

**AGENCY OF EDUCATION**  
**Barre, Vermont**

**TEAM:** School Governance Team

**ACTION ITEM:** Will the State Board of Education find that the proposed unified union school district formed by all current member districts of the **BARRE SUPERVISORY UNION (BSU)**, which asks to be its own supervisory district, is "in the best interests of the State, the students, and the school districts," and will the State Board therefore vote to approve the attached report of the BSU Study Committee?

**SECRETARY'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:**

**That the State Board of Education finds that the proposed formation of a new unified union school district by all member districts of the BSU, which will be its own supervisory district, is "in the best interests of the State, the students, and the school districts" pursuant to 16 V.S.A. § 706c(b).**

**That the State Board of Education votes to approve the attached report of the BSU Study Committee.**

**That the State Board of Education votes to approve the temporary assignment of the new unified union school district, if approved, to the BSU for the purpose of receiving administrative and other transitional assistance. Assignment would be for the interim period beginning on the date on which the unified union school district becomes a legal entity pursuant to 16 V.S.A. § 706g and ending on July 1, 2017, and would not modify the governing structure of the existing system.**

**STATUTORY AUTHORITY:** 16 V.S.A. § 706c; Act 46 of 2015; Act 153 of 2010, Secs. 2-4, as amended

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:** The BSU consists of two towns and three school districts, each governed by its own board. The Barre City and Barre Town School Districts each operate an elementary school serving resident students through grade 8. Both school districts are members of the Spaulding Union High School District, which hosts the Central Vermont Career Center.

The BSU Study Committee recommends creation of a unified union school district (New Unified District) that would be its own supervisory district. The Study Committee identifies all districts as "necessary" to the proposal, pursuant to 16 V.S.A. § 706b(b)(1). It does not identify any district as "advisable."

The combined average daily membership (ADM) of all districts within the BSU for FY2017 is 2,388.11

If approved by the State Board and the voters of the districts before July 1, 2017, the New Unified District would be eligible for incentives and protections under Act 153, Secs. 2-5, because it would be a unified union district formed with a combined ADM of at least 1,250.

The New Unified District, which would be known as the Barre Unified Union School District, would provide for the education of all resident PK-12 students by operating one or more schools for each grade. The proposal would unify all existing school districts and the supervisory union into a single supervisory district responsible for operating two elementary/middle schools, one secondary school, and the regional career technical center. It would replace the current governing bodies with one unified union school board.

The New Unified District would be governed by a nine member school board. Eight board members would be nominated by and from among the electorate of the individual towns, with the number to be nominated by a single town being closely proportional to the fraction the town population bears to the total population of the New Unified District (initially four from the City and four from the Town). Election of these eight board members would be by the electorate of the town to which the board seat was apportioned. The ninth member would fill a fully at-large seat on the board.

A currently operating school building could not be closed during the first four years of the New Unified District's existence. Any proposal by the board to restructure the current schools into one elementary school and one middle school could not be considered during the first five years.

During the New Unified District's first five years of operation, the school board could not adjust school attendance boundary lines except on an individual basis with parental consent. After the initial five years, the board could adjust school attendance lines upon approval by at least two-thirds of its members. The proposal contemplates the potential for intra-district choice and the creation of magnet schools.

If a building is closed and would no longer be used for public education purposes, then the town in which the school building is located would have the right of first refusal and could purchase the property for \$1.00, provided that the town agreed to use the property for public and community purposes for a minimum of five years. The proposal includes provisions addressing use for these purposes for fewer than five years.

All future votes in the New Unified District would be by Australian ballot. The votes would be counted separately in each town before determining the combined result.

The electorate of each potentially merging district will vote on November 8, 2016 whether to approve creation of the New Unified District. If the voters in both Barre City and Barre Town vote in favor of the proposal, then the New Unified District will begin operation on July 1, 2017.

The BSU Study Committee's report and its appendices examine the community's educational vision, the potential for maximizing efficiencies, the projected financial consequences of unification, and transition planning. The report and appendices include tables and charts that, among other things, compare proficiency on the Smarter Balanced Assessments when disaggregated to reflect students who live in poverty. The report also addresses concerns raised by members of the Committee and the community at large and explains the reasons that the Study Committee did not invite districts outside the supervisory union to participate in its deliberations.

**POLICY IMPLICATIONS:** By enacting Act 46, which incorporated the provisions of Act 153 (2010), the General Assembly declared the intention to move the State toward sustainable models of education governance designed to meet the goals set forth in Section 2 of the Act. It was primarily through the lens of those goals that the Secretary has considered whether the BSU Study Committee's proposal is "in the best interests of the State, the students, and the school districts" pursuant to 16 V.S.A. § 706c.

**EDUCATION IMPLICATIONS:**

When developing the proposal's education vision for unification, the Study Committee concluded that "it is not enough to simply point out the potential opportunities that might attend a unification of existing education governance structures, but [it was necessary] to provide voters with concrete examples of how a unified district might in fact operate, and the opportunity to evaluate specific initiatives ... ." Although the districts have taken a number of steps in recent years to coordinate and deliver more equitable instruction to students throughout the supervisory union, the Committee identified a range of potential educational benefits of merger, including:

1. Increased sharing of educational resources among buildings (*e.g.*, piano keyboards; Naviance career readiness training; and microscopes).
2. Improved communication within and between departments and grade levels (noting the historic lack of alignment of world languages across buildings)
3. The elimination of bureaucratic redundancies and centralization of supports so that administrators are able to focus on their roles as educational leaders.
4. The creation of a unified program of educator recruitment, induction, and mentoring, including paraprofessionals and substitutes.

**FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:**

The BSU already has centralized services and operations for many functions. Nevertheless, the BSU Study Committee identified an additional \$102,000 in potential annual cost reductions related to auditing, board salaries, stenographic services, legal services, supplies, dues, and other areas. In addition, the Study Committee's report anticipates other potential cost reductions resulting from the formation of a unified union through, for example, the negotiation of common vendor contracts for food services and copiers, the coordination of staffing assignments to address changing needs, and increased efficiency in state and federal data collection and reporting. *See also* Act 153, as amended, for cost implications to the State.

*See* pages 7-23 of the Study Committee's report a more detailed discussion of educational and fiscal elements and *see* the Committee's Worksheet for an overview of those elements in the proposal that address the goals identified by Act 46, Section 2.

The Study Committee's proposal is aligned with the goals of the General Assembly as set forth in Act 46 of 2015 and with the policy underlying the union school district formation statutes as articulated in 16 V.S.A. § 701.

**STAFF AVAILABLE:** Donna Russo-Savage, Principal Assistant to the Secretary,  
School Governance  
Brad James, Education Finance Manager