

Good Afternoon, By way of introductions and to establish that I may have perspectives relevant to your considerations on school governance... I am Bob Mason, currently Chief Operations Officer for Chittenden South Supervisory Union serving the communities of Charlotte, Hinesburg, St George, Shelburne, Williston and Champlain Valley Union High School.

I am a member for the Vermont Association of School Business Officials (VASBO) and currently serve as association President

In prior years I served 10 years on the CVU and CSSU School Boards, 5 years as chair. Additionally I have 10 years experience in Aerospace General Management having P&L responsibility for an over \$50M business and 15 years experience in Manufacturing management directing the activities of over 900 employees. I have a familiarity with organization structures, restructures rightsizings, downsizings and such. It is clear to me that the governance structure we have currently for Prek-12 education in Vermont is archaic, inefficient and does little to improve student outcomes in an efficient focused manner.

Let me directly answer your question as posed in the short term...**what are the financial implications to our system as a result of moving towards a new form of governance?** There will be some transition expense as we bring in outside help, legal and otherwise, to wrestle with the issues of change and the process as it is worked through with seven boards and 34 board members... moving to one board. The process as described would have us in time to:

- One operating budget

- One financial review system

- One tax rate across communities

- And five new "school councils" to accomplish local community obligations

The work will require some outside resource, I estimate given my current understanding of the proposed law that these costs will not exceed \$80,000.

Once fully integrated into one school district I expect to see cost reductions not cost increases for the future, as our experience would say that we will likely improve student outcomes and improve operating efficiency as we remove the burden of a troublesome organization structure.

Three tangential comments:

My thoughts and opinions are my own and are related to my own context at Chittenden South and do not correlate directly to the challenges and opportunities in other SU's or districts across the state.

Those on the opposite side of the issue will talk of concerns about what may kids, with communities and with the cost of education. I am very familiar with the debate having spent one year in support of 7 board members, community members and administrators discussing moving to a new form of governance under the RED statute, during the year 2011. All seemed to be heading towards asking voters to consider such a move until the last meeting of the committee when the group voted in a five-five tie to shelve the plan, and submit a final report to state board of education.

Not too much later I was asked to join a subcommittee of the SU Board to discuss possible changes to our approach to food service in our schools, collectively we at CSSSU have sales well over \$2M across our five independent operations and the issue this particular group spent much time discussing was the possibility of pulling things together, hiring someone with the experience and skills necessary to manage such an operation and drive performance to a different level. In similar fashion the group chose not to go forward at this time

For Chittenden South the journey to a more appropriate mode of operation regardless of the overlying governance structure has been ongoing since the mid 1990's. At that time it was readily apparent to key players in the system that: 5 schools reporting to seven different boards, and splitting ownership for success and failure amongst 34 board members, a superintendent, and five principals in a poorly understood model of shared responsibility was not the best for kids. We wouldn't wish that sort of structure on anyone if we were starting over.

Our objectives at that time focused first on the job of educational leadership driving improved student outcomes. What we had in the early 90's was a confusing overlap of responsibilities between Superintendent, Principals and Boards. Compounding our problems we asked principals to at the same time be the operations head for such diverse activities as food service, transportation, finance, facilities and school safety. The breadth alone added to inevitable performance disappointment in at least two or three of these areas.

By bringing expertise to manage these other areas to the table we were able to shift focus the attention of educational leaders to students and student outcomes. Secondly we are now providing some much needed attention to other areas of the operation as well.

While success have been had over the years the current structure is fragile, heavily dependent on the possible qualms or concerns of any number of board members, boards or principals desiring some contrary outcome. Couple that with the turnover currently seen in all three ranks, the process is slow at best.

Back to the question you asked as we began.....What are the financial and non-financial implications to moving to this new form of governance in the longer term?... there are two in my mind

#1 Improved student outcomes through the better utilization of gifted and talented education leaders focused on students

#2 More effective leadership direction over other operational responsibilities of a school. By bringing these together under a single district structure it will allow sufficient size for the proper talent and expertise to be on task.

Those other areas include at a minimum...

Food Service: Consolidating purchasing, combining food prep operations, consolidating other business processes such as menu development and preparation ...all to improve quality, improve participation and reduce costs.

Transportation: We currently support the schools of Chittenden South with both in house drivers and buses, and the services of an outside contractor. The biggest opportunities I see on the horizon are group purchasing of vehicles and more effective route development to optimize costs.

Finances: Within our SU we operate on one financial and human resources system, but support five schools making procurement decisions independently with five distinctly different processes. Leveraging purchasing volume to lower prices is made that much more difficult.

Building and Facilities: Long term facility planning, decisions to invest in buildings and procurement, spending in support of operations and maintenance are all made locally in our system on the shoulders of a many times overworked, facility supervisor. How much better we could be if we pooled resources, identified key challenges, more effectively dealt with the issues.

I appreciate the time you have afforded me and would be willing to answer any questions you might have

Bob Mason
4/1/14