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House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development Testimony
Lynn Cota, Superintendent - Franklin Northeast Supervisory Union

March 12, 2026

Testimony on H.205 Headrick Amendment

Chair and Members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is Lynn Cota, and I serve as the Superintendent of the Franklin Northeast Supervisory Union. I proudly represent nine member schools, in the six towns of Bakersfield, Berkshire, Enosburg, Montgomery, Richford, and Sheldon.

To give you some context about FNESU, the visual included in this testimony represents the FY 26 disparity between weighted per pupil spending for districts in Vermont. The statewide average is represented by the black line reflects the average spending at $13,947 and the two red lines near the bottom reflect the weighted per pupil spending for our two districts. For FY27 our two districts are expected to have lower weighted per-pupil spending than every other operating district in the state. Some other districts pass budgets allowing them to spend at rates more than $7,000 per weighted pupil higher than we do. I am offering testimony today regarding the profoundly negative impacts the proposed Headrick amendment, and now revised amendment, would have on our students in FNESU and in systems like ours throughout Vermont.

Vermont's constitution establishes the state's obligation to provide a substantially equal educational opportunity for all of Vermont's students, a principle confirmed by the *Brigham v. State* decision in 1997. This mandate requires that a student's educational experience is not dependent on a town's property wealth or zip code. However, the current, stark disparity between the lowest and highest spending school systems in the state confirms that this constitutional obligation is simply not being met.

Research is clear that the single greatest school based factor contributing to a child's academic success in school is the quality of the teacher. This is where the core inequity lies: better-resourced systems already benefit from the ability to offer higher salaries, naturally leading to a stronger candidate pool and allowing them to hire their pick of experienced educators. This gives their students a vast advantage from the start.

In contrast, economically disadvantaged communities like FNESU currently struggle significantly to fill critical teacher positions. We are often forced to rely on candidates with provisional or emergency licenses, or those with unrelated degrees, who are learning the role as they work. This compounds the challenge for our students, many of whom begin with a greater distance to travel and the most barriers to

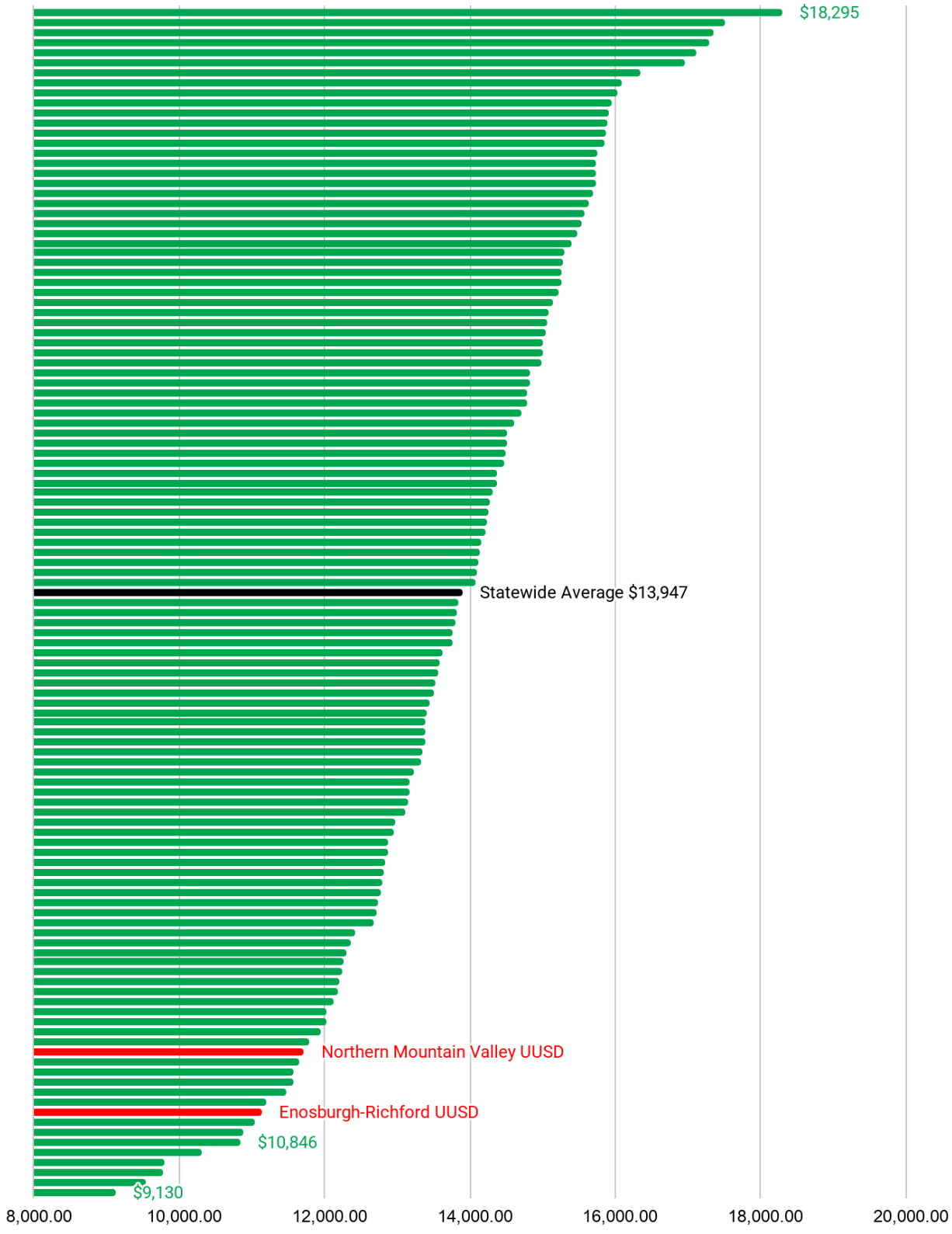
overcome in their journey towards proficiency and require a strong Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) to accelerate their growth. When schools are faced with late resignations, or mid-year departures, they often have to pull educators out of the MTSS system that is intended to provide students with the extra support and intervention they need to succeed in order to fill classroom teaching positions.

Imagine, then, the impact of the proposed Headrick amendment, which would allow teachers to leave contracts late in the hiring season or mid-year. This potential instability would completely undermine our ability to ensure continuity of learning, leaving our most vulnerable students without the consistent, qualified instruction they need. This amendment would ensure an even more substantially unequal experience for our students.

Teaching contracts have always been and should continue to be a two-way street. Contracts serve as a promise to teachers that they have a teaching position for the upcoming year and should be considered an assurance that the teacher will provide continuity of learning for our students for the duration of the contract period.

In FNESU, we work incredibly hard to strengthen the learning ecosystem in each of our schools. This includes investments in recruitment and retention, teacher onboarding, instructional coaching, professional development, and mentoring. There is a tremendous financial cost to recruiting and onboarding new educators, and more importantly, there is an even greater cost to students when staffing turnover is high and students have multiple years of their educational experience led by educators who don't yet have fully developed teaching skills. We already serve as a "farm team" to better resourced districts; we will now be losing our players mid-season rather than just during free agency.

Unless you are willing to first prioritize leveling the playing field with a statewide teacher's contract, I implore you to strike this amendment. Don't take away the one tool we have to maintain some level of teacher continuity from one contract period to the next for the benefit of our students. **We cannot claim to be working towards an equitable educational system if language like this passes into law and widens the opportunity gap for Vermont's most under-resourced students.**


$18,295
Statewide Average $13,947
Northern Mountain Valley UUSD
Enosburgh-Richford UUSD
$10,846
$9,130
8,000.00
10,000.00
12,000.00
14,000.00
16,000.00
18,000.00
20,000.00