

Alison Lane Anand 4/22/15

MEMO TO VERMONT STATE LEGISLATURE

April 22, 2015

From: Alison Lane Anand, Richmond VT.

Re: H.361, Bill regarding School Consolidation and Funding

The prevailing atmosphere of fiscal fear is tempting us to import educational systems that have failed precious children in states around the country. In order to address our current challenges, we need understand the problems. Good public policy should reflect a high level of positive public spirit in the system and enhance the dignity and moral character of our society. Ultimately it is judged by whether or not it creates economic stability. The growing gap between the rich and poor in America is testimony enough that public policy has failed in many ways. This is not the failure of public schools.

A perfect storm of government policies have over the past few decades gradually produced a society of "haves and have nots". Many of these policies have been passed with good intentions, but they have had unexpected consequences. H.361 unfortunately follows the patterns which have created the troubles in these ways:

1. The RED structure has been proven to worsen inequality of opportunity in numerous other cities and states. It will do the same thing here in Vermont and should NOT be a "preferred structure" of consolidation. The tax incentives for this system should be eliminated!
2. Using tax incentives to bribe people to vote for a system that is not good for them undermines constitutional values which we hold dear. It is worse than offensive and is probably illegal. If there is a significant rush of communities to consolidate to receive these incentives, it will cost the state huge amounts of money which would be better invested in education.
3. The public does not want to lose local control over education. We need to keep the school boards. They are volunteers who do not cost money! The public feels disenfranchised by replacing democracy with bureaucracy.
4. The structural problems created by the RED system in other states have led to a mass exodus of the affluent population to private schools. This leaves the public schools with increasingly deficient funds to support good education. Here is a huge contributor to the opportunity gap.
5. There is NO PROOF that this system will save money. It will COST MORE in the long run.

A few years ago I asked former Gov. Douglas what he had in mind with the original consolidation bill. He said that when he learned that Vermont had more superintendents per child of any state, he thought we could eliminate some superintendents and have more money to hire teachers. Why don't we just do that? There has been some conversation about simplifying the administrative aspect of education and still retaining school boards, small schools, and the structures that we do know have worked well for some years. It is evident from recent testimony from financial officers that some of the push for streamlined consolidation is to simplify accounting practices. This is not about education. Separating these issues may hold some promise and should be carefully considered. Mandating mass consolidation in just a few years will create confusion, distraction from the real business of teaching, and destructive upheaval with a downward spiral.

Legislators have been given a terribly difficult task. You have been asked to devise a system that expands the scope of public education to include pre-K through 12, provide increasing demands to meet special needs, fix the tax system, and do it all for less money. Where is the reality in this task? To fix things, we need to invest in education. Thank you for your time and efforts.

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