



## Special Legislative Update: Friday, March 1<sup>st</sup>

The last few weeks have been busy for our associations, with dozens of new education-related bills introduced in the legislature and committees in both the House and the Senate taking extensive testimony on a number of important issues. We plan to provide a comprehensive mid-session legislative report late next week, covering everything that has been taking place at the State House as well as school district budget results from Town Meeting Day.

Before then, however, and as you prepare for Town Meeting and the opportunity to speak with your legislators, we want to call your attention to a few of our associations' priorities, matters that are both of interest and of concern.

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Our associations have particular concerns about bills on **agency fees for non-union members** and **collective bargaining for childcare providers**.

[S. 14](#) would require teachers and support staff who choose not to be members of the union to pay agency fees in the same manner as union dues are paid; the fees are estimated to be around 85 percent of full dues, and the bill does not specify how they would be used.

This bill has already passed the Senate; **we urge you to speak with your Representatives on this issue**—particularly those in the House Committee on General, Housing, and Military Affairs, where the bill was referred. If passed, S. 14 would affect approximately 700 teachers and 1,400 support staff, raising roughly \$500,000 per year for the union. It also would take off the table an important bargaining chip school boards have in negotiating teachers' contracts. This is especially problematic at a time when school boards are doing all they can to hold costs down.

[S. 52](#) would extend collective bargaining rights to child care providers, allowing them to join a union that would bargain with the State over its fiscal support for childcare services. Covered by the legislation would be some private childcare providers under contract with school districts to provide childcare or pre-K services.

This bill is still being reviewed by the Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing, and General Affairs; **we urge you to speak with your Senators on this issue**—especially those in this committee. If passed, S. 52 could seriously affect our efforts to achieve universal access to high-quality pre-K education. It would allow childcare providers to negotiate with the Department for Children and Families, with no ties

whatsoever to the education system. Early education *must be* a collaboration between education and human services. A high percentage of providers who would be eligible for this union—which would be negotiating quality standards—do not participate in the STARS rating program. Above all, this legislation could erode education support for a universal pre-K system that takes advantage of both private and public early education resources, something we are working on right now.

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We also encourage you to speak with your House and Senate members about the positive work being done at the State House on a number of bills consistent with **the VSA/VSBA agenda for a world-class education system**, formally introduced in our joint press conference in Montpelier this January.

In it, we urged the General Assembly to adopt legislation this year to provide universal access to prekindergarten education; to expand access to flexible pathways for students, including the creation of personal learning plans; and to provide free school lunch to students who qualify only for reduced-price lunch. Bills addressing each of these goals are currently in progress in the two chambers; **we urge you to speak about their importance with your Representatives and Senators.**

Universal, high-quality prekindergarten education is one of the best investments we can make in our children's future and our state's future. [H. 270](#) would allow more children to access pre-K programs, and would help make providing them more affordable for local schools. The Flexible Pathways Initiative proposed by [S. 130](#) is just as important an investment. It would expand access to successful programs like dual enrollment and early college, and would help all our students on an individual basis with the creation of personalized learning plans. Finally, providing free lunch for low-income students ([S. 26/H. 60](#)) who cannot afford it is essential—students cannot learn effectively when they are hungry.

We hope that this opportunity to talk with your legislators will be productive, and that it will help with the work the Vermont Superintendents Association and Vermont School Boards Association are doing on these important issues over the next 10 weeks.

#### **House General Affairs (S. 14)**

Helen Head (Chittenden-7-3)  
John Moran (Windham-Bennington)  
Brian Savage (Franklin-4)  
Jean O'Sullivan (Chittenden-6-2)  
Thomas Stevens (Washington-Chittenden)  
Warren Van Wyck (Addison-3)  
Sheila Vowinkel (Windsor-4-2)  
Cynthia Weed (Franklin-7)

#### **Senate General Affairs (S. 52)**

Philip Baruth (Chittenden)  
Don Collins (Franklin)  
Ann Cummings (Washington)  
Bill Doyle (Washington)  
Kevin Mullin (Rutland)