

## BARRE SUPERVISORY UNION DISTRICT #61

Barre City Elementary and  
Middle School  
  
Barre Town Middle and  
Elementary School  
  
Central Vermont Career Center  
  
Spaulding High School

*John Pandolfo*  
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*Doing whatever it takes to ensure  
success for every child.*

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To: The House Education Committee  
From: John Pandolfo, Superintendent, Barre Supervisory Union  
Date: January 13, 2017  
Re: Act 166 Testimony

Thank you for hearing my testimony, on behalf of the Barre Supervisory Union. We are actively engaged in efforts to implement Act 166 at the current moment and fully support the goals of the legislation. We have serious concerns about the ability for the goals of Act 166 to be realized in our own SU and statewide if things continue along their current trajectory. I am here today because I responded to Jeff Francis' survey, am located close to Montpelier, and expressed willingness to testify.

### Background

- Over the past several years, Barre Town Elementary School has increased its internal capacity to serve PreK students to four classrooms and 120 students. The school runs classes of 150 minutes five days per week in the morning and again in the afternoon. Transportation is provided to and from each session, and subsidized meals are provided. This program has historically had a waiting list, although expansion to a fourth classroom this year eliminated that waiting list.
- Over the past several years, Barre City Elementary School has increased its internal capacity to serve PreK students to three classrooms and 90 students. Planned expansion to a fourth classroom has been on hold simply due to lack of physical space. The school runs classes of 150 minutes five days per week in the morning and again in the afternoon. Transportation is provided to and from each session, and free meals are provided. This program has also historically had a waiting list, larger than Barre Town's.
- As the largest SU in central Vermont, and as we increased our internal PreK programs and partnerships with private providers, we developed a position of Early Education Director at the Supervisory Union level. This administrator shares her time between two public schools and oversees about twelve professional staff and an equal number of support staff. This person works closely with the building principals and special

education directors, who oversee upwards of 50 professional and support staff. This Director is directly responsible for Act 166 implementation in Barre, is an active participant in PreK work regionally and statewide, and is the primary point person for approximately 40 annual transitions of children into Early Essential Education.

- Besides the 210 PreK students we serve internally, we provide tuition for 45 students in eleven community-based pre-qualified centers as far away as Williston. Additionally, about a handful of PreK students from Barre City attend the Barre Town PreK program with tuition paid from the Barre City district to the Barre Town District, as the Barre Town program had room and the Barre City program had a waitlist at the start of the current school year.
- In total we estimate there are about 350 eligible PreK students in our SU; of which we are serving about 255 through our internal programs and providing tuition to outside programs.

#### Act 166 Implementation Issues:

1. We are making Act 166 "work" in our system, but only because we have expended an inordinate amount of time and resources, and have a dedicated Early Ed Director.
  - Previously the EED (Early Ed Director) primarily focused on curriculum development and coordination between internal and outside partner programs, embedded coaching and support of staff, outreach to families and prospective families, and some effort toward compliance with assessment and other state requirements.
  - This year, the majority of the efforts of our EED have been spent ensuring compliance with the administrative requirements of Act 166. This includes:
    - Developing systems for tracking student enrollment at outside qualified programs, including changes in enrollment as families move their children.
    - Developing and revising (as guidance has changed) contracts with outside qualified programs over the course of summer and school year.
    - Developing and revising systems for tracking whether outside qualified programs have met and maintained all record check requirements and pre-qualification requirements.
    - Dealt with issues related to withholding tuition from outside qualified programs which had not met requirements in an effort to resolve these issues so we could actually count students in these programs towards our ADM and Equalized Pupils and not lose revenue.
    - Dealt with issues related to licensing our internal programs and supporting our own staff in meeting changing licensing requirements, including record checks.
    - In addition to our EED's efforts, we have added a 0.5 FTE admin assistant that the EED did not previously have, who works almost entirely on Act 166 implementation.
    - Needless to say, support for actual teaching and learning has suffered. In particular, there is no good system in place to ensure outside qualified programs deliver high quality curriculum with fidelity.

2. Act 166 is not serving the students it was intended to serve and is not addressing issues of equity

- Of the students enrolled in our internal programs, in Barre City 66% are students below the poverty level (defined as qualifying for Free/Reduced Lunch) and in Barre Town 36% are below the poverty level. While we do not know the comparable number for those attending outside qualified programs, we do know that they do not get transportation provided, and they do not get free or subsidized meals.
- When students with special needs are enrolled in qualified programs outside our SU boundaries, we do not have the resources to go to those students (as far away as Williston) to provide services. We have the ability to best serve those students in our own internal programs, which puts families in a difficult position and creates inequity.
- Our anecdotal experience suggests that our students most in need are not accessing tuition for outside qualified programs; we believe they are best served by our internal programs for the reasons stated above.
- Community-based programs are required only to have one licensed teacher present ten hours per week, and not necessarily during the ten hours a tuitioned student is present, whereas public schools are required to have a licensed teacher in every classroom.
- Some families have expressed intent to use PreK tuition funds to keep their children in PreK programs for their Kindergarten year, as this is currently possible under Act 166. Some of these families may choose to move their children directly into Grade 1, as Kindergarten is not required; this will lead to children entering Grade 1 with vastly different experiences.

3. Act 166 is cumbersome for outside qualified programs and school systems

- Several of our previous partners have chosen not to become prequalified due to the strict licensing requirements and some have shut down.
- Some of our partners are “trying” but not meeting requirements related to licensing, record checks, attendance reporting, etc. This places a burden on our system to monitor these programs for compliance, and several school systems are put in a position of monitoring the same providers or not meeting their assurances.
- We are required to withhold tuition payments from outside programs which have not met compliance requirements. This places a hardship on the operation of these small businesses and sets school systems up to be the “bad guy” in these situations.
- Our PreK teachers and support staff in our internal programs are held to different licensing and record check standards than their K-12 colleagues, even though they are in the same school and same labor bargaining unit.
- Families have little or no incentive to enroll their children prior to the deadlines for student census reporting in the school systems. They will still benefit from the tuition (our expense) but we are unable to get revenue.
- Outside qualified programs have little or no incentive to complete their prequalification and licensing paperwork before the deadlines for student census reporting.

- With the budget development timeline for school systems almost a year in advance of actual enrollment, accurate budgeting for tuition payments is challenging.
- By current guidelines, our EED is not able to serve as the Program Director for each of our internal programs. This is because of the requirement that the Program Director be physically present in the program for 60% of their time. We are extremely confident that our EED is the best qualified person to oversee these programs. Programs in some other school systems have the building principal serving as the Program Director, and it is not likely that these principals spend 60% of their time in the PreK Program. Other public programs have a teacher serving as the Program Director simply because the teacher meets the requirements. As a large school system, and in the spirit of centralization and consolidation, we have created a centralized Director position. We have attempted to work with AHS, with the support of the VSA and AOE, to resolve this issue and find a solution. Like many of the other parts of Act 166, an awful lot of people have spent an inordinate amount of time on this one issue and we still do not have a solution. This seems to be representative of many facets of Act 166.

In the Barre Supervisory Union, we are proud of the work that we have done to put a strong PreK program in place. We believe we have been successfully addressing the goals of Act 166 since before the act even existed. We also believe that compliance with the act as it currently exists hinders us from continuing to achieve those goals. Looking deeper at the issues that currently exist with implementation of Act 166 and resolving those issues is critical for achieving the goals of the act in our supervisory union and at a statewide level.

Thank You!

John Pandolfo