

Jan. 25, 2016

Good Morning. My name is David Schoales. I have been a member of the Brattleboro Town School Board for eight years, a member of the town select board for four years, and am one of the two school board members representing the Windham Region on the board of the Vermont School Boards Association. I write today in support of H 15 as an private citizen.

Windham Southeast Supervisory Union is the poster child for an Alternative Structure. As you can see from the chart of the 2016 SBAC results, there is no demonstrable inequity in student outcomes among our town schools. Our seven elementary schools perform at the high end of the graph. Dummerston and Putney also have Middle Schools that regularly lead the county and state. This year, third and sixth graders in Guilford led Windham County in math performance. In-class performance assessments, like AIMSWeb, also show our schools to be effective in improving individual performance. Data from previous NECAP scores show progress in closing the achievement gap. Although the program offerings in our towns differ, the unique character of each school, the coherence of our leadership team, and the grade-level coordination of curricula and professional development have resulted in equitable performance across our schools.

By contrast, our large, recently renovated, comprehensive, consolidated high school students do not perform as well as their peers in the other county high schools.

All supervisory union functions have been consolidated for years. We have operated our special ed services on a SU-wide service plan for years, and formally brought SpEd into the SU a year before required. Our leadership team has developed several programs that have been adopted statewide, including dual enrollment, support for local pre-k providers, healthy snack and universal breakfast and lunch. We already share teachers between districts. We even purchase our fuel oil in conjunction with the town in order to secure a lower price. The only concrete example of meaningful savings from merging our schools would be from fewer audits. Since we haven't put audits out to bid in years, it is likely those savings could less than current imagined.

Our operating models are diverse - two K-8 town schools; three K-6 schools already consolidated into one district of 860 students; one K-6 town school with 7-12 choice and one K-6 that tuitions their middle school students to Brattleboro. This has created significant challenges for our Act 46 Study Committee in creating Articles of Agreement. After 14 months of diligent effort, we do not have a merger vote scheduled.

Brattleboro is the largest town in the SU and the economic hub of our region. Brattleboro's municipal tax provides the infrastructure for the region's economy- the roads, police, fire, snow removal, and sanitation services supported

by the Brattleboro taxpayers make it possible for residents in the outlying towns to go to the dentist, run a business, work in a business, have a hip replaced, go to a concert or a movie, etc., but we have no way to raise revenue from those towns to help pay for these infrastructure services. We have adopted a Rooms and Meals Tax, although much of the revenue stays in Montpelier. We have tried three times to adopt a 1% Local Options Sales Tax, but our proximity to New Hampshire has made it impossible to pass. This means Brattleboro's property tax is nearly double that of the surrounding towns, with 56% going to the schools. Town residents are aware of these facts, and I do not believe they will support a school merger that results in our property tax revenues going to support schools in the surrounding communities.

H 15 will move districts like ours from the back-end of a State-wide plan to a viable alternative that recognizes things are different around the state, particularly on the New Hampshire side of the Green Mountains. It will make equitable the criteria used to evaluate proposals- if we are meeting the goals of Act 46, we should not have extra hoops to jump through. It will eliminate the requirement that the State Board find that a proposed Alternative Structure is the "best means" of meeting the goals of moving the State toward sustainable models of education governance. How can they know that in every circumstance? H 15 removes the stigma of not being a "preferred" educational governance structure and prohibits the State Board from imposing additional requirements on us. Please support H 15.

Thank you for your consideration.  
Dave.

--

David Schoales  
Brattleboro  
246 1220

"And for the support of this Declaration, ...we mutually pledge *to each other* our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor."

*Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776*