

1 H.322

2 Introduced by Representatives Sibilila of Dover and Partridge of Windham

3 Referred to Committee on

4 Date:

5 Subject: Education; education funding; governance; small schools; economic
6 development

7 Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to create a Small
8 Schools Working Group, co-chaired by the Secretaries of Education and of
9 Commerce and Community Development, that:

10 (1) creates an economic impact statement outlining the effect that
11 discontinuance of a small school support grant, and the potential resulting
12 closure of a school or schools, would have on a school district and the
13 community in which the school is located; and

14 (2) based in part upon the impact statements, develops policy guidelines
15 upon which the State should rely to determine where small schools are most
16 necessary to support the Vermont economy and which shall be available to
17 assist communities when planning to mitigate the economic and community
18 impacts of school closure.

19 An act relating to creation of a Small Schools Working Group

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

1 Sec. 1. SMALL SCHOOLS; WORKING GROUP; ECONOMIC IMPACT
2 STATEMENT; ANALYSIS; REPORT

3 (a) Creation. There is a Small Schools Working Group created to analyze
4 the impact that the repeal of small school support and closure of small schools
5 will have on the districts, the communities in which the districts are located,
6 and the statewide education funding system.

7 (b) Membership. The Working Group shall be composed of the following
8 members:

9 (1) the Secretary of Education;

10 (2) the Secretary of Commerce and Community Development;

11 (3) the Executive Director of the Vermont League of Cities and Towns
12 or designee;

13 (4) the Executive Director of the Vermont School Boards Association or
14 designee;

15 (5) three current municipal administrators, to be selected by the Board of
16 the Vermont League of Cities and Towns and who, to the extent possible, shall
17 represent geographically diverse areas of the State;

18 (6) three current school board members, to be selected by the Board of
19 the Vermont School Boards Association and who, to the extent possible, shall
20 represent geographically diverse areas of the State;

1 (7) two current executive directors of Vermont Regional Development
2 Corporations, to be selected by the Corporations and who, to the extent
3 possible, shall represent geographically diverse areas of the State; and

4 (8) two current executive directors of Vermont Regional Planning
5 Commissions, to be selected by the Commissions and who, to the extent
6 possible, shall represent geographically diverse areas of the State.

7 (c) Economic impact statement.

8 (1) For each district that currently receives small school support
9 pursuant to 16 V.S.A. § 4015, the Working Group shall analyze the impact on
10 the school district and on the community in which it is located:

11 (A) if small school support were discontinued; and

12 (B) if discontinuance of small school support resulted in closure of
13 one or more schools within the district.

14 (2) When conducting the analysis required by subdivision (1) of this
15 subsection relating both to the school district and the community in which it is
16 located, the Working Group shall consider:

17 (A) the purpose and the potential benefits and disadvantages of
18 discontinuation of small school support;

19 (B) the purpose and the potential benefits and disadvantages of
20 potential small school closure;

1 (C) the economic climate of the community in which the school
2 district and affected school or schools are located;

3 (D) the economic impacts on the community as a whole, including
4 impacts on new and potential commercial activity and on the grand list;

5 (E) the potential alternative actions to discontinuation of small school
6 support or school closure, or both; and

7 (F) ways in which negative economic consequences could be
8 mitigated if the State chooses to pursue an action that will result in
9 discontinuation of small school support or school closure, or both.

10 (d) Statewide policy guidelines.

11 (1) After completion of the data collection and analysis required by
12 subsection (c) of this section, the Working Group shall use this and other
13 information to develop policy guidelines:

14 (A) upon which the State should rely to determine where small
15 schools are most necessary to support the Vermont economy; and

16 (B) which shall be available to assist communities when planning to
17 mitigate the economic and community impacts of school closure.

18 (2) In developing the guidelines, the Working Group shall consider:

19 (A) the relative geographic isolation of the school;

1 (B) the economic vitality of the community in which the school is
2 located and whether and to what extent employers benefit from young families
3 living in the community;

4 (C) population trends for at least the past 20 years in the community
5 in which the school is located;

6 (D) grand list trends for at least the past 20 years in the community in
7 which the school is located;

8 (E) the extent to which there is capacity in neighboring school
9 districts to enroll students from the small school;

10 (F) the extent to which there is capacity in the small school to enroll
11 students from neighboring districts;

12 (G) the comparative sizes and conditions of the building in which the
13 small school is located and of the buildings in neighboring schools districts;

14 (H) the travel conditions and time between the community in which
15 the small school is located and neighboring schools and whether they are
16 appropriate for students of the age enrolled in the small school;

17 (I) the potential statewide consequences to the Education Fund if
18 small school support is eliminated or restricted and small schools close as
19 a result;

20 (J) the community services currently delivered on school property or
21 coordinated by the school; and

1 (K) any other factors the Working Group determines to be relevant.

2 (e) Report. On or before November 1, 2015, the Working Group shall
3 submit a written report to the General Assembly detailing the results of the
4 economic impact statement and the policy guidelines developed pursuant to
5 subsections (c) and (d) of this section.

6 (f) Organizational details.

7 (1) The Secretary of Education shall call the first meeting of the
8 Working Group to occur on or before July 1, 2015.

9 (2) The Secretaries of Education and of Commerce and Community
10 Development shall serve as co-chairs.

11 (3) A majority of the membership shall constitute a quorum.

12 (4) The Working Group shall have the administrative, technical, and
13 legal assistance of the Agencies of Education and of Commerce and
14 Community Development.

15 (5) The Working Group shall cease to exist on July 1, 2016.

16 Sec. 2. EFFECTIVE DATE

17 This act shall take effect on passage.