

Public Testimony to the House Education Committee in regards to S122

Linda Treash, Barnard

What an interesting ride it has been these past months since the details of Act 46 became known to me. I live in Barnard, which recently voted no to a merger with the other towns in our SU. I personally worked hard to get that “no” vote as I believed the plan presented to vote would have devastating results for our community and our kids and hardly meet the goals of Act 46. But it was a contentious fight, mainly because the future now for Barnard is so unknown. Many of the people who did vote “yes” did so out of fear, which is a lousy way to make quality decisions about education.

Out of this muddle a strong cadre of Barnard residents pulled to the forefront and began to meet independently, study and learn about the laws and educational mandates in Vermont, and reach out to others in our SU and across the state. This Barnard education posse is an eclectic group of academics, farmers, artists, technicians, business managers and retirees. We all have areas of expertise to bring to the table – some can pour over documents endlessly, some can study the finances, and others, like myself, bring long experience with the school. It’s an exciting time because we have so much potential, so many great ideas. Out of our posse, a new school board got voted in on town meeting day, and we also have a new principal coming to our school this summer, returning to VT after teaching on four other continents. She is excited by our small, hard-working town, and we are excited for her ideas and leadership.

My study group is now an official sub-committee of our school board, and we are looking broadly at all options available to us. We seek to not only meet the goals of Act 46, but exceed them, as we consider ways to strengthen our school by working hard in our town and also by collaborating with others. We are the boots-on-the-ground which make Vermont strong – we consider it our responsibility to protect our students, our town and also find the best solution moving forward within the law. But the law is challenging and ill defined for those of us who find our best options in meeting the goals of Act 46 to be outside of the preferred model. As you evaluate S122, please consider the details of HS15, which liberates and supports those of us with excellent ideas which might not fit a tightly defined model. Please make a place in the law for the ideas of the independent local innovators who have always been the backbone of what makes Vermont strong.

I moved to Vermont intentionally years ago because I wanted to live in a place with quality values. We could have moved anywhere in the country, but we moved here because we wanted a manageable form of community in a state where things still make sense. And when they don't make sense, people pull together and fix things, which I have seen happen so many times in our town – whether in pulling together after Irene, or to save our beloved Barnard General Store or now to save the heart and life-blood of our town - our school.

That’s what we are doing here, all of us, pulling together to fix things.

Please make the changes to allow us to think deeply, broadly and creatively as we work hard to meet the goals of Act 46. Our town is small, but powerful and full of quality Vermont values that attract people to this wonderful state. It matters that we have a voice, it matters that we can make the most of our school, and it matters to all of us here that Vermont remain a place that people move to, and people come back to, and people stay.

~ Linda