

House Proposal of Amendment to Senate Proposal of Amendment

H. 513

An act relating to making miscellaneous changes to education law

The House concurs in the Senate proposal of amendment with further amendment thereto as follows:

* * * Criminal Record Checks * * *

Sec. 1. 16 V.S.A. § 255(k) and (l) are added to read:

(k) The requirements of this section shall not apply to persons operating or employed by a child care facility that is prequalified to provide prekindergarten education pursuant to section 829 of this title and that is required to be licensed by the Department for Children and Families pursuant to 33 V.S.A § 3502.

(l) The requirements of this section shall not apply with respect to a school district's partners in any program authorized or student placement created by chapter 23, subchapter 2 of this title. It is provided, however, that superintendents are not prohibited from requiring a fingerprint supported record check pursuant to district policy with respect to its partners in such programs.

* * * Education Weighting Report * * *

Sec. 2. EDUCATION WEIGHTING REPORT

(a) The Agency of Education, the Joint Fiscal Office, and the Office of Legislative Council, in consultation with the Secretary of Human Services, the Vermont Superintendent's Association, the Vermont School Boards Association, and the Vermont National Education Association, shall consider and make recommendations on the criteria used for determining weighted long-term membership of a school district under 16 V.S.A. § 4010, including the following.

(1) The current weighting factors and any supporting evidence or basis in the historical record for these factors.

(2) The relationship between each of the current weighting factors and the quality and equity of educational outcomes for students.

(3) Whether any of the weighting factors, including the weighting factors for students from economically deprived backgrounds and for students for whom English is not the primary language, should be modified, and if so, how the weighting factors should be modified and if the modification would further the quality and equity of educational outcomes for students.

(4) Whether to add any weighting factors, including a school district

population density factor, and if so, why the weighting factor should be added and if the weighting factor would further the quality and equity of educational outcomes for students. In considering whether to recommend the addition of a school district population density factor, the Agency of Education shall consider the practices of other states, information from the National Council for State Legislatures, and research conducted by higher education institutions working on identifying rural or urban education financing factors.

(b) In addition to considering and making recommendations on the criteria used for the determining weighted long-term membership of a school district under subsection (a) of this section, the Agency of Education may consider and make recommendations on other methods that would further the quality and equity of educational outcomes for students.

(c) Report. On or before December 15, 2017, the Agency of Education shall submit a written report to the House and Senate Committees on Education, the House Committee on Ways and Means, and the Senate Committee on Finance with its findings and any recommendations.

* * * Surety Bond; Postsecondary Institutions * * *

Sec. 3. 16 V.S.A. § 175 is amended to read:

§ 175. POSTSECONDARY EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS; CLOSING

(a) When an institution of higher education, whether or not chartered in this State, proposes to discontinue the regular course of instruction, either permanently or for a temporary period other than a customary vacation period, the institution shall:

(1) promptly inform the State Board;

(2) prepare the academic record of each current and former student in a form satisfactory to the State Board and including interpretive information required by the Board; and

(3) deliver the records to a person designated by the State Board to act as permanent repository for the institution's records, together with the reasonable cost of entering and maintaining the records.

* * *

(e) When an institution of higher education is unable or unwilling to comply with the requirements of subsection (a) of this section, the State Board may expend State funds necessary to ensure the proper storage and availability of the institution's records. The Attorney General shall then seek recovery under this subsection, in the name of the State, of all of the State's incurred costs and expenses, including attorney's fees, arising from the failure to comply. Claims under this subsection shall be a lien on all the property of a defaulting institution, until all claims under this subsection are satisfied. The

lien shall take effect from the date of filing notice thereof in the records of the town or towns where property of the defaulting institution is located.

* * *

(g)(1) Each institution of higher education accredited in Vermont, except institutions that are members of the Association of Vermont Independent Colleges (AVIC), the University of Vermont, and the Vermont State Colleges, shall acquire and maintain a bond from a corporate surety licensed to do business in Vermont in the amount of \$50,000.00 to cover costs that may be incurred by the State under subsection (e) of this section due to the institution's failure to comply with the requirements of subsection (a) of this section, and the institution shall provide evidence of the bond to the Secretary within 30 days of receipt. The State shall be entitled to recover up to the full amount of the bond in addition to the other remedies provided in subsection (e) of this section.

(2) AVIC shall maintain a memorandum of understanding with each of its member colleges under which each member college agrees to:

(A) upon the request of AVIC, properly administer the student records of a member college that fails to comply with the requirements of subsection (a) of this section; and

(B) contribute on an equitable basis and in a manner determined in the sole discretion of AVIC to the costs of another AVIC member or other entity selected by AVIC maintaining the records of a member college that fails to comply with the requirements of subsection (a) of this section.

* * * Prekindergarten Education Recommendations * * *

Sec. 4. PREKINDERGARTEN EDUCATION RECOMMENDATIONS

On or before November 1, 2017, the Secretaries of Human Services and of Education shall jointly present recommendations to the House and Senate Committees on Education, House Committee on Human Services, and Senate Committee on Health and Welfare that will ensure equity, quality, and affordability, and reduce duplication and complexity, in the current delivery of prekindergarten services.

* * * High School Completion Program * * *

Sec. 5. 16 V.S.A. § 942(6) is amended to read:

(6) ~~“Contracting agency”~~ ~~“Local adult education and literacy provider”~~ means an entity that enters into a contract with the Agency to provide ~~“flexible pathways to graduation”~~ services itself or in conjunction with one or more approved providers in Vermont is awarded Federal or State grant funds to conduct adult education and literacy activities.

Sec. 6. 16 V.S.A. § 943 is amended to read:

§ 943. HIGH SCHOOL COMPLETION PROGRAM

(a) There is created a High School Completion Program to be a potential component of a flexible pathway for any Vermont student who is at least 16 years ~~old~~ of age, who has not received a high school diploma, and who may or may not be enrolled in a public or approved independent school.

(b) If a person who wishes to work on a personalized learning plan leading to graduation through the High School Completion Program is not enrolled in a public or approved independent school, then the Secretary shall assign the prospective student to a high school district, which shall be the district of residence whenever possible. The school district in which a student is enrolled or to which a nonenrolled student is assigned shall work with the ~~contracting agency~~ local adult education and literacy provider that serves the high school district and the student to develop a personalized learning plan. The school district shall award a high school diploma upon successful completion of the plan.

(c) The Secretary shall reimburse, and net cash payments where possible, a school district that has agreed to a personalized learning plan developed under this section in an amount:

(1) established by the Secretary for the development and ongoing evaluation and revision of the personalized learning plan and for other educational services typically provided by the assigned district or an approved independent school pursuant to the plan, such as counseling, health services, participation in cocurricular activities, and participation in academic or other courses; provided, however, that this amount shall not be available to a school district that provides services under this section to an enrolled student; and

(2) negotiated by the Secretary and the ~~contracting agency~~ local adult education and literacy provider, with the approved provider, for services and outcomes purchased from the approved provider on behalf of the student pursuant to the personalized learning plan.

* * * Act 46 Findings and Purpose * * *

Sec. 7. FINDINGS AND PURPOSE

(a) 2015 Acts and Resolves No. 46 established a multi-year, phased process that provides multiple opportunities for school districts to unify existing governance units into more “sustainable governance structures” designed to meet the General Assembly’s identified educational and fiscal goals while recognizing and reflecting local priorities. It has been the General Assembly’s intent to revitalize Vermont’s small schools – to promote equity in their offerings and stability in their finances – through these changes in governance.

(b) While Vermont generally does an excellent job educating our children, we fall short in two critical areas. First, we are not as successful as we need to be in educating children from families with low income, and second, while we have a very high graduation rate from our high schools, not enough of our graduates continue their education. Fulfilling the goals of Act 46 is a critical step in addressing these shortcomings.

(c) As of Town Meeting Day 2017, voters in 96 Vermont towns have voted to merge 104 school districts into these slightly larger, more sustainable governance structures, resulting in the creation of 20 new unified union districts (serving prekindergarten–grade 12 students). As a result, approximately 60 percent of Vermont’s school-age children live or will soon live in districts that satisfy the goals of Act 46.

(d) These slightly larger, more flexible unified union districts have begun to realize distinct benefits, including the ability to offer kindergarten–grade 8 choice among elementary schools within the new district boundaries; greater flexibility in sharing students, staff, and resources among individual schools; the elimination of bureaucratic redundancies; and the flexibility to create magnet academies, focusing on a particular area of specialization by school.

(e) Significant areas of the State, however, have experienced difficulty satisfying the goals of Act 46. The range of complications is varied, including operating or tuitioning models that differ among adjoining districts, geographic isolation due to lengthy driving times or inhospitable travel routes between proposed merger partners, and greatly differing levels of debt per equalized pupil between districts involved in merger study committees.

(f) This act is designed to make useful changes to the merger time lines and allowable governance structures under Act 46 without weakening or eliminating the Act’s fundamental phased merger and incentive structures and requirements. Nothing in this act should suggest that it is acceptable for a school district to fail to take reasonable and robust action to seek to meet the goals of Act 46.

* * * Side-by-Side Structures * * *

Sec. 8. 2012 Acts and Resolves No. 156, Sec. 15 is amended to read:

Sec. 15. TWO OR MORE MERGERS; REGIONAL EDUCATION DISTRICT INCENTIVES

(a) Notwithstanding 2010 Acts and Resolves No. 153, Sec. 3(a)(1) of No. 153 of the Acts of the 2009 Adj. Sess. (2010) that requires a single regional education district (“RED”) to have an average daily membership of at least 1,250 or result from the merger of at least four districts, or both, two or more new districts shall be eligible jointly for the incentives provided in Sec. 4 of No. 153, Sec. 4 if:

* * *

(3) one of the new districts provides education in all elementary and secondary grades by operating one or more schools and the other new district or districts pay tuition for students in one or more grades; each new district has a model of operating schools or paying tuition that is different from the model of the other, which may include:

(A) operating a school or schools for all resident students in prekindergarten through grade 12;

(B) operating a school or schools for all resident students in some grades and paying tuition for resident students in the other grades; or

(C) operating no schools and paying tuition for all resident students in prekindergarten through grade 12;

* * *

(b) The incentives provided under this act shall be available only if the new districts receive final approval of their electorate on or before November 30, 2017. This section is repealed on July 1, 2017 2019.

Sec. 9. THREE-BY-ONE SIDE-BY-SIDE STRUCTURE; EXEMPTION
FROM STATEWIDE PLAN

(a) If the conditions of this section are met, the Merged District and the Existing District or Districts shall be exempt from the requirement under 2015 Acts and Resolves No. 46, Secs. 9 and 10, to self-evaluate and make a proposal to the Secretary of Education and State Board of Education and from the State Board's statewide plan.

(1) The new district is formed by the merger of at least three existing districts (Merged District) and, together with one or two existing districts (each an Existing District), are, following the receipt of all approvals required under this section, members of the same supervisory union (Three-by-One Side-by-Side Structure).

(2) As of March 7, 2017, town meeting day, each Existing District is either:

(A) geographically isolated, due to lengthy driving times or inhospitable travel routes between the Existing District's school or schools and the nearest school in which there is excess capacity as determined by the State Board of Education; or

(B) structurally isolated, because all adjoining school districts have operating or tuitioning models that differ from the Existing District.

(3) The Merged District and each Existing District have, following the

receipt of all approvals required under this section, a model of operating schools or paying tuition that is different from the model of each other; provided, however, that if two Existing Districts are members of the Three-by-One Side-by-Side Structure, the Existing Districts may have the same model of operating schools or paying tuition if they are geographically isolated from each other, within the meaning of subdivision (2)(A) of this subsection. These models are:

(A) operating a school or schools for all resident students in prekindergarten through grade 12;

(B) operating a school or schools for all resident students in some grades and paying tuition for resident students in the other grades; or

(C) operating no schools and paying tuition for all resident students in prekindergarten through grade 12.

(4) Each Existing District and the districts proposing to merge into the Merged District jointly submit a proposal to the State Board after the effective date of this section and demonstrate in their proposal that:

(A) the Three-by-One Side-by-Side Structure is better suited to them than a governance structure described in 2015 Acts and Resolves No. 46, Sec. 6 and will meet the goals set forth in Sec. 2 of that act;

(B) each Existing District meets one or more of the criteria set forth in subdivision (2) of this subsection (a);

(C) each Existing District has a detailed action plan it proposes to take to continue to improve its performance in connection with each of the goals set forth in 2015 Acts and Resolves No. 46, Sec. 2.

(5) Each Existing District and the districts proposing to merge into the Merged District obtain State Board approval of their proposal to form the proposed Three-by-One Side-by-Side Structure.

(6) Each Existing District obtains the approval of its electorate to be an Existing District in the proposed Three-by-One Side-by-Side Structure on or before November 30, 2017.

(7) The districts proposing to merge into the Merged District receive final approval from their electorate for the merger proposal on or before November 30, 2017, and the Merged District becomes fully operational on or before July 1, 2019.

(8) The Three-by-One Side-by-Side Structure is formed on or before November 30, 2019 in the manner approved by the State Board.

(b) The districts that are proposing to merge into the Merged District may include:

(1) districts that have not received, as of the effective date of this section, approval from their electorate to merge, regardless of whether the Merged District will be eligible to receive incentives under 2010 Acts and Resolves No. 153, 2012 Acts and Resolves No. 156, or 2015 Acts and Resolves No. 46, each as amended; and

(2) districts that received, on or after July 1, 2010 but prior to the effective date of this section, approval from their electorate to merge but are not operational as a Merged District as of the effective date of this section, regardless of whether the Merged District is eligible to receive incentives under 2010 Acts and Resolves No. 153, 2012 Acts and Resolves No. 156, or 2015 Acts and Resolves No. 46, each as amended.

(c) The formation of a Three-by-One Side-by-Side Structure shall not entitle the Merged District or an Existing District to qualify for the incentives provided in 2010 Acts and Resolves No. 153, Sec. 4. However, a Merged District that is otherwise entitled to incentives under 2010 Acts and Resolves No. 153, 2012 Acts and Resolves No. 156, or 2015 Acts and Resolves No. 46, each as amended, shall not lose these incentives due to its participation as a member of a Three-by-One Side-by-Side Structure.

Sec. 10. TWO-BY-TWO-BY-ONE SIDE-BY-SIDE STRUCTURE;
REGIONAL EDUCATION DISTRICT INCENTIVES

(a) Notwithstanding 2010 Acts and Resolves No. 153, Sec. 3(a)(1) that requires a single regional education district (RED) to have an average daily membership of at least 1,250 or result from the merger of at least four districts, or both, two or more new districts shall be eligible for the incentives provided in No. 153, Sec. 4 as amended by 2012 Acts and Resolves No. 156 and 2015 Acts and Resolves No. 46 if:

(1) Each new district is formed by the merger of at least two existing districts (each a Merged District) and, together with an Existing District, are, following the receipt of all approvals required under this section, members of the same supervisory union (Two-by-Two-by-One Side-by-Side Structure).

(2) As of March 7, 2017, town meeting day, the Existing District is either:

(A) geographically isolated, due to lengthy driving times or inhospitable travel routes between the Existing District's school or schools and the nearest school in which there is excess capacity as determined by the State Board of Education; or

(B) structurally isolated, because all adjoining school districts have operating or tuitioning models that differ from the Existing District.

(3) Each Merged District and the Existing District, following the receipt of all approvals required under this section, have a model of operating schools

or paying tuition that is different from the model of each other. These models are:

(A) operating a school or schools for all resident students in prekindergarten through grade 12;

(B) operating a school or schools for all resident students in some grades and paying tuition for resident students in the other grades; or

(C) operating no schools and paying tuition for all resident students in prekindergarten through grade 12.

(4) The Two-by-Two-by-One Side-by-Side Structure meets all criteria for RED formation other than the size criterion of 2010 Acts and Resolves No. 153, Sec. 3(a)(1) (average daily membership of at least 1,250) and otherwise as provided in this section.

(5) The Existing District and the districts proposing to merge into the Merged Districts jointly submit a proposal to the State Board after the effective date of this section and demonstrate in their proposal that:

(A) the Two-by-Two-by-One Side-by-Side Structure is better suited to them than a governance structure described in 2015 Acts and Resolves No. 46, Sec. 6 and will meet the goals set forth in Sec. 2 of that act;

(B) the Existing District meets one or more of the criteria set forth in subdivision (2) of this subsection (a); and

(C) the Existing District has a detailed action plan it proposes to take to continue to improve its performance in connection with each of the goals set forth in 2015 Acts and Resolves No. 46, Sec. 2.

(6) The Existing District and the districts proposing to merge into the Merged Districts obtain State Board approval of their proposal to form the proposed Two-by-Two-by-One Side-by-Side Structure.

(7) The Existing District obtains the approval of its electorate to be an Existing District in the proposed Two-by-Two-by-One Side-by-Side Structure on or before November 30, 2017.

(8) The districts proposing to merge into each Merged District receive final approval from their electorate for the merger proposal on or before November 30, 2017, and each Merged District becomes fully operational on or before July 1, 2019.

(9) Each Merged District has the same effective date of merger.

(10) The Two-by-Two-by-One Side-by-Side Structure is formed on or before November 30, 2019 in the manner approved by the State Board.

(b) The districts that are proposing to merge into the Merged Districts may

include:

(1) districts that have not received, as of the effective date of this section, approval from their electorate to merge, regardless of whether the Merged District will be eligible to receive incentives under 2010 Acts and Resolves No. 153, 2012 Acts and Resolves No. 156, or 2015 Acts and Resolves No. 46, each as amended; and

(2) districts that received, on or after July 1, 2010 but prior to the effective date of this section, approval from their electorate to merge but are not operational as a Merged District as of the effective date of this section, regardless of whether the Merged District is eligible to receive incentives under 2010 Acts and Resolves No. 153, 2012 Acts and Resolves No. 156, or 2015 Acts and Resolves No. 46, each as amended.

(c) If the conditions of this section are met, the incentives provided in 2010 Acts and Resolves No. 153, Sec. 4 shall be available to each Merged District, unless the Merged District has already received incentives under 2010 Acts and Resolves No. 153, 2012 Acts and Resolves No. 156, or 2015 Acts and Resolves No. 46, each as amended. These incentives shall not be available to the Existing District.

(d) If the conditions of this section are met, the Existing District shall be exempt from the requirement under 2015 Acts and Resolves No. 46, Secs. 9 and 10, to self-evaluate and make a proposal to the Secretary of Education and State Board of Education and exempt from the State Board's statewide plan.

* * * Withdrawal from Union School District * * *

Sec. 11. TEMPORARY AUTHORITY TO WITHDRAW FROM UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT

(a) Notwithstanding any provision of 16 V.S.A. § 721a to the contrary, a school district may withdraw from a union high school district without approval by the remaining members of the union high school district upon the following conditions:

(1) The school district proposing to withdraw from the union high school district operates a school or schools for all resident students in prekindergarten through grade 6 and pays tuition for resident students in grade 7 through grade 12.

(2) At least one year has elapsed since the union high school district became a body politic and corporate as provided in 16 V.S.A. § 706g.

(3) A majority of the voters of the school district proposing to withdraw from the union high school district present and voting at a school district meeting duly warned for that purpose votes to withdraw from the union high school district. The clerk of the school district shall certify the vote to the

Secretary of State, who shall record the certificate in his or her office and shall give notice of the vote to the Secretary of Education and to the other members of the union high school district.

(4) The State Board approves the withdrawal based on a recommendation from the Secretary of Education.

(5) The withdrawal process is completed on or before July 1, 2019.

(b) In making his or her recommendation, the Secretary of Education shall assess whether:

(1) students in the withdrawing school district would attend a school that complies with the rules adopted by the State Board pertaining to educational programs; and

(2) it is in the best interests of the State, the students, and the districts remaining in the union high school district for the union to continue to exist.

(c) The State Board shall:

(1) consider the recommendation of the Secretary and any other information it deems appropriate;

(2) hold a public meeting within 60 days of receiving the recommendation of the Secretary, and provide due notice of this meeting to the Secretary and all members of the union high school district;

(3) within 10 days of the meeting, notify the Secretary and all members of the union high school district of its decision;

(4) if it approves the withdrawal, declare the membership of the withdrawing school district in the union high school district terminated as of July 1 immediately following, or as soon after July 1 as the financial obligations of the withdrawing school district have been paid to, or an agreement has been made with, the union high school district in an amount to satisfy those obligations; and

(5) file the declaration with the Secretary of State, the clerk of the withdrawing school district, and the clerk of the union high school district concerned.

Sec. 12. REPEAL

Sec. 11 of this act is repealed on July 2, 2019.

* * * Reduction of Average Daily Membership; Guidelines for Alternative Structures * * *

Sec. 13. 2015 Acts and Resolves No. 46, Sec. 5 is amended to read:

Sec. 5. PREFERRED EDUCATION GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE;

ALTERNATIVE STRUCTURE GUIDELINES

* * *

(c) Alternative structure: supervisory union with member districts. An Education District as envisioned in subsection (b) of this section may not be possible or the best model to achieve Vermont's education goals in all regions of the State. In such situations, a supervisory union composed of multiple member districts, each with its separate school board, ~~can~~ may meet the State's goals, particularly if:

(1) the member districts consider themselves to be collectively responsible for the education of all prekindergarten through grade 12 students residing in the supervisory union;

(2) the supervisory union operates in a manner that complies with its obligations under 16 V.S.A. § 261a and that maximizes efficiencies through economies of scale and the flexible management, transfer, and sharing of nonfinancial resources among the member districts, which may include a common personnel system, with the goal of increasing the ratio of students to full-time equivalent staff;

(3) the supervisory union has the smallest number of member school districts practicable, achieved wherever possible by the merger of districts with similar operating and tuitioning patterns; ~~and~~

(4) the supervisory union has the smallest number of member school districts practicable after consideration of greatly differing levels of indebtedness among the member districts; and

~~(4)~~(5) the combined average daily membership of all member districts is not less than ~~1,100~~ 900.

* * * Secretary and State Board; Consideration of Alternative Structure Proposals * * *

Sec. 14. 2015 Acts and Resolves No. 46, Sec. 10 is amended to read:

Sec. 10. TRANSITION TO SUSTAINABLE GOVERNANCE
STRUCTURES; PROPOSAL; FINAL PLAN

* * *

(c) Process. On and after October 1, 2017, the Secretary and State Board shall consider any proposals submitted by districts or groups of districts under Sec. 9 of this act. Districts that submit such a proposal shall have the opportunity to add to or otherwise amend their proposal in connection with the Secretary's consideration of the proposal and conversations with the district or districts under subsection (a) of this section, and in connection with testimony presented to the State Board under subsection (b) of this section. The State

Board may, in its discretion, approve an alternative governance proposal at any time on or before November 30, 2018.

(d) The statewide plan required by subsection (b) of this section shall include default Articles of Agreement to be used by all new unified union school districts created under the plan until the board of the new district votes to approve new or amended articles.

(e) After the State Board of Education issues the statewide plan under subsection (b) of this section, districts subject to merger shall have 90 days to form a study committee under 16 V.S.A. § 706b and to draft Articles of Agreement for the new district. During this period, the study committee shall hold at least one public hearing to consider and take comments on the draft Articles of Agreement.

(f) If the study committee formed under subsection (e) of this section does not approve Articles of Agreement within the 90-day period provided in that subsection, the provisions in the default Articles of Agreement included in the statewide plan shall apply to the new district.

(e)(g) Applicability. This section shall not apply to:

(1) an interstate school district;

(2) a regional career technical center school district formed under 16 V.S.A. chapter 37, subchapter 5A; or

(3) a district that, between June 30, 2013 and July 2, 2019, began to operate as a unified union school district and:

(A) voluntarily merged into the preferred education governance structure, an Education District, as set forth Sec. 5(b) of this act; or

(B) is a regional education district or any other district eligible to receive incentives pursuant to 2010 Acts and Resolves No. 153, as amended by 2012 Acts and Resolves No. 156.

* * * Deadline for Small School Support Metrics * * *

Sec. 15. 2015 Acts and Resolves No. 46, Sec. 21 is amended to read:

Sec. 21. SMALL SCHOOL SUPPORT; METRICS

On or before July 1, 2018, the State Board of Education shall adopt and publish metrics by which it will make determinations whether to award small school support grants pursuant to 16 V.S.A. § 4015 on and after July 1, 2019, as amended by Sec. 20 of this act; provided, however, that on or before September 30, 2017, the State Board shall publish a list of districts that it determines to be geographically isolated pursuant to that section as amended by Sec. 20 of this act.

* * * Time Extension for Qualifying Districts * * *

Sec. 16. 2015 Acts and Resolves No. 46, Sec. 9 is amended to read:

Sec. 9. SELF-EVALUATION, MEETINGS, AND PROPOSAL

(a) On or before November 30, 2017 the date that is the earlier of six months after the date the State Board's rules on the process for submitting alternative governance proposals take effect or January 31, 2018, the board of each school district in the State that has a governance structure different from the preferred structure identified in Sec. 5(b) of this act (Education District), or that does not expect to become or will not become an Education District on or before July 1, 2019, shall perform each of the following actions, unless the district qualifies for an exemption under Sec. 10(g) of this act.

Sec. 17. TIME EXTENSION FOR VOTE OF ELECTORATE

Notwithstanding any provision of law to the contrary, the date by which a qualifying district must receive final approval from the electorate for its merger proposal is extended from July 1, 2017 to November 30, 2017. A qualifying district is a district that:

(1) proposed a school district consolidation plan under 2010 Acts and Resolves No. 153, as amended, or 2012 Acts and Resolves No. 156, as amended, which was rejected by voters;

(2) is a member of a study committee formed under 16 V.S.A. § 706 that provides to the Secretary a declaration that another school district wants to join the district's study committee, signed by each member of the study committee and the district that proposes to join the study committee; or

(3) is a member of a supervisory union that, on or after July 1, 2010, combined with another supervisory union.

* * * Grants and Fee Reimbursement * * *

Sec. 18. 2015 Acts and Resolves No. 46, Sec. 7 is amended to read:

Sec. 7. SCHOOL DISTRICTS CREATED AFTER DEADLINE FOR ACCELERATED ACTIVITY; TAX INCENTIVES; SMALL SCHOOL SUPPORT; JOINT CONTRACT SCHOOLS

* * *

(b) A newly formed school district that meets the criteria set forth in subsection (a) of this section shall receive the following:

* * *

(3) Transition Facilitation Grant.

(A) After voter approval of the plan of merger, notwithstanding any provision to the contrary in 16 V.S.A. § 4025, the Secretary of Education shall

pay the transitional board of the new district a Transition Facilitation Grant from the Education Fund equal to the lesser of:

(i) five percent of the base education amount established in 16 V.S.A. § 4001(13) multiplied by the greater of either the combined enrollment or the average daily membership of the merging districts on October 1 of the year in which the successful vote is taken; or

(ii) \$150,000.00.

(B) A Transition Facilitation Grant awarded under this subdivision (3) shall be reduced by the total amount of reimbursement paid for consulting services, analysis, and transition costs pursuant to 2012 Acts and Resolves No. 156, Secs. 2, 4, and 9.

* * *

Sec. 19. 2012 Acts and Resolves No. 156, Sec. 9 is amended to read:

Sec. 9. REIMBURSEMENT OF FEES FOR CONSULTING SERVICES;
MERGER; SCHOOL DISTRICTS; SUNSET

(a) From the ~~education fund~~ Education Fund, the ~~commissioner of education~~ Secretary of Education shall reimburse up to \$20,000.00 of fees paid by a study committee established under 16 V.S.A. § 706 for legal and other consulting services necessary to analyze the advisability of creating a union school district or a unified union school district and, to prepare the report required by 16 V.S.A. § 706b, and to conduct community outreach, including communications with voters. Community outreach materials shall be limited to those that are reasonably designed to inform and educate. Not more than 30 percent of the reimbursement amount provided by the Secretary under this section shall be used for the purpose of community outreach.

* * *

Sec. 20. 2015 Acts and Resolves No. 46, Sec. 10 is amended to read:

Sec. 10. TRANSITION TO SUSTAINABLE GOVERNANCE
STRUCTURES; PROPOSAL; FINAL PLAN

* * *

(d)(1) The Secretary of Education shall make a supplemental Transitional Facilitation Grant of \$10,000.00 to a school district that:

(A) has received or is eligible to receive tax incentives under 2010 Acts and Resolves No. 153, 2012 Acts and Resolves No. 156, or 2015 Acts and Resolves No. 46, each as amended (a qualifying school district); and

(B) either on its own initiative or at the request of the State Board, agrees by vote of its electorate to merge with another school district (a

qualifying merger).

(2) A qualifying school district shall use the grant funding to defray the cost of integration. The Secretary shall pay the grant amount to a qualifying school district for each qualifying merger with a school district even if multiple qualifying mergers are effective on the same date. The Secretary shall pay the grant amount not later than 30 days after all required approvals are obtained.

(3) Notwithstanding any provision to the contrary in 16 V.S.A. § 4025, the Secretary of Education shall pay the supplemental Transition Facilitation Grant from the Education Fund.

(4) The supplemental Transition Facilitation Grant shall be available for a qualifying merger initiated by a qualifying school district only if the merger is scheduled to take effect on or before November 30, 2018.

* * * Applications for Adjustments to Supervisory Union Boundaries * * *

Sec. 21. 16 V.S.A. § 261 is amended to read:

§ 261. ORGANIZATION AND ADJUSTMENT OF SUPERVISORY UNIONS

(a) The State Board shall review on its own initiative or when requested as per subsection (b) of this section and may regroup the supervisory unions of the State or create new supervisory unions in such manner as to afford increased efficiency or greater convenience and economy and to facilitate prekindergarten through grade 12 curriculum planning and coordination as changed conditions may seem to require.

(b)(1) Any school district that has so voted at its annual school district meeting, if said meeting has been properly warned regarding such a vote, may request that the State Board adjust the existing boundaries of the supervisory union of which it is a member district.

(2) Any group of school districts that have so voted at their respective annual school district meeting, regardless of whether the districts are members of the same supervisory union, may request that the State Board adjust existing supervisory union boundaries and move one or more nonrequesting districts to a different supervisory union if such adjustment would assist the requesting districts to realign their governance structures into a unified union school district pursuant to chapter 11 of this title.

(3) The State Board shall ~~give timely consideration to requests~~ act on a request made pursuant to this subsection within 75 days of receipt of the request and may regroup the school districts of the area so as to ensure reasonable supervision of all public schools therein.

* * *

* * * Technical Corrections; Clarifications * * *

Sec. 22. 2012 Acts and Resolves No. 156, Sec. 16 is amended to read:

Sec. 16. UNION ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICTS; REGIONAL
EDUCATION DISTRICT INCENTIVES

* * *

(b) This section is repealed on July 1, ~~2017~~ 2019.

Sec. 23. 2012 Acts and Resolves No. 156, Sec. 17 is amended to read:

Sec. 17. MODIFIED UNIFIED UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT

* * *

(d) This section is repealed on July 1, ~~2017~~ 2019.

Sec. 24. AVAILABILITY OF TAX AND OTHER INCENTIVES

The tax and other incentives under 2010 Acts and Resolves No. 153, as amended, and 2012 Acts and Resolves No. 156, as amended, shall be available only if the new governance structure formed under those acts becomes fully operational on or before July 1, 2019.

Sec. 25. 2015 Acts and Resolves No. 46, Sec. 23 is amended to read:

Sec. 23. DECLINING ENROLLMENT; TRANSITION

(a) If a district's equalized pupils in fiscal year 2016 do not reflect any adjustment pursuant to 16 V.S.A. § 4010(f), then Sec. 22 of this act shall apply to the district in fiscal year 2017 and after.

(b) If a district's equalized pupils in fiscal year 2016 reflect adjustment pursuant to 16 V.S.A. § 4010(f), then, notwithstanding the provisions of § 4010(f) as amended by this act:

(1) in fiscal year 2017, the district's equalized pupils shall in no case be less than 90 percent of the district's equalized pupils in the previous year; and

(2) in fiscal year 2018, the district's equalized pupils shall in no case be less than 80 percent of the district's equalized pupils in the previous year.

(c) Notwithstanding the provisions of subsections (a) and (b) of this section, if a district is actively engaged in merger discussions with one or more other districts regarding the formation of a regional education district (RED) or other form of unified union school district pursuant to 16 V.S.A. chapter 11, then Sec. 22 of this act shall apply to the district in fiscal year 2018 and after, and each of the dates in subsection (b) of this section shall be adjusted accordingly. A district shall be "actively engaged in merger discussions" pursuant to this subsection (c) if on or before July 1, 2016, it has formed a study committee pursuant to 16 V.S.A. chapter 11. Until such time as Sec. 22

of this act shall apply to the district, the district's equalized pupil count shall be calculated under 16 V.S.A. § 4010(f), as in effect on June 30, 2016.

Sec. 26. QUALIFICATION FOR INCENTIVES; ASSIGNMENT TO A
SUPERVISORY UNION BY THE STATE BOARD

Notwithstanding any requirement under 2015 Acts and Resolves No. 46, Secs. 6 and 7 that the newly formed school district be its own supervisory district, the newly formed school district shall qualify for the incentives under this section even if it is assigned to a supervisory union by the State Board of Education and that assignment by the State Board is not made at the request of the school district.

* * * State Board Rulemaking Authority * * *

Sec. 27. 2015 Acts and Resolves No. 46, Sec. 8 is amended to read:

Sec. 8. EVALUATION BY THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

* * *

(c) The State Board may adopt rules designed to assist districts in submitting alternative structure proposals, but shall not by rule or otherwise impose more stringent requirements than those in this act.

* * * Tax Provisions * * *

Sec. 28. CALCULATION OF EDUCATION PROPERTY TAX SPENDING
ADJUSTMENT AND EDUCATION INCOME TAX SPENDING
ADJUSTMENT FOR CERTAIN SCHOOL DISTRICTS

(a) Under this section, a qualifying school district is a school district:

(1) that operates no schools and pays tuition for all resident students in prekindergarten through grade 12;

(2) that, on or before November 15, 2017, obtains final approval from its electorate to consolidate with an existing unified union school district that is eligible to receive incentives under 2010 Acts and Resolves No. 153 (consolidated district), as amended; and

(3) for which either:

(A) the education property tax spending adjustment under 32 V.S.A. § 5401(13)(A) for the district's fiscal year 2017 exceeded the district's education property tax spending adjustment for the district's 2015 fiscal year by more than 100 percent; or

(B) the education income tax spending adjustment under 32 V.S.A. § 5401(13)(B) for the district's fiscal year 2017 exceeded the district's education income tax spending adjustment for the district's 2015 fiscal year by more than 100 percent.

(b) Notwithstanding any provision of law to the contrary:

(1) for the first year in which the consolidated district's equalized homestead tax rate or household income percentage is reduced under 2010 Acts and Resolves No. 153, as amended, the equalized homestead tax rate and household income percentage for the town associated with the qualifying district shall be set at the average equalized homestead tax rate and household income percentage of the towns associated with the other districts that merge into the consolidated district; and

(2) 2010 Acts and Resolves No. 153, Sec. 4(a)(2), which limits the amount by which tax rates are permitted to change, shall not apply to the town associated with the qualifying district for the first year for which the consolidated district's equalized homestead tax rate or household income percentage is reduced under that act.

Sec. 29. MODIFIED UNIFIED UNION SCHOOL DISTRICTS; TAX RATE
CALCULATIONS

The tax rate provisions in 2010 Acts and Resolves No. 155, Sec. 13(a)(1), as amended, shall not apply to the calculation of tax rates in a member of a modified unified union school district (MUUSD) formed under 2012 Acts and Resolves No. 156, Sec. 17, as amended, if that member is a member for fewer than all grades, prekindergarten through grade 12. This section shall apply to the calculation of taxes in any MUUSD that began full operation after July 1, 2015.

* * * Elections to Unified Union School District Board * * *

Sec. 30. ELECTIONS TO UNIFIED UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARD

(a) Notwithstanding any provision to the contrary under 16 V.S.A. § 706k, the election of a director on the board of a unified union school district who is to serve on the board after expiration of the term for an initial director shall be held at the unified union school district's annual meeting in accordance with the district's articles of agreement.

(b) Notwithstanding any provision to the contrary under 16 V.S.A. § 706l, if a vacancy occurs on the board of a unified union school district and the vacancy is in a seat that is allocated to a specific town, the clerk shall immediately notify the selectboard of the town. Within 30 days of the receipt of that notice, the unified union school district board, in consultation with the selectboard, shall appoint a person who is otherwise eligible to serve as a member of the unified union school district board to fill the vacancy until an election is held in accordance with the unified union school district's articles of agreement.

(c) This section is repealed on July 1, 2018.

* * * Effective Dates * * *

Sec. 31. EFFECTIVE DATES

(a) This section and Secs. 2 and 4–30 shall take effect on passage.

(b) Sec. 1 (criminal record checks) shall take effect on passage and shall apply to persons hired or contracted with after June 30, 2017 and to persons who apply for or renew child care provider license after June 30, 2017.

(c) Sec. 3 (surety bond; postsecondary institutions) shall take effect on October 1, 2017.