

To: The Vermont Senate Education Committee

From: Gail B. Conley Citizen, Huntington, VT

Date: April 22, 2015

Re: Comments on Our Schools and Their Future

I appreciate the opportunity to share my thoughts with you today. I retired from my career in education after 34 years of service to our youth in 3 different states. My last 14 years were spent in Vermont with 11 years as the CESU Superintendent and 1 year in Barre and 2 years in Middlebury as their Interim Superintendent.

I continue to believe that the number our school boards of volunteer citizens should not be eliminated. All of our students benefit from the commitment of our local boards. These efforts to improve opportunities for students and reduce the cost of education by creating large regional school districts are not founded on any credible data or research. These efforts are political efforts to respond to needed tax relief. My criticism is not an effort to maintain the status quo for our towns. Our students benefit from these schools that are directly supported by our community boards.

Many of our SUs are very efficient and effective. Some of our SUs and our high schools are too small to provide effective programs. The improvement legislation should be directed to these schools—not to the wholesale destruction of our local neighborhood school boards. This Senate Committee plan to eliminate the Union High School Boards is a bad idea. Most of our great high schools have been created by these boards—Spaulding HS, Middlebury HS, Essex HS, CVU HS, Mount Mansfield HS are some of these schools. These are our largest schools. For those schools that are too small we should find ways to help them consolidate and grow.

This legislation has critics from both sides of the consolidation question. Those citizens who want fewer districts (15 to 25) do not like it and citizens who want to keep our community boards don't like it. The cynics might say that makes a good compromise. I believe the makes really bad legislation.

Where is our Governor? It is time for him to step up and stop this present legislation. My solution is for Governor Shumlin to direct his Secretary Holcombe to draw up an **educator created plan** that the Legislature can adopt in 2016 with WIDE spread support from the citizens of Vermont and Vermont Educators and Vermont School Boards.

Thank you for your attention.