

Franklin North West Supervisory Union

Act 46 Concerns and Complications

Franklin North West Supervisory Union Districts

Mississquoi Valley Union High School

Franklin Central School

Highgate Elementary School

Swanton Elementary School

Sheldon Elementary School

Chronology

- **Act 46 Legislation is Passed-** Only two Franklin County legislators voted for the bill.
- **Formation of an Act 46 committee and initial \$5,000 Governance Study-** This study was biased and ineffective.
- **Community Forums-** Our communities expressed deep opposition to Act 46.
- **Act 46 Independent Study instead of 706b Governance Study**

General Concerns

1. **Loss of Representation-** Currently, the four communities that constitute our SU have equal representation on the SU board. Our smaller communities are concerned that they will lose that representation if the districts consolidate.
2. **Loss of Accountability-** In our current governance structure, tax payers maintain the ability to hold their local school governance accountable (relationships, proximity, and finances). In a consolidated structure, communities lose their ability to vote on their local budgets.
3. **Loss of Community Relations-** In our current governance structure, our elementary schools have tremendous local support. (Our four elementary school districts have long histories of passing their local budgets. Contrarily, our high school budget (which is voted on by three towns) often gets voted down due to lack of community relationship. We are concerned that a consolidated structure will exacerbate this community relation problem.

Act 46 Goals

1. **Equity-** The FNWSU Act 46 Study Committee has found that there is substantial equity among our four elementary districts. There are some equity gaps among our two middle schools, but these can be adequately addressed in our current governance structure.
2. **State Education Quality Standards-** The Franklin Central Elementary School is one of the highest performing elementary schools in the state. Our other districts need improvement, but we believe that this can be achieved through focused efforts and better collaboration, not consolidation. (Our district principals affirm this view.) Our curriculum is already consolidated across our supervisory union.

3. **Operational Efficiencies-** Our districts already share purchasing agreements, custodial/maintenance expertise, fiscal services, and special education resources. We share teachers among districts and even with districts outside of our supervisory union.
4. **Transparency and Accountability-** There is already a high degree of transparency and accountability within our supervisory union. We believe that a consolidated governance structure would substantially reduce transparency and accountability (i.e. representation and budgets.)
5. **Cost Value-** All of our school districts already rank among the lowest equalized per pupil spending in the state. The consolidation of Special Education over the past two years has already caused management problems and increased costs.

Specific Questions

1. Where is the evidence that consolidated governance structures lead to higher student achievement?
2. Where is the evidence that consolidated governance structures lead to reduced costs?
3. Will the state provide any funds for independent or alternative governance structure studies and/or transition costs?

Conclusion

From the evidence that our Act 46 Independent Study Committee has gathered and analyzed thus far and the feedback we have received from district principals and community forums, we believe that our current governance structure provides us the best opportunity to meet the goals of Act 46. **We also believe that a consolidated governance structure would be detrimental to our schools and communities. Therefore, we urge the legislature to adopt H. 15.** This bill will afford supervisory unions and districts like ours more time to complete analysis and it will eliminate the inherent assumption that a consolidated governance structure is the best means of meeting Act 46 goals.