

Notes from a School Board Member Regarding H.361
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4/15/15

As you continue to craft and refine an Education bill, I ask that you keep the focus on our quietest constituents, the students. Last fall at the Green Mountain Imperative we heard from our students about what they need to be more successful in our schools. They cited the need for increased opportunities, choice of education venue based on learning style and interest based learning with high rigor. Our current education system with its focus on town based school governance, contains structures and processes that impede effective change in these areas.

The Green Mountain Imperative Summit and many of the conversations around education over the past year left me with hopes for a full reform of our education system which it appears by the current legislation is not the case. I understand the issues are multiple and complex. There are a few points I wish to make based on where the legislation is at this time.

1. The focus should remain on the positive goals such as Pre K-12 systems to get all the key players involved in student education at the same table at the same time for collaboration and decision making. *A single board is directly accountable to all the voters and students unlike the Supervisory Union system with its multiple boards governing distinct parts of the system.* The point is to collaborate and be creative in problem solving, as we ask our students to do in their own education. **Merger or unification discussions can be incredibly rewarding and uncover potentials to solve the problems students have identified that had not even been considered due to structural constraints. You won't know until you sit down and discuss.** The legislation should mandate discussion and improve the carrots and sticks to this unification discussion based on the goal of Pre K-12 system creation.
2. Both caps and a required number of students to a district are a distraction from the purpose of education reform. They provide a target to throw darts at and allow people to reject the whole proposal based on that distraction.
3. Any idea or legislation that puts as a primary goal to "keep local boards" is fundamentally flawed as it focuses on the adults and not on the education of students. As a school board member whose role is to see that schools are well managed but not manage them, I believe that boards must exert the **right** amount of influence into the education system not simply keep the system we inherited from the early 1900's.

4. The "local" solution lies with towns working together with everyone at the table prek-12 including the students and the local independent schools that take public funds. Picking your own dance partners to start the discussion is preferable to mandated necessary partners.
5. Other schemes or plans calling for big management units such as "READs or CADs" that "allow local school districts to remain" will end up as a sham. The larger global or regional boards will drive the system. The "local boards" will lose direct accountability and be able to blame the "big board" for funding deficits or policy issues. Power and money go hand in hand. You change the money when you add a big regional board and with it you change the power. Those local boards will quickly become irrelevant. We would be better off changing the concept of what is local. Moving from micro town based school districts to manageable Pre K-12 systems with natural partners.