

H.883 – Education Governance
House Ways and Means Strike-All
Section by Section Summary

Sec. 1. Section 1 adds a new chapter 35 to Title 16 that requires realignment of existing school districts into 45–55 prekindergarten–grade 12 districts. The statutory sections in the chapter and the process it requires are roughly similar to those in Title 17 for legislative redistricting.

§ 4051. Purpose (p. 1): § 4051 states that the purposes of realignment are to encourage and support (1) equity in the quality and variety of educational opportunities; (2) operational efficiencies and cost savings; and (3) better connections between schools and the community.

§ 4052. Definitions (pp. 1–2) § 4051 defines two terms: “Design Team” and “Statewide Realignment Plan.”

§ 4053. Guidelines (pp. 2–3): The guidelines repeat some of the broad principles guiding creation of new districts in the bill as introduced, such as requiring the new districts to be designed to recognize each community’s unique character and traditions and to consider obstacles caused by geography. In addition, § 4053 requires the Statewide Plan to preserve current opportunities for school choice and to endeavor to enhance opportunities for public school choice.

§ 4054. Statewide Realignment Plan (pp. 3–5): This section repeats some of the requirements for new districts in the bill as introduced and adds others.

Subsection (a) requires the Statewide Realignment Plan to realign existing districts into 45–55 prekindergarten–grade 12 districts responsible for the education of all resident students.

Subsection (b) requires that each new district shall endeavor to have an average daily membership of 1,250 students; be governed by no more than one school board; and adopt one districtwide budget. It differs from the bill as introduced by not requiring (1) realignment of 4 or more districts or (2) the creation of community councils. In addition, it specifically requires a common, districtwide education property tax rate.

Subsection (c) provides that, to the extent feasible, the Statewide Plan shall not realign any new district created under the RED process. The subsection references the process by which REDs are formed under current union school district statutes. It also clarifies that a plan of realignment can address areas of particular interest to the local communities and, once adopted, the plan becomes the articles of agreement that govern the new district.

Subsection (d) provides that during the first three years after realignment under the Statewide Plan, the equalized homestead property tax rate in each town within a new district shall not increase or decrease by more than 5 percent in a single year.

Subsection (e) repeats the encouragement to pursue innovative ideas that appears in Sec. 3(c) of the bill as introduced.

§ 4055. Design Team (pp. 5–7): § 4055 creates a Design Team with similar membership and pursuant to the process found in the bill as introduced, except that it requires that two of the members have experience serving on a school board in Vermont and that one of the Governor’s appointees is the Chair of the State Board of Education or the Chair’s designee. In addition, § 4055 authorizes the Design Team to delegate its responsibilities and powers to any one or more of its members, including the responsibility to conduct public hearings. The Design Team ceases to exist on July 1, 2017.

§ 4056. Preliminary Realignment Plan (pp. 7–8): Between June 1, 2014 and April 1, 2016, the Design Team is required to:

- (1) consult with local education leaders;
- (2) conduct no fewer than 10 public hearings statewide;
- (3) conduct independent research;
- (4) develop a preliminary Statewide Realignment Plan, including a schedule and process for transition to the new format by July 1, 2020;
- (5) make the preliminary Plan available to the public; and
- (6) submit the preliminary Plan to the General Assembly for review.

§ 4057. Final Realignment Plan (p. 8): Between April 1, 2016 and January 1, 2017, the Design Team is required to:

- (1) conduct no fewer than 10 public hearings statewide and consult with local educational leaders about the preliminary Plan;
- (2) conduct any additional independent research that may be necessary; and
- (3) develop a final Statewide Realignment Plan;

The Design Team is required to make the final Plan available to the public and submit it to the General Assembly by January 1, 2017.

§ 4058. Realignment (p. 8): The Plan submitted to the General Assembly on January 1, 2017 takes effect on July 1, 2017 unless the General Assembly explicitly disapproves of it in legislation before that date.

Sec. 2. Incentives (p. 9): Section 2 confirms that all reimbursement and incentive grants available in Act 156 of 2012 for districts and SUs that work together, whether or not they form a RED, continue to be available through the original expiration date of July 1, 2017.

Secs. 3–6. SUs; Special Education / Transportation (pp. 10–13): Act 153 of 2010 required that Special Ed and transportation services be provided by supervisory unions on behalf of member districts. Subsequent amendments have moved full implementation to July 1, 2014. Secs. 14–17 remove the requirement (which will be moot under Expanded Districts) and restores the related statutes to their pre-Act 153 status, while preserving the rights of employees who have been moved to the supervisory union in the meantime. *[identical to bill as introduced]*

Sec. 7. North Bennington (p. 14): On the date the North Bennington School District merges into an Expanded District under this act, this section requires that title to the school building owned by the district and leased by the Village School will transfer to the Village. *[identical to bill as introduced]*

Sec. 8. Effective Date (p. 14): on passage