



WINDSOR SOUTHEAST SUPERVISORY UNION

Final Report of the RED Study
Committee

Study prepared by James Massingham
Vermont School Boards Association
10/24/2012

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Executive Summary

The Regional Education District (RED) Study Committee was formed in December of 2011 to investigate the costs and benefits associated with forming a single unified union district with the four member towns of Weathersfield, West Windsor, Windsor, and Hartland. The committee was comprised of school board members from each town in the supervisory union, community representatives, the superintendent, and VSBA consultant James Massingham. The committee discussed merger experiences from other states. In addition, pertinent statutes and regulations were reviewed with a particular focus on the pros and cons of merger and high school choice. The study highlights significant educational benefits to a merger including coordinated services; consistent curriculum, instruction and assessment; and the consistent approach to policies, procedures, and general school governance. Some financial advantages were identified including those fiscal incentives offered by the state.

The one common theme that emerged throughout the study was the importance that at least three of the towns place on the ability of parents and students to choose their high school. Currently, Windsor offers limited school choice through the Regional Choice Collaborative, but the towns of Hartland, Weathersfield, and West Windsor allow high school choice based on existing state law and related tuition regulations. These three towns will not support any merger that limits that parental choice. Under current statute, a district that operates a high school is not permitted to offer broad based school choice.

In conclusion, the committee decided that the advantages of merger, while significant, do not outweigh the anticipated loss of high school choice for three of the four member towns of the supervisory union. **Therefore the committee does not recommend a merger vote at this time.** The committee did recommend, however, that the Executive Committee of the WSSU work with local legislators to enact changes to state law that will allow broad based high school choice as part of a plan to merge the four member towns. The committee further recommends that the school boards engage their communities in open dialogue related to the benefits of a merger plan that includes choice. The complete recommendations are on page 29 of this document.

Overview

RED Study Mission

It is the mission of this Vermont School Boards Association Governance Study to research the possible benefits and challenges for forming a Unified Union School District to govern all schools in the Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union.

The Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union Executive Committee commissioned this governance study to research the governance of all schools in the district with one regional school board in order to maintain quality education opportunities for students at a reasonable cost to tax payers. To that end, the WSSU RED Study Committee began its work in December, 2011. The committee is made of school board members, community members and Superintendents Tom Christiansen and, after July 2012, Interim Superintendent David Baker.

Introduction

The demographic, economic, and political landscapes for Vermont's schools have experienced substantial changes over the past decade. There has been an increase in the overall population in Vermont, but a substantial decline in the number of students in most schools. In addition, both state and federal departments of education have imposed numerous policy requirements, standards, and accountability measures beyond what has ever been experienced in the history of education. The work of school leaders is increasingly complex. Future trends for the United States and world are calling for new content and strategies to educate students of all ages. These factors have resulted in the need for local school boards to look carefully at how they deliver education services.

Before embarking on a school governance study it makes sense to explain what the term means. Education governance, as defined by the Vermont School Boards Association is:

“In the context of the relationship between school district voters, school boards, school administrators, and the legislative and executive branches of state government, means the assignment of roles and responsibilities to each of those entities, and the organizational structures created to allow each entity to carry out its responsibilities.”

Interpreted in this context, governance means the relationship shared between the voters, school boards, and administrators within and/or outside the Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union, as well as the State Board and Commissioner of Education.

The Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union Executive Committee contracted with the Vermont School Boards Association (VSBA) to facilitate exploration of options for creating a formal system that will unify the governance of elementary schools, middle schools, and high school. To that end, school board and community members volunteered to serve on the RED Study Committee. VSBA consultant James Massingham, facilitated the work of the committee and writing of this study.

The goal of this study is to clarify questions and provide data that will assist Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union with framing public policy and developing governance options for the future of the SU. To this end, the study generated data on school performance, school budgets,

costs per pupil, cost of school choice, district debt and applicable state laws regarding education governance. Part of the study includes information inserted into the "Template" provided by the Vermont Department of Education. The template organizes the plan and supporting data so that required information is included if the committee determines that it wishes to move forward. A request to form a RED must be forwarded to the State Board of Education before a vote by local citizens would take place. The district voters will have the final say.

We appreciate the assistance and cooperation extended to us by the Administrators, Central Office Staff and School Board members from Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union. All of these people were instrumental in enabling us to conduct the necessary research for a thorough study.

Brief History of Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union

According to the Vermont Department of Education, the Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union was first formed as the Windsor East Supervision District on September 7, 1915. It included the towns of Hartland, Windsor, West Windsor and Reading. Clearly this was part of an attempt in the early 1900's to consolidate some services and to have a district superintendent oversee the fiduciary responsibilities of the member towns. Each town had several little village schools and as more and more students attended the responsibilities became increasingly complex. Researching early school directories of the school districts in Vermont, the Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union is first mentioned in 1935 and consists of the current towns of Windsor, West Windsor, Hartland and Weathersfield. It appears that the union operated with one superintendent up until 1996.

In the late winter of 1996 the Supervisory Union requested that the Vermont State Board of Education grant it a governance waiver for a two year "trial" so that each member town/school could operate in a multi-town governance structure that would include a part-time superintendent in each of those respective towns. The State Board approved the waiver, but reserved the right to rescind it within the two-year period if it resulted in an ineffective model. The union continued operating in that manner from June of 1996 through July of 2009. The supervisory union remained intact, but answered to four different part-time superintendents. On December 3, 2008 the supervisory union board voted 10-2 to re-establish a single superintendent model at the end of that fiscal year. So, on July 1, 2009 the union returned to a single superintendent governance structure. The minutes of the December 2008 meeting indicate that the union board had some concerns about the lack of autonomy, but felt that the autonomy issue was outweighed by the need to overcome a disjointed and inefficient system of governance. The majority felt that coordinating things like professional development, hiring practices, curriculum work, business services and special education services had merit.

The district has operated as a single-superintendent supervisory union ever since. In July of 2009 an Interim Superintendent was hired to help make the transition. She served for two years and on July 1 2011, the supervisory union hired its first full-time permanent superintendent. That superintendent served for only one year. On July 1, 2012, the union board hired another interim and has begun a search for a full-time permanent superintendent. Currently the union board has expressed concern about the continuous superintendent turnover since moving back to a single superintendent. That said, the union board has also expressed a strong desire to continue to increase services provided on a supervisory-wide basis; understanding the benefits of consistency among the individual school districts. This desire to cooperate helped to

instigate this RED study and is supported in many of the recommendations contained with this report.

Recent declines in student population indicate a growing need to consider any factors that could create savings for taxpayers. WSSU schools served almost 1,200 (actual number 1,195) students as recently as 2007/2008. The combined school population last school year was 1,134. This rate of decline, if it continues, will result in a population reduced to 1,051 by 2016/2017.

Definition of a Unified Union and Steps Necessary to Create One

What is a Unified Union? Unified union school districts are formed by agreement between participating school districts to operate a single school system for residents of the participating districts. A unified union school district has a school board comprised of representatives of the member towns, elected on a one-person-one-vote basis from each town. A unified union school district adopts an annual budget, and member towns pay assessments in accord with the unified union district's articles of agreement.

A unified union means all grade levels are combined into a PK-12 district.

How are they formed? There is a comprehensive statutory process for the formation of unified union school districts. Formation requires an extensive study process (preceded by vote of the electorate *only if the governance study budget exceeds \$25,000*), approval by the State Board of Education and final approval by the electorate of each member district to create the new unified union. Further information regarding the Vermont Statutes that control formation of Union and Unified Union Districts can be found in Appendix D.

What are their advantages? Unified union school districts are municipal entities. As such, unified union school districts have powers to build, finance, own and operate schools. They are therefore stable entities. The level of public participation in unified union school districts is on a par with the level of public participation in "town" school districts.

What are their disadvantages? Unified union school districts are difficult to form and difficult to alter once formed. On occasion, a member district may want to leave a unified union district, or a new district may wish to join an existing unified union district. While there are statutory processes to allow these things to happen, a single district will be unable to enter or leave a union without the assent of other members.

Where are they? There are five unified union school districts in Vermont. Those districts are: Blue Mountain School District (Wells River), Twinfield (Washington Northeast), Waits River (Orange East) and Miller's Run (Caledonia North) and, as of March 2, 2010, Addison Northwest Unified Union School District.

Definition of a Regional Education District (RED)

A RED is a specialized type of Unified Union, which affords its member districts certain incentives if they create a UU that has the characteristics of a RED. The rationale for the creation of this incentive system is that larger school districts afford their students broader opportunities, while at the same time reducing costs, in the long term, through economies of scale and through more efficient utilization of buildings and personnel. The legislation, which

authorizes these incentives for voluntary school district mergers, is contained in Sections 1-8 of Act 153 of 2010 (formerly H.66).

General Research Findings

Economies of scale and streamlined governance typically produce benefits to communities. Following is a summary of benefits that may result from merger. This general information is helpful in understanding the benefits of merger. Information specific to WSSU can be found later in the report.

Potential Benefits of Creating a Unified Union

1. Reduced School Board Turnover;

- With one board instead of four, the number of board members is reduced from 18 to 13, making recruitment and retention somewhat easier. The annual board turnover average in WSSU for the past three years is 20%. The annual Vermont average for the same period is 17%. Therefore, over the last five years WSSU has had almost a 100% turnover. Only three board members out of 18 have been here for the full five years. Fewer board and committee meetings and reduced number of board members needed could result in a lower turnover rate and more stable board governance.

2. Improved Accountability for K-12 Outcomes;

- The creation of common policies and their consistent application throughout the system is enhanced with a single school board providing oversight for the implementation of those policies,
- Consistent curriculum and program articulation and evaluation across all schools in the system is improved with the superintendent taking direction from one school board that is responsible for oversight of PreK-12 education,
- The ability to allocate resources across the RED based on student needs can be enhanced as single board prioritizes the needs of all students,
- Increased accountability for the superintendent can be enhanced in a RED. Financial transparency is enhanced with a single budget and one board focused on results for all students in the district.

3. Economies of Scale for Business Management;

- District purchasing for all schools will improve the economy of scale and create greater consistency of resource allocation,
- The efficiency and effectiveness of human resources and financial management is enhanced with administration benefits realized with the creation of a single school district,
- One annual audit instead of five (four districts plus SU) increases systemic oversight of financial records and budget procedures and reduces costs for the entire district,

- Development of one annual budget versus five (four districts plus SU) in the current system increases efficiency and potential coordination of resources based on the needs of all children in the district.

4. Tax Rate Impact of Forming a Unified Union;

- Financial savings, by governing the district with one school board instead of many, RED tax rate incentives provided by Act 153 for the first four years of operation,
- Funding is provided by the state to offset the cost of transition to a RED.

5. Increased Income Potential;

- Reduced vulnerability to excess spending threshold penalties and Act 82 two-vote requirements, currently in play for smaller schools, can be realized with a RED budget construct,
- The administration and accounting for state and federal grants is more efficient with the single board configuration and the aggregated students,
- RED financial incentives provided by Act 153 to offset some startup costs.

6. Board decision making for the K-12 system is enhanced;

- Unified union school districts are governed by a single school board, which is subject to the one person, one vote requirement of the United States Constitution. A unified union school board may have up to eighteen members, and each member district shall be entitled to at least one representative. Board membership must be determined based on the populations of the towns involved,
- To provide for proportional representation the school board can be structured to allow for weighted voting by unified union school board members. Under this system the district could have a board of any size between seven and eighteen members. However, to comply with the one person one vote requirement, board member votes would be weighted in proportion to the census data,
- Hartland, Weathersfield, and West Windsor would have a voice at the high school level. Currently these three school boards have no say in the governance of Windsor High School, even though they send a significant number of students each year.

7. Reduced financial exposure for individual districts for necessary capital improvements and operations;

- Future assets and liabilities for the entire system are shared equally in a RED system. This reduces the financial risk for any individual district. The following data is taken from the most recent audits of the district's financial operations,
- Currently the schools of WSSU have a total debt of \$7,010,000. Forming school districts will each create a plan to pay off their obligations,
- Total assets of WSSU would be \$39,705,602 and would be assumed by the RED.

8. Expanded opportunity for school choice within the district;

- With the creation of a single unified union district, board options for elementary school choice within the RED can be made available. The choice options would be described in the Articles of Agreement for the RED,
- Expansion of high school choice to include Windsor School District.

9. Systemic response to fluctuations in student enrollment patterns;

- The RED board would be empowered to address fluctuations in student enrollment in the district. If a pattern of increasing or decreasing enrollment threatens the viability of the educational program or budget resources, the RED board can adjust the assignment of students to better meet the educational program needs,
- Assignment of instructional staff in a unified union can be adjusted across the district to respond to changing enrollment patterns and student needs.

10. Reduced Superintendent Burnout;

- The annual average superintendent turnover rate in Vermont 17%. Candidate pools for superintendent vacancies in Vermont are small. The average number of candidates in current searches is 12 with generally only three to five possessing the skills and experience to be considered viable candidates. Substantial expenses associated with searches for superintendents are also a feature of high turnover,
- The departure of superintendents lead to systemic turbulence and lack of consistency in direction of the system toward improved student results and reduced system accountability,
- Currently the superintendent prepares and attends 72 School board meetings per year. This equates to 4½ hours per week devoted to meeting preparation and attendance at meetings before any other work of the district is considered.
- Systemic oversight and accountability for professional development, curriculum development, human resources, labor negotiations, long range planning for building and grounds all require leadership time from the superintendent. Their effectiveness could be enhanced if the hours/day currently allocated to preparing for and attending, and following up numerous school board meetings could be reduced.

Potential Challenges

1. Changes in local control

- Other SU leaders considering the formation of a RED have encountered public resistance due to a point-of-view that influence and control over the local elementary school program will be diminished with only one board governing all schools in the district,
- Fewer people involved in decision-making for the entire district may seem like a loss of local control to district residents,
- Changes to current practice regarding high school choice.

2. Confusion about lines of communication and the ability to solve problems locally

- This is commonly coupled with the perception that the UU Board is not able to respond as quickly to citizen concerns/questions as a board with a smaller jurisdiction.

3. Perceived loss of voting power by smaller town

- Some communities, who have studied the RED concept, encounter the concern that smaller towns will have reduced influence on the system due to their limited proportional representation on the RED board. Although the number of representatives on the RED board is less than the current three to five person boards, the RED representation is proportional to the population of each town.

The following section, pages 9-21, is organized according to the report template provided by the Vermont Department of Education. If the committee had decided to move forward with a merger vote, this section would have been forwarded to the Vermont School Board for approval before such vote.

**Hartland School District; Weathersfield School District;
West Windsor School District; Windsor School District
Regional Education District (RED)
Planning Committee Report**

The Plan

October, 2012

Authorization to engage in this RED Planning Committee process was voted in the affirmative by the following boards of directors on the following dates:

Hartland Board of Directors, on November 28, 2011;
Weathersfield Board of Directors, on November 21, 2011;
West Windsor Board of Directors, on December 15, 2011;
Windsor Board of Directors, on December 5, 2011;

The Commissioner of Education was advised of the formation of this RED Study Committee, pursuant to Title 16 V.S.A. § 706b, by letter dated January 26, 2012, and in that letter, Kris Garnjost was identified as chairperson of the RED Planning Committee.

Recommended Articles of Agreement, pursuant to the requirements of Title 16, Chapter 11, Subchapter 3, as are set forth herein below, were agreed upon by the Windsor Southeast RED Study Committee at its duly warned meeting of October 24, 2012.

The Following Districts Are Deemed Necessary for the Establishment of the Proposed RED.

Hartland School District

2011-2012	Grades served:	K-8
	Current year (2011/2012) ADM:	306
	Current year per pupil spending:	\$14,189 per equalized pupil
	Current year student-to-teacher ratio:	8.27
	Current year student-to-adult student ratio:	5.39
	Current year administrator-to-teacher ratio:	13.5
	Current year student-to-administrator ratio:	153
2010-2011	Last Year (2010/2011) ADM:	309
	Last year per pupil spending:	\$13,449.25 per equalized pupil
	Last year student-to-teacher ratio:	10.18
	Last year student-to-adult student ratio:	5.83
	Last year administrator-to-teacher ratio:	10.12
2009-2010	Last year student-to-administrator ratio:	103
	2 years ago (2009/2010) ADM:	295
	2 years ago per pupil spending:	\$13,178 per equalized pupil
	2 years ago student-to-teacher ratio:	8.91
	2 years ago student-to-adult student ratio:	6.12
	2 years ago administrator-to-teacher ratio:	16.55
Last Census	2 years ago student-to-administrator ratio:	147.50
	District population	3,393

Weathersfield School District

2011-2012	Grades served:	K-8
	Current year ADM(2011/2012):	211
	Current year per pupil spending:	\$14,163
	Current year student-to-teacher ratio:	8.44
	Current year student-to-adult student ratio:	3.70
	Current year administrator-to-teacher ratio:	25
	Current year student-to-administrator ratio:	211
2010-2011	Last Year (2010/2011) ADM:	203
	Last year per pupil spending:	\$14,654 per equalized pupil
	Last year student-to-teacher ratio:	9.81
	Last year student-to-adult student ratio:	3.93
	Last year administrator-to-teacher ratio:	20.70
2009-2010	Last year student-to-administrator ratio:	203
	2 years ago (2009/2010) ADM:	207
	2 years ago per pupil spending:	\$14,551 per equalized pupil
	2 years ago student-to-teacher ratio:	12.8
	2 years ago student-to-adult student ratio:	4.15
	2 years ago administrator-to-teacher ratio:	17.00
Last Census	2 years ago student-to-administrator ratio:	207
	District population	2,885

West Windsor School District (Albert Bridge School)

2011-2012	Grades served:	K-6
	Current year (2011/2012) ADM:	70
	Current year per pupil spending:	\$11,777 per equalized pupil
	Current year student-to-teacher ratio:	5.83
	Current year student-to-adult student ratio:	3.88
	Current year administrator-to-teacher ratio:	6
	Current year student-to-administrator ratio:	70
2010-2011	Last Year (2010/2011) ADM:	78
	Last year per pupil spending:	\$11,904 per equalized pupil
	Last year student-to-teacher ratio:	13
	Last year student-to-adult student ratio:	4.26
	Last year administrator-to-teacher ratio:	6
	Last year student-to-administrator ratio:	78
2009-2010	2 years ago (2009/2010) ADM:	77
	2 years ago per pupil spending:	\$12,586 per equalized pupil
	2 years ago student-to-teacher ratio:	12.83
	2 years ago student-to-adult student ratio:	4.17
	2 years ago administrator-to-teacher ratio:	6
	2 years ago student-to-administrator ratio:	77
Last Census	District population	1,099

Windsor School District (Windsor State Street School, Windsor High School)

2011-2012	Grades served:	K-12
	Current year (2011/2012) ADM:	547
	Current year per pupil spending:	\$12,329 per equalized pupil
	Current year student-to-teacher ratio:	8.54
	Current year student-to-adult student ratio:	5.25
	Current year administrator-to-teacher ratio:	16
	Current year student-to-administrator ratio:	136.75
2010-2011	Last Year (2010/2011) ADM:	570
	Last year per pupil spending:	\$12,473 per equalized pupil
	Last year student-to-teacher ratio:	10.25
	Last year student-to-adult ratio:	5.46
	Last year administrator-to-teacher ratio:	17.96
	Last year student-to-administrator ratio:	138.13
2009-2010	2 years ago (2009/2010) ADM:	592
	2 years ago per pupil spending:	\$12,453 per equalized pupil
	2 years ago student-to-teacher ratio:	19.71
	2 years ago student-to-adult student ratio:	5.66
	2 years ago administrator-to-teacher ratio:	20.00
	2 years ago student-to-administrator ratio:	140.37
Last Census	District population	4,979

All current member districts of the Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union are essential to this merger. There are no districts deemed advisable.

Planning Committee Members

Nancy Gabriel (Hartland)

Scott Richardson (Hartland)

Gloria Ballantine (Weathersfield)

John Broker Campbell (Weathersfield)

David Baker, Superintendent

Art Keating (West Windsor)

Danielle Farnsworth (Windsor)

Wendy Moody (Windsor)

Kris Garnjost (Windsor), Chairperson

Note that Amber Trombley and Carla Balch served as community members representing Hartland for a short time. Tom Christensen, Superintendent of Schools, Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union was replaced by the new, Interim Superintendent David Baker on August 29, 2012.

Articles of Agreement

The Planning Committee recommends that the following Articles of Agreement be approved by the electorates of each of the named school districts in order to create a RED to be named Mt. Ascutney Regional Education District (MARED).

Article 1

The School Districts of Hartland, Weathersfield, West Windsor, and Windsor (hereinafter referred to as the “forming districts”) are necessary to the establishment of the Mt. Ascutney Regional Education District.

Article 2

The member school districts of the Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union have worked increasingly over the past several years to consolidate management and educational services, master employee contracts and to otherwise bring about effective and efficient operating procedures and practices. Through this process, both formal and informal agreements, management systems and operating procedures have evolved between and among these member school districts, laying a foundation for the creation of the Mt. Ascutney Regional Education District (MARED).

Article 3

The MARED will offer education to students in Kindergarten through Grade 12, and will offer Pre-K education as determined by the Mt. Ascutney RED Board.

Article 4

Beginning July 1, 2014, the MARED will be responsible for providing, or contracting for, any transportation which is to be provided to publicly-funded students attending public schools within the boundaries of the RED, in accordance with transportation policies to be adopted by the Mt. Ascutney RED Board.

Article 5

The Mt. Ascutney RED will honor all pre-existing master and individual contracts that are in place for the forming school districts on July 1, 2014. These master and individual agreements will continue until their respective specified termination dates.

Article 6

The combining/forming districts of the Mt. Ascutney RED recognize their obligations, pursuant to Act 153 of 2010, Section 9, to standardize curricula, and to otherwise standardize their operations within existing Supervisory Unions boundaries, on or before July 1, 2012.

Article 7

Any and all operating deficits and/or surpluses, including capital debt, of any of the combining/forming districts shall remain their obligation. The Mt. Ascutney RED will assume all new obligations effective on the date of the creation.

Article 8

The combining/forming districts will convey to the Mt. Ascutney RED all of their school-related real and personal property, for One Dollar, and the MARED will assume all capital debt associated therewith, effective on the date of the creation of the Mt. Ascutney RED.

In the event that, and at such subsequent time as, the Mt. Ascutney RED determines that any of the real property, including land and buildings, conveyed to it by one or more of the combining/forming districts is or are unnecessary to the continued operation of the MARED, and its educational programs, the Mt. Ascutney RED shall convey such real property, for the sum of One Dollar, and subject to all encumbrances of record, to the town in which it is located.

Article 9

A forming town/district’s representation on the Mt. Ascutney RED Board will be closely proportional to the fraction that its population bears to the aggregate population of the MARED. Initial Mt. Ascutney RED Board composition will be based upon the year 2010 Federal Census, and shall be recalculated promptly following the release of each subsequent decennial census. However, at no time will a combining/forming town/district have less than one board member on the MARED Board. Subject to the previous sentence, each proportionality calculation shall be rounded to the nearest whole number.

Number of MARED School Board Members by Town/City*

Town/City	Board Members (population of town)
Hartland	4 members (3,393)
Weathersfield	3 members (2,885)
West Windsor	2 member (1,099)
Windsor	6 members (4,979)
Total	15 members

*Each member represents about 950 citizens, with no town having fewer than 2 representatives.

Article 10

Mt. Ascutney RED Board members will be elected for three-year terms, except for those initially elected at the time of the formation of the Mt. Ascutney RED. In the initial Mt. Ascutney RED Board Member terms of office will be as follows:

Distribution of Initial One-Year, Two-Year and Three-Year Terms:

- Hartland - one 1 year term, two 2 year terms, and one 3 year term
- Weathersfield - one 1 year term, one 2 year term, and one 3 year term
- West Windsor - one 1 year term and one 2 year term
- Windsor - two 1 year Terms, two 2 year terms, and two 3 year terms

Article 11

The proposal for forming this RED will be presented to the voters of each member school district which is designated as “necessary” on March 5, 2013, at which time the required RED Board Members will also be elected.

Article 12

Upon an affirmative vote of the electorates of the school districts which are necessary, and upon compliance with 16 V.S.A. § 706g, the Mt. Ascutney RED shall have and exercise all of the authority which is necessary in order for it to prepare for full operation beginning on July 1, 2014. The RED shall, between the date of the necessary affirmative votes and June 30, 2014, develop school district policies, adopt curriculum and educational programs, prepare for contractual agreements, set the school calendar for Fiscal Year 2014/15, prepare and present the budget for Fiscal Year 2014/15, prepare for the 2014 RED Annual Meeting and transact any other lawful business that comes before the Board, provided, however, that the exercise of such authority by the RED shall not be construed to limit or alter the authority and/or responsibilities of the Districts of Hartland, Weathersfield, West Windsor and Windsor.

The RED shall become operative on July 1, 2014.

Article 13

Community approval of the annual RED budget shall be conducted by Australian ballot. The requirements of 17 VSA Chapter 55, Subchapter 3 will be followed. Representative to the new district will be elected at the same time.

Article 14

The combining/forming districts, and their boards, shall remain in existence after the date of the creation of the Mt. Ascutney RED, but only for so long as is reasonably necessary for the purpose of completing any business not concluded prior to (or at) the creation of the Mt. Ascutney RED. All such uncompleted business shall be completed as soon as practicable, and in no event any later than June 30, 2014 (one year following the creation of the RED).

Article 15

Educational and Financial Advantages of the new governance structure are summarized in the Cost Benefit Analysis. See Attachment A.

Article 16

The impacts on **School Choice** of this proposed merger are summarized in Attachment B.

Article 17

Enrollment will follow lines currently in existence. Attendance boundaries will be determined by town lines.

The RED will serve Kindergarten – Grade 12 by providing for students’ education at public schools operated by the RED. Students will attend elementary schools according to their town of residency for educational purposes. See Appendix B for configuration and enrollment plan of each school maintained by the RED.

High School choice options will be expanded in the MARED. See Attachment B.

Article 18

Local participation in the development of RED policy and budget development will be assured by policies that require the new RED board and it’s sub-committee to hold meetings in public and which encourage public input.

Educational and Financial Advantages of Merger

Cost Benefit Analysis

One reason that the legislature enacted Act 153 was the belief that a reduction in the number of school districts would bring new efficiencies to Vermont school governance, resulting in reduction in local expenses and thus reduction in state and local school expenditures. Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union has achieved many of the suggested changes. Consolidation may result in some savings but the most significant gains will be improved opportunities for students.

Improved student opportunities and outcomes

A RED would allow staff to be moved from one school to another in order to meet the needs of the student population and take advantage of staffing expertise. Currently, the majority of staff are employees of the local district. This significantly limits the administration's ability to adjust staffing based on academic needs and student population trends. Often, districts make additional hires in response to needs that arise within their current district instead of studying the entire Supervisory Union (SU) to identify existing staff that could be reassigned. This is a cultural shift that has the prospect of saving money.

Equalized programming opportunities for all students within Windsor Southeast could be advanced with the formation of a RED. Currently, resources, program offerings, staffing and supplemental support varies across the supervisory union. One unified school district would, over time, reduce or eliminate the disparities in support services, staffing and programs that now exist (e.g. some schools have an enrichment program, others do not; instructional support varies between school districts; supplemental support is not equal or allocated based on SU-wide factors; infrastructure funding differs from school district to school district). Consolidation will improve student-learning opportunities.

Technology

The use of technology as a teaching and communication tool has expanded exponentially in the later portion of the 20th Century and early part of the 21st Century. Parents, colleges/universities and employers are expecting students to have adequate technology skills and understand its capabilities. Equalized conditions and support of technology is essential in the successful transition of students to work or higher education.

Schools within the WSSU employ technology support personnel to maintain a variety of systems and services, but the ability to perform these functions in an effective and efficient manner is significantly influenced by the variances in equipment, software and staff proficiency within WSSU. There is a large difference in the investment that member school districts have made in technology over the past several years. This has affected some school's ability to follow and meet the goals of WSSU's comprehensive technology plan. A unified school district increases the likelihood of resources being distributed evenly and provides flexibility in the allocation of resources based on necessity. The versatility of a RED could allow schools to upgrade their technology systems to better support students, staff and families. Schools currently share a fiber optic network but their ability to maximize the educational value is in the early stages. Further growth in this area will improve student-learning opportunities as the SU intranet

expands. The cost of technology will continue to expand and grow. By sharing among the SU these costs can be shared. As WSSU continues to expand the intranet, it is anticipated that continued technology spending will be shared, rather than absorbed completely by individual districts.

Teacher staffing

As mentioned earlier in the report, flexibility in staffing assignments empowers a unified school district to adjust staff assignments based on need, current demographic realities and staff expertise. This authority also has the potential to save money and intensify continuity and coordination of personnel. Often, school districts are faced with the choice of reducing staff because of a shift in student population while a neighboring school district is considering adding staff. These decisions are often complicated because from year to year grade-level populations ebb and flow. Administrators and school boards frequently deliberate about reducing or adding staff or maintaining staffing levels when faced with these grade level ebbs and flows. The ability to move teachers from one school to another has the prospect of saving money because the RED would have the option of assigning staffing levels based on annual needs. When looking at the SU as a whole, there are only about 1,125 students. In some areas of Vermont there are individual schools of 1,000 students. Projections indicate that there likely will be a decline in that number. The key to staffing savings is the willingness of schools to consolidate programs, including grades and other resources.

Non-teacher staffing

Many of the efficiencies and benefits pertaining to teaching staff also relate to non-teaching staff members. A RED has the authority to shift and use personnel based on student population, student needs, staff needs, programming changes, building renovations and staff certifications. Much like what was outlined above, the sharing of support personnel across the RED allows a better economy of scale and a more efficient use of limited resources. Furthermore, it is an efficient and cost effective method of aligning personnel to requirements, responsibilities and obligations.

School Board efficiencies

The reduction from five school boards (four towns and SU) to one, creates significant savings in both administration and staff time. Reduced school board meetings would reduce time spent by central office personnel from about 60 scheduled meetings per year to about two per month. Additionally, time spent by the superintendent and central office personnel during the workday developing budgets, preparing for meetings, filing state paperwork, etc. could be reduced by about 80%. The cost of preparing agendas and reports might also be reduced by 80%. Reduction of costs associated with maintaining 18 school board positions would be reduced. Fewer meetings may also reduce the school board turnover rate.

Student data collection and reporting

Collecting, reporting and analyzing student data from PreK-12 supports coordination, continuity and responsible allocation of resources. In a RED, a single board would govern a PreK-12 system and hold schools accountable for student results at every level. Attention and accountability to every grade in the system would become a necessity because staff, administration, and the board would be responsible for collective results. Strategic plans

and action plans would be written and implemented for all students PreK-12 rather than the current fragmented PreK-6, K-8 and 7-12 planning process. Each grade would be a building block to complete a student's experience within Windsor Southeast. In most cases, school boards focus on the needs and results of their local school district and not on the entire PreK-12 system. Data compilation and analysis as a RED, optimizes the capacity of our curriculum and data management systems and affords more opportunities for universal and streamlined training of staff.

Financial, accounting and budgeting (Central Office Functions)

The formation of a unified school district could streamline accounting systems by creating a single budget, eliminating assessments to member school districts for costs currently incurred at the supervisory union level, and eliminating the bill-backs required when employees are shared by more than one school district. Employees would no longer receive multiple checks and W2s from different employers (school districts). There would be one treasurer for the RED resulting in reduced services required from town offices. Budgets would be prepared at the school level, but would be encapsulated into one school district budget. One annual report would be prepared and audited (compared to the five that are now being prepared). The RED would be required to submit one statistical report and staff census to the state. Consolidation of accounting and auditing would result in some savings.

Windsor Southeast SU has recently made ongoing investments in accounting/human resource software. Consolidation has already occurred and savings in this area have been maximized by bringing this function under one entity. When considering grants, viewing Windsor Southeast as a whole presents a stronger case due to combined enrollments - often student population is a criterion in competitive grant opportunities. With this model our eligibility for consolidated grant funding would increase.

Centralized contracting

A RED could benefit from contracting with a single provider for selected services (e.g. trash, snow plowing). Currently the SU is reducing the use of district based contracted student services by expanding SU based services. These include psychological, speech, occupational, and physical therapy services that are now provided by SU employees rather than contractors, so no additional savings are anticipated.

Transportation

Windsor Southeast currently has partially centralized transportation services. Formation of the RED could be the impetus for expanding that to a fully centralized system, which would eliminate the need to budget for upgrades to the bus fleet on a biannual basis.

Food service

Food services have been losing money in every WSSU district, except Windsor, which contracts out the service. General budget fund revenue is used to support these programs. Staff turnover is an ongoing problem in one school. Consolidation would present significant opportunities to save. Estimated annual savings: \$60,000.

School Choice Options

High School Choice

Three of the four member districts in the SU operate K-6 or K-8 schools and allow unlimited school choice for students in the grades for which they do not provide instruction. Students in Windsor, which is a K-12 district, attend Windsor High School. Some students from Hartland (11.38%), West Windsor, (17.24%) and Weathersfield (25.26%) elect to attend Windsor High School. However students in these three districts and their parents may pick a school that they feel best meets their needs. Proximity to another school or parent's work, family traditions, sports, and academic programs are reported to be important considerations for many families. For example, some students attend Woodstock High School in order to play ice hockey. Others attend Hanover High School because parents work in Hanover thus enabling them to easily transport their child and attend school functions. Some students from the southern end of the SU attend Springfield High School because other family members have also attended the school. Some students choose a larger high school, which they believe can provide more program variety.

In addition to the public school options, students also attend multiple private schools both in Vermont and New Hampshire. Currently, tuition to Windsor High School is the lowest of all high schools in the area. When compared to the cost of paying tuition to Windsor High School, the unlimited choice option has annual additional costs for the three participating districts. See chart below. These numbers represent the difference between the cost of tuition to Windsor High School and the tuition charged by the receiving high schools for those students who chose other high schools in 2012/2013.

Anticipated Cost of School Choice

Town	Number of students FY13	Cost FY13
Hartland	140	\$289,370
Weathersfield	61	\$264,441
West Windsor	41	\$51,387

The grades, which are presently served by WSSU districts and their building configurations, are summarized in the following chart.

Current & Grades Served by District Schools

School District	School/s	Grades
Hartland	Hartland Elementary	K – 8
Weathersfield	Weathersfield	K – 8
West Windsor	Albert Bridge	K – 6
Windsor	State Street School	K – 6
	Windsor High	7 – 12

No changes in school configuration are planned at this time. There have been no discussions regarding school closures. The below illustrates the school configurations to be served by the Mt. Ascutney RED.

**Anticipated Grades to be Served by
District Schools**

School/s	Grades
Hartland Elementary	K – 8
Weathersfield	K – 8
Albert Bridge	K – 6
State Street School	K – 6
Windsor HS	7 – 12

As per Vermont statute(16 VSA 1621 and 1622), Windsor offers limited high school choice to partner schools. Windsor participates in the ***Southeastern Vermont Superintendent Region Public School Choice Collaborative***. Very few students participate each year. In the last three years, no students have left Windsor High school for other regional high schools. In the same time period, 36 students from outside the SU have come to Windsor. The Windsor High School may elect to expand the offerings made available through the collaborative but these future choices cannot be guaranteed because agreements with other schools must be negotiated and approved by their governing school boards also.

After consulting with neighbors, parents, and their school boards, members of the RED Study Committee are convinced that the communities that they represent wish to continue the tradition of offering broad school choice for high school students. The ability to match student needs to the wide variety of area high schools helps Windsor Southeast communities provide the best learning opportunities for their students. The Mt. Ascutney RED plans to continue school choice options currently available to Hartland, Weatherfield and West Windsor students. It will also make these choice options available to Windsor students.

Attachment C

Unified Union Tax Rates

If the homestead property taxes for Fiscal year 2012 had been calculated for the MARED instead of the current districts, homeowners property taxes would look different than today. Homestead property taxes reflect a combination of the spending per equalized pupil and the Common level of Appraisal (CLA). If WSSU were to merge to form a RED the spending per pupil would change but the CLA for each town would not change because this is based on the date of the last reappraisal. An additional complicating factor is the cost of the existing debt that will remain the obligation of the current district.

Homestead Tax Rates

	Actual Homestead Tax Rate FY2012	Education Spending per Equalized Pupil FY2012	Estimated Homestead Tax rate if district had been part of RED in 2012	Estimated Ed. Spending per Equalized Pupil if district had been part of RED in 2012
Hartland	\$1.5096	\$14,189.17	1.4296	13587.48
Weathersfield	\$1.5964	\$14,162.95	1.5164	13331.45
West Windsor	\$1.2353	\$11,777.40	1.1553	11416.41
Windsor	\$1.2540	\$12,329.07	1.1740	11521.63

APPENDIX D

The Laws that Govern the Creation of Union School Districts

16 VSA § 701. POLICY

It is declared to be the policy of the state to provide equal educational opportunities for all children in Vermont by authorizing two or more school districts, including an existing union school district, to establish a union school district for the purpose of owning, constructing, maintaining, or operating schools and to constitute the district so formed a municipal corporation with all of the rights and responsibilities which a town school district has in providing education for its youth.

§ 701b. APPLICATION OF CHAPTER

(a) Whenever referred to in this subchapter, the term “school district” shall include a “town school district,” “incorporated school district,” “union school district,” or “city school district,” and this subchapter shall accordingly apply to the organization and operation of a union school district of which any school district is a member or prospective member. The provisions of this subchapter shall apply and take precedence in the event of any conflict between those provisions and the provisions of the charter of a municipality which is a member or prospective member of a union district. Upon the organization of a union district under this subchapter, any charter of a member municipality is considered to be amended accordingly without further action.

§ 706. PROPOSAL TO FORM PLANNING COMMITTEE

When the boards of two or more school districts believe that a planning committee should be established to study the advisability of forming a union school district, or if five percent of the voters eligible to vote at the last annual or special school district meeting petition the board of their respective school districts to do so, each of the boards shall meet with the superintendent of each participating district. With the advice of the superintendent, the boards shall establish a budget, and shall fix the number of persons to serve on the planning committee, that prepares the report required by this subchapter. The boards’ proposal shall ensure that each participating district share in the committee’s budget, and be represented on the committee, in that proportion which the equalized pupils (as defined in section 4001 of this title) of the district bear to the total equalized pupils of all school districts intending to participate in the committee’s study. Nothing in this section shall be construed to prohibit informal exploration between and among school districts prior to the formation of a planning committee.

§ 706a. APPROVAL OF PLANNING BUDGET; APPOINTMENT OF PLANNING COMMITTEE

- (a) If the proposed budget established in section 706 of this chapter exceeds \$25,000.00, then:
 - (1) The voters of each participating district shall be warned to meet at an annual or special school district meeting to vote on a question in substantially the following form: “Shall the school district of appropriate funds necessary to support the district’s financial share of a study to determine the advisability of forming a union school district with some or all of the following school districts:? It is estimated that the district’s share, if all the above-listed districts vote to participate, will be \$..... The total proposed budget, to be shared by all participating districts, is \$.....” It is not necessary for the voters of each participating district to vote on the same date to establish a union school district planning committee.
 - (2) If the vote is in the affirmative in two or more districts, the boards of the participating districts shall appoint a planning committee consisting of the number of persons previously fixed. At least one school director from each participating district shall be on the committee. A district board may appoint residents to the committee who are not school directors.

(3) The sums expended for planning purposes under this section, shall be considered a part of the approved cost of any project in which the district participates pursuant to sections 3447 through 3449 of this title.

(b) If the proposed budget established in section 706 of this chapter does not exceed \$25,000.00, then the boards of the participating districts shall appoint a planning committee consisting of the number of persons previously fixed. At least one school director from each participating district shall be on the committee. A district board may appoint residents who are not school directors to the committee. The sums expended for planning purposes under this section shall be considered a part of the approved cost of any project in which the district participates pursuant to sections 3447 through 3449 of this title.

§ 706b. PLANNING COMMITTEE; CONTENTS OF PLANNING COMMITTEE REPORT

- (a) Planning committee. When a planning committee is appointed, the members shall elect a chair who shall notify the commissioner of education, of the appointment. The commissioner shall cooperate with the planning committee and may make department staff available to assist in the study of the proposed union school district. The committee is a public body pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 310(3). The committee shall cease to exist when the clerk of each district voting on a proposal to establish a union school district has certified the results of the vote to the commissioner of education pursuant to section 706g of this chapter.
- (b) Decision and report. The planning committee may determine that it is inadvisable to form a union school district or it may prepare a report in the form of an agreement between member districts for the government of the proposed union school district. In making its determination, the committee may contact additional school districts it believes may be advisable to include within a new union school district. If the committee decides to recommend formation of a union school district, its report shall specify:
- (1) the names of school districts the committee considers necessary to the establishment of the proposed union; provided, however, only districts named in the warning for the vote under section 706a of this chapter may be identified as necessary;
 - (2) the names of additional school districts the committee considers advisable to include in the proposed union school district; (3) the grades to be operated by the proposed union school district;
 - (4) the cost and general location of any proposed new schools to be constructed and the cost and general description of any proposed renovations;
 - (5) a plan for the first year of the union school district's operation for the transportation of students, the assignment of staff, and curriculum that is consistent with existing contracts, collective bargaining agreements, or other provisions of law. The board of the union school district shall make all subsequent decisions regarding transportation, staff, and curriculum subject to existing contracts, collective bargaining agreements, or other provisions of law;
 - (6) the indebtedness of proposed member districts that the union school district shall assume;
 - (7) the specific pieces of real property of proposed member districts that the union shall acquire, their valuation, and how the union school district shall pay for them;
 - (8) the allocation of capital and operating expenses of the union school district among the member districts;
 - (9) consistent with the proportional representation requirements of the equal protection clause of the Constitution of the United States, the method of apportioning the representation that each proposed member district shall have on the union school board. The union school board shall have no more than 18 members, and each member district shall be entitled to at least one representative;
 - (10) the term of office of directors initially elected, to be arranged so that one-third expire on the day of the second annual meeting of the respective districts, one-third on the day of the third

- annual meeting of the respective districts, and one-third on the day of the fourth annual meeting of the respective districts, or as near to that proportion as possible;
- (11) the date on which the union school district proposal will be submitted to the voters;
 - (12) the date on which the union school district will begin operating schools and providing educational services; and
 - (13) any other matters that the committee considers pertinent, including whether votes on the union school district budget or public questions shall be by Australian ballot.

§ 706c. APPROVAL BY STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

If a planning committee prepares a report under section 706b of this chapter, the committee shall transmit the report to the commissioner who shall submit the report with his or her recommendations to the state board of education. That board after notice to the planning committee and after giving the committee an opportunity to be heard shall consider the report and the commissioner's recommendations, and decide whether the formation of such union school district will be for the best interest of the state, the students, and the school districts proposed to be members of the union. The board may request the commissioner and the planning committee to make further investigation and may consider any other information deemed by it to be pertinent. If, after due consideration and any further meetings as it may deem necessary, the board finds that the formation of the proposed union school district is in the best interests of the state, the students, and the school districts, it shall approve the report submitted by the committee, together with any amendments, as a final report of the planning committee, and shall give notice of its action to the committee. The chair of the planning committee shall file a copy of the final report with the town clerk of each proposed member district at least 20 days prior to the vote to establish the union.

§ 706d. VOTE TO ESTABLISH UNION SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Each school district that is designated in the final report as necessary to the proposed union school district shall vote, and any school district designated in the final report as advisable to be included may, vote on the establishment of the proposed union school district. The vote shall be held on the date specified in the final report. The vote shall be warned in each proposed member school district by the school board of that district, and the vote shall be by Australian ballot, at separate school district meetings held on the same day and during the same hours. The polls shall remain open at least eight hours. Early or absentee voting as provided by sections 2531 to 2550 of Title 17 shall be permitted. The meetings shall be warned as a special meeting of each school district voting on the proposal. The school board of a school district designated as "advisable" in the proposed union school district may choose not to hold a meeting to vote on the question of establishing the union school district; provided, however, it shall warn and conduct the meeting on application of ten percent of the voters in the school district.

§ 721a. WITHDRAWAL FROM DISTRICT

- (a) A school district that is a member of a union school district may vote to withdraw from the union school district if one year has elapsed since the union school district has become a body politic and corporate as provided in section 706g of this title.
- (b) When a majority of the voters of a school district present and voting at a school district meeting duly warned for that purpose votes to withdraw from a union school district the vote shall be certified by the clerk of the school district to the secretary of state who shall record the certificate in his or her office and give notice of the vote to the commissioner of education and to the other member districts of the union school district. Within 90 days after receiving notice, those member districts shall vote by Australian ballot on the same day during the same hours whether to ratify withdrawal of the member district. Withdrawal by a member district shall be effective only if approved by an affirmative vote of each of the other member school districts within the union school district

- c) If the vote to ratify the withdrawal of a member district is approved by each of the other member districts, the union school district shall notify the commissioner of education who shall advise the state board of education. At a meeting held thereafter, if the state board finds that the pupils in the withdrawing district will attend a school that is in compliance with the rules adopted by the board pertaining to educational programs, the board shall declare the membership of the withdrawing school district in the union school district to end as of July 1 immediately following or as soon thereafter as the obligations of the withdrawing district have been paid to, or an agreement made with, the union school district in an amount satisfactory to the electorate of each member district of the union school district. The board shall give notice to the remaining member districts in the union of its meeting and give representatives of the remaining member districts an opportunity to be heard. It shall then determine whether it is in the best interests of the state, the students, and the school districts remaining in the union district for the union to continue to exist. The board may declare the union dissolved as of July 1 immediately following or as soon thereafter as each member district's obligations have been satisfied, or it may declare that the union shall continue to exist despite the withdrawal of the former member district. The state board of education shall file the declaration with the secretary of state, the clerk of the withdrawing district, and the clerk of the union school district concerned.
- (d) A vote of withdrawal taken after a union school district has become a body politic and corporate as provided in section 706g of this title but less than one year after that date shall be null and void.

§ 722. UNIFIED UNION DISTRICTS

If a union school district is organized to operate grades kindergarten through 12, it shall be known as a unified union district. On the date the unified union district becomes operative, unless another date is specified in the study committee report, it shall supplant all other school districts within its borders, and they shall cease to exist. If provided for in the committee report, the unified union district school board may be elected and may conduct business for the limited purpose of preparing for the transition to unified union district administration while the proposed member school districts continue to operate schools. The functions of the legislative branch of each preexisting school district in warning meetings and conducting elections of unified union school district board members shall be performed by the corresponding board of alderpersons of a city or city council, the select board of a town, or the trustees of an incorporated school district as appropriate.

§ 723. TRANSITION TO UNIFIED UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION

On the day the establishment of a unified union school district becomes effective, the district gains title to the assets and assumes the existing contractual obligations and other liabilities of the member school districts within its borders unless otherwise agreed to by the member districts in the approved plan for the formation of the unified union school district; provided, however, the unified union school district shall in all cases assume the contractual obligations of the member districts regarding each existing collective bargaining agreement or other employment contract until the agreement's or contract's expiration. All trust funds held or enjoyed by a preexisting district shall be held and applied as the terms of the trust indicate. If such trust allows, the funds may be applied for the use of the unified union school district. Within five days of the day a unified union school district becomes effective, the treasurer of each preexisting school district shall pay by check to the treasurer of the unified union school district the full amount of the balance standing in his or her school account and transfer to him or her all outstanding notes and contracts in force. All other officers of the preexisting school districts shall transfer to the corresponding officer of the unified union school district all instruments and other documents giving evidence of the assets, liabilities, and contractual status of the district.

RED Study Conclusions

After twelve months of study, the committee agrees that there are many reasons that a merger would improve the operation of the supervisory union. The following list of pros and cons summarizes our early discussion of merger without possibility of continuation of High school choice.

Pro	Con
Finances	
Financial incentives from state will reduce taxes temporarily (4 years)	Financial incentives may not be large enough to influence voters
Possibilities of savings for towns	
State will provide transition funding	
Educational Quality	
Greater alignment of curriculum, assessment and instruction	Possible loss of high school choice
3 additional communities will have representation and say in operation and program of Windsor High School	Possible loss of high school control for Windsor
More student opportunities in technology	Programs offered at 'choice' high schools may not be available elsewhere
Sending schools would have more input into Windsor High School program	Choice high schools may better meet the needs of some students
Maintains a sense of community	
Equity may improve	
Increased student population may bring positive changes to Windsor High School	
Operations	
Fewer meetings for school boards, staff and superintendent	
Centralized decision making may increase consistency	
High School Choice	
There may be ways to preserve some limited choice if merger occurs	Choice very important to 3 towns
	Students/parents can pick a school that best meets needs
	Unlimited choice is very important to many students/parents

After examining the pros and cons of merger, it was clear that the loss of high school choice does not outweigh the advantages. The overwhelming opinion of the committee is that three of the four communities place great value on school choice, as it currently exists for them. Unlimited school choice, with other public high schools (located in Vermont and New Hampshire) and private schools, is not available to a Vermont school district that operates a

high school. Our committee believes that member districts should further explore the creation of a RED while holding on to school choice across the Unified Union.

There is considerable discussion in Vermont regarding expansion of current school choice rules. If this happens the situation will change dramatically. If changes are made, the Committee asks that the WSSU revisit the merger question.

Therefore, the Windsor Southeast RED Study Committee recommends that:

- **This report will not be sent to the State Board of Education for approval;**
- **No merger vote will be scheduled at this time;**
- **Further exploration of the formation of a Regional Education District will take place when the State Board of Education and/or state statute allows the approval of a RED that offers broad based school choice.**

In addition, the committee recommends that:

- **The WSSU Executive Committee ask local legislators to work toward changes in statute or special language specific to choice in a proposed WSSU merger;**
- **Request the Vermont State Board of Education and/or the Department of Education to support a Windsor Southeast RED that offers broad based school choice;**
- **Supervisory union school boards agree to continue discussion of the details of a merger and propose proactive steps associated with forming a RED that includes school choice;**
- **Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union identifies any other legislative barriers to meeting the conditions set forth in the merger articles outlined above (debt, assets, etc.) and;**
- **SU school boards engage their communities in further discussion of the formation of a RED that offers school choice.**