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VERMONT AGENCY OF EDUCATION APPROVES LAUNCH OF STATE'S FIRST BOARD OF COOPERATIVE EDUCATION SERVICES (BOCES)

Establishment of Southeast Regional Board of Cooperative Services sets new milestone, empowers school districts to work together to lower costs, improve quality -- voluntarily -- across Vermont

WINDSOR, VT -- JANUARY 13, 2026 -- The Vermont Learning Collaborative (VTLC) announced on Wednesday that its work with The Vermont Agency of Education (AOE) and Vermont Education Secretary, Zoie Saunders, has earned the State's formal approval for *Articles of Agreement* that legally establish VTLC as Vermont's first Board of Cooperative Educational Services -- or BOCES. As defined by State law (Act 168 of 2024), BOCES are empowered to provide shared resources and responsive solutions that can cost effectively meet many short- and long-term regional challenges faced by school districts across Vermont.

VTLC is a non-profit organization focused on providing high-quality, responsive and cost-effective comprehensive educational and operational solutions for its member districts to excel -- including those that build the capacity of education personnel and their learners in the southeast region. The agency's Executive Director, Jill Graham, noted that BOCES services are designed to supplement and support rather than replace local capacity. These may include, but are not limited to: professional development, cooperative purchasing, staffing and personnel supports, therapeutic programs and services, professional and technical services, and grant administration.

Over the past two years, Graham said VTLC has demonstrated the value of regional collaboration by delivering high-quality shared services that have strengthened capacities for supervisory districts/unions across southeastern Vermont.

"At its core, the role of an educational service agency is to provide responsive, cost-effective services that help member supervisory districts and unions access specialized programs and expertise that may be difficult or cost-prohibitive to access independently," said Graham. "With the AOE's formal approvals, the VTLC will continue to operate as the *Southeast Vermont Regional Board of Cooperative Education Services* (Southeast Regional BOCES) and will be positioned to expand and deepen its support to its members as a state-recognized educational service agency."

The agency's transformation into a regional BOCES began more than five years ago -- a process supported by regional superintendents who believed they could all benefit from collaborations that led to shared services, thereby reducing costs and improving both educational and operational quality.

Based on their comprehensive feasibility and needs assessments, they drafted *Articles of Agreement* for a new BOCES (attached to this release) in accordance with Act 168, which were then approved by VTLC's Board of Directors and formally adopted by each supervisory district and union who had helped to create the emerging collaborative. Those eight members now include: Mountain Views Supervisory Union (the founding member), Springfield School District, Windham Northeast Supervisory Union, Windham Southeast Supervisory Union, Two Rivers Supervisory Union, Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union, Windham Central Supervisory Union, and Windham Southwest Supervisory Union.

The foundational BOCES members stand to gain benefits that include shared staffing resources, professional development initiatives, recruitment and hiring support, consultation services, and the pooling of resources for cooperative purchasing, transportation, and other services at reduced costs. Furthermore, because VTLC will be operating as the Southeast Regional BOCES, the agency will continue to share its learning and provide guidance, training, and technical assistance to any other supervisory district and union in any other Vermont region interested in establishing their own BOCES model.

"The Southeast Regional BOCES expresses its sincere gratitude to Secretary of Education Zoie Saunders and the Vermont AOE for their partnership and formal approval of the *Articles of Agreement* that have established the State's first BOCES,"

said Christine Bourne, Superintendent of the Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union and the new President of the Southeast Regional BOCES. “This milestone represents an historic shift in Vermont’s educational landscape and demonstrates AOE’s commitment to the vision set forth in Act 168, empowering supervisory unions and districts to work together as a body to deliver regionalized, cost-effective, and high-quality educational programs.”

The work by VTLC and the eight supervisory unions and districts to form a BOCES earned the attention of the Vermont State School District Redistricting Task Force (RTF) this fall, when the Mountain Views Supervisory Union’s Board of Directors unanimously voted to approve MVSU as the BOCES’ founding member.

In October, the RTF invited MVSU’s Superintendent, Sherry Sousa, and Graham to present on the BOCES concept. The presentation subsequently influenced the RTF so powerfully that in its final, December 1 recommendations to the State of Vermont and Governor Phil Scott, the RTF abandoned the notion of carving Vermont into the five large mega districts contemplated in Act 73 -- Vermont’s sweeping but largely undefined education-reform bill. Instead, the task force voted in favor of creating Cooperative Education Service Areas (CESAs) as well as strategic voluntary mergers and comprehensive regional high schools.

In its final report to the State of Vermont and the public on December 1, the RTF recommended regional educational service agencies as a new “roadmap” that emphasizes “immediate gains through shared services; long-term improvements through voluntary, community-driven mergers and regional high schools; protection of local identity alongside improved statewide coherence; and a feasible implementation plan aligned with Vermont’s geography, capacity, and public sentiment.”

In its final recommendations, the RTF concluded in part, “This approach does not reject the intent of Act 73 -- it advances this intent in realistic, evidence-based, and community responsive ways.”

“I think it’s important to note how tightly the overall BOCES concept as developed for Southern Vermont’s education landscape -- and adaptable for other state regions -- is in alignment with the RTF’s final recommendations to Vermont’s Governor and legislators after four months of intense work,” said MVSU’s Superintendent Sousa. “That work represents -- among other important data pools -- input from more than 5,000 Vermonters and extensive deliberation among RTF members.”

Sousa, who worked with the VTLC for five years to gain the State’s approval of the Southeast Regional BOCES, will serve as new BOCES’ Vice President.

Wrote Secretary Sauders to the Southeast Regional BOCES in her letter of January 7, “I offer my congratulations on reaching this milestone in your work.” In that letter she concluded, “This is an exciting step forward in regionalizing and improving education service delivery, and I thank you for your sustained and focused efforts to stand up this first BOCES in Vermont.”

About the Vermont Learning Collaborative:

Vermont Learning Collaborative is a non-profit educational service agency supporting supervisory unions and school districts in the southeast region through shared, cost-effective programs and services. VTLC provides educational programming, evaluations, therapeutic services, professional development, and regional staffing solutions that expand access, strengthen educator capacity, and promote equitable outcomes across the region. For more information, please visit www.vtlc.org.

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