

TESTIMONY PROVIDED TO: House Education Committee
FROM: Meagan Roy, Ed.D. (Chair, Commission on the Future of VT Education)
TOPIC: Commission Update
DATE: May 8, 2025

Summary of April 21 and May 5 Meetings

As we shared with you during testimony on April 15th, the Commission has refocused its working cadence in two areas: Regular review of current legislative proposals and an analysis of policy considerations for Governance, Quality and Funding using a framework for assessing the equity impact of any proposal.

Legislative Proposal Discussions

During the April 21st meeting, H.454 had been passed by the House and discussion had moved to the Senate. By the time the Commission convened again this week, the Senate Education Committee had developed a strike-all version of H.454 with several revisions. Thus, the Commission took the opportunity to discuss both the House-passed version and the version being discussed by Senate Education (as of May 5th, that was [H.454 Version 7.1](#)).

In each of its discussions, the Commission is viewing policy proposals in the context of its own findings from the [December 2024 Preliminary Report](#). Specifically, we consider this finding:

"Vermont has a shared responsibility for the education of our youth. Delivering on this responsibility will require us to collaborate around *broad transformational policy changes in **each** of the identified areas: education finance, governance & administration and our education delivery system*. It will require that Vermonters think deeply about solutions and challenge our assumptions about the causes. *It is the belief of the Commission that real solutions will include changes to **all three** policy consideration areas*, and we wish to begin this report by elevating that finding. There is no "silver bullet solution." (pg 6, emphasis added)

With that framework in mind, the following are themes that emerged from the discussion:

- **There is a recognition that the two global policy recommendations in both the House and Senate bills (Governance [Redistricting] and Foundation Formula) are consistent with two of the three policy consideration areas identified by the Commission.** The Commission believes it is important to highlight areas in which both bodies are coalescing - this does not necessarily mean there is full consensus about those areas, but they do represent some alignment.
- **There is concern that the Senate bill does not address underlying cost drivers in education.** This Commission has shared its perspective, repeatedly, that without addressing underlying cost drivers in education, no proposal will be successful in mediating public education cost. A reduction of education funding will simply impact students. These cost drivers include, but are not limited to: healthcare, facilities, tuition, mental health services and others.
- **There is concern about the timeline of the Senate bill.** Commission members noted that even the most seamless of voluntary mergers under Act 46 required two or more years for a full transition. Forced or otherwise complex mergers required much more time for transition - and

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the mergers contemplated in the Senate version would all fall into the category of complex mergers because they would cross existing district lines, require specific decision making about school board representation and more.

- **There is concern that the Senate bill does not address the three intersecting policy areas, and as a result will not fully address the challenges identified by the Commission.** Two examples were shared:
 - The Senate bill does not address the challenges with Vermont's current education delivery system. Elements from the House version that were intended to address instructional quality (class size, for example) were removed from the current version. Class size/school size guidelines in the House bill, while imperfect, are proxy for quality because they are based on the delivery of quality instruction. Without requirements in those areas, the decision making surrounding how districts will spend their (reduced) foundation dollars will continue to be variable, impacting offerings and quality. Failing to address the delivery system impacts quality.
 - Commission members also pointed to the claim that the revised foundation formula allows for a 10% increase in teacher salary. The foundation formula would not force districts to pay teachers more; it gives them funding that they could use for that purpose. Further, the "10% increase" is on the average salary in Vermont. For districts already paying more than the average, districts are unlikely to reduce salaries to match the formula amount - thus, they will have less dollars available to pay their existing teachers. This would likely result in teacher reductions. This, too, will impact quality.
- **There is concern about the magnitude of change proposed in relation to independent schools.** For some, the concern is that a large number of independent schools who currently receive public dollars would no longer be able to do so. For others, the concern is that the Senate proposal is designed with an outsized focus on protecting existing tuition structures.
- **The Senate version removes the requirement for the Commission to utilize the community engagement structures it has developed.** The Commission continues to expend resources in support of gathering input for the legislature. We are part of the way through a contract because we believe deep engagement is critical for the magnitude of change being considered - and because Act 183 requires this of us. If the legislature determines that it does not want to utilize the structures created by the Commission, then significant taxpayer funds will have been spent in support of an engagement structure that was terminated prior to gathering all of the input.
- **The Commission's input to date unanimously supports the ongoing and continued work of the Commission, particularly so that Vermont voices can continue to be engaged in this work.**
 - The only area of consistent feedback the Commission has received is that equitable community engagement and input in the transformation of our education system is critical. While there are many opinions about what that transformation should look like,

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all of the feedback we’ve received acknowledges that we need to keep gathering it. The Senate version of H.454 would disregard this, our most unanimous, finding.

- Commission feedback suggests that the Commission could and should play an important role in ongoing discussions and should not be terminated early as noted in the Senate version. The House Bill, even though it narrowed the focus, kept the Commission in existence through the time when redistricting was proposed. Once the legislature is not in session, it is the only body still standing that is charged with continuing to gather input.

Commission Media Update & Input Sessions

Afton Partners has been working closely with the Commission to revise and respond to the changing legislative context. This includes fast tracking the scheduling of public input sessions that are designed to be as accessible as possible for Vermonters, as well as targeted input sessions with specific stakeholder groups. The [Progress Update](#) includes registration information for these sessions, which were confirmed at this week’s meeting (Afton Partners is working on a “save the data” communication that will be shared widely).

Equity Impact Assessment

Finally, Commission members continued their work in subcommittees on considering the equity impacts of the current policy proposals. This framework is essential so that we deeply understand the implications of what is being considered. As a reminder, each policy area is being considered according to the following:

Step One: Determine Outcomes and Stakeholders 1. What is the policy and what is it trying to achieve? 2. What underrepresented or underserved populations are/would be impacted by the proposed policy? How would they each be impacted?
Step Two: Look at Numbers & Narratives 3. What data will we review and why? What did we learn?
Step Three: Measure Benefits & Burdens 4. How does the proposed policy seek to enhance services and/or reduce disparities to underrepresented or underserved communities?
Step Four: Implementation and Accountability

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">5. What implementation considerations need to be addressed in order to ensure the policy achieves equitable results?6. What performance measures should be used to track the quantity and quality of work performed by the proposed policy? |
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adapted from the [State of Vermont's \[Equity\] Impact Assessment Tool](#) and [Chicago United for Equity's Racial Equity Impact Statement](#).

Preliminary Public Input Themes

The Commission received an update from Afton Partners about the public input it has received to date. Afton has developed a preliminary summary of the themes gathered to date (August 2024-April 2025), through public comment, Commission correspondence and input sessions.. The [Public Input Themes and Takeaways](#) include:

- “The Commission must make a concerted effort to elevate underrepresented voices in all stages of planning and decision-making. Without this, every recommendation risks lacking legitimacy or missing key perspectives.”
- “Members of the public have cited lack of trust and communication from local school boards and the Agency of Education. They urge the Commission to create consistent norms and practices to improve transparency around decision-making.”
- “Members of the public are frustrated over the lack of timely, accurate, and relevant data. Without accurate, disaggregated, and shared data, the Commission cannot make effective decisions that center equity.”
- “There were mixed views on consolidation savings under Act 46, as well as concerns over budget timelines, maintaining local autonomy, and school district disruptions. Proposals that seemingly undermine core equity principles raised concerns and red flags for members of the public.”

As you can see, those that have been able to engage with the Commission have critical things to say about the future of public education in Vermont. We also know that our engagement to date has not reached all voices - and, arguably, neither has the general assembly. We are firmly committed to the idea that this engagement is critical, and will continue to work with Afton to design additional input opportunities. **It is the position of the Commission that this engagement should not be overlooked - your public is asking for it.**