

Montpelier Roxbury Public Schools

5 High School Drive, Unit #1, Montpelier, VT 05602

Office: 802-223-9796

Fax: 802-223-9795

www.mrpsvt.org



Our schools are caring, creative, and equitable communities that empower all children to build on their talents and passions to grow into engaged citizens and life-long learners.

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My name is Libby Bonesteel and I am the superintendent of Montpelier Roxbury Public Schools. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak on such an important matter. I was raised by teachers. Being in education was all I have ever wanted to do in life. I work with some of the best teachers around. I am not here because I don't want what's best for teachers. I am here because I am incredibly concerned about the detrimental impact this bill has on student learning and will further destabilize a system in which teachers work. I ask that the legislature carefully weigh the potential chaos this bill would create on systems of learning prior to putting it into law.

I have had the privilege of being an administrator in three separate counties in Vermont—Chittenden at what was then Essex Town School District (now EWSD), Franklin at what was then Franklin Northwest Supervisory Union (now MVSD), and currently in Washington County. The abilities in each of these counties and school systems to attract and retain high quality teachers are incredibly different.

To get a sense of how others might feel should this bill be passed, I ran it by my administrative team. Some of their comments are as follows:

"...it's the worst timing EVER to put this bill into effect with what we know will be a MASS EXODUS of teachers. We can't even fill positions when we do have a timeline, so this puts schools and students at risk of starting a school year without a teacher in the classroom..."

"There is NOTHING positive about this for the current state we all find ourselves in. All this will do is create more uncertainty and stress for both leaders AND teachers. We are going to have a ton of hiring to do already and if it's anything like last year, finding licensed and qualified teachers was beyond challenging. 'My teammate may or may not be here next year' is also not what [teachers] need in their minds finishing out the year, especially after these last 3 school years."

"...This will put our students at great risk for not having qualified staff in place should teachers have more leeway to leave under the provisions of the bill as written."

These comments, from veteran Washington Cty administrators, are based on concerns for teachers and students alike. I can assure you that this bill is a perfect way for high paying

districts to continue to maintain and attract veteran teachers and smaller, less affluent districts to struggle in hiring even more than they already do.

While I haven't combed through every negotiated agreement, I would venture to guess that most CBA's have some sort of language regarding a contract extension process. I would also guess that this is not a problem of magnitude across multiple districts, but rather an instance of isolated cases. Without hard data, it is impossible to know. I wonder if the legislators considering this bill have asked for and received longitudinal data that points to a widespread problem that only the institution of a law that destabilizes school systems, particularly those in rural and low income communities, might solve.

In the last MRPS negotiation cycle, the topic-teachers being able to seek employment elsewhere after MRPS contract deadlines-was at the heart of a lengthy, collaborative conversation between myself, school board, and the teachers union. We agreed to the following language: *A contract shall be issued no later than April 15 of each year and signed and returned by each teacher no later than May 1st of the same year. ... A teacher who desires additional time to consider a contract will notify the Superintendent, in writing, who may grant a two week extension. The position of that teacher will appear in the next vacancy list that is prepared. Candidates will be actively recruited for said position, but none will be interviewed by the Board until the extension is expired.*

This language was a fabulous compromise between what the District needs and a few teachers need. Teachers can receive an extension through May 15th while the District can actively look for candidates and interview immediately should the teacher find another job. Why take this locally agreed upon language that works for both parties away? Why cherry pick this portion of a CBA? Why create more flexibility for educators without providing Districts flexibility to ensure stability in their workforce?

Imagine, if you will, if this bill as written, came to pass:

- District could have anywhere from 1-25 teachers seeking employment at another school, without the knowledge of administration, until the last week of school. Some Franklin County Districts already face a 20% turnover rate yearly-so the number of 25 teachers is a very real number.
 - Administration would potentially find out about the unexpected loss of a teacher on June 15th. We would need to immediately advertise for the position until there are applicants. This process, at its shortest time period, can take two weeks. Interviews will need to be set up, something that can take a few days to a week. No one will be available around the July 4th holiday to hold interviews, essentially pushing interviews to mid-July. This is a considerable stress on the system. To be frank, not having a full staff by mid-July is a crisis for administrators.

- Hiring would occur for these positions in the summer. Most of this hiring would be happening, not in Essex or Williston or South Burlington, but in Highgate and Orleans, and Roxbury.
- Districts would be competing for underprepared or inexperienced teachers. They would be brand new teachers, teachers who cannot be hired elsewhere, or teachers who would be teaching out of their licensure area or on an emergency license. This has a direct impact on the quality of education children receive.
- Faculty positions are hired using interview teams made up of caregivers, students, and colleagues. Creating interview teams would be next to impossible with teachers not working throughout the summer and families on vacation. Teacher/community/student voice in the hiring process would be limited if not completely muted.
- There is a very real possibility that positions would not be filled over the summer creating havoc on course offerings, class composition, and class size.
- We are expecting a tremendous amount of hiring that will be needed in the following years due to many factors: increase of federal dollars available, significant teacher retirement, and those simply leaving the profession. This bill would exacerbate the stress this causes in an already stressed system.
- Essex Town saw 60-100 qualified applicants to teaching jobs when I served as an administrator there. While I served MVU, they hired a different person for the same high school math position for five straight years. Each year, the third-fourth choice was typically the person who got the job, all hired in the summer months. MRPS will see 15 applicants at most for an elementary position, much fewer for a middle/high school position or at Roxbury Village School where we might get 3 applicants. There is not an enormous pool of applicants vying for jobs outside of Chittenden Cty.
 - Franklin County is the training ground for wealthier districts—once a teacher in a Franklin Cty school has 2-3 years of experience, they look to move to a high paying district. This occurs every single year. This bill would encourage this movement.
 - This year MRPS has 10% of our teachers working under provisional and emergency licenses because we couldn't find licensed candidates. This is the highest it has ever been. I'm sure the AOE can provide the legislators with data regarding the number of provisionals/emergency licensed teachers across multiple years. I would not be as worried about the passage of this bill if there was an unlimited supply of highly qualified teachers in our state. Unfortunately there is not.
- This bill could significantly increase teacher turnover in rural or high poverty areas. There are hidden and direct costs to this.
 - There is a significant financial cost to teacher turnover. A quick google search can

show you that research studies have found that the cost of replacing a teacher reaches \$9000 in rural districts, considerably more in urban areas.

- repeating capacity building initiatives
- new teacher orientation
- costs of onboarding new faculty
- increased need for mentoring supports
- There are hidden costs to high teacher turnover
 - In areas with high turnover, the teachers tend to be newer to the profession.
 - it takes a teacher a full 5 years to become skilled if that teacher is highly reflective of their craft
 - new teachers are learning how to manage a class, learn the curriculum, communicate effectively with caregivers, etc.... This has a direct impact on student achievement.
 - In Districts like MRPS, that value collaboration and collective efficacy, we need a trusting faculty to succeed. It's hard to build trust with an increase in turnover—something this bill would intentionally cause.

Finally, and this is important for me to say, I want what is best for the teachers I work with. When a teacher comes to me looking to relocate because they live far away from Montpelier or Roxbury or because they are looking for a position that better fits their skill set and they are doing so within what has been agreed upon in our contract, I listen to them. I do not want people working for the students of MRPS who don't want to be there, and it is my job to provide the strongest faculty possible for the students we serve. This bill would significantly and negatively impact my ability to do this. It would have an incredibly detrimental effect on our teams and increase the stress level of educators at a time when stress levels cannot go much higher. I ask that you reconsider the language of this bill.