

Testimony  
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April 4, 2017

S. 122 is a quick fix for a few towns, but it fails to address the fundamental flaw of Act 46. It fails to recognize the pluralism and diversity of Vermont and the fact that rural is an asset not a liability.

Act 46 itself makes achieving its worthy goals seem simple: “Do away with your local school boards and quality, equity and efficiency will fall like manna from heaven.” But the peer reviewed research is overwhelming: “States should generally avoid one-size-fits-all approaches to maximizing district size.”<sup>1</sup>

A globalizing economy, the digital revolution and the greying of Vermont have profound implications for our students and our schools. Change is not optional, it is imperative. We need more community engagement with personalized, community based learning. Centralization makes school governance less accessible, when it needs to be more accessible to more stakeholders. Worse, centralization makes achieving savings through closing rural elementary schools increasingly tempting. Those “savings” come with a high price tag. Without those elementary schools there is less reason for people to move to those towns, children are bused longer distances, property values go down and the social and civic heartbeat of a town begins to flatline.

Rural Vermont doesn't need to be like the gold towns of Montana or the mill towns of Maine. But avoiding their fate depends on unleashing, not strait jacketing, our imaginations. Just as our students need flexible pathways to education, our school districts need flexible pathways to innovation and collaboration. Real progress toward those goals requires the collective wisdom and the unique and unrepeatable experience of each community in Vermont. We should amend S. 122 to embrace that wisdom and the flexibility it requires to thrive. Then judge us by honest, demonstrable outcomes, not structures.

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1 <https://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/SchoolDistrictSize.pdf>  
<http://educationnorthwest.org/resource/what-does-research-say-about-school-district-consolidation>