

FRANKLIN NORTHWEST SUPERVISORY UNION

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February 21, 2018

Dear Members of the House Ways and Means Committee:

The Franklin Northwest Supervisory Union Board and administrators expresses our deep concern with the rapidity in which the House Ways and Means Committee is promoting the implementation of a new education law that relies primarily on funding education through income tax rather than property tax. We understand and support the legislative interest to reduce property taxes and are open to the idea that taxing income may create a more equitable system. We are not pushing back on the theory. It's the short time frame for research and consideration that troubles us.

If the Ways and Means Committee proposal eventually moves through the legislative process this year, then we say bully to the innovative leaders. All we ask is, simply delay implementation until July 1, 2019.

A number of our school board members and administrators remember the complexities that were addressed in 1997 when the Brigham decision created the new Act 60 school funding law. Act 60 was revised again in 2004, when a number of unanticipated and unintended outcomes eroded some of equity accomplishments and positive benefits that Act 60 brought to bear.

The second reason to delay implementation is Vermont tax payers are just starting to figure out the impact from the federal tax overhaul. In baseball vernacular, it's hard enough to hit one curve ball. This is not the time to hurl two, simultaneously.

Another rationale for not making a major education law change right now is, let the Act 46 merger dust settle and celebrate the fact that school budget increase assumptions are considerably less than predicted in December.

Finally, it is unfair to the deliberative budget development process that school boards completed last month to hurriedly change the assumptions and structure for how education is paid for. Boards need more time to plan and prepare for changes in the education law.

In closing, please slow down and celebrate the efficiency gains that are just beginning to emerge.

Thanks for listening

Nola Gilbert

Nola Gilbert
FNWSU Board Chair

Pc: Governor Phil Scott
Franklin County Legislators
Winton Goodrich, FNWSU Superintendent