

Good afternoon and thank you for your time,

I am not in general agreement that the district consolidation envisioned is necessary or the best path forward, but so what. It seems to me a critical mass of consensus to move forward has been reached, and a fundamental part of my job as a school board member is to help provide for the best possible learning experience for our students in a manner and at a cost the community can support. I am here to help you make sure we set up a statewide structure that will provide our state's pre-K through 12 students with what they need and deserve while being sure that Vermonters from all locations can and will support our education system.

I primarily want to address the issue of governance, and I want to place this in the context of five principals that I hope can find a way forward in the process of district consolidation you are considering. These principals are: A quality public education that is defined as open to all comers and free of charge at the door; parental and student choice; accountability to the Vermont community at large; local input and accountability; and fair governance.

I'm defining fair governance for today's purpose as being that which is designed to provide for the best student outcomes regardless the size of community from which a student comes. We cannot allow district consolidation to be a way for communities with large populations to dominate board level policy and financial decisions.

I offer two possibilities as examples: In the Orange North Supervisory Union Williamstown is the big dog on the block of three towns, the other two being Orange and Washington. If the ONSU were to consolidate into a single school district represented by a single elected board, Williamstown would have control. Looking from a different direction if Williamstown were to consolidate with Barre City into a single school district Barre City at three times Williamstown's population would run the show.

I don't believe that future board members will act out of a desire to harm smaller communities, but I absolutely do believe board members elected from particular communities will act on what they believe is in the best interests of the community from which they come. Not long ago I was part of an informal group that gathered to discuss in a very introductory manner consolidating the Williamstown School District with the Barre City School District. One of the first things to come up from a Barre resident was closing down the Williamstown High School and busing Williamstown students to Spaulding High School. The initial introduction of this issue revolved around space that was available in the Spaulding High School building and not the educational offerings or financial effects.

I am not here to discuss in detail the merits of Barre City's or Williamstown's schools – that is a separate discussion from this one where we are talking about state level policy decisions that will set up a framework for others to make more local choices. And THAT is the point.

Elected boards from communities of widely varying size will create power imbalances. This will affect issues such as building closings or maintenance, finances, personnel and more. District consolidation will most certainly change the conversation and will hopefully lead to better student learning experiences, more nimble staffing, stronger leadership and financial efficiencies – but we must be sure these changes occur in a manner that leaves students, their parents and their surrounding communities feeling safe to enter a larger discussion. This is especially true if, as you seem to prefer, districts hop on the consolidation bandwagon before any drop dead date.

I believe there is a way to provide fair governance that will lend itself to a board that will focus on the