

To: The Senate Education Committee and the House Education Committee  
From: Sean McMannon, Superintendent, Winooski School District (WSD)  
Date: January 8, 2016  
Re: Act 46 Testimony

I will speak to you from my perspective as the father of two high school-aged daughters who are currently thriving at Colchester High School (CHS) having grown up in the Colchester School District, the former principal of Champlain Valley Union High School (CVU) which provides an outstanding educational program for students from Williston, Shelburne, Hinesburg and Charlotte and the current superintendent of the wonderfully diverse and complex Winooski School District. Also, I have had the good fortune of being a special educator in California, Alaska and Massachusetts and my first teaching job was in Botswana with the Peace Corps.

First, I would like to state that I 100% support the position that both the Vermont School Boards Association (VSBA) and Vermont Superintendents Association (VSA) have passed through resolutions calling for the repeal of the allowable growth rate. Specifically stated:

*The General Assembly should repeal the "allowable growth" provision of Act 46 and replace it with a system or formula that more equitably controls costs and creates efficiencies, while preserving educational quality.*

Second, I would like to tell you about the Winooski School District:

## **Winooski School District**

- We are a PreK-12 single district with 867 students
  - We must respond to the Act 46 Governance component in addition to allowable growth
- 33-40% English Language Learners who speak over 20 languages
  - Wonderful & challenging
  - Weighting increase would help
- 65-80% Free or Reduced Lunch
  - Biggest hurdle we face, getting worse everywhere.
  - Weighting increase would help
- ~19% Students with Disabilities, VT State Avg: ~16%
  - Act 46: (c) The proportion of Vermont students with severe emotional needs has increased from 1.5 percent of the population in fiscal year 1997 to 2.3 percent in fiscal year 2015. In addition, the proportion of students from families in crisis due to loss of employment, opiate addiction, and other factors has also increased during this time period, requiring the State's public schools to fulfill an array of human services functions.
  - WSD is seeing more complex needs
- Lowest paid teachers in Chittenden County
  - Most challenging working conditions
  - Retention is a big problem: 84% of our teachers are in the 0-14 years of experience range
  - Board was ready to shrink the gap considerably but impossible with allowable growth
- MOMENTUM
  - Board leadership and stability through policy governance and a clear mission/Ends
    - 2014 VSBA Award for Exceptional School Board Leadership.
  - Stable and visionary administrative leadership
  - Proficiency-Based Graduation Requirements (PBGRs) leader across the state
    - Nellie Mae Education Foundation grant with Burlington School District
    - iLab: innovative personalized learning program

- Reading: K-12 74% of our students made at least 1-year's growth last year
- Wellness: Coordinator, Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), Fresh Fruits & Vegetables, Backpack program, Mindfulness & Movement
- Impacts of Allowable Growth
  - Cut 6 support staff positions
  - Reduce co-curriculars: Athletics & Clubs
  - Reduce field trips
  - Reduced access to technology for students
  - Teacher Retention will continue to be a significant problem

WSD Board member Julian Portilla wrote in the WSD News (January edition) which goes to every home in Winooski: "this law (Act 46), designed to provide substantial equity in the quality and variety of educational opportunities statewide, is in fact **freezing inequality around the state** while reducing educational opportunities".

Allowable growth penalizes low-spending districts. And as Mary Moran, Rutland City Public Schools superintendent said recently in her testimony "Equity is placed under fire as a result."

<u>WSD Ed Spending</u>	<u>VT Avg.</u>	<u>+/-</u>	<u>WSD Ed Spending Rank</u>
FY 15- \$12,736	\$13,770	<b>-\$1,034</b>	206/282
FY 14- \$11,911	\$13,436	-\$1,525	225/282
FY 13- \$11,572	\$12,577	-\$1,005	215/286
FY 12- \$10,717	\$12,012	-\$1,295	231/286
FY 11- \$11,053	\$11,890	-\$837	216/286
FY 10- \$11,022	\$11,736	-\$714	211/286
FY 09- \$10,943	\$11,233	<b>-\$290</b>	193/289

I applaud the intent of Act 46 to improve equity but I do not think enough was done last year to really model the effects of allowable growth on students in poverty and English Language Learners. I can tell you from my experience as a parent of daughters in the Colchester School District, principal at CVU in Chittenden South Supervisory Union (CSSU) and in my current role in Winooski that we are currently not meeting the mark for our most vulnerable student populations and the allowable growth provision freezes inequality around the state and pushes our neediest and most complex students further down the equity ladder. Please act quickly to remedy this situation.

