

Peter Burrows 4/22/15

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Senate Education Committee Testimony  
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Thank you for the opportunity to talk with you today. The legislation before us, H.361, is critical, and is the result of decades of discussion about how Vermont will move forward in its design of its educational systems to serve the students of the 21st century. We have been in the midst of this conversation for quite some time, and have effectively established a polarizing political issue that seems to be stuck in the paralyzing eddies of fear.

And there is much to fear. We fear the loss of what has made Vermont the strongest democratic state in the union. We fear the loss of local control and community engagement. We fear that we will lose our schools, our town centers, our deep roots in the land around us. These fears are well-grounded, and ones that we need to heed as we move forward.

Yet among these fears, I believe we lose sight of our strength, a united strength, in pursuing the best educational opportunities for the students of Vermont. When we look across the considerable complexity of our supervisory union structure, we find a system that is uniquely challenging to manage, when the goal is an articulated educational system that provides equitable supports, services, and opportunities to each and every student in our supervisory unions.

By uniting our strengths and unifying our governance structure, we can work together more cohesively to support all of our students, our schools, and our communities by aligning our educational visions to what we value. We value our small schools, we value our community commitment to a world class education, and most importantly, we value the success of our students. A singular board uniting our towns can and should work from these values to help us reach farther to develop greater efficiencies, stronger systems, and improved student outcomes.

We have framed this issue for too long as either local control or consolidation, and it's time we recast our vision to move towards a governance structure that enables us to do more for the students of Vermont while maintaining the core values that make us who we are.