

2/17/15

Presentation to the Vermont Senate Education Committee

It is my pleasure to be here today to express the new reality we now have as we approach the combining of the Orange Windsor SU and the Windsor North West SU. This new marriage is now official and it has certainly given us a new set of issues to deal with and the two systems approach becoming one on July 1st, 2016. What we have is a very complex system at this time as follows:

1) **A. Describe your new SU and its Complexities.**

- Ten Districts
- Eleven Budgets
- Eight School buildings
- Four Small High Schools (two of them are probably considered micros) within four PreK-12 Districts
- Two PreK-6th grade buildings
- Two K-8 buildings
- About 45 miles over mountains roads two get from east to west farther most districts.
- One Independent School in the middle of the SUs
- 41 Board members
- Two contracts for professional staff and two for support staff
- One SU that contracts bussing and one that owns its own busses.
- A leadership team that has twenty professionals
- Technologically challenge infrastructure
- No Public transportation system
- Geographically difficult – 1 gulf, 2 mountains, long and winding roads

B. Strength of the new configuration

- We think we can get volume discounts because of our size like bulk purchasing
- Create new programs for expanded opportunities for students
- Efficient deployment of Staff
- Increased numbers of students allows for increased curriculum offerings
- Offering for diverse and discrete populations that are not currently served well within our district or are served out of district
- More efficiently negotiated contracts over the new SU
- Share Technology, Curriculum, and Special Education, Transportation Costs
- Consolidation of Central Office functions will build a more efficient and effective leadership model.
- Shared Professional Development
- Savings on office staff, space, and software
- Expanded Middle School options
- Improved High School structures
- Savings from shared services and programs

- Improved multi-tiered system of support for all students PreK-12
- Hire and retain leadership because it is a manageable job

C. Possible disadvantages of the new configuration

- Potential and perceived loss of local control
- Change in governance
- More central office involvement
- Less local board control over individual districts
- Less individual board member responsibility
- Communication is paramount and must be structured and explicit

2) What challenges have you experienced in the past in trying to operate cooperatively or merge in the same way?

- We have tried to get people to take it one step at a time and not jump ahead
- We have to tackle our governance structure
- We have to not allow people to skip steps in the process
- We need time to do this right
- We have to make sure that all students are served better by what we create
- Because of critical mass or strength in bigger numbers we the we can create programs for students who we didn't serve well in the past and do it closer to home
- We have a huge geography issue in transportation our students because of the region we live in (very hilly and students living in rural hard to reach areas with potential long bus rides)
- Money to purchase quality assistance with the process

3) From your personal perspective, what ideas that are being discussed in the legislature might be helpful or pose barriers to making progress on coming together to create somewhat greater scale and greater flexibility to manage costs?

- It is hard to get to and do a quality job with the state we are in right now. We have board meetings consolidation meetings and negotiations going on all at the same time and I want to be able to get into schools everyday.
- I am trying to be patient and wait to make the decisions when we meet with the transition board. We have created an ongoing action plan to try to keep the boards on target with what they have to do when it needs to be done.
- We need time to do this work. The legislation has to be patient and give us time. Give us deadlines that are reasonable and recognize our regional challenges. One size doesn't fit all even in a small state like Vermont.
- Need generous timelines for purposeful change
- Fear over loss of phantom students and small schools grant that might force a decision

4) How might you react to the charge to create an “Integrated PreK-12 System”? How might that be approached?

- I think the idea is intriguing for us. I envision students being able to move around to go to schools within our configuration and take advantage of some schools within or larger schools. It could create a magnet program but in all levels. I can see the opportunities to address all kids and create something for everyone.

We know we will achieve success when all stakeholders, especially board members, make a regional, empathetic and mindful shift towards the education and welfare of all our students in this expanded region, ie: take responsibility, care, and concern for all students, not just for those in their town. This is a shift in thinking and potential change in the way we see responsibility and governance. We need to get to this shift in thinking before we can move forward with an appropriate governance model. Whatever policy is approved by the legislature has to allow us time to make this shift in thinking.

Respectfully Submitted,

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