

Dear Committee Members,

I read in the newspaper that you received testimony from Westford's former superintendent Dr. Michael Deweese. In the testimony he evidently spoke about the unified union study between Essex Junction, Essex Town and Westford. I only know what I read in the paper about what he said. With that caveat I would like to explain what happened from my perspective.

First we were told by the lawyer for DOE that Westford would be able to retain school choice. We never would have entered the study if that weren't the case. Near the end of the study the lawyer changed his mind.

The unified union proposal failed in all three communities. In Westford it failed by a vote of something like 460-33. I believe it failed for three reasons...choice, voice and cost.

Westford would have lost high school choice. Most of our students attend Essex but many attend Mt. Mansfield and Fairfax. Parents did not want this to change.

Westford would have had one vote on a nine member board. Community members were very upset about losing voice.

Finally, the projection was that Westford's tax rate for education would increase by 10 cents.

I believe these three issues need to be considered as you look at your governance proposal.

The paper also said that Dr. Deweese asserted that Westford might not be facing the tax increase it is facing were there a unified union in place. I disagree with this assertion. Virtually every community in the state is facing the situation we are....a small increase in the school budget resulting in a large increase in taxes. I have served on the Westford School Board since 1985. I see nothing in our budget that would have been helped by being part of a unified union.

Thank you for considering my thoughts as you examine the proposed governance change.

Sincerely, Martha Heath