

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