

Betsy Brigham 4/22/15

Testimony before the Senate Education Committee regarding H. 361 / *Senate version*  
April 22, 2015

I am **opposed** to ~~H. 361~~ <sup>this bill</sup> for a number of reasons. This bill is intended to reduce costs and increase equitable access to quality education, but I see a lot of false premises behind the solutions the bill proposes.

I don't see solid evidence that consolidation will save money. While "economy of scale" is a nice concept, smaller organizations are often the most frugal as well as most responsive to the needs of those they serve. I worry about cost shifts such as transportation, not just for busing but for families who have to drive further to pick up a sick kid or go in for a parent conference or meet the bus after a basketball game. I work in a small school with a "free & reduced" population of nearly 70%, and there are plenty of families who already struggle with these transportation issues. This is the kind of cost shift that will go under the radar but have a very real affect on low-income Vermonters.

I also don't see solid evidence that educational quality will improve with consolidation. To the contrary, of only 3 Vermont schools recently selected by the Greater School Partnership as educational leaders, 2 of them are tiny little K-12 schools, Twinfield and Cabot, because they've shown the flexibility necessary in adapting quickly to progressive educational models. H.361 seems to be based on the flawed premise that bigger is better, when reality often proves that the opposite is true. The concept of districts with a minimum of 900 students may seem completely normal for larger areas but when you start looking at a map, it's way out of scale for so much of our rural state.

In addition to those monetary and educational concerns, I'm also concerned about the power shift inherent in this bill. It moves power from the local level to the centralized, and from rural communities to larger ones. Change of the scope this bill mandates is going to change not just schools but the whole social structure of communities across Vt. I urge you to slow down, continue the research, engage people at the local level, and make sure you've got it right before you push through a change of this magnitude.

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