

BARNET – DANVILLE – PEACHAM – WALDEN

Caledonia Central Supervisory Union
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Date: January 12, 2016

To: Senate and House Education Committee's

From: Dr. Mathew G. Forest, Superintendent CCSU (Walden, Danville, Peacham, Barnet)

Testimony:

Caledonia Central Supervisory Union (CCSU) understands the importance of Act 46, and appreciates the time and effort the legislation has invested into the process. CCSU has taken Act 46 very seriously. Our Supervisory Union will be moving forward with a Red Side by Side merger configuration with a PreK-8 (Barnet, Peacham, Walden, Possibly Waterford) on one side and a PreK- 12 (Danville, Cabot, Twinfield) on the other side. We are in the early stages of developing the PreK- 12 side, we are working with a consultant, and have obtained two \$5000.00 study grants to investigate these partnerships further.

We have adopted the Common Core State Standards SU wide. We understand the need to provide early intervention. We created a Multi-Tiered System of Support where every student K-12 receives an intervention at their level, based on their individual needs. Some may receive enrichment, others remediation. Students who receive a remediation intervention are progress monitored bi-weekly to ensure that the student is making progress. If the student flat lines or regresses in progress the approach/method is altered to ensure success. Every eight weeks all student data is reviewed and student groupings are reconfigured based on student progress and need. This is our second year of implementing this model. Our hope is that we will catch students early that need extra assistance and eliminate the need for special education services later on. We are seeing success with this approach.

Danville High School is in a challenging situation. The High School sits between two prominent high schools, Lyndon Institute and St. Johnsbury Academy. We have families from Walden and Barnet that do not even consider Danville High School a viable option, simply due to the strong reputations of these two private schools. Due to this we have had to get creative and redefine what Danville High School can become. We are exploring adopting an International Baccalaureate (IB) program.

If successful Danville would be the only public high school in Vermont to offer this program, courses would be accepted internationally. Research shows that students who participate in an IB program are better prepared for college and can transfer IB courses in for college credit. Our faculty and staff have visited two IB schools and plan on piloting IB courses next fall. We have begun to establish a collaborative partnership with St. Johnsbury Academy. This relationship is somewhat dependent on Danville's ability to deliver an IB program. This would allow for a fluid exchange of students between the two schools to expand offerings. For example, students at the Academy who wanted to take IB courses could attend them at Danville and Danville students could have access to Academy courses that Danville does not offer. This is an exciting and promising partnership that will expand opportunities for all students involved.

However, in order for Danville to avoid the double tax penalty we will need to cut \$475,493.00 from the budget, this will put all these efforts on hold. Danville School has seen a \$259,000.00 increase in special education costs, this is due to out of district placements and an increase in students with intensive service needs. Teacher salaries and health insurance add another \$251,192.00 to the budget for a total of \$510,192.00. There is no question that even without the tax penalty Danville will have to make budgetary cuts that involve personnel. However, with the tax penalty these cuts will be deeper and will impact the quality of the educational program and hinder Danville from moving forward with the work that has been started.

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The Danville School Board has made sound personnel and budgetary decisions. Last year we had a reduction in force among the para educators and the custodial staff, because the board recognized we were overstaffed in these departments. When the State forces schools to make cuts due to avoiding a tax penalty, not knowing what the impact will be, this becomes problematic for students. Danville does not have elective courses or clubs that larger schools have that we can cut to reduce the budget. The type of cuts that will be required to avoid the tax penalty will decimate programs.

In order for Walden to avoid the tax penalty the district will need to cut \$364,484.00 from the budget. \$222,144.00 of this year's increase is due to special education costs, and \$39,600.00 due to mandated PreK requirements. Last year Walden's cost per pupil was artificially lowered due to having a \$107,600.00 fund balance that was returned to the town. This year Walden does not have a fund balance to assist with offsetting these high costs. The Walden School has 7 full time teachers and two special educators. Two of these teachers teach multiage classrooms. The School has a part time nurse, and part time PE, music and art teachers. There is little room to cut to try and avoid the tax penalty. We will have to eliminate programs and positions that have a direct impact on children.

In Barnet and Peacham the increases are due to increased tuition costs. We recognize that Peacham has one of the highest cost per pupil spending in the State. The Board has taken steps to remedy the matter. We have reduced the principal to a part time position. Barent and Peacham are scheduled to have a joint board meeting to discuss merger options that will assist in this, outside of the other k-8 merger decisions taking place in our SU. We understand the importance of collaborating with other districts to find efficiencies and equity in educational opportunities for students. Penalizing our districts with double taxation as we are working toward trying to achieve these efficiencies and opportunities for children is counterproductive to the intent of Act 46. As Superintendent of Caledonia Central Supervisory Union I respectfully request that the legislation remove the tax penalty imposed by Act 46.

Respectfully Submitted By



Dr. Mathew G. Forest
Superintendent

Free and Reduced Lunch data:

Peacham - 30% on free/reduced lunch
Barnet - 46%, on free/reduced lunch
Danville - 35% on free/ reduced lunch
Walden – 66% on free/reduced lunch