

Ed 306 Testimony - Dover School Board - April 3, 2024 Board of Education hearing

Good afternoon, my name is Micaela Demeter. I speak today as a member of the Dover School Board and I share this testimony on behalf of our elected body.

The board wishes to express its concerns with the Department of Education's current version of the *Ed 306 Minimum Standards for Public School Approval*. As elected leaders, we are charged with providing for the education of Dover's nearly 3,600 students. School boards across the state engage in the same work within their districts and we all require clear, robust and uniform guidance to ensure each New Hampshire student receives an equitable and adequate education.

Commissioner Edelblut's proposed changes walk back the state's responsibility to define an adequate education, which then absolves the state of its future responsibility to pay for that adequate education. If this responsibility is largely left to local school boards, an adequate education may look different in each district, thereby exacerbating the deep inequities we know exist in our state at this time. Further, this absolution of responsibility by the state leaves local school boards to face the frustration of taxpayers who are already paying for over 70% of local school costs. Districts need guidance on what they should offer so there's equity from district to district, but also because the state must define an adequate education.

The Dover School Board has identified many examples of the watering down of education standards throughout this proposal:

A language shift from "teaching students" to "facilitating learning" sends the wrong message to our education community by removing the expectation that teachers are the orchestrators of learning experiences. Schools are schools because they contain qualified and certified teachers to do the teaching. The Dover School Board opposes any language change that removes the requirement for a teacher to do the teaching. The proposed language is vague and concerning.

In Dover, we have worked diligently to keep our class sizes as low as financially possible. Our board is opposed to the proposed removal of all maximum class size limitations. Significant research supports the understanding that smaller class sizes are linked to better educational outcomes, particularly in early elementary grades. The Dover School Board is concerned that a lack of maximum class size regulations will only augment learning inequities in districts that already struggle to educate their students with limited resources. Further, districts that could not afford to maintain lower class sizes would struggle even more to hire and retain qualified staff.

One of our chief responsibilities as a board involves creating and modifying district policies that guide school governance. Current law requires school boards to create policies governing the assessment and review of instructional materials. With the proposed change from "instructional materials" to "learning resources", the watering down continues. What exactly are learning resources, and how do school boards regulate such a vague term?

Finally, the Dover School Board has overseen our district's transition to a Competency-Based Education model over the past few years. The proposed language change once again waters down the expectation of "mastery" to "proficiency" when considering whether a student has achieved learning sufficient to earn course credit.

We reject the notion that our students in NH should learn under ill-defined and anemic standards, and we stand opposed to any changes that would decrease equity across the state. For these reasons, the Dover School Board is opposed to the current Ed 306 changes as proposed.