (or beneficial) impacts.
 - (Re)Considering the Equalized Pupil Calculation – In particular, the “poverty” multiplier factor of .25
 - The weighting adjustment to the SPED census grant under Act 173 – which if left alone (no weighting) would bring Barre’s annual SPED revenue from around \$5.3M to around \$3.8M
- The weighting study does NOT address the fact that low spending schools/districts continue to subsidize high spending schools/districts. Funding POLICY would need to be modified to resolve this, not just the funding FORMULA.
- The AoE has only recently retracted their ruling that separated out regular ed from special ed costs for independent school charges (<https://education.vermont.gov/documents/memo-french-accounting-for-certain-special-education-expenses>). This would have had a negative impact of over \$1M on Barre (see topic C also)

B. Family and Mental Health Services/Trauma/Poverty

- More and more, schools are being required to shoulder the burden of supporting children and families who experience significant mental health issues, impacts of toxic stress, adverse childhood experiences and trauma without additional resources. A much higher portion of our budgets ends up going to this area every year.
- Therapeutic programs are giving notice they cannot accept new enrollments because they are at capacity.
- We are exploring expanding our own alternative programs to accommodate the increased needs of our students, but this comes at significant cost (see topic D also).
- We are also exploring the cost of providing universal meals at all schools, at a cost to our taxpayers of \$800K. This would provide a level of equity. Wouldn’t it be great if this was implemented at the state level?

C. Concerns with the Agency of Educations Capacity and Leadership/Guidance

- The AoE simply does not have the capacity to support school systems in the way that we need support. Vital positions have turned over and continue to turn over. Vital positions remain unfilled. All historical knowledge is lost. Guidance and decisions issued are ill-conceived and have the potential to be disastrous.

- The recently retracted ruling on special ed expenses is one prime example of this.
- The indefinite delay of the release of the School Climate Survey is another example (https://education.vermont.gov/sites/aoe/files/documents/edu-memo-french-data-collection-climate-survey-update_0.pdf)
- As in other areas, we have specific concerns about the ability of the Agency to support Career and Tech Ed with staffing reductions. Additionally, this makes any changes to regulations potential problematic.
- The rollout of the SSDDMS (Shared School District Data Management System) has been extremely problematic and leaves us less than confident it will serve our needs.
- The rollout of the SLDS (Statewide Longitudinal Data System) has been extremely problematic and leaves us less than confident it will serve our needs.
- We have concerns that the Vermont Education Quality Review process (Annual Snapshot and Integrated Field Review) are not being given the necessary priority by the Agency.

D. Capitol Construction and Bids

- We are now seeing some communities move forward with large-scale construction plans, but there is still no approved legislation to support this.
 - Will our taxes be supporting these projects?
 - As we consider significant renovations, will funding be available?
- The threshold for board approval of bids for purchases has been \$15,000 for a very long time, while costs have risen significantly. Can this be increased?

E. Student Data Privacy Bill (S110)

- While we are in support of a bill that strengthens privacy, we are concerned that the current bill is not modified as to make it onerously restrictive on our systems as has happened in New Hampshire (and is in progress in New York)

F. Healthcare (Act 11)

- Both the labor and management sides agree that an implementation date of January 1, 2021 makes sense, but the law currently states July 1, 2020 for implementation. The December decision issued by the Arbitrator may potentially contradict the law. This will need to be resolved.

G. Lead Testing

- This is another example of something that was problematic in implementation; we were on board early with this and are still dealing with some of the implementation issues being worked out at the state level.

H. School Security

- Is the legislature concerning any further action or funding?

I. Universal PreK (Act 166)

- We understand the House Ed Committee is committed to looking seriously at making long needed improvements to this and hope you will support that effort.