



To: House Education Committee

From: Sue Ceglowski, Executive Director and General Counsel, VSBA
Flor Diaz Smith, President, VSBA Board of Directors

Re: Analysis of Conlon Map, Draft Bills & VSBA Criteria Act 73

Date: February 12, 2026

Thank you for inviting the Vermont School Boards Association (VSBA) to provide testimony on the Conlon draft map which was introduced last week. We are Sue Ceglowski, Executive Director of the VSBA and Flor Diaz Smith, President of the VSBA Board of Directors.

As noted in earlier testimony to the Committee, the VSBA developed its own set of criteria for evaluating any proposals that emerge through the Act 73 process, reflecting the needs and priorities identified by school board members from across the state. The criteria are laid out in our position paper, "[Responsible Implementation of Act 73](#)" and at the end of this testimony. We supported the Redistricting Task Force's proposal because it creates the conditions for meeting VSBA's criteria. We encouraged the Legislature to build upon the work of the Task Force by refining the proposal and filling in the details.

Last night, the VSBA Board evaluated Chair Conlon's draft map and legislative language using the same criteria from our position paper. In doing so, they acknowledged that it would be difficult for any initial proposal to meet all of the VSBA criteria given that some of the criteria require significant analysis and planning.

The real test is whether the proposal creates the conditions for meeting the criteria. For instance, earlier in the legislative session the VSBA Board concluded that the hybrid scenario (presented by the Agency of Education a few weeks ago) containing 13 districts with a minimum district size of 4,044 and a maximum district size of 9,122 contained districts that were too large to maintain a strong sense of community within each district and would represent a drastic change from Vermont's current number of 119 school districts. For that reason, it was evident that the hybrid scenario did not create the conditions to meet the rest of the VSBA criteria.

In contrast, Chair Conlon's proposal creates smaller districts ranging from 984 students to 4,421 students. In general, the Conlon map recommends parameters for district size that are large

enough to allow efficiency at scale but small enough to maintain a strong sense of community and personalized attention to every student, supported by research (see [VSA Instructional Scale Policy Brief](#) and citations within).

That said, we appreciate that the Conlon map was presented as a starting point needing refinement. VSBA Board discussion last night indicated that the map does not always recognize and address significant variation across different regions of the state, including student demographics, community resources, and other geographic considerations. For example, district #14 in the northeast corner of the state covers a large geographic area which would pose significant challenges to maintaining a strong sense of community in the new district.

If the Committee furthers its exploration of the Conlon map, we urge you to seek meaningful input from district leaders and school boards in that area and other areas most affected by these changes and make adjustments to ensure that a strong sense of community can be built and maintained within each new district. In addition, we call for detailed cost analyses to determine if there are cost savings projected by the Conlon proposal.

Turning now to the draft legislative language. VSBA appreciates the proposal's general approach to contracting and designation reflected in the draft language, which would require a school district to designate public or approved independent schools and enter into contracts when necessary to serve resident students. This reflects an intention to maintain access to educational opportunities for all students while redefining how those obligations are structured. Given the larger size of the districts in the Conlon proposal as compared to current district sizes, we ask you to consider whether school districts should be able to designate more than three public or approved independent schools to provide education for students who do not have reasonable access to a public school within the district. Additionally, it will be important to have a clear definition of "reasonable access."

In closing, we appreciate the work that has gone into Representative Conlon's map and the conversation it has sparked. After facilitating our VSBA Board meeting last night, it is clear that we, as school board members from across the state, have a great deal to offer you, and we are committed to working alongside you as this proposal moves forward. The general consensus is that this is a step in the right direction. However, it is still a starting point, a map, rather than a plan grounded in a unified vision and mission for Vermont's entire PreK–12 education system. As Sue shared, while we see progress, we must now take the time to examine areas that present geographic challenges or feel more like attachments rather than thoughtfully integrated areas in the state.

As you continue this work, we urge you to ensure the proposal fully addresses the criteria before you. It must recognize and respond to the significant variation across regions, student demographics, community resources, and geography. It must emerge from a collaborative, inclusive, and transparent process that meaningfully engages residents, families, educators, district leaders, and school boards. It must be supported by detailed cost analyses of current district finances and clearly projected savings. It must include a comprehensive transition plan and timeline that minimizes disruption, is adequately funded, and strengthens our investment in

safe, modern learning environments. If the intent is to create a more efficient and cost-effective system that addresses rising costs, health benefits, mental health supports, facilities, and investment in first instruction education, then that must be clearly articulated. And most importantly, it must be grounded in data and evidence that show how redistricting will improve student outcomes for all learners.

As you move forward, we encourage you to consult directly with school board members from different regions of the state to understand how this proposal may work, or not work, on the ground. We are willing to facilitate this and make sure we bring forward members of different regions. The Committee needs more information, and you need the right questions guiding this effort. As we look ahead, VSBA remains committed to working with the Legislature and the Governor to shape the future of public education in Vermont. Real change takes steady leadership. It takes trust. It takes people willing to stay at the table, even when it is hard. Our students need stability, fairness, and decisions grounded in real data. Together, we must ensure that Vermont's public education system remains strong, steady, and centered on equity for every student in every community.

VSBA's Criteria for a Successful Statewide Plan

VSBA believes a successful proposal for transforming Vermont's public education system will:

1. Be based on a **unified vision and mission** for Vermont's education system, PreK through Grade 12;
2. Improve **student outcomes**, as supported by evidence and data that show the correlation between redistricting and enhanced educational experiences and results for all students;
3. Ensure **equitable access** for all students to public educational opportunities, including academic programs, co-curricular activities, and support services, particularly by identifying and addressing inequities that currently exist in both access and outcomes;
4. Promote a shared sense of responsibility to educate students with a **full range of needs and strengths**, recognizing that some populations may require additional resources;
5. Prioritize equitable access to both **high-quality career and technical education and flexible pathways** for all students, equipping them with the knowledge and skills needed for successful careers of their choosing;
6. Increase resources to support the maintenance, repair, renovation and construction of modern **school facilities**, recognizing that safe, healthy and well-designed learning environments are essential to better student outcomes;
7. Create a more **efficient and cost-effective system** of school districts that addresses some of the critical expenses that are rising at exponential rates, including employee health benefits, mental health supports, facilities needs, and special education services;
8. Recommend parameters for **district size** by enrollment that are large enough to allow efficiency at scale but small enough to maintain a strong sense of community and personalized attention to every student, supported by research;

9. Recognize and address significant **variation across different regions** of the state, including student demographics, community resources, and other geographic considerations;
10. Emerge from a **collaborative, inclusive, transparent decision-making process** that incorporates meaningful engagement and input from residents, families, educators, district leaders, and school boards, who will be most affected by any changes;
11. Be supported by **detailed cost analyses** of current district finances and projected savings through redistricting, including the impact on staffing levels and class sizes; and
12. Minimize disruption and ensure **effective implementation** through the development of a comprehensive transition plan and timeline, with adequate funding to support all expenses associated with redistricting.