

On March 7, 2017 the Town of Lemington, Vermont voted against joining the NEK Choice School District that includes Bloomfield, Brunswick, East Haven, Granby, Guildhall, Kirby, Maidstone, Norton and Victory. Why did Lemington decide against the merger? Here are two areas of concern.

The state of Vermont has a very complex formula for calculating educational taxes. Part of this formula uses a two year equalized pupil average instead of the number of actual students. Using this formula, we have actual students in our town that are not accounted for. The number of students in Lemington has increased from 11 to 17.5 over the past few years. The equalized pupil count in fiscal year 2017 was 14.98 students. This difference significantly impacts the calculations used by the State of Vermont to determine Homestead Tax Rates. Using this average resulted in Lemington having a tax increase of 132% over two years. Lemington had the highest educational tax rate in the entire state of Vermont FY17. If we were given credit for our actual number of students, not the average, our tax rate would have been significantly lower.

Secondly, the proposed merger includes a 5% throttle to prevent educational tax rates from decreasing or increasing by more than 5% each year. With this 5% throttle in place, it would take Lemington almost 5 years for our tax rate to become comparable to the other towns within the new district. There is no immediate tax incentive for us to merge with this throttle in place. This unintended consequence should be corrected in order to allow towns with abnormal circumstances share the benefits of this proposed merger.

We respect the intent and spirit of the NEK Choice School District consolidation committee. We share their goals of reducing educational costs, maintaining school choice for Pre K-12 and creating more opportunities for our students. However, one size does not fit all with educational funding in Vermont and we are in a unique position. The formula that's designed to control cost, in fact keeps our tax rate artificially inflated.

The concerned taxpayers of Lemington are working with our town officials and school board to address the Vermont Legislature and request a solution to our unique situation.

Respectfully,

The Concerned Taxpayers of Lemington