

Ken Page, Vermont Principals' Association
Testimony on School Governance, April 9, 2014

I am Ken Page, Executive Director of the Vermont Principals' Association. I have been involved in education for over 40 years, with 15 years as a teacher, 21 years as a principal and I now am in my fifth year at the VPA. I have almost 35 years experience working in two central Vermont supervisory unions-the Washington Central Supervisory Union and in the Washington West Supervisory Union.

For many reasons, this is a watershed moment in education. It is clear that despite the Brigham decision, Act 60 and 68, and herculean attempts by individual boards, superintendents, principals, teachers and other well-meaning school staff, there still exists huge disparities in educational quality, throughout Vermont. And, as you are well aware, financing schools has become a yearly struggle consumes much time, and more importantly it is diversionary, sapping our attention away from our kids and the value of education to our state.

This plan excites me because I see possibilities:

- Possibilities that students across Vermont will have more equitable experiences
- Possibilities that students and schools will have greater opportunities
- Possibilities that school leaders can focus on providing quality feedback to teachers so that we can improve instruction
- Possibilities that students will have more choice and options
- Possibilities that we can be more flexibly deploy staff to meet needs of students in schools

What I like

- When I was a principal, I spent an inordinate amount of time on things I knew very little about and had no training in-septic systems, water testing, air quality, finding head lice on kids, transportation, renting portable classrooms, asbestos training, analyzing lunch programs. You get the idea. I am excited that in this governance plan, I would get to focus on teaching and learning
- 70-100 principals change jobs every year. I am excited about establishing continuity in school leadership. I know, and it is confirmed by Roots of Success that continuity in school leadership is essential for schools to flourish
- I know there is a direct connection between a positive school climate and student improvement. I am excited for our leaders to have time to work with their staff on establishing positive climate for learning.
- I am excited about less of the leader's time being spent on the budget. Honestly when I decided to retire from the principalship, my decision to retire was partially motivated by my board relentless attempts to entirely focus on cutting spending rather than to focus on teaching and learning.
- I am excited about working closely with parents and community members with school councils to define the quality and type of learning experiences at my school.

To Sum Up

Sometimes, when the situation presents itself, one has to strike out on a course of moving forward, even if one does not entirely know all of the bumps or curves in the road ahead.

You have done an excellent job of thinking through this governance change and considering a structure, a process, and some of the roadblocks ahead. But my observation is this:

I believe that there are those who define this as a plan to consolidate; there are others who believe that it a plan to fix school financing. Still others think this is a bill to provide equitable opportunities for kids.

Although parts of all of these may be true. However, at this point, in this hearing, in this legislature, it has come down a four letter word:

W-i-l-l

Do you have the political will in these committees and in the full Vermont legislature to do something different? Do you have the will to debate with those who want to protect the status quo? And most importantly, do you have the will to act rather than taking the convenient way out and asking for yet another study of the issue?

Commissioners Wolk, McNulty, Cate and Vilaseca are right: The time is Now.

Thank you.