



Final Report of the Task Force on Collaboration to Benefit all Students

Submitted by:

Clare Wool, Task Force Chair

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TASK FORCE MEMBERS

Name	VSBA Region Represented	School Board Served
Clare Wool, Chair	Western Chittenden	Burlington School District
Mark Koenig	Addison	Addison Northwest School District
Herbert Ogden	Bennington	Taconic and Green Regional School District
Tiffany Donza	Central VT	Lamoille South Supervisory Union and Stowe School District
Edye Graning	Eastern Chittenden	Mount Mansfield Unified Union School District
Tammy Revoir	Franklin/ Grand Isle	Bellows Free Academy Fairfax/Franklin West Supervisory Union
Gaston Bathalon	Kingdom North	North Country Supervisory Union and Troy School District
Terri Vest	Kingdom South	Mountain View Union School District, Hazen Union School District
Lisa Miser	Rutland	Quarry Valley Unified Union School District & Greater Rutland County Supervisory Union
Stacey Peters	Windsor	Granville Hancock Unified School District
Jacki Murano	Windham	Searsburg School District

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Vermont School Boards Association (VSBA) represents the elected officials who govern one of our most precious resources as a state: our public schools. Our organization is dedicated to serving Vermont's elected school boards as they navigate an increasingly challenging policy landscape, in support of public education across Vermont.

Vermont has a deep commitment to public education that provides each Vermont student what they need to be successful. Education policy in our state codifies this commitment to equity in Title 16 of Vermont Statutes: "[I]t is the policy of the State that all Vermont children will be afforded educational opportunities that are substantially equal although educational programs may vary from district to district." (16 V.S.A. § 1)

Governor Scott has been clear about his long-standing focus on ensuring Vermont is attractive for families and other residents for years to come. In his 2020 inaugural address, he shared his belief that "building the best education system in the nation is one of the greatest economic development tools we could ask for." We believe that the health of our public schools is central to that priority. Families want (and our children deserve) excellent schools, and the fundamental funding challenges our state faces requires a deep focus on public education.

The Task Force on Collaboration to Benefit All Students was convened following the passage of a VSBA resolution in response to long-standing challenges that have existed within the education leadership structure of the state. These challenges have impacted districts' ability to realize our state's educational goals. The Task Force sought to identify those challenges and propose a series of recommendations as important launching points for future collaborative work. The Task Force offers this report as a starting point to work collaboratively across agencies and organizations to make meaningful progress toward "...educational opportunities that are substantially equal..." - toward our collective vision for inclusive, effective and sustainable public education for all Vermont students. Together, we can leverage Vermont's strengths and improve outcomes for all Vermonters.

Overview

After selecting one VSBA representative from each of the VSBA's 11 regions across the state, the Task Force began its work by engaging a number of important partners in the education system to gather input about the leadership support needed in Vermont schools. Their engagement included reaching out to the Interim Secretary of Education, the Chair of the State Board of Education, surveying school board members and superintendents, and conducting focus group discussions with Vermont educational organizations. This input was synthesized into two specific themes:

- 1) Vermont needs timely and consistent access to valid data about its schools, and
- 2) Vermont needs its state level leadership, the Agency of Education (hereafter "Agency") and State Board of Education (hereafter "State Board"), to be structured and supported

in a manner that allows them to uphold the leadership roles and responsibilities to public education outlined in state statute.

Recommendations

In order to address the fundamental challenges in our state's public education system, we need a shared, non-partisan commitment to our collective responsibility. The Task Force recommendations include:

- ***Expand and Maintain a Comprehensive & Accurate Data Dashboard***
The Agency must provide a publicly available, accurate and accessible data dashboard as a mechanism to ensure equity for all students (see the [Massachusetts DOE School & District Profiles](#)). Utilizing data is the single most important way to effectively monitor the state's ability to meet its education policy needs.
- ***Improve the Capacity of the Agency of Education to Meet Statutory Responsibilities***
The Agency should conduct a comprehensive organizational analysis in order to understand why it has been unable to meet its statutory responsibilities to oversee public education in Vermont. This analysis, inclusive of feedback from the field and an evaluation of the culture of the organization, should result in a redesign to support better Agency function.
- ***Utilize the District Quality Standards to Conduct a Review of the Function of the State Board of Education***
The State Board should adhere to the governance standards outlined in Section 113 of the [District Quality Standards](#). The State Board should be required to conduct an annual self-assessment on its own adherence to these standards.
- ***Depoliticize the State Board of Education***
The State Board should be restructured to ensure that it can act in a non-political capacity. The appointment structure should be expanded so that the Governor does not have sole authority for appointing members. The State Board makeup should more proportionately represent local school board members from districts that operate a public school. And finally, the State Board should have adequate resources to conduct its work, either through the budget allocation process or by leveraging Agency of Education resources
- ***Prioritize Existing Legislation***
Attempts to implement new legislation without the underlying data and structures to support it are irresponsible. Repeating the pattern of failing to support existing policy will continue to put students and public education in jeopardy.
- ***Acknowledge the work of the Commission on the Future of Public Education***
[Act 183 of 2024](#) convened the Commission to make recommendations to the General

Assembly regarding public education funding, delivery and governance. Many of the issues outlined here also seek to be addressed in the Commission's work. The Task Force affirms the need for this work to be completed in order for substantive improvements to be made.

BACKGROUND, ORIGIN & DESIGN OF THE TASK FORCE

VSBA Resolutions

The VSBA utilizes a resolutions process to identify and take action on issues of importance to its members. Resolutions allow the organization to develop its legislative platform and provide a framework for its work with partner organizations and agencies on issues of common importance. They are proposed by member boards, discussed as a full membership, and then adopted or not.

As part of its 2023 resolutions process, VSBA members articulated a number of concerns facing school boards as they work to provide responsible governance and oversight of Vermont's public school system. These concerns arose over time, with Board members hearing frequently from their local administrators about significant leadership challenges that exist within the State Board and Agency. VSBA members have held concerns that have persisted over years, making it increasingly challenging for school districts not only to implement the landmark education legislation passed over the past number of years, but also to meet their basic statutory responsibilities under the law. During resolution discussions, VSBA members highlighted the following as examples of the challenges:

- The State Board of Education and the Agency of Education have attempted many comprehensive system changes over the past decade including the Statewide Longitudinal Data System, Vermont's comprehensive student assessment system, special education funding (Act 173), and revised school quality standards - and yet implementation of these efforts has been limited at best.
- The Efinance software implementation was a statewide failure and resulted in abandoning the software after spending a significant amount of money from the Education Fund and school resources (financial and human).
- The Statewide Longitudinal Data System project was established in 2005 and received \$4.9 million in funding, but useful information from that System has never been made available.

All of this, in a context wherein Vermont's students, teachers, staff, and administrators have emerged from a world-wide pandemic with daily concerns including school violence, inequality and hate speech, and ongoing actions taken against marginalized persons. In order to initiate more productive discussions to improve outcomes for Vermont students, VSBA members adopted the following resolution:

"That VSBA convene a Task Force to assess concerns regarding the failures of the State Board of Education and/or the Agency of Education, and thereafter provide to the Governor and the legislature no later than January 2025 a list of recommended actions they should take in order to provide appropriate support toward the education of Vermont's students. This Task Force may include support from groups such as the Vermont Superintendents Association, the Vermont

Principals Association, the Vermont Council of Special Education Administrators, and the Vermont Business Managers Association.”

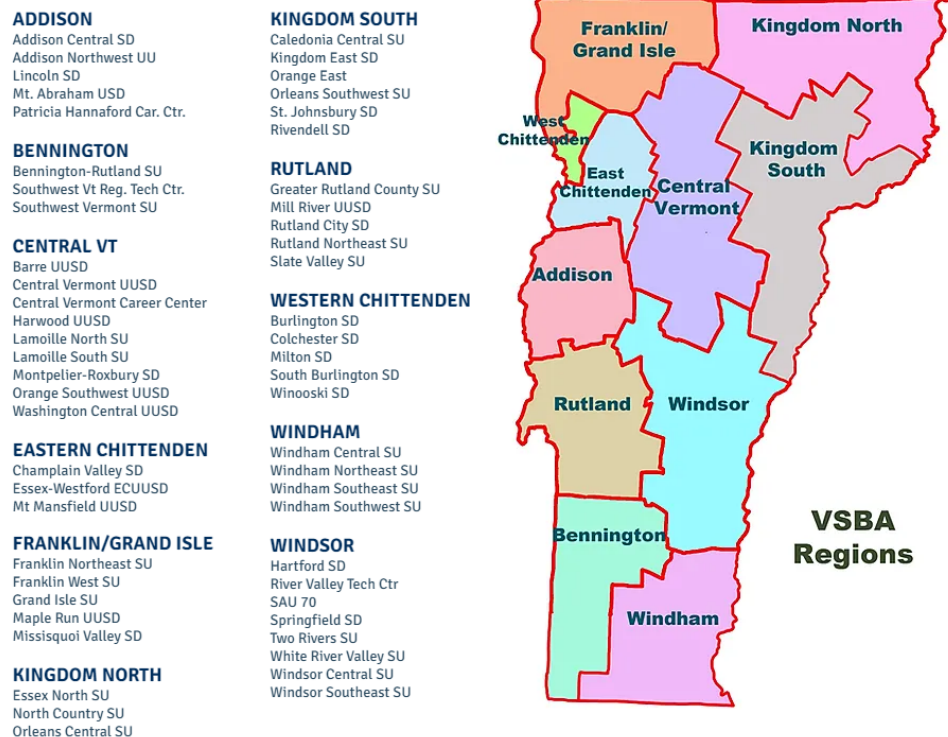
The VSBA membership adopted this resolution on October 26, 2023. Its adoption by the full membership indicates that the concerns raised are not unique to a single district, but rather represent the perspective of school leaders across the state. The resolution adoption set into motion the creation of the Task Force, which would work to define an approach to identifying recommendations.

Work of the Task Force

The VSBA assembled a Task Force that represents all of its eleven regions across Vermont [see figure 1]. The goal was to convene a group that could speak to the unique challenges across the state. This would allow the group to draw on the experiences of VSBA’s membership more broadly and integrate the perspectives of Vermont’s partner organizations for public education (Vermont Superintendents Association, Vermont Principals Association, Vermont Association of School Business Officials, Vermont Council of Special Education Administrators and Vermont Curriculum Leaders Association). The VSBA contracted with a consultant to support the group in synthesizing feedback and in writing the report.

Figure 1

VSBA Regions



Membership & Meeting Structures

Name	VSBA Region Represented	School Board Served
Clare Wool, Chair	Western Chittenden	Burlington School District
Mark Koenig	Addison	Addison Northwest School District
Herbert Ogden	Bennington	Taconic and Green Regional School District
Tiffany Donza	Central VT	Lamoille South Supervisory Union and Stowe School District
Edye Graning	Eastern Chittenden	Mount Mansfield Unified Union School District
Tammy Revoir	Franklin/Grand Isle	Bellows Free Academy Fairfax/Franklin West Supervisory Union
Gaston Bathalon	Kingdom North	North Country Supervisory Union and Troy School District
Terri Vest	Kingdom South	Mountain View Union School District, Hazen Union School District
Lisa Miser	Rutland	Quarry Valley Unified Union School District & Greater Rutland County Supervisory Union
Stacey Peters	Windsor	Granville Hancock Unified School District
Jacki Murano	Windham	Searsburg School District

The Task Force met at least monthly between January 2024 and the writing of this report. The group began its work by designing a process that would dig deeper into the high level concerns raised as part of the VSBA's resolutions process, identify shared priority issues that are consistent across the state, and develop a set of recommendations for further collaboration. While it was clear that the resolution was born out of frustration, the Task Force quickly understood that the path to improvement would occur through a thoughtful and forward-thinking process that engaged multiple education partners. Approaching the challenges collaboratively and with shared intentions is key to making change, and the Task Force designed its work toward that end.

Education Partner Survey

The Task Force developed and distributed a survey to all school board chairs and

superintendents in Vermont (see Appendix I). The survey results were analyzed to identify high-level themes. The purpose of the survey was to surface specific feedback about the leadership challenges in order to identify themes. The Task Force also intended to take those preliminary findings and reflect them back to other education partners for further refinement and prioritization.

Agency of Education Engagement

The naming of the Interim Secretary of Education occurred just after the convening of the Task Force. This presented an opportunity for VSBA leadership to meet with Interim Secretary Zoie Saunders. The Task Force Chair and VSBA leadership discussed the work with former Interim Secretary of Education Heather Bouchey and General Counsel Emily Simmons at the outset of the project. They reiterated that the goal of the Task Force was to initiate further collaboration and productive discussions. In addition, Interim Secretary Saunders had an opportunity to view the survey and subsequently met with VSBA leadership and members of the Task Force to discuss the work she is leading at the Agency. It is clear that the work of this Task Force will be helpful to the Interim Secretary as she conducts listening and learning sessions across the state.

State Board of Education Engagement

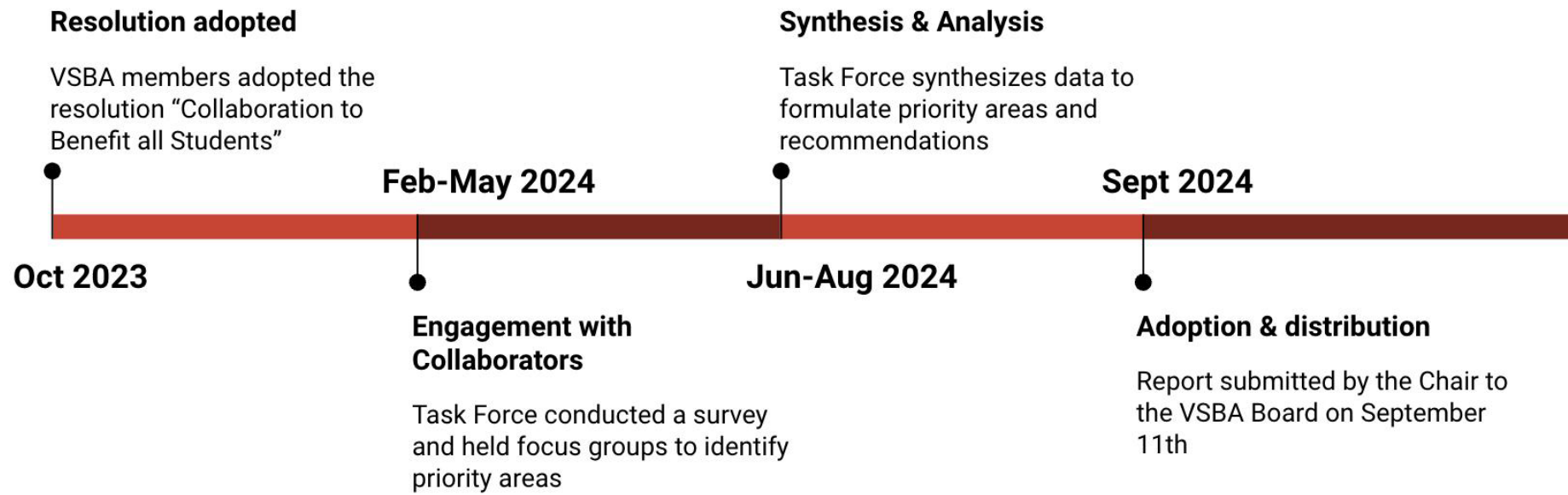
The Task Force Chair and VSBA leadership also had an opportunity to meet with the Chair of the State Board of Education, Jennifer Deck Samuelson. The State Board is also undertaking a look at its identified roles and responsibilities from state statute. As an all-volunteer Board with no significant staffing support from the Agency of Education, the Board members recognize that it is difficult to carry out all of the duties that were outlined in the law at a time when there was a more concrete connection with the Agency of Education. The resurrection of their Roles & Responsibilities Committee was done, in part, to begin high level conversations with the Agency to provide increased clarity. The State Board Chair voiced support for engaging further with VSBA, perhaps using the recommendations from the Task Force as a starting point.

Partner Organization Engagement

In addition to gathering the perspective of its membership, the Task Force identified a number of other public education groups whose perspective was critical to this work. The VSBA regularly collaborates with the other organizations that represent public education, including the Vermont Superintendents Association (VSA), the Vermont Principals Association (VPA), the Vermont Council of Special Education Administrators (VCSEA), Vermont Curriculum Leaders Association (VTCLA), and the Vermont Association of School Business Officials (VASBO). The Task Force held a focus group session with representatives from VPA, VCSEA, VTCLA and VASBO, and a separate meeting with members of VSA. This provided an opportunity to reflect the emerging priorities back to those groups for feedback and to begin to identify

recommendations.

Key Events Timeline



PRIORITIES

The work of the Task Force was underway during a legislative session where the general assembly and education policy makers across the state were working to address the funding challenges for public education. Midway through the Task Force's work, H.887 (2024) became law (Act 183), setting into motion a study of Vermont's education system, including both delivery and funding. The Task Force believes this report has the potential to inform the critical work of the Commission on the Future of Public Education.

A number of clear themes emerged from the survey, the focus groups, and the Task Force meetings. These themes were consolidated, and this report focuses on the most consistent and high-leverage priorities that formed the basis for its recommendations:

Priority #1: Vermont needs timely and consistent access to valid data

Whether operating from the perspective of a school board member, public education leader or teacher in a school, the use of data is foundational to achieving the equitable education Vermont is committed to. The regular review of consistent, valid data is how school boards exercise their core oversight responsibilities, how school leaders plan and adjust their instructional leadership, and how teachers respond to and adjust instruction for students. It is how Vermonters can see how their schools are upholding their commitment to public education for all Vermont students.

Much like the Joint Fiscal Office (JFO) is the most trusted source of state financial data, the Agency of Education is expected to be the most trusted source of information about Vermont education. The examples below make clear that the Agency is not meeting its minimum statutory responsibility to provide timely data.

Vermont's constitution considers public education a statewide responsibility, and our funding system is a shared financial model - which means that we have shared responsibility for all public schools (VT Const. ch. I, art. 7 and ch. II). Therefore, it is essential that the public have access to information about all schools. In many other states, there is easy access to a school "dashboard" that incorporates a range of information and allows for easy comparisons across the state. The following are specific examples where data is insufficient or non-existent:

- **Accessibility of PreK - grade 12 student outcome data:** It is difficult, if not impossible, to view longitudinal data about Vermont student outcomes. Data is difficult to locate on the Agency of Education website and frequently outdated.
- **Implementation of education policy:** The Secretary of Education is required to "Supervise and direct the execution of the laws relating to the public schools and ensure compliance" (16 V.S.A. § 212). And yet, there is little valid information publicly available as to the implementation status of Vermont's education legislation (Act 77 of 2013, Act 173 of 2018, Act 127 of 2022).
- **Spending and delivery models:** Vermont has a shared financial model for funding public education; therefore, data (about both spending and student outcomes) should be readily accessible. Measures like per pupil spending, staff

to student ratios, capital spending and much more are not available for easy comparison.

- **Clear and Transparent Data about Independent Schools:** Public and private schools are held to different standards. The same data made available for public schools needs to be made available for independent schools because of our shared funding model. We need to be explicit that when we talk about data, we mean the data from all schools that receive Vermont tax dollars.

These are just a few examples highlighted by the Task Force. These are to illustrate the most fundamental reason why the lack of data is of concern: **With equity central to Vermont's expectations for public education, we do not have the information we need to determine whether we are meeting our responsibility for equity.**

***Priority #2:** Vermont needs an Agency of Education and State Board of Education that can uphold the statutory roles and responsibility to public education in a non-partisan, student-centered manner*

Vermont law clearly defines the roles of the Agency of Education and State Board as it pertains to leading public education in Vermont. Unfortunately, both entities have been unable to successfully uphold those roles. Yet, the statewide rhetoric about the cost of education and lagging student outcomes makes no mention of the persistent lack of leadership and support from the responsible entities - instead, it fully places the blame on local schools, school boards and voters. This does not acknowledge the shared responsibility of these leadership structures *along with* local school boards and district administrators. Of note: education partners in particular raised overall concerns to the Task Force about the fundamental structure of the Agency with an administration-appointed Secretary - a structure that can impede the work of leading schools in a consistent manner when the administration changes.

The following sections outline the statutory responsibilities of both the State Board and the Agency along with examples of persistent implementation challenges. State education leadership, public schools, and the school boards which govern those schools have a shared responsibility to realize Vermont's vision for education. The Task Force believes the examples given in this report represent important information to support collaborative movement to make change. Together, we can leverage Vermont's strengths and improve outcomes for all Vermonters.

Agency of Education

The Vermont Agency of Education’s primary responsibility is to execute the policies enacted by the State Board of Education. The Agency self-identifies its three priorities to be Leadership, Support, and Oversight. With the identification of new leadership at the Agency as well as the historical challenges Vermont public education is facing, now is an especially critical time to be forthright about the challenges that exist and identify a path forward.

Table 1: Implementation Challenges in the Agency

Duties of the Secretary (Agency) (16 V.S.A. § 212)	Current State
(2) Identify the educational goals of the public schools, provide alternative methods of attaining those goals, and promote education in the State.	The Agency has not communicated a clear and cohesive vision for education in Vermont and does not articulate clear goals to achieve such vision as it works with schools. School leaders in particular identify this as the most central barrier to implementing Vermont’s education policy expectations, as they affirm that a clear vision is required to effectively administer all remaining statutory requirements.
(3) Evaluate the program of instruction in the public schools.	It is unclear what methods the Agency has to evaluate instruction in schools. Previous structures for monitoring implementation (e.g., Education Quality Reviews) have come and gone. Education leaders question the capacity of Agency staff (both in number and expertise) to effectively lead instructional oversight in schools. Salaries at the Agency are significantly below public school salaries, which raises questions about what impact this may have on their ability to recruit qualified staff. The Agency also remains significantly understaffed.
(4) Advise the General Assembly concerning proposed laws affecting the public schools.	Departments within the Agency sometimes provide conflicting information when testifying to the General Assembly, making it difficult to have a coherent and understandable message for lawmakers. Over the past few years, education leaders and school board members report that Agency testimony focuses on local school concerns (with no data shown to support its claims), and

Duties of the Secretary (Agency) (16 V.S.A. § 212)	Current State
	does not address its own role in failing to support policy implementation in districts. The Agency does not publicly acknowledge its own capacity challenges and their impact on their ability to support local schools.
(5) Supervise and direct the execution of the laws relating to the public schools and ensure compliance.	The Agency's methods of compliance monitoring change frequently. Within special education monitoring alone there have been significant concerns raised about incorrect interpretations of Federal law, inconsistent definitions of what constitutes compliance, and conflicts among agency staff about best practices - at times, schools will be told they are meeting requirements by the Agency's own program consultants, and then later told by Agency compliance monitors that they have not met requirements. School districts regularly identify situations where Agency staff have created an inaccurate interpretation of federal requirements in monitoring. The Agency has been unable to deliver on the recommendations of statewide advisory committees for the development of a comprehensive implementation plan for landmark legislation (Act 173). In the absence of Agency leadership, state public education professional organizations have taken on the responsibility for professional learning, and yet are not able to utilize the funding that the Agency holds. These costs are then borne by public schools themselves. The Agency's lack of implementation support creates a scenario where education legislation is seen as ineffective, prompting the General Assembly to contemplate additional legislative solutions, which then have further implementation challenges. An Agency that can effectively support existing policy <u>and</u> advocate effectively on behalf of schools is critical.
(6) Supervise the expenditure and distribution of all money appropriated by the State under the provisions of this title for public schools.	School district leaders question the ability of Agency staff to oversee Federal grants. One district gave the example that was a common issue across multiple districts: being notified on October 31st of their

Duties of the Secretary (Agency) (16 V.S.A. § 212)	Current State
	status of being “in need of comprehensive supports” - four months later than the notification required under law. That district did not receive its allocation of funds for those comprehensive supports until January, it was changed in February, and the identification of allowable use of funds was not received until March. Funds were required to be utilized by June 30th with no ability to carry forward. The school districts in this situation risk giving back money targeting to supports or making decisions in haste due to the Agency’s failure to implement its timeline. This example, though egregious, is unfortunately representative of the impact of Agency challenges. The IDEA-B grant (Federal special education grant) was not opened for districts until June 21st this year. Districts who need to utilize those funds for special education services beginning on July 1 had five business days to complete the grant paperwork (this application would typically be released at the end of May). The Agency has not provided transparency about its own budget to the general assembly or the broader public.
(8) Inform citizens of the condition of and opportunities within the public education system and provide other educational publicity for the enlightenment and well-being of the citizens of the State.	It is unclear the last time the Agency submitted a general “state of the schools” (financial and programmatic) in a way that is accessible and understandable to the public. The Agency does not broadly “provide other educational publicity” to inform, celebrate and endorse public education in Vermont. As the state agency charged with the running of our public schools, they should be the primary communicator of the strength of those schools.
(9) Establish requirements for information to be submitted by school districts, including necessary statistical data and other information and ensure, to the extent possible, that data are reported in a uniform way. Data collected under this subdivision shall include budget surplus amounts, reserve fund amounts, and information concerning the purpose and use of any reserve funds.	Statewide professional organizations take a leadership role in developing consistent practices amongst their members, in absence of Agency leadership.

Duties of the Secretary (Agency) (16 V.S.A. § 212)	Current State
(11) Provide an educational facilities planning service to make available technical assistance and comprehensive information on school construction, school systems design, component technology and suppliers, and similar subjects to public schools, school districts, and independent schools, for the purpose of helping them to achieve flexibility and economy in construction, to retain the potential for modification and expansion of educational facilities, and to attain the lowest maintenance costs consistent with educational needs.	The Agency has not provided this support in any measurable way, despite the increasingly complex interplay between education funding, PCB implementation and construction funding. The General Assembly convened the study of statewide school construction, another example of the legislature taking up work in absence of leadership by the Agency.
(19) Establish an information clearinghouse and accessible database to help districts share information about educational programs and practices that improve student performance. Educational programs and practices include those designed to create and sustain a safe learning environment.	While the Agency may desire to utilize its website for this purpose, the website is frequently outdated and difficult to navigate. School districts create their own informal networks for information sharing among their statewide professional organizations to make up the difference. In fact, Vermont educators frequent the Agency websites <i>of other states</i> to inform their work.

State Board of Education (SBE)

The State Board has ultimate authority to oversee the implementation of the state's education policies; thus, they play an outsized role in ensuring that public education in the state is meeting constitutional and statutory requirements - and serving all Vermont students. The findings of the Task Force suggest that the State Board is not meeting this core responsibility, and therefore it cannot adequately assess whether "...all Vermont children will be afforded educational opportunities that are substantially equal." The State Board does not adequately provide oversight of the Agency of Education, contributing to a lack of accountability for the Agency's challenges outlined above. The findings of the Task Force suggest that this inability to meet its statutory requirements is related to both the appointment structure of the State Board as well as its current limited resource allocation.

The Task Force finds that independent (non-partisan) leadership of the State Board is critical to effective oversight of public education in Vermont. The State Board is made up of nine voting members and two non-voting members, all appointed by the Governor (Governor Scott has appointed every single member of the current State Board). The sole appointing authority given to a single administration raises concerns about the Board's ability to be independent and non-partisan. In Vermont, 94.9% of students attend publicly operated schools; the rest attend independent schools (see the [2023 Agency of Education Budget Book](#)). Yet, the current State Board composition does not match this makeup - currently, fifty percent of its membership are individuals from towns who do not operate public schools (and therefore students in those towns may attend independent schools at public expense). Even the perception of a politicized Board impacts the public's trust in the institution. Other states have appointment structures that protect the independence of State Boards (see the [NASBE State Education Governance Matrix](#), July 2024).

There are conflicting perspectives on the part of the administration and other governance experts about the role of the State Board. During discussions about [S.203](#) (2024), a proposal to change the makeup of the State Board, government officials [testified](#) of their belief that State Board members must be appointed by the executive branch in order to maintain the separation of powers. This commentary was disputed by other constitutional experts called to testify (see [Peter Teachout](#) testimony). Task Force members believe the current appointment structure compromises the ability of the Board to do its core work in a non-partisan manner on behalf of Vermont students.

Further, the Task Force finds that the State Board has insufficient resources available to complete its work, a concern raised at times by State Board members themselves. An example of this insufficiency is regarding legal support in the development of Rules. Rulemaking is a core responsibility of the State Board, and it has been deeply engaged in this work over the past decade while navigating new special education rules and revised independent school rules (required under Act 173) as well as the Board's current work on the Rule Series 2000 (Education Quality Standards).

Below, the Task Force highlights examples of the State Board's inability to meet its own statutory responsibilities.

Table 2: Implementation Challenges of the State Board of Education

State Board of Education (16 V.S.A. Chapter 3)	Current State
General Powers and Duties (16 V.S.A. § 164)	
The State Board shall engage local school board members and the broader education community and, consistent with the provisions of this title, its own rules, and rules adopted by the Secretary, establish and regularly update a long-term strategic vision for the delivery of educational services in Vermont;	The SBE does not meaningfully engage with the VSBA as a representative entity nor individual school board members in any measurable manner. The last time a strategic vision was developed for Vermont appears to be 2018; even that document is rarely referenced and likely not very well known in education. Across the country, 49 state boards of education actively engage in strategic visioning (see NASBE Policy Update, June 2024), suggesting that this is a critical component of state board work that is not occurring in Vermont.
advise the General Assembly, the Governor, and the Secretary of Education on high-priority educational policies and issues as they arise	The Task Force cannot identify examples of when the State Board advised the General Assembly on educational policies and issues aside from the rulemaking processes that are specifically outlined in statute.
act in accordance with legislative mandates, including the adoption of rules and executing special assignments	It is challenging for the public to understand how well the State Board is meeting its legislative mandates because of ongoing concerns regarding how the Board conducts its business. There have been concerns raised about open meeting law violations and how the SBE utilizes executive sessions during the rulemaking process. The existence of the State Board is meant to ensure that Vermont has independent oversight of public education. Both the membership of the State Board <u>and</u> the Secretary of the Agency of Education are governor-appointed, calling this independent oversight into question.

State Board of Education (16 V.S.A. Chapter 3)	Current State
General Powers and Duties (16 V.S.A. § 164)	
(7) Adopt rules pursuant to 3 V.S.A. chapter 25 to carry out the powers and duties of the Board as directed by the General Assembly, within the limitations of legislative intent.	Concerns have been raised about the State Board’s compliance with administrative procedures (see 3 V.S.A. chapter 25) during the rulemaking process; specifically, the State Board utilizing executive session during rulemaking discussions outside of 1 V.S.A. § 313
(17) Report annually on the condition of education statewide and on a supervisory union and school district basis...	The last annual report referenced on its website is from January 2021
(18) Ensure that Vermont’s students, including students enrolled in secondary career technical education, have access to a substantially equal educational opportunity by developing a system to evaluate the equalizing effects of Vermont’s education finance system and education quality standards under section 165 of this title.	The Task Force is unaware of any “system to evaluate the equalizing effects of Vermont’s education finance system and education quality standards”

BUILDING ON VERMONT'S STRENGTHS: RECOMMENDATIONS

While navigating this historically difficult time in public education, we have both an obligation and an opportunity to rethink and reframe Vermont's education delivery system. The Task Force is concerned about the public rhetoric that focuses solely on school districts and boards as bearing the responsibility for these challenges, and believes that we (statewide leadership, public schools, and public school boards) have a shared responsibility to reframe these perceptions. Our challenges are complex, and improvements will not be possible without a recognition of collective responsibility, and without a significant shift in our statewide education leadership.

Below are the recommendations of the Task Force, offered as a starting point for further collaboration.

Expand and Maintain a Comprehensive & Accurate Data Dashboard

Without comprehensive, accurate, and easily accessible data, Vermont schools will not be able to effectively monitor their adherence to the State's education policy. This, in turn, makes it impossible to ensure outcomes for students. The Agency has attempted to maintain a dashboard (indeed, one does exist), but the currently available dashboard is insufficient, outdated and is not utilized in any measurable way by districts, Boards, the public and the Agency itself. The Task Force believes that the most important component of ensuring equity for students is to be transparent about the inputs (finances) and outcomes for all of our schools; this requires a comprehensive data platform.

Most other states utilize a comprehensive data dashboard that is accessible to the public and updated regularly. Vermont's dashboard must include (but is not limited to): student enrollment and demographic data; student outcome measures (including both academic and well-being/social emotional learning metrics), per pupil expenditure information, enrollment trends, teacher salaries and retention rates, and more (see the [Massachusetts DOE School & District Profiles](#)).

Local school boards often receive some of this data from their administration; however, the metrics are not standardized in content or presentation. If such standardization did exist across the state, it would allow for transparency across districts. In a funding system that is shared statewide, it is essential that citizens have access to data beyond their own schools.

Improve the Capacity of the Agency of Education to Meet Statutory Responsibilities

The challenges in the Agency's ability to meet its statutory duties are undeniable. The Task Force recommends that the Secretary conduct a comprehensive program evaluation and organizational analysis of the Agency of Education, inclusive of feedback from the field and an

evaluation of the culture of the organization. This analysis can occur while the Commission on the Future of Public Education does its work, and indeed may inform the work of the Commission in understanding the capacity of the Agency. The Task Force has some concerns about a new Secretary making sweeping changes to the Agency prior to the conclusion of the Commission's work; therefore, this analysis allows the new Secretary to better understand the Agency and ready the organization to support whatever resulting recommendations come from the Commission.

Based on the feedback gathered, the Task Force specifically recommends that this analysis include looking at the Agency's pay scale, which currently limits the recruitment and retention of expert staff, as well as an inventory of the training and reporting requirements currently asked of school districts by the Agency and the origin of those requirements.

The Task Force believes that the analysis and subsequent redesign will increase the Agency's capacity to perform its statutory responsibilities; put more simply, it will allow the Agency to support a robust public education system in Vermont. It will also ensure that the Agency can act as an advocate for public education and recommend statutory changes necessary to fully support high quality education.

Utilize the District Quality Standards to Improve the Function of the State Board of Education:

School Boards in Vermont will soon be held to a set of governance standards under the new [District Quality Standards](#). Rule Series 100 (and specifically Section 113: Governance) provides a comprehensive set of standards for local school boards. The State Board should also be required to follow these standards, and the Task Force recommends that the Board conduct a self-reflection on its own adherence. A local school board assesses its performance towards the standards and makes annual goals - it is only appropriate that the Statewide governing body be required to do the same. The State Board has a unique opportunity to model effective governance practices. The table below illustrates the applicability of the new standards to the State Board's statutory duties:

District Quality Standards (Rule Series 100: 113)	Applicability of DQS to SBE work to promote good governance	Related Duties of the State Board (16 V.S.A. § 164)
113.1 Governance Priorities Through an equity lens, the Board of each SU/SD and, if applicable, of each member school district within the SU, adopts a vision and measurable goals to support continuous improvement and monitors student academic progress and wellness. 113.1.1 The Board follows an inclusive process to invite and incorporate community input into the vision and goals for the school system.	Through an equity lens, the State Board adopts a long-term strategic vision and measurable goals for the delivery of educational services in Vermont. The State Board follows an inclusive process to engage local school board members and the broader education community and incorporates their input into its long-term strategic vision for the delivery of educational services in Vermont.	16 V.S.A. § 164: The State Board shall engage local school board members and the broader education community and, consistent with the provisions of this title, its own rules, and rules adopted by the Secretary, establish and regularly update a long-term strategic vision for the delivery of educational services in Vermont;
113.1.2 At least annually, the Board sets measurable goals and regularly reviews the progress toward those goals.	At least annually, the State Board sets measurable goals on the development of education policy for the State and regularly reviews the progress toward those goals.	(21) Report annually to the Governor and the General Assembly on the progress the Board has made on the development of education policy for the State.
113.1.3 At least annually, the Board monitors student academic progress and wellness. 113.1.4 At least annually, the Board formally evaluates the performance of the superintendent, based in part on the superintendent's progress toward meeting agreed-upon goals.	At least annually, the State Board monitors the condition of education statewide and on a supervisory union and school district basis. The State Board develops and utilizes a system to evaluate the equalizing effects of Vermont's education finance system and education quality standards under 16 VSA § 165 to ensure that Vermont's students, including students enrolled in secondary career technical education, have access to a substantially equal educational opportunity.	(17) Report annually on the condition of education statewide and on a supervisory union and school district basis. (18) Ensure that Vermont's students, including students enrolled in secondary career technical education, have access to a substantially equal educational opportunity by developing a system to evaluate the equalizing effects of Vermont's education finance system and education quality standards under section 165 of this title.

District Quality Standards (Rule Series 100: 113)	Applicability of DQS to SBE work to promote good governance	Related Duties of the State Board (16 V.S.A. § 164)
113.2 Governance Protocols The Board of each SU/SD and, if applicable, of each member school district within the SU adopts, reviews annually, and revises, as needed, operating protocols for how it does its work and annually reads foundational documents such as articles of agreement. 113.2.1 The Board annually assesses its performance, including adherence to agreed protocols, processes, and policies.	The State Board adopts, reviews annually, and revises, as needed, operating protocols for how it does its work and annually reads foundational documents such as its authorizing statute, 16 V.S.A. § 164. The Board establishes and follows inclusive, transparent and predictable methods to conduct its work. The State Board annually assesses its performance, including adherence to agreed protocols, processes, and policies.	While there is no related language in 16 V.S.A. § 164, developing operating protocols and following inclusive, transparent and predictable methods for how the State Board conducts its work are recommended in accordance with good governance practices. While there is no related language in 16 V.S.A. § 164, the annual assessment of a board's performance, including adherence to agreed protocols, processes and policies is recommended in accordance with good governance practices.
113.2.2 The Board annually reviews whether and/or how its actions and contributions have impacted the school system's success in meeting goals.	The State Board annually reviews whether and/or how its actions and contributions have impacted the condition of education statewide and on a supervisory union and school district basis. The State Board annually reviews whether and/or how its actions and contributions have impacted Vermont's education finance system and education quality standards under 16 VSA § 165 to ensure that Vermont's students, including students enrolled in secondary career technical education, have access to a substantially equal educational opportunity.	Advise the General Assembly, the Governor and the Secretary of Education on high priority educational policies and issues as they arise. (21) Report annually to the Governor and the General Assembly on the progress the Board has made on the development of education policy for the State.
113.2.3 The Board annually evaluates the effectiveness of community engagement and public communication efforts.	The State Board annually evaluates the effectiveness of its public engagement and public communication efforts.	The State Board shall engage local school board members and the broader education community and, consistent with the provisions of this title, its own rules, and

District Quality Standards (Rule Series 100: 113)	Applicability of DQS to SBE work to promote good governance	Related Duties of the State Board (16 V.S.A. § 164)
		rules adopted by the Secretary, establish and regularly update a long-term strategic vision for the delivery of educational services in Vermont;
113.2.4 The Board undertakes its own continuous learning and development and provides members with opportunities for ongoing training and support to maintain and increase their skills and understanding.	The State Board undertakes its own continuous learning and provides members with opportunities for ongoing training and support to maintain and increase their skills and understanding.	While there is no related language in 16 V.S.A. § 164, continuous learning is necessary for the State Board to increase its skills and understanding. This is an area of growth for the State Board as it has not been a priority in recent years. The State Board discontinued its membership in the National Association of State Boards of Education when John Carroll was chair. Additionally, State Board members do not regularly participate in learning opportunities such as the VSBA/VSA Annual Conference. In Fiscal Year 2024, the State Board budgeted \$1000.00 for meeting/conference registrations and spent \$0.00 . The State Board decreased its FY2025 budgeted amount for meeting/conference registrations to \$500.00 .
113.3 Governance Protocols The Board of each SU/SD and, if applicable, of each member school district within the SU establishes and follows inclusive, transparent, and predictable methods to conduct its work.	The State Board establishes and follows inclusive, transparent, and predictable methods to conduct its work.	1 V.S.A. §§ 310-314, Vermont's Open Meeting Law, requires all meetings of public bodies to be open to the public at all times, unless a specific exception applies. The purpose of the law is to promote transparency, accountability, and better decision-making in government.

District Quality Standards (Rule Series 100: 113)	Applicability of DQS to SBE work to promote good governance	Related Duties of the State Board (16 V.S.A. § 164)
113.3.1 The Board discusses, adopts, and revises policies on a regular basis to ensure the system is supporting and meeting the needs of every student.	The State Board discusses, adopts, and revises rules on a regular basis to ensure that Vermont’s students, including students enrolled in secondary career technical education, have access to a substantially equal educational opportunity.	(7) Adopt rules pursuant to 3 V.S.A. chapter 25 to carry out the powers and duties of the Board as directed by the General Assembly, within the limitations of legislative intent.

Depoliticize the State Board of Education

The Task Force believes a stable, high functioning and non-partisan State Board of Education is essential for ensuring continuity of education leadership in Vermont - and re-establishing public trust through vision and accountability. The Task Force recommends restructuring the State Board in the following ways:

- Change the appointment structure so that a variety of interested parties share responsibility for appointing members to the State Board. There are a number of options available, including those discussed during the drafting of S.203 and utilized across the country (see again the [NASBE State Education Governance Matrix](#), July 2024)
- Amend the criteria for membership on the Board including a more proportionate representation of local school board members from districts that operate a public school
- Ensure adequate resources for the State Board to conduct its work, either through the budget allocation process or by leveraging Agency of Education resources

Prioritize Existing Legislation

While noble policy discussions occurred during the 2024 session around literacy, seclusion and restraint, and others, the Task Force firmly believes that the passage of new legislation without the underlying data and structures to support it is irresponsible. Vermont has existed in a pattern of passing landmark legislation, but without the Agency capacity to effectively support schools in the implementation. Pausing additional legislation will ensure a solid foundation for existing policy, resulting in real change for students rather than repeated failed policy. Repeating the pattern of failing to support existing policy will continue to put students and public education in jeopardy.

Acknowledge the work of the Commission on the Future of Public Education

As noted above, the work of this Task Force pre-dated H.887 ([Act 183 of 2024](#)) and the convening of the Commission on the Future of Public Education. Many of the intractable issues outlined here seek to be addressed in the Commission's work, including the creation of a sustainable education funding system that realizes Vermont's requirement for equitable education opportunities for all children.

The Commission also seeks to examine the ongoing issues of governance and administration, including the structure, staffing and resource allocation for the Agency of Education and the composition, role and function of the State Board of Education. The Task Force affirms the need for this work to be completed in order for any substantive improvement to be made to education in Vermont. Leadership and oversight for public education should not be politicized.

APPENDIX I: Survey of Education Partners

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Partner Feedback on Collaboration to Benefit All Students

Partner Feedback on Collaboration to Benefit All Students

This survey has been developed as a tool to collect feedback from leaders in public education. Specifically, the VSBA's Task Force on Collaboration to Benefit All Students aims to "assess concerns regarding and failures of the State Board of Education and/or the Agency of Education, and thereafter provide to the Governor and the legislature no later than January 2025 a list of recommended actions they should take in order to provide appropriate support toward the education of Vermont's students. This task force may include support from groups such as the Vermont Superintendents Association, the Vermont Principals Association, the Vermont Council of Special Education Administrators, and the Vermont Business Managers Association."

The Task Force is seeking feedback from education partners, which will be considered and potentially included in a final report. Names of respondents (email addresses) will remain confidential within the Task Force. Your email address would only be used to reach out for clarification on your response(s). Thank you in advance for your time and thoughtfulness.

* Indicates required question

1. Please indicate your role: *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ School Board Chair/Vice Chair or School Board Chair Designee
- ☐ Superintendent
- ☐ Other: _____

2. Your email address:

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Partner Feedback on Collaboration to Benefit All Students

3. Your VSBA region ([Click here for details](#)): *



Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Addison
- ☐ Bennington
- ☐ Central Vermont
- ☐ Eastern Chittenden
- ☐ Franklin/Grand Isle
- ☐ Kingdom North
- ☐ Kingdom South
- ☐ Rutland
- ☐ Western Chittenden
- ☐ Windham
- ☐ Windsor

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Partner Feedback on Collaboration to Benefit All Students

4. **ACADEMICS and STUDENT OUTCOMES:** includes elements such as leadership for best practices for teaching and education strategies; pedagogy, curriculum. What is most important to you/your board/your district with regard to Academics and Student Outcomes from the Agency of Education and State Board of Education?

5. **DATA:** includes accuracy, timeliness, efficiency of systems, reporting on outcomes, completeness (including VT's data within national data sets), relevance, and connecting data to accountability. What is most important to you/your board/your district with regard to data?

6. **COMMUNICATION:** includes elements such as clarity, responsiveness, timeliness, accuracy, trust. What is most important to you/your board/your district with regard to communication from and to the AOE and/or State Board of Education?

7. **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:** includes information regarding which organization (AOE or State Board of Ed) is responsible for what, who specifically within each organization is responsible for what, who to contact with specific questions, reducing bureaucracy, timeliness, clearly articulated policies, procedures, and norms, up-to-date organizational charts, flowcharts, clearly articulated decision-making ability of various roles, recruitment and retention of highly-qualified staff who work collaboratively and are accessible to the field, a culture of growth, collaboration, transparency, commitment. What is most important to you/your board/your district with regard to Roles and Responsibilities of the AOE and SBE?

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Partner Feedback on Collaboration to Benefit All Students

8. While there may be many priority needs from the AOE and/or State Board of Education for you/your district, please assign a level of priority to following area:

- academic & student outcomes

Mark only one oval.

Highest level of priority

1 ☐

2 ☐

3 ☐

4 ☐

Lowest level of priority

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Partner Feedback on Collaboration to Benefit All Students

9. While there may be many priority needs from the AOE and/or State Board of Education for you/your district, please assign a level of priority to following area:

- data

Mark only one oval.

Highest level of priority

1 ☐

2 ☐

3 ☐

4 ☐

Lowest level of priority

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Partner Feedback on Collaboration to Benefit All Students

10. While there may be many priority needs from the AOE and/or State Board of Education for you/your district, please assign a level of priority to following area:

- communication

Mark only one oval.

Highest level of priority

1 ☐

2 ☐

3 ☐

4 ☐

Lowest level of priority

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Partner Feedback on Collaboration to Benefit All Students

11. While there may be many priority needs from the AOE and/or State Board of Education for you/your district, please assign a level of priority to following area:

- roles & responsibilities

Mark only one oval.

Highest level of priority

1 ☐

2 ☐

3 ☐

4 ☐

Lowest level of priority

12. What type of information from the AOE and/or State Board of Education is most essential for your to make decisions?

13. Do you have a good understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the State Board of Education?

Mark only one oval.

☐ yes

☐ no

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Partner Feedback on Collaboration to Benefit All Students

14. If you could recommend one action to the Governor and/or Legislature that would benefit all students, what would it be?

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