

Testimony Before The House Ways and Means Committee
By Milan Miller, Williamstown, VT
April 9, 2014

1. The worst part of H883 is its top down, one size fits all template. One size doesn't fit all. You will do well if it is a good fit for 20% of the schools being forced in a RED.
2. I will leave with you a copy of the letter I wrote to one of my representatives – Phil Winters in Williamstown. He and I have been debating consolidation for the three years I have been on the School Board. Phil says he would vote for anything that saves money. I point out that 883 might bend the cost curve over time, but offers nothing definite in savings. Some positions might be trimmed, but salaries and wages will go up. Is there a net savings?
3. If any plan could be proven to save 20% on costs, sustainable for ten years, I would accept the reality that we should do it. Proof would be an extensive analysis and modeling that would generate realistic numbers – not a set of assumptions.
4. Language in the bill says we need consolidations because principals spend too much time doing reports and SUs are a loose collection of small schools, each going their own way. That is false. Act 153 of 2010 consolidates administrative functions at the SU level and makes the SU Board the governing body of the schools in the SU by redefining duties of the Supervisory Union Board and Superintendents. See Title 16, Sec 242 and Sec 261a.
5. We are told consolidation is needed so we can increase learning opportunities. We are already doing that. We learn of innovations to bring more learning opportunities to our students at every board meeting.
6. There is only one thing that will change with H883. It will do away with local boards and, by definition, local schools. There must be an easier way to relieve superintendents of the burden of attending several board meetings every month.
7. I recommend the following be done this year:
 - a. fix the superintendent/board meeting problem
 - b. set up a task force to visit every school in the state to evaluate how they function and what they need. Could take more than one year.
 - c. allow schools and SUs that are working well to remain as they are.
 - d. allow consolidations to vary in size and scope to fit the schools involved.

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April 3, 2014

Rep. Philip Winters
1374 Chelsea Road
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Dear Phil:

You have said that you would vote for anything that saves money. The idea of school consolidation was driven by saving money.

The language on H883 says it will, at most, "bend the cost curve" over time. Start-up costs of implementing the consolidation are estimated to be \$11 million. Renegotiating contracts of teachers and staff will seek the highest common denominator. A few positions may be cut, but will the savings be offset by higher salaries and wages?

The bill now purports to consolidate administrative functions to relieve small school staffs of accounting and reporting chores. This was already done by Act 153 of 2010. They say the consolidation will increase opportunities and resources for learning. We are already doing those things.

That leaves one problem to solve. Superintendents spend too much time on preparing for and attending board meetings. Their solution? Do away with the boards? There must be a simpler fix!

The House of Education roof is leaking. Do we repair the roof or demolish the house and build a new one?

Ask yourself: Does the dubious prospect of miniscule savings to be realized by forcing all schools to join a RED and give up their buildings and properties justify the incalculable harm that will be done to their small communities? Williamstown is overwhelmingly opposed to this consolidation plan.

I urge you to vote against H883. I also urge you to vote in support of the Komline-Scheurmann amendment to repeal and replace Act 60/68.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Milan Miller

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

By Milan Miller, Williamstown, VT

March 18, 2014

UNABRIDGED VERSION

I am Milan Miller from Williamstown. I am a member of the local school board and the ONSU board, but I am speaking as an individual and not on behalf of those boards.

- 1.. The worst part of this draft is its top down, one size fits all, cookie cutter template. One size doesn't fit all. Every school and SU is unique.
2. School districts will be like the Regional Education Districts of Act 153. SUs do not cease to exist. They will be embedded in the new REDs. Local boards cease to exist and local schools are lost with them.
3. In our local boards there is a rich, deep cadre of engaged, knowledgeable, motivated, innovative people who work within the context of their local circumstances. This resource will be lost if local boards are eliminated.
4. The school is the center and common ground for small rural communities, which is most of Vermont. Take the peoples' schools away and you destroy the social and economic fabric of their communities.
5. When consolidation was all about saving money, I had decided that if it could be proven that a 20% reduction in cost, sustainable for 10 years, could be achieved then I would accept the fact that we needed to make that change.

The reasons now given for consolidation are unspecified broad concepts about more resources, improved opportunities, and outcomes.

We are already doing those things. When Williamstown didn't have a Spanish course, one of our students travelled to Montpelier because she wanted to take Spanish. Another student transferred to Montpelier because she wanted more music and drama than Williamstown had, and she played hockey in Montpelier. By developing this and other strategies like Flexible Pathways and

Dual Enrollment, we can provide those extra opportunities for the few students who truly want more than the standard curriculum offered by their school.

6. Extra-curricular activities like sports, music, drama, and arts are important nearly as much as academic subjects. There will be more opportunities to participate in small schools. A greater portion of the student body will be participating in activities in small schools than in large schools. A basketball squad has 12 members, give or take a couple, whether there are 100 students in the school or 1,000.

7. Administratively: Comments about a principal spending too much time doing reports and SUs being a loose collection of local boards, each going their own way, suggests lack of familiarity with 153. Check "the duties of SU boards" and "the duties of superintendents" in Act 153. These were put in 153 to consolidate administrative functions. Implement the law we have and we won't have to make a new one.

8. Working group/Design Teams. Here you have it backwards. First have the teams visit every school in the state and discern their situation. Then design a bill around their findings.

9. Surely a fix can be found for superintendents of large unions having too many board meetings to attend without scrapping our current system and starting over from square one.

10. A bill should be more flexible than this one. Allow smaller consolidations. Move laterally. Allow more latitude in the courses that can be taught by one teacher.