

Sonya Spaulding
Act 46 Implementation Delay
Barre City
1/23/19

Good afternoon,

My name is Sonya Spaulding and I serve as the board chair in Barre City and have been on the Barre City Elementary and Middle School board for the last 8 years. Although our district falls under the umbrella of a forced merger under Act 46, our community supports being merged and following the timeline as outlined in Act 46.

While our communities were not successful in voting to voluntarily merge, the voters of the City of Barre have supported the merger in both votes. In addition to the support of the voters of Barre City, it is important to take into consideration the number of voters in Barre Town that also voted in favor of a merger. Over the course of the last 2 votes in both communities, and the re-votes in Barre Town, the majority of voters actually voted in favor of a merger (please see the table below for the results of each vote and re-vote). It is also important to note that in the last re-vote in Barre Town, more people voted to merge than not to merge, but there were not enough votes to overturn the results of the original vote in November. The tide is turning and we need to continue to make progress, not delay and move backward.

I ask that you please consider that while some districts are not happy about the forced mergers, do not assume that every district that is being forced to merge wants to delay this any longer.

Even with the defeated votes and re-votes, our supervisory union has been slowly moving forward with the possibility that we may be forced to merge, knowing that we may have a small window of time to accomplish that merger. Our understanding of the law led us to believe that we would be forced to merge. The State Board of Education's decision in November confirmed that to be true. After that decision, we moved forward with a transitional board, we have a third draft of a consolidated budget and are working toward the consolidation of policies. We have warned a vote for amendments to the articles of agreement and we are preparing warnings for an election of the new board of the unified union school district. With a delay, would this election just be put on hold? Would we be expected to tease apart the consolidated budget, finalize it, approve it and warn it by next week to vote on it in March? Will seats on the board go unfilled, as people realize that they are being asked to serve past the July 1, 2019 start date of the new unified union district? At this time, it will take more time and energy to undo the consolidation work that has already taken place, as well as delay the inevitable outcome of merging our districts. In some instances, I'm not even sure there is enough time to undo it and proceed as individual districts.

Some of the concern with voters in Barre Town was due to the fact that as two separate districts we meet many of the goals that Act 46 set out to accomplish. However, we continue to believe that one merged district would provide greater flexibility to manage, share and transfer resources. In addition, we recognize that both school districts are fiscally responsible, with some of the lowest per pupil spending in the state, but a

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merged district would provide more efficiencies, economies of scale and a greater opportunity for transparency and accountability. Finally, and most importantly, our students deserve the very best education we can provide. We believe that we are providing an outstanding education at a great value, but we also believe that we can do more, and continually strive to improve. As a merged district, we believe we can provide more equitable and richer educational opportunities at the modest cost that our communities have come to expect.

While I recognize that some districts may be struggling to comply with the law as it was written, I ask you to take into consideration that all of us have had the last 4 years to prepare for this. By delaying the implementation of these forced mergers, you are suggesting that some districts need special treatment, while the majority of districts have gone through the process of voluntary merger or are in the process of complying with the constraints of a forced merger.

When making your decision, I hope you will recognize that the public education system in Vermont has been a political lightning rod for at least the past 8 years. There have been many laws passed to improve the quality and scope of education. There have been others passed to address the continued increase in educational spending. For the most part, those laws remain as they were written. They have not always been easy to implement, but they were followed. Please remember the goals of Act 46 and realize that we will all benefit when you allow it to continue as it is written without further delay.

Thank you for your time.

November 2016 vote		
	yes	no
Barre City	2069	694
Barre Town	1611	2108
Total	3680	2802
January 2017 Re-Vote		
Barre Town	482	1159
November 2018 vote		
	yes	no
Barre City	1887	567
Barre Town	1262	2106
Total	3149	2673
January 2019 Re-Vote		
Barre Town	952	534
Grand Total	8263	7168