

FRANKLIN NORTHEAST SUPERVISORY UNION

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Written Testimony House Education Committee Concerning Act 46

April 7, 2017

Please consider the following bullet points as you consider whether to make changes that will fundamentally alter the principles upon which Act 46 was created. I have broken them up into two sections – state concerns and impact in Franklin Northeast Supervisory Union that we have lost in terms of student opportunities and other factors due to our “no vote” on unifying last June.

State Concerns:

- We have lost over 25,000 students in the last two decades yet we have essentially the same number of school employees. I do not believe this is sustainable.
- Our small school’s grants and phantom student protections prior to Act 46 legislation actually incentivizes schools and school boards for not “right sizing.”
- The Supervisory Union governance structure with its convoluted system of school boards in each town makes it difficult and at times impossible for Superintendents to “right size” schools.
- The state has a fundamental obligation to provide all Vermont students with a high-quality education. Too many small school districts and schools use the mantra of “local control” to justify not providing their students with the breath of opportunities that students need in the highly competitive digital age in which we live.
- Since all tax-payers pay into the funding formula for educating all students – the state has a compelling interest in making sure that all students are provided with an equitable public education to the degree possible.

- We have the highest educational tax burden in the nation despite the fact that our teachers and administrators are paid in the middle of the pack in terms of national pay ranking – this tax burden is a direct cause of our micro-size schools and the high number of adults we employ in public education.
- The field of applicants for quality Superintendents and Principals is diminishing. The places that are more challenging in terms of governance will continue to have greater trouble hiring and retaining school and school system leaders
- Please do not allow the principles behind Act 46 – equity of opportunities for children and a sustainable school system from an economic point of view that is affordable for our taxpayers – be eroded.
- Insist that Supervisory Unions and school districts form into the smallest number of districts practicable and that opportunities for children be at the center of any changes as opposed to adult convenience and a misguided understanding of the concept of “local control”. Make the law flexible where you can but not in a way that diminishes the ability to streamline governance systems and ensure that schools are merging systems to the degree possible to have student learning be the focus.

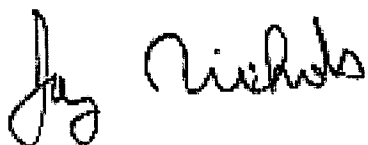
Franklin Northeast Supervisory Union factors

- We have a high percentage of students that move from one town to another. When the students’ families move, the students must change schools. In some cases, students sometimes move from one town to another and *wind up residing physically closer to their previous school than their current school*, but because of municipality boundaries the student must change schools. There is a great deal of research demonstrating that changing schools has a negative effect on student achievement, attendance, behavior, and many other factors associated with students’ success. Had we unified this problem for students moving from one town to another in our schools could be fixed with no extra cost.
- Students at our smaller high school have access to only a couple of Advanced Placement(AP) classes while students in our larger high school have access to many Advanced Placement classes. Had we voted to become one district we would have been able to offer all students more AP classes, without adding any staff. Instead of classes with 4-10 students we would have AP classes with 8-20 students – still easily manageable with one student.

- Had we become one district we projected approximately a million dollars in savings a year, mostly from no longer paying tuition dollars. In our current system, our three “choice” towns are at the mercy of the high school tuition rates set in area high schools.
- Under the current system, one of our smaller towns has parents of means sending their children to high school to a private school in Canada with the residents of that town paying part of the cost. This certainly creates an equity issue for children from the town and sends taxpayer dollars not only out of the state but out of the country.
- Had we unified, we would have been much more able to effectively share staff in a way that would greatly benefit student learning and opportunities. We would have been able to increase offerings in World Languages, music, the arts, and higher level core content at both of our high schools as well as at our elementary schools. With each district going it alone, it is often cost prohibitive to enhance this type of programming.
- We have elementary school students that ride the bus for up to an hour because of our rural nature and the boundaries of our towns in our Supervisory Union construct. Many of these students literally ride by other schools on the way to “their” school.
- Had we unified, taxpayers in each of our towns would have found significant financial relief. We were projecting just under 1 million dollars of funds that would have stayed in our Supervisory Union that are made in tuition payments this is not counting the incentives we would have received from the state
- We cannot share staff across districts in a way that best meets the needs of children because employees for the most part work for their local school district – not the Supervisory Union at large.
- By unifying, we could avoid a great deal of duplication that currently occurs that takes away time from teachers and administrators that could be better spent on instruction and learning.

If you would like to further discuss these issues or have any questions you would like to ask, please do not hesitate to contact me via phone at (802)848-7661 or via email at jnichols@fnesu.net.

Yours in education,



Jay Nichols