

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
  
10  
11  
12  
  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21

H.101

Introduced by Representatives Austin of Colchester and Jerome of Brandon

Referred to Committee on

Date:

Subject: Education; literacy support; grants

Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to provide assistance to supervisory unions in their implementation of 2018 Acts and Resolves No. 173 by providing grant funding to build systems-driven, sustainable literacy support for all students with measurable outcomes.

An act relating to the implementation of 2018 Acts and Resolves No. 173 by providing grant funding to build systems-driven, sustainable literacy support for all students with measurable outcomes

It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

Sec. 1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this act is to provide assistance to supervisory unions in their implementation of 2018 Acts and Resolves No. 173 by providing grant funding to build systems-driven, sustainable literacy support for all students with measurable outcomes.

Sec. 2. FINDINGS

(a) In 2016 Acts and Resolves No. 148, the General Assembly directed the Agency of Education to contract with a consulting firm to review current

1 practices and recommend best practices for the delivery of special education  
2 services in school districts. The Agency of Education contracted with the  
3 District Management Group, which issued in November 2017 its report entitled  
4 “Expanding and Strengthening Best-Practice Supports for Students who  
5 Struggle” (Report).

6 (b) This Report made the following five recommendations on best practices  
7 for the delivery of special education services:

8 (1) ensure core instruction meets most needs of most students;

9 (2) provide additional instructional time outside core subjects to students  
10 who struggle rather than providing interventions instead of core instruction;

11 (3) ensure students who struggle receive all instruction from highly  
12 skilled teachers;

13 (4) create or strengthen a systems-wide approach to supporting positive  
14 student behaviors based on expert support; and

15 (5) provide specialized instruction from skilled and trained experts to  
16 students with more intensive needs.

17 (c) In enacting 2018 Acts and Resolves No. 173, the General Assembly’s  
18 goal was to enhance the effectiveness, availability, and equity of services  
19 provided to all students who require additional support in Vermont’s school  
20 districts, recognizing that changing the models for delivery of services and  
21 funding for students who require additional support is a significant change for

1 school systems and their constituencies, and that they will require time and  
2 assistance in making necessary accommodations.

3 (d) In Act 173, the General Assembly provided additional staff and  
4 resources to the Agency of Education to support its work with supervisory  
5 unions and schools that are transitioning to the best practices recommended in  
6 the Report.

7 (e) Further support for supervisory unions and schools that are transitioning  
8 to the best practices recommended in the Report are necessary, particularly in  
9 the area of teaching literacy to students in kindergarten through grade 3, given  
10 that proficiency in reading is an essential foundational skill for educational  
11 success. According to a paper published by the World Literacy Foundation  
12 website in April 2020 entitled “The Economic and Social Cost of Illiteracy: A  
13 Snapshot of Illiteracy in a Global Context,” “UNESCO defines functional  
14 illiteracy as ‘measured by assessing reading, writing, and mathematical skills  
15 in the various domains of social life which influence individual identity and  
16 insertion into society.’ From this perspective, literacy involves not only  
17 reading and writing but also the acquisition of skills necessary for productive  
18 performance within society.”

19 (f) According to the 2019 assessment of reading proficiency by the  
20 National Assessment of Educational Progress, only 37 percent of Vermont

1 students in fourth grade were proficient in reading, and that percentage has  
2 declined from 2002 (39 percent) and 2017 (43 percent).

3 (g) Ensuring that students in kindergarten through grade 3 learn to read at a  
4 proficient level advances the best practices recommended in the Report, in  
5 particular ensuring core instruction meets most needs of most students and  
6 ensuring that students who struggle receive all instruction from highly skilled  
7 teachers.

8 (h) According to new research reported in an article published by the New  
9 York Times on June 5, 2020 entitled “Research Shows Students Falling  
10 Months Behind Due to Virus Disruptions,” “by September 2020, most students  
11 will have fallen behind where they would have been if they had stayed in  
12 classrooms, with some losing the equivalent of a full year’s worth of academic  
13 gains. Racial and socioeconomic achievement gaps will most likely widen  
14 because of disparities in access to computers, home internet connections and  
15 direct instructions from teachers.”

16 (i) According to a paper published on the Annenberg Institute at Brown  
17 University website in June 2020 entitled “Projecting the Potential Impact of  
18 COVID-19 School Closures on Academic Achievement,” “[s]tudents are likely  
19 to return to school in the fall of 2020 with approximately 63-68% of the  
20 learning gain in reading relative to a typical school year and with 37-50% of  
21 the learning gains in math. However, we estimate that losing ground during

1 COVID-19 school closures would not be universal, with the top third of  
2 students potentially making gains in reading. Thus, preparing for fall 2020  
3 educators will likely need to consider ways to support students who are  
4 academically behind and further differentiate instruction.”

5 Sec. 3. LITERACY GRANT PROGRAM

6 (a) Definitions. As used in this section:

7 (1) “Eligible applicant” means three or more supervisory unions  
8 applying together for the same grant under this section.

9 (2) “Grant” means a grant provided under this section.

10 (3) “Participating supervisory unions” means the supervisory unions that  
11 are applying together as an eligible applicant.

12 (4) “Program” means the Literacy Grant Program created by this  
13 section.

14 (5) “Regional leadership team” means the superintendent or designee of  
15 each participating supervisory union included in the grant application by the  
16 eligible applicant, and two representatives of schools within those participating  
17 supervisory unions appointed by the superintendent.

18 (b) Program creation and grant authorization.

19 (1) The Literacy Grant Program is created to enable supervisory unions  
20 to work together in a sustained and targeted manner to adopt best practices in  
21 teaching literacy instruction to students in kindergarten through grade three. In

1 recognition that literacy proficiency is a foundational learning skill, this  
2 program is designed to assist supervisory unions implement 2018 Acts and  
3 Resolves No. 173 by providing students with the literacy instruction necessary  
4 to ensure that core instruction, to the extent practicable, is designed to  
5 differentiate between students' different learning styles and abilities and that  
6 students who are not attaining grade level benchmarks are identified and  
7 instruction is delivered by master teachers experienced in the advancement of  
8 the targeted grade level skills and understanding. Subject to the terms of the  
9 program, grants shall be awarded to eligible applicants for two consecutive  
10 years.

11 (2) The Agency of Education shall inform supervisory unions of the  
12 availability of grants under this act and provide technical assistance to eligible  
13 applicants in applying for these funds. The Agency of Education shall also  
14 advise supervisory unions of other sources of funding that may be available to  
15 advance the purpose of this act.

16 (c) Application for, and approval of, grant funding.

17 (1) On or before July 15, 2021, the Agency of Education shall develop  
18 the application for the grant program and post the application on the Agency's  
19 website.

20 (2) The application for the grant shall include:

1           (A) the members of the eligible applicant’s regional leadership team  
2           and a description of its governance structure;

3           (B) the person or persons who will disperse the grant funds among  
4           the participating supervisory unions, a description of the fiscal controls to  
5           ensure proper accounting of these funds, and the eligible applicant’s program  
6           budget;

7           (C) the literacy indicators and outcomes the eligible applicant seeks  
8           to improve, which shall include each of phonemic awareness, phonics, reading  
9           fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, and any other areas of current best  
10          practices in teaching literacy;

11          (D) the priority problems of practice in teaching and improving  
12          literacy outcomes, including shared problems of practice across the  
13          participating supervisory unions;

14          (E) the eligible applicant’s plan for improving literacy teaching and  
15          outcomes, including how the proposed plan will strengthen the applicant’s  
16          process towards ensuring that:

17               (i) core literacy instruction is designed, to the extent practicable,  
18               to differentiate between students’ different learning styles and abilities; and

19               (ii) students who are not attaining grade level benchmarks are  
20               identified and that instruction is delivered by master teachers experienced in  
21               the advancement of the targeted grade level skills and understanding;

1           (F) how the eligible applicant will implement its plan for literacy  
2           teaching and outcomes and a description of how it will achieve the purpose of  
3           this act;

4           (G) how literacy results and outcomes will be measured and reported;

5           (H) how the eligible applicant will improve its tier 1 education under  
6           16 V.S.A. § 2902 through this process; and

7           (I) how systems and processes developed through the grant funding  
8           will be sustained.

9           (3) The Agency shall develop application scoring criteria consistent with  
10          subdivisions (2)(A)–(I) of this subsection (c). On or before July 31, 2021, the  
11          Agency shall send a copy of the grant application and scoring criteria, review  
12          process, and selection criteria to the House and Senate Committees on  
13          Education.

14          (4) Eligible applicants shall submit applications for grant funding to the  
15          Agency of Education, which shall review those applications.

16          Following the application review process, the Agency shall recommend  
17          applications to the Secretary for funding based on the review scores, funding  
18          dollars available, and the Agency’s view of the applicant’s need for literacy  
19          instructional support as compared with other applicants. The Secretary shall  
20          make the final grant funding determination.

1           (5) Based on the Secretary’s determination, the Agency of Education  
2           shall, on or before September 1, 2021, award the first year of grant funding, up  
3           to \$100,000.00 per application, to successful applicants. The amount of this  
4           funding shall be based on the applicant’s proposed budget, total availability of  
5           funds, and the applicant’s need for literacy instructional support as compared  
6           with other applicants. If the amount appropriated for this purpose is  
7           insufficient to fully fund the grants under that section, then the grant amounts  
8           that are awarded shall be prorated.

9           (6) The Agency of Education shall, on or before September 1, 2022,  
10           award the second year of grant funding of up to \$100,000.00 per eligible  
11           applicant. The amount of this funding shall be based on the applicant’s  
12           proposed budget, total availability of funds, and the Secretary’s assessment of  
13           the eligible applicant’s progress towards implementing its action plan to  
14           improve literacy teaching and outcomes under subdivision (2)(F) of this  
15           subsection. The Secretary may deny or reduce second-year grant funding if the  
16           Secretary finds that the applicant has made insufficient progress towards  
17           implementing its action plan. If the amount appropriated for this purpose is  
18           insufficient to fully fund the grants under that section, then the grant amounts  
19           that are awarded shall be prorated.

20           (d) Use of grant funds.

21           (1) Grant funds shall be used to:

1           (A) establish the eligible applicant’s regional leadership team and its  
2           governance structure;

3           (B) implement the eligible applicant’s action plan to improve literacy  
4           teaching and outcomes under subdivision (c)(2)(F) of this section; and

5           (C) measure the literacy results and outcomes under subdivision  
6           (c)(2)(G) of this section.

7           (2) Grant funds may be used to:

8           (A) build literacy instructional leadership capacity to lead the  
9           improvement of the quality of literacy teaching and for the improvement of  
10          student learning;

11          (B) implement an instructional coaching model, as described in the  
12          guidelines for implementing effective coaching systems issued by the Agency  
13          of Education in March 2016 (Coaching Guidelines);

14          (C) implement a systems’ coaching model, as described in the  
15          Coaching Guidelines;

16          (D) support educators in using collaborative data systems to promote  
17          continuous improvement of literacy teaching and outcomes;

18          (E) provide focused training on the literacy indicators and outcomes  
19          the eligible applicant seeks to improve, which, if offered, shall include each of  
20          phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary, and  
21          comprehension, and any other areas of focus in teaching literacy;

1           (F) employ universal design for literacy learning, which is a  
2           framework to improve teaching and learning for all students based on scientific  
3           research on how people learn;

4           (G) employ evidence-based structured literacy instruction, including  
5           for students at risk for dyslexia or diagnosed with dyslexia; and

6           (H) employ any other proven method that builds sustainable  
7           systemwide improvement in literacy delivery and outcomes.

8           (3) Required activities shall not be duplicative of existing programs and  
9           activities.

10          (4) Grant funds may be used for hiring additional staff, providing  
11          additional compensation to existing staff, or contracting with another entity or  
12          entities to aid in the implementation activities under subdivision (1) of this  
13          subsection.

14          (e) Monitoring, evaluation, and reporting.

15          (1) Each eligible applicant that receives a grant under this section shall  
16          monitor the literacy skills of students in grades four through six who were  
17          identified, when they were in kindergarten through grade three, as not meeting  
18          grade level literacy benchmarks to determine if the literacy skills and  
19          understandings from the additional literacy instruction under this act have been  
20          sustained and mastered. Notwithstanding 2 V.S.A. § 20(d):

1           (A) on or before September 30, each eligible applicant that receives a  
2           grant under this section shall report its monitoring findings to the Agency of  
3           Education for each prior school year commencing with the 2022–2023 school  
4           year and ending with the 2029–2030 school year; and

5           (B) on or before December 15 of each of 2023 through 2030, the  
6           Agency of Education shall report to the General Assembly and the Governor  
7           on the monitoring performed by eligible applicants for the prior school year,  
8           with the results collated from all reporting eligible applicants in a readily  
9           understood format and made publicly available on the Agency of Education’s  
10          website.

11          (2) Not later than 30 calendar days after the one-year anniversary of  
12          receiving a grant award under this section, the eligible applicant shall submit to  
13          the Agency of Education a report that describes progress and concerns with the  
14          implementation of the eligible applicant’s action plan to improve literacy  
15          teaching and outcomes under subdivision (c)(2)(F) of this section.

16          (3) Notwithstanding 2 V.S.A. § 20(d), on or before each of January 15,  
17          2024, 2027, and 2030, the Agency of Education shall report to the General  
18          Assembly and the Governor on the overall impact of the grant program. The  
19          report shall be made publicly available on the Agency of Education’s website.

