

## Act 46- Unification of Governance

Act 46 (2015) is designed to encourage and support local decisions and actions that:

- Provide substantial equity in the quality and variety of educational opportunities statewide;
- Lead students to achieve or exceed the State's Education Quality Standards, adopted as rules by the State Board of Education at the direction of the General Assembly;
- Maximize operational efficiencies through increased flexibility to manage, share, and transfer resources, with a goal of increasing the district-level ratio of students to full- time equivalent staff;
- Promote transparency and accountability; and
- Are delivered at a cost that parents, voters, and taxpayers value.

In addition, Act 46 cautions that governance changes should “be mindful of any other district in the region that may become geographically isolated, including the potential isolation of a district with low fiscal capacity or with a high percentage of students from economically deprived backgrounds.” (Sec. 8(a)(2))

Although the State intends that all school boards will continually work toward achieving the stated goals, Act 46 acknowledges that the **means to achieve the goals will vary depending on the specific circumstances of the school district or the region.**

### Key considerations:

1. One size will not fit all in Vermont, and Act 46 anticipates this – as does the earlier merger incentive legislation it incorporates, Act 153 (2010) and Act 156 (2012).
2. Incentives are available under the three laws for newly unified districts that operate all grades, that tuition all grades, and that operate some grades and tuition others.
3. Only a district gets to decide, by a vote of the electorate, whether to tuition students or operate schools, and at what grade levels. Current statute requires districts to choose between these two options. Neither the State Board nor the Agency has authority to require any district to change its operating/tuitioning structure.
4. Districts with different structures cannot merge unless voters of one or both are willing to change to a common operating/tuitioning structure.
5. As a result of #3 and #4 above, some districts will be grouped in Alternative Education Structures – that is, in an SU with multiple member districts.
6. The nature and level of self-study and analysis necessary for districts proposing an Alternative Education Structure is the same as that required of districts proposing merger.
7. We anticipate that up to 14 merger proposals will be presented to the State Board in December and January, and as many as 12 more in the following months.
8. Based on plans under discussion, we also expect local votes to reduce the number of supervisory unions in the State.
9. Voters have cast 43,307 ballots on merger votes since the enactment of Act 46. While proposals on mergers have failed in some regions, statewide, 68% of votes cast have been cast in favor of merging and voters have approved 12 of the 15 merger proposals presented in the first year.
10. Due to progress to date, about 51% of students in grades PK-12 now live in merged systems.