


MEMORANDUM

TO: Superintendents, Board Chairs, Principals, Educators and School Staff
FROM: Rebecca Holcombe, Secretary of Education 
SUBJECT: Educational Opportunities - H.361
DATE: May 28, 2015

I am writing to focus our collective attention on the educational opportunities component of H.361, the recently passed governance bill. Before everyone gets heavily involved in structuring and restructuring school governance, my hope is that we will place all that activity in its proper context: making sure that, however education is structured locally, it affords each and every child an education that is built around his or her needs and interests and which does not disadvantage any child by virtue of his or her community's relative wealth.

Over the last 20 years, many of our systems have seen pronounced declines in student enrollment, due to regional demographic trends that are much larger than any of our individual districts. In some regions, these gradual population declines are likely to continue for years. At the same time, as the baby boomers move out of the workforce, Vermont is left with a smaller cohort of working taxpayers to support school systems designed for a much larger population.

At the same time, on so many fronts, Vermont is on the cusp of a renaissance. We have terrific teachers who innovate and create to find better ways to engage and inspire our students. Our schools are finding new ways to use technology to push the limits on personalization and effective teaching. Our students consistently score among the highest performing in the country. Statewide, our schools are embracing opportunities to develop and support student voice, and ultimately, civic participation. With so many devoted community members and powerful educators, we have an incredible opportunity to make sure we are well organized to prepare all our students to thrive in their communities and the work force, and to make sure our resources are effectively targeted at our highest priorities.

H.361, which will soon be signed into law, provides our systems with a set of tools they can use to plan for a strong future for our schools and children. The Agency is reaching out to other stakeholders for advice on keeping governance in its proper context, and these stakeholders include:

- Vermont Principals' Association
- Vermont-NEA
- Vermont Superintendents Association
- Vermont School Boards Association
- Vermont Association of School Business Officers
- Vermont Council of Special Education Administrators
- Vermont School Boards Insurance Trust (VSBIT)

With representatives of these groups, we will think through guiding principles for implementation, in order to identify potential barriers to and “enablers” of successful implementation.

There are several significant phases we see for implementing this law. Under separate cover, I will be sending you some introductory materials for you to consider as you enter these phases. For the moment, however, I hope you will view us at the Agency as a resource to help us all make sure we implement this law sequentially and well.

We cannot stress enough how important it is to begin by engaging your teachers and other school employees, your community and your students in a discussion of your goals and purpose. Any change you make must be driven by your shared vision of what is best for students. Once you have clarity around goals, you can turn your efforts to finding a change in governance structure and developing a strategy that supports your goals.

Most of all, seize this as an opportunity, but be guided by your careful and painstaking interests in the well-being of ALL Vermont children. The civic and economic well-being of our state depends on making sure that every child has the support and opportunities she or he needs to learn and develop, regardless of her or his family circumstances.

Thank you for all you do. There is no more important investment in our future than that which we make in our children.