

Vermonters share a common vision for our children: that the education we provide serves them well, now and into their futures.

For me this conversation reduces to a single concept: maximizing our available resources for students.

As a former Vermont superintendent of 24 years I am now a consultant serving school districts across the state giving me the unique perspective of seeing many schools and my heart is heavy as I view the disparate range of educational opportunities afforded our state's children.

One school I recently visited has a single fifth grader. Image your school experience being the only one in your grade, every year. It was a lovely community with caring teachers and a hard working school board. Lacking is the necessary critical mass of resources for that school district to maximize their students' educational experiences.

Essex High School offers 21 AP and honors classes and has a STEM Academy that this week sent a science experiment 20 miles into the stratosphere. Contrast that with other high schools that have entire graduating classes of 15 seniors. In taking a quick look at schools' published "Programs of Study" or "School Profiles" the disparities in offerings will leap off the page at you.

For schools like Essex, having a sufficient critical mass of students and resources to maximize and deploy on behalf of students is key. And, due to its scale, K-12 class sizes in Essex are routinely in the upper teens and lower twenties.

I'm proud of Vermont's financial support of our schools, but as a state we are not being smart about maximizing that vital resource. *The practical step of organizing schools as single PreK-12 systems would be a major step forward. In legitimate cases where this may be impractical, getting as close to that ideal as possible is clearly the answer.*

The state has an absolute responsibility for our children's education reinforced by our statewide funding system. The time is overdue to adjust our structures in ways that maximize our resources to better benefit all of our children.

I echo Secretary Holcombe's sentiments: if we can save money, simplify governance, provide more equitable educational offerings regardless of students' towns of residence, get better performance results, and strike at the heart of closing achievement gaps in service to all of our state's students, why wouldn't we?

Thank you for being the legislators Vermont's children needs you to be as you work this out.