

Russ Caffry 4/22/15

My name is Russ Caffry. I served for a total of 9 years on the Shelburne Community School board, 4 of them as board chair, and stepped down in March at the end of my third term. 7 of those years I was also on the Chittenden South Supervisory Union board. During that time I was fortunate to work with some amazing people from the various CSSU boards, the administration, faculty, and staff.

I witnessed a lot of change during those 9 years but one thing that did not change is the governance structure of the education system in Vermont. In my view, this change is long overdue and it is high time that the legislature and governor displayed the political courage to bring our governance structure into this century. During my board service I served on two committees examining governance and nothing came of either of them. In my view, most of the reasons I heard advocating for the status quo were adult focused reasons rather than student, or education focused reasons. *That view was reinforced this evening.*

Chittenden South is a highly functioning SU. I'd like to think one of the best in the state. However, that functionality is a very delicate thing. There's a saying about modern airplanes that goes something like this; a plane is millions of parts flying in close formation. The implication is that a failure of just a few parts can lead to disaster. To me, an SU in Vermont is a lot like a plane. At Chittenden South we've made tremendous progress doing things voluntarily to be more efficient, spend the tax payers' money wisely, and most important deliver a high quality education to our students. I've also seen the wheels come close to falling off a couple of times. I served on the contract negotiation committee through three rounds of teacher contract talks and two of those times we were very close to having one or more districts walk away from a consolidated contract for the entire SU that took many years to achieve.

The concept of retaining "local control" seems to be the biggest roadblock to making progress on school governance. I can tell you that from my experience, the critical decisions have increasingly been made on the SU board. This isn't because everyone on the various Chittenden South boards thought that was a neat idea, although many of us did think that. It's because legislation passed by the state, especially in the areas of curriculum, special education, and budgeting, has pushed the decision making in that direction. Increasingly "local control" decisions are smallish matters made around the margins of the critical work our educators do. We cannot continue to expect that a 19th century education governance structure will deliver a 21st century education. I'm not the first to pose this question but if we were designing an educational system in 2015 would we come up with the system we have today? I think you all know that the answer is no.

Thank you.