

My name is Sarah Peacock and I am the school board chair in Isle La Motte.

Eliminating our local school boards simply feels like the wrong thing to do. Vermont school boards have a rich history in Vermont. School boards provide a local face to an education system that most citizens don't comprehend and is far removed from "the old days". School boards provide the direct link between the education system and the tax payers. They are the very reason why more school budgets in this state did not fail on town meeting day.

Let's also not forget that school directors are generally volunteers with only very small stipends. They are probably the only people left in our education system who aren't paid. They provide a diverse set of experiences, knowledge, and strengths. Community members serve on school boards because they are passionate about their towns, their schools, and education. This passion tends to spread to other community members creating an exciting and positive response about education in communities.

I'm having a difficult time understanding why the legislature would choose to basically pink slip half of its volunteers? Half of its experience...half of that passion to produce outcomes in our local kids.

I've heard and read that this bill will improve opportunities. It falls short of telling us what those opportunities might be. I can't see what opportunity this bill provides for our youngest students...or how making one district out of several helps us to provide them a better education. Bigger is not better. Bigger is not cheaper or more efficient. We live in Vermont – surely we all understand the concept that bigger is not better.

I don't disagree that districts working together can create positive outcomes. We have used cooperation in our supervisory union to achieve some things we couldn't have done in our individual districts. However, I strongly believe that you cannot successfully legislate cooperation. We chose to work together in our union because it is fiscally responsible to do so and we all benefit - financially, educationally, and in the eyes of the community. Maybe it's time for some of our other districts and unions to come to this same conclusion...not because the legislature tells them they must but because they choose to work together...for their own good and for the good of their students. And I don't mean mergers or consolidation, I mean good old-fashioned cooperation.

Finally our town has one of the smallest schools left in the state. We are constantly targeted for that reason. Others think that we cannot be sustainable at this size or that our students are missing out on something. I completely disagree. We have a strong experienced superintendent, a dedicated and passionate principal, an amazing teaching staff, a supportive community, and a board that scrutinizes every penny that we spend. That's not illogical or unsustainable, that's smart business. Every district should be looking to provide exemplary education at a feasible cost within their budget constraints. Bigger is not better. We need to be smart at every size – small, medium, and large....that's what will save money and change outcomes. That's what you can get with local boards when you cooperate.

Education is not a system that belongs just to educators and legislators. It belongs to us all. To students. To parents and families. To communities. And to local boards. Keeping us all intact and engaged will lead to the best outcomes over time.