Education Legislative Report

March 17, 2026 – Issue 2

As leaders of your school systems, you serve as a voice for public education. Your associations work hard to represent your interests throughout the legislative session, but there is no substitute for direct contact and advocacy with your legislators. We encourage you to stay current on legislative activity by reading our reports and other legislative updates from your associations and staying in touch with your representatives.

Here are links to the **2025-2026 Legislative Delegation** by Supervisory Union/School District: Word Format, Acrobat Format, and Excel Format.

Here is an infographic summarizing how a bill becomes a law.

You can follow the work being done by the legislative committees. Each legislative committee has its own YouTube channel, allowing the public to watch committee meetings. Here is a link to live-stream or watch recorded committee meetings. You can also review the committee meeting schedules and agendas. Here is a link to each committee's agenda.

Please note that the links provided throughout this report were active when it was issued. Sometimes, links break when the General Assembly staff organizes files and documents. If you encounter an error while accessing a link, please follow these steps: Go to the Vermont General Assembly home page. Click "Committees" from there and select the committee of interest

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(for example, House Education). Scroll down to "Documents and Handouts," where you will see a folder for each date the committee collected documents. Click on the folder to access all the documents presented on that date. You can also browse documents by bill number or witness name on that page.

We are approaching the crossover deadline in the legislative session, which is the last day for a bill to pass out of the relevant committee it was assigned to when introduced. This year, the crossover deadline for policy bills was Friday, March 13, while for money bills, it is Friday, March 20. The General Assembly may extend these deadlines for education-related matters. Additionally, even if a bill fails to pass out of committee before the crossover, it is still possible that elements of that bill, or its overall language, could be incorporated into another bill currently under consideration. This is a common practice.

This mid-session report is current as of March 15, 2025.

If you have questions about the content of this report, please contact your association's executive director or Mark Koenig, Director of Policy Services and Legislative Affairs at the Vermont School Boards Association (VSBA) at mkoenig@vtvsba.org

Town Meeting Day Overview

Across Vermont, voters approved a significant majority of school budgets demonstrating a show of public support for Vermont education.

Sue Ceglowski and Chelsea Myers testified before both the House Education and House Ways and Means Committees to discuss these results. Their testimony can be found here. The unofficial school budget vote results can be found here.

Act 73 Implementation Update — Mid-Session Legislative Status

Act 73 is the Legislature's multi-year framework for restructuring Vermont's public education governance and finance systems. The law directs policymakers to examine statewide school district structures, transition toward a potential foundation funding formula, and evaluate regional service delivery models intended to improve efficiency while maintaining educational quality.

At the midpoint of the 2026 legislative session, Act 73 is not itself under reconsideration, but the Legislature is actively debating the implementation framework and unanswered questions that will determine how the law reshapes Vermont's education system over the next several years. Many policy decisions must be made by the Legislature prior to full Act 73 implementation. Discussion of the more important inflections are as follows:

Key Implementation Issues Under Active Legislative Review

District Governance Maps

Two conceptual models have dominated legislative discussion regarding the potential regionalization of Vermont school governance.

The "Conlon Map"

Associated with House Education leadership, this model proposes 27 larger regional school districts across the state. Governance authority consolidated at the district level. These proposed districts could have a greater ability to redistribute staffing, equalize program offerings, and manage regional budgets. They could also help to reduce administrative duplication, increase fiscal capacity of districts, and/or support consistent educational opportunities statewide.

Concerns raised in testimony included potential loss of local governance and community voice, risk of large administrative structures that feel distant from communities, and navigating the complexity of merging existing union and unified districts.

The "Bongartz Map"

This model envisions a mix of supervisory unions and school districts including 11 SUs with 45 districts as well as twelve SDs statewide. The proposal would retain more localized governance in some areas of the state with mixed operational structures under more complex supervisory unions. It also emphasizes gradual consolidation providing a 2-year "on-ramp" period for school districts to voluntarily merge, after which the State Board of Education would impose forced mergers. Such a structure might preserve current local governance models and operational/ non-operational structures and/or reduce political resistance to consolidation.

Concerns raised in testimony included limited cost efficiencies, the maintenance of Vermont's current fragmented governance structure, and a continued reliance on independent schools without providing appropriate guardrails around "same rules" concerns.

The Taylor Proposal

On the afternoon of March 13, Representative Taylor presented a draft proposed "Enrollment attendance zone/school choice policies– draft 1.3". This proposal does not include any district maps, instead focusing on policy structure. Taylor described the draft as a "good faith effort" to work within Act 73 while preserving Vermont's existing attendance and tuitioning patterns, including public tuition for 4,000–5,000 students attending

independent schools. The proposal would establish district-level governance and require school boards to adopt enrollment and attendance policies aligned with current patterns, alongside expanded choice options such as magnet schools, intra-district choice, and hardship exceptions. Chair Conlon acknowledged the effort but questioned whether two different education delivery models could operate within a single district. Taylor said the goal is to focus on the broader system serving about 84,000 students statewide while maintaining local flexibility. No decisions were made, and the draft was not final. Members agreed more work is needed to clarify the proposal and assess how it would function once district maps and funding mechanisms are developed.

The VSA Proposal

Recognizing that the mapping exercise, now underway for more than a year, has produced limited progress, the Vermont Superintendents Association developed a presentation that brings together policy proposals from several sources as a more measured step toward change in our education system. The goal is to continue making progress toward greater quality and affordability, bring people back together, and take thoughtful, deliberate action to preserve and strengthen Vermont's public education system. Last week, the VSBA endorsed this approach.

"Small/Sparse by Necessity" Adjustment

A major issue raised by rural districts is the recognition that some communities must operate small schools due to geographic realities rather than policy choice. The "small and sparse" adjustment would provide additional funding for districts that serve low-density populations, face long transportation distances, and/or lack feasible consolidation options. Legislators have cautioned that adjustments must be designed carefully to avoid incentivizing inefficient structures and that the state must balance rural equity with overall education cost containment.

Foundation Funding Formula

Act 73 directs the implementation of a foundation formula should certain conditions be met, including the adoption of new districts. A foundation formula is a significant shift from the way that Vermont currently funds education. As written in Act 73, the foundation formula would set a base amount of $15,033 and apply student weights not based on tax capacity but based on actual dollars. Categorical aid would also be used to supplement the foundation amount.

A number of impactful questions related to the foundation formula remain unanswered and have many education leaders and legislators concerned, including a lack of clarity regarding how the state intends to fund CTE, PreK, transportation, and other significant expenses. Although the House Ways and Means Committee has begun these conversations, there is still a long way to go before any level

of consensus is reached. Without answers to these questions, map-making is little more than a guessing game with regard to real-world impacts. It also asks all Vermonters to trust a future general assembly to find solutions to the unanswered questions before the foundation formula takes effect in FY29.

Regional Service Delivery (BOCES / CESA Models)

Act 73 requires evaluation of regional structures like *Board of Cooperative Educational Services* (BOCES) or *Cooperative Educational Service Agencies* (CESAs). Significant discussion and analysis of such structures was undertaken this past summer by the School District Redistricting Task Force. On a 7-4 vote, the Task Force advanced a combined CESA–Strategic Merger–Regional High School proposal, highlighting the emphasis on locally driven cooperation, shared services, and implementation feasibility. The final report of the Task Force can be found here.

These structures could allow districts to share services such as special education programming, professional development, transportation coordination, and specialized instructional staff. Questions have been raised about how Vermont would formalize regional service agencies, if services could be delivered separately from governance, or whether regional entities could help support small districts.

Mid-Session Legislative Assessment

At the midpoint of the session:

- Act 73 is exempt from the standard crossover timeline which governs other policy bills.
- Legislative committees continue to review district mapping proposals, governance options, funding formula design, and regional service models
- Multiple proposals remain conceptual rather than set out in legislative text

For school leaders and education advocates, several implications are emerging:

- Act 73 implementation will likely extend across multiple sessions. However, current timelines established in Act 73 seem unworkable.
- Decisions on governance structure will directly influence local decision-making authority.
- Funding formula changes would significantly reshape how the state would pay for and distribute funding for education.
- Regional service delivery models may expand regardless of the final governance structure.

Act 73 remains the central policy framework guiding Vermont's education reform discussions, but its implementation is still evolving. The remainder of the legislative session will likely clarify the direction of district consolidation, the implementation of a foundation funding formula following redistricting, and how regional service systems could operate alongside local schools.

For public school advocacy organizations, continued engagement in these debates will be critical as the Legislature moves from conceptual planning toward concrete statutory changes during the remainder of the current legislative session and in the coming years.

"Yield Bill" — Annual Education Property Tax Rates

The annual yield bill establishes the education property tax rates, homestead yield, and related fiscal parameters used to finance Vermont's Education Fund for the upcoming fiscal year. Consistent with prior years, the House Ways and Means Committee began conversations about statewide spending estimates, projected state revenues, and potential tax rate scenarios early in the session in preparation for setting the yield.

Governor Scott's pronouncement of once again "buying down" the tax rate by $105 million has significant implications for school districts. Most school boards do not project their tax rates based on this buy down proclamation, thus voters vote on proposed budgets that do not reflect possible buy downs. This disconnect means that the final yield set months later does not align with the financial information presented to voters on Town Meeting Day. Education leaders have raised questions about this practice, the ability to communicate with voters early on how this "buydown" can impact actual property taxes and if some of the funds could instead be used to begin much needed work on infrastructure projects.

House Ways and Means will set and pass a yield bill (which will start as a committee bill) in the coming weeks. Whether some or all of the fund transfer proclaimed by the governor will be used to buy down property taxes is yet to be seen. The yield bill also will also determine how much of the tax increase will be picked up by homestead vs non-homestead taxes based on the rates set for each category. House Ways and Means has also been taking testimony on establishing new categories within the non-homestead classification. Education associations have long been in support of restructuring the homestead/non-homestead system, adjusting how the state taxes second homes, and establishing regional appraisals – and will continue to advocate for such changes regardless of the outcome of Act 73.

H.205 — Noncompete Agreements and Worker Mobility

H.205 proposed broad limits on the use and enforceability of noncompete agreements in Vermont employment contracts, establishing restrictions on when such agreements may be used and strengthening employee mobility protections across multiple sectors of the workforce.

During committee deliberations, Rep. Headrick raised a proposed amendment requesting to repeal 16 V.S.A. §1752(a), which governs teacher employment contracts and resignation requirements in Vermont public schools. The amendment claimed that the statutory restrictions placed on teachers who resign from contracts after a specified date function similarly to employment noncompete provisions, potentially limiting workforce mobility.

This change could have led to increased staffing disruptions throughout the year. The consequences would fall most heavily on rural and higher-need districts that already struggle to recruit and retain educators and are hamstrung by persistent funding inequities. Teacher quality is the single most important school-based factor influencing student outcomes. When teachers leave their positions, especially mid-year, the impact extends far beyond staffing logistics. High turnover disrupts student learning, destabilizes school communities, costs more money, and is associated with lower student achievement.

Current Vermont law already provides flexibility. Teachers may leave a contract for "just cause," and school leaders regularly work compassionately with educators when circumstances require it. This amendment goes far beyond reasonable flexibility and will lead to instability for schools and students alike. Additionally, collective bargaining agreements typically incorporate the dates that districts must provide individual contracts and the amount of time teachers have to accept or reject their contract; this window of time is part of the current negotiation process.

Although this bill had been under discussion since 2018, it was not until late February that teacher employment contracts were considered under the intent of this bill. The House Commerce & Economic Development Committee took testimony from and held meetings with the VSBA, VPA, VSA, and the VT-NEA in an effort to find compromise. Rep. Headrick declined to remove his amendment resulting in the Committee deciding to hold back the bill, missing the crossover deadline. It is likely that the question of how 16 V.S.A. §1752(a) intersects with non-compete agreements will be a topic of discussion in the legislature next year.

H.542 — PCB Testing in Vermont Schools

H.542 would terminate the statewide requirement that Vermont schools continue testing buildings for polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), while maintaining authority and funding to address remediation in schools where contamination has already been identified.

Committee discussion has largely centered on the cost and policy rationale of the statewide PCB testing program. Testimony and legislative discussion highlighted concerns from school officials and some legislators that the ongoing testing mandate creates significant financial uncertainty and potential long-term capital costs for school districts, while supporters of the testing program emphasized public health protections and the need to identify contamination in older school facilities. The policy debate therefore reflects a broader tension between environmental health oversight and the fiscal impact on public education systems. This tension has especially come to the forefront since the governor included no additional funding for the program in this year's budget despite being a longtime supporter of the initiative.

The bill passed second reading in the House and is scheduled for a third reading on March 17.

H.558 — Medicaid School-Based Services Program

H.558 proposes changes to Vermont's Medicaid school-based services program, including shifting primary administrative responsibility to the Agency of Human Services and revising how federal Medicaid reimbursements are distributed to school districts, increasing the district share to 55 percent of federal reimbursement generated by eligible services.

Testimony in the Health Care Committee focused on the state's transition to a new Medicaid reimbursement methodology required by federal rules, and the need to modernize Vermont's school-based services billing system. Agency of Education and Agency of Human Services officials indicated that the current claims-based model has operational challenges and that H.558 would streamline administration and increase the district share of reimbursements from 50 percent to 55 percent. Testimony from VASBO raised implementation and fiscal questions, including how the revised reimbursement formula would affect individual districts and how administrative responsibilities would shift between AHS and AOE.

There is a high likelihood that this bill will move out of committee by Friday, March 20.

H.650 — Educational Technology Products

H.650 would establish new oversight requirements for companies that provide educational technology products used by students and schools, including an annual registration requirement with the Vermont Secretary of State and disclosure obligations regarding data practices and product use in schools.

Committee hearings in early February focused heavily on student data privacy, the influence of digital learning platforms in classrooms, and the regulatory gap surrounding educational technology vendors. Testimony came from representatives of the Secretary of State's Office, the Attorney General's Office, school IT officials, and national experts on educational technology and student privacy. Witnesses raised concerns about the rapid expansion of classroom technology tools and the limited transparency around how student data are collected and used, while some education technology experts and school technology administrators, as well as the AOE, cautioned that new regulatory requirements could create administrative burdens for districts and vendors or limit access to widely used learning tools.

House Commerce voted this bill out of committee on March 13, 2026 with some revisions. The current draft can be viewed here.

H.750 — School Construction During State Aid Moratorium

H.750 addresses the ongoing moratorium on the State Aid for School Construction Program by allowing districts to proceed with voter-approved construction projects and clarifying how capital construction costs are treated in Vermont's education finance system, including excluding certain

construction costs from the definition of "education spending" used to calculate excess spending penalties.

This specific bill did not get out of committee prior to crossover. However, S.220 was voted out of Senate Finance and it includes a provision that excludes debt service when calculating the excess spending penalty. See the discussion of S.220 later in this report for more information.

H.802 — Adjusting the Special Education Census Grant for Inflation

H.802 would revise Act 173 to insure that Vermont's special education census grant be indexed to inflation on a yearly basis beginning in FY2027. The Act as written inadvertently sunset any inflation adjustment at the end of FY2026. Based on statements made in House Ways and Means on March 10, this "technical correction" will be folded into the Yield Bill.

H.842 — Commission on Public School Employee Health Benefits

H.842 proposes changes related to the Commission on Public School Employee Health Benefits, the body responsible for negotiating and overseeing statewide health insurance benefits for public school employees under Vermont's collective bargaining framework. The bill is intended to revisit elements of the commission's structure or operations following several years of experience with the statewide bargaining model.

Because the bill did not advance beyond its initial referral, committee consideration was limited. However, informal discussion among legislators and associations focused on the broader policy question of whether the statewide teacher health insurance bargaining framework – created under Act 11 of 2018 – needs adjustments. Senate Finance took testimony from the VSBA regarding the commission's decision-making structure, appropriate representation of interested parties, and the long-term fiscal impact of statewide bargaining on school district budgets. This bill's underlying concerns regarding the cost of and negotiation around health care benefits may continue to inform broader legislative discussions during the remainder of the session.

H.886 — Cost of Competing Adjustment in Education Funding

H.886 proposes creating a "cost of competing adjustment" within Vermont's education funding formula to account for regional differences in labor costs across the state, with the goal of ensuring districts facing higher labor markets are not disadvantaged in recruiting and retaining educators.

Testimony in Ways and Means has focused on how Vermont's evolving education funding reforms, particularly work related to a potential foundation funding formula, may inadequately account for regional variation in labor markets and cost of living. In written testimony, sponsors emphasized that districts in certain regions face structurally higher salary and cost pressures, and that failing to

account for these differences could lead to reductions in educational opportunities or difficulty attracting qualified educators.

Expert testimony from the Education Commission of the States also highlighted that many other states incorporate regional cost adjustments into school funding formulas to reflect differences in teacher labor markets and operational costs.

For public school advocates, the policy debate around H.886 is closely tied to the Legislature's broader examination of education finance reform and potential changes to Vermont's current funding structure. The bill has therefore functioned largely as a policy exploration of regional equity issues rather than a fully developed statutory proposal at this stage of the session.

Although this bill did not advance out of the committee, the issue it raises regarding regional cost adjustments in education funding is part of broader legislative discussions on school finance reform. It is likely that aspects of this bill will be incorporated into another education bill, possibly in the form of a study.

H.930 – An act relating to addressing and preventing chronic absenteeism

This bill proposes a statutory overhaul of Vermont's approach to chronic absenteeism and truancy, shifting state law toward a prevention-focused framework that standardizes definitions, requires statewide policy guidance from the Agency of Education, and emphasizes early intervention rather than punitive enforcement.

Committee discussion has focused on Vermont's persistent post-pandemic attendance challenges. State education officials testified that chronic absenteeism—defined as missing 10 percent or more of school days—has risen sharply since 2019, prompting calls for updated statutory tools to address the issue. The Agency of Education framed the proposal as a shift from a truancy enforcement model toward a prevention-focused, multi-tiered support system, including clearer definitions, earlier intervention, and consistent statewide reporting expectations.

At the same time, testimony from school leaders and counselors has urged caution about overly punitive mechanisms. Several witnesses emphasized that chronic absenteeism often reflects underlying barriers such as mental health challenges, transportation issues, housing instability, and family stress, and advocated for approaches grounded in student engagement and wraparound services rather than enforcement.

This bill was voted out of committee on March 12, 2026.

H.931 – An act relating to miscellaneous changes in education law

This bill proposes (1) to create an exemption to the moratorium on approval of new approved independent school initial applications when a currently therapeutic approved independent school

experiences a change in ownership; (2) that Vermont adopt and enter into the Interstate Compact for Education; (3) rename boards of cooperative education services as cooperative educational service areas; and (4) exclude a school's failure to comply with class size minimums as counting towards the three consecutive years necessary for the Secretary to be able to recommend action to the State Board until the State Board adopts updates to the Education Quality Standards rules or July 1, 2027, whichever date comes first.

Draft 4.1 was read for the first time on March 13, 2026 and referred to House Ways and Means per Rule 35(a).

S.26 — Artificial Dyes in School Foods

S.26 would prohibit Vermont school districts and participating independent schools from serving or selling foods and beverages containing certain artificial food dyes and additives during the school day, with the goal of reducing student exposure to synthetic ingredients that some research has linked to behavioral or health concerns.

Testimony before the committee has reflected broad agreement on the goal of improving the nutritional quality of foods served in schools, but differing views on implementation. Public health advocates and medical professionals argued that several petroleum-based dyes have been associated with hyperactivity and other potential health concerns in children, and urged Vermont to follow emerging national and state trends toward eliminating these ingredients from school meals.

Education associations focused more on operational and administrative implications. Representatives from the Agency of Education indicated that schools would likely be able to comply with the proposed restrictions because artificial dyes are not commonly used in most school meal programs, though the bill currently lacks a clear compliance or enforcement mechanism. The Burlington and Essex Westford nutrition directors testified that while they support healthier food standards, the proposal could create additional monitoring and documentation requirements and potentially function as an unfunded mandate unless aligned with existing federal nutrition program oversight processes.

This bill has been voted out of the Senate Health & Welfare Committee.

S.161 — Governor's List of Scholarship Granting Organizations

S.161 would establish a process for the Governor of Vermont to designate eligible scholarship-granting organizations (SGOs) so that Vermont taxpayers may participate in a new federal tax-credit program that incentivizes donations supporting K–12 student scholarships. Although it did not gain any traction this session. H.770 was introduced as a request that Vermont opt out of the federal tax credit program for contributions to scholarship granting organizations.

Early committee discussion has focused on the relationship between S.161 and a new federal scholarship tax-credit program, which would allow donors to receive federal tax credits for contributions to nonprofit scholarship organizations supporting K–12 students. Committee members examined how Vermont would identify and oversee eligible organizations, including provisions requiring that recognized SGOs demonstrate a Vermont-focused mission and be subject to audit or oversight by the State.

For education associations, the policy conversation has also reflected broader debates about the role of private scholarship programs in relation to Vermont's public education system, including whether state recognition of SGOs could indirectly expand access to private school scholarships or other alternative educational opportunities.

This bill passed out of Senate Education and is currently in Senate Finance; "money" bills have until March 20 to cross over. Based on the nature of this bill, even if this specific bill does not cross over, it is likely that the issue concerning how the governor should respond to this federal tax credit program will be further discussed and included in another education bill this session.

S.190 — Public-Sector Employee Health Insurance Study (Section 10)

S.190 addresses multiple public-sector workforce policy issues and, in a newly added Section 10, establishes a legislative study committee to evaluate the creation of a statewide health insurance pool for all public-sector employees in Vermont. The study would examine whether combining employees from state government, municipalities, and public schools into a single insured pool could improve bargaining leverage, stabilize premium growth, and reduce administrative costs.

Although this bill was initially introduced on January 6, no mention of the creation of a study group was introduced until March 11. The proposed study group would be tasked with producing a report regarding the potential for establishing the Public Employee Health Benefit Authority to provide and administer health plans that would meet the health care and wellness needs of Vermont's municipal, State, public school, and public college and university employees and their dependents.

The VT-NEA provided brief testimony to the Senate Health and Welfare committee on March 11. The committee did not hear from any other union or employer groups before voting this bill out of committee.

This proposal raises questions about whether school employee health plans would ultimately be integrated with other public-sector plans, how such a change might affect premium costs and collective bargaining structures, and whether existing statewide bargaining mechanisms would be maintained or replaced.

S.206 — Licensure of Early Childhood Educators

S.206 proposes establishing a state licensure system for early childhood educators, administered through the Office of Professional Regulation, with the goal of professionalizing the early childhood workforce, improving consistency in training standards, and strengthening workforce retention in Vermont's child care and prekindergarten system.

S.206 has received extensive testimony and discussion across multiple committees, reflecting the complexity of establishing an additional statewide professional licensure system for early childhood educators. This bill would create a new, separate licensure pathway at OPR for childcare providers in regulated child care and preK settings. This is distinct from the Agency of Education's existing early childhood and early childhood special educator endorsements, which have significantly different degree and preparation requirements. This has been a major concern of the VPA, VSA, VSBA, the AOE and the NEA. It is not often we all can agree on something. VPA provided relevant written testimony last week to the Health and Welfare committee and Gov Ops Committee.

Supporters, including early childhood advocacy organizations such as Let's Grow Kids and workforce development advocates, have argued that licensure would elevate early childhood education as a recognized profession, establish clearer career pathways, and improve workforce stability in a sector experiencing significant staffing shortages. Testimony emphasized that many early childhood educators currently lack access to consistent professional credentialing structures despite performing educational roles comparable to those in the K–12 system.

Providers and child care program leaders raised concerns that new licensing requirements could create additional barriers to entry into the field and/or exacerbate existing workforce shortages if educational requirements or credentialing standards are implemented too quickly. Several witnesses urged legislators to ensure that licensure requirements are accompanied by adequate scholarships, compensation supports, and transition periods.

Testimony from the Office of Professional Regulation and the Agency of Human Services focused on the design of a new licensing board, administrative costs, and the relationship between licensure standards and Vermont's existing child care quality rating and credentialing systems. Fiscal analysts also examined the cost of administering the licensing system, which prompted the referral to Senate Appropriations.

S.206 intersects with broader policy discussions about prekindergarten access and alignment between early childhood and the public education system. Legislators have noted that strengthening the early childhood workforce is increasingly viewed as a critical component of Vermont's overall education continuum. However, education associations are concerned that the language used in this bill does not make clear the different levels of training required of licensed child care providers vs. AOE-licensed early educators.

This bill moved out of committee.

S.214 — Prekindergarten Access in Geographically Isolated Districts

S.214 proposes adjustments to Vermont's publicly funded prekindergarten system intended to provide greater flexibility for geographically isolated school districts that face challenges delivering prekindergarten services due to distance, transportation barriers, or a limited number of licensed early childhood providers.

Committee testimony and discussion have focused on how Vermont's universal prekindergarten statute functions in rural regions, where districts may struggle to meet statutory requirements due to geographic realities.

School administrators and early childhood providers testified that some communities face long travel distances between families and licensed providers, limited availability of private partner providers, and logistical challenges coordinating transportation for four-year-olds. Witnesses emphasized that these barriers can make it difficult for some districts to provide the 10 hours per week of publicly funded prekindergarten required under Vermont law.

Supporters of the bill argue that allowing additional flexibility for geographically isolated districts would help ensure that families in rural communities have equitable access to prekindergarten opportunities, even where the existing provider network is limited.

Some legislators and early childhood advocates cautioned that any new flexibility should be designed carefully to maintain consistent program quality standards statewide, particularly with regard to teacher qualifications and curriculum expectations.

For public school districts, the proposal has been framed as a targeted adjustment to improve access to early childhood education without altering the core universal prekindergarten framework.

On March 12, Senate Education voted this bill out of committee unanimously and referred it to Senate Finance.

S.220 — Education Spending Caps

S.220 would establish temporary limits on the growth of school district per-pupil education spending in fiscal years 2028 and 2029, tying allowable increases to a defined "allowable growth" percentage based on the prior year's spending. The proposal is intended as an interim measure to restrain education property tax growth while the Legislature continues broader education finance reform efforts.

S.220 has been one of the more closely watched education proposals of the session because it directly addresses education spending growth and property tax pressures. Testimony from state fiscal analysts emphasized that education fund costs have been rising steadily, contributing to

significant property tax increases and prompting lawmakers to consider temporary spending constraints while longer-term structural reforms are developed.

Education organizations—including school boards, superintendents, principals, and educators—have raised substantial concerns about the proposal. Testimony argued that a state-imposed cap on district spending could conflict with Vermont's tradition of local voter control over school budgets and limit districts' ability to respond to enrollment shifts, staffing needs, and mandated services.

At the same time, the bill has received political support from some state leaders, including public comments from the Governor endorsing efforts to limit education spending growth as part of broader property tax relief efforts. As a result, S.220 has become a focal point in the broader policy debate over how Vermont should balance cost containment with local governance and educational adequacy.

On March 13, Senator Thomas Chittenden presented an amendment which removed the idea of a percentage cap and instead relied on the existing threshold mechanism, lowering the excess percentage from the current 118% to 112%. JFO provided financial analysis, both with and without a hold harmless provision. The amendment also stated that "voter-approved bond payments toward principal and interest shall not be included in "education spending" for purposes of calculating excess spending".

Senate Finance voted this amended bill out of committee on a 5-2 vote.

S.227 — Immigration Protocols in Vermont Schools

S.227 would require Vermont school districts to adopt formal policies governing how school personnel respond to federal immigration enforcement requests, including protocols for when immigration agents seek access to school grounds or student information. The bill is intended to clarify procedures so that schools remain "sensitive spaces" while ensuring staff understand legal requirements when interacting with federal authorities.

Testimony in the Senate Education Committee has focused on how immigration enforcement activity can affect student attendance, school climate, and family engagement, particularly in communities with significant immigrant populations. Witnesses, including the Superintendent Wilmer Chavarria of the Winooski School District, described local efforts to develop "sanctuary school" protocols and urged the Legislature to establish statewide guidance so that smaller districts are not left to develop policies independently.

Education policy researchers and advocates also emphasized evidence suggesting that immigration enforcement actions can lead to immediate declines in student attendance and academic performance, arguing that clear policies can help schools maintain stable learning environments. At the same time, testimony from the Attorney General's office raised legal and operational considerations, including the need to ensure that any state policy is consistent with federal law and

provides clear guidance for front-office staff who may be the first point of contact with federal agents.

VSBA and VSA raised questions on the implementability of the bill – focusing on what objectives are best suited for school board policy and what belongs in administrative procedure. To that end, VSBA and VSA provided testimony regarding revisions to the bill's language, many of which were incorporated into the final draft.

This bill was read for a third time and passed out of the Senate on March 13.

S.313 — Transforming Vermont's Career and Technical Education System

S.313 expresses legislative intent to transform Vermont's career and technical education (CTE) system by expanding universal access to CTE programs, aligning offerings with workforce needs, and exploring governance, funding, and delivery reforms to better connect secondary education with postsecondary and career pathways.

Committee discussions have emphasized the importance of expanding equitable access to CTE programs for all Vermont high school students, particularly given that a majority of students will pursue pathways other than four-year college degrees. Witnesses from workforce and education organizations have highlighted persistent barriers to participation—including transportation limitations, scheduling conflicts between sending schools and CTE centers, and program capacity constraints that lead to waitlists.

Testimony from AOE and the Vermont Business Roundtable focused on how a redesigned CTE system could better align program offerings with regional labor market needs, support industry-recognized credentials, and strengthen the transition from secondary education to employment or postsecondary training. The bill's current draft is largely "intent language," outlining a strategic vision for CTE transformation rather than establishing immediate statutory changes, suggesting that additional legislative work would be needed to translate the proposal into specific policy reforms.

This proposal is part of a broader policy conversation about strengthening career pathways, improving student engagement, and addressing workforce shortages in key sectors, while also ensuring that CTE expansion complements rather than competes with traditional high school programming.

This bill was voted out of Senate Education unanimously.