

METTAWEE SCHOOL DISTRICT
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To: House Education Committee

From: Julie Mach, Representing the Mettawee School District

Re: Amendment to S.164

Date: April 16, 2019

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on S.164.

I am a resident of Pawlet, Vermont and am representing the Mettawee School District which is a merged district under Act 46 (Rupert School District, Pawlet School District and Union District 47 merged to become the Mettawee School District).

The Mettawee School District is in the Bennington Rutland Supervisory Union. There are no public high schools in the Bennington Rutland Supervisory Union.

I am testifying today on behalf of the Mettawee School District Board to ask that you amend S.164 by adding a provision to address dual enrollment inequity for our students attending New York public schools, caused by Act 46.

Prior to Act 46, the towns of Pawlet and Rupert operated a union district elementary school (the Mettawee Community School) for grades preK-6 and designated public schools in Granville and Salem NY, respectively, for grades 7-12. The designation of New York public high schools was allowed by Vermont law under 16 VSA Section 827(e)(1).

The merger study committee from our towns went to the State Board with a merger proposal which included continuing designation to New York State Schools for grades 7-12. The State Board denied this proposal, referencing equity concerns for students wishing to attend Vermont independent schools: see 5:26:30 - 6:15:44 (specifically 6:14):

www.youtube.com/watch?v=niacCNa-658&list=PLCnAH6cl9AsHrf2CW49g_DNRlmtftxg7Y&index=23&t=22555s

The merger study committee then went back to the State Board the next month with a revised merger proposal including school choice for grades 7-12. The State Board approved this proposal, again referencing equity concerns: see 3:12:15 - 3:22:50

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iLCJEOWLtPg&t=os&index=22&list=PLCnAH6cl9AsHrf2CW49g_DNRlmtftxg7Y

The voters of Pawlet and Rupert approved the merger and the Mettawee School District Board has moved forward in its work. We identified and focused on one goal for the first year of operation of the new district: to become one educational community. Although it may sound simple, becoming one educational community is a complex task.

During this first year of operation, the Board became aware that the students in our district who attend public schools in New York (previously our designated schools) are facing an inequity: the Vermont Agency of Education is denying them access to dual enrollment specifically because their schools are no longer designated. Prior to our merger, these students were eligible to apply for dual enrollment vouchers. These students have not changed schools and they continue to be publicly funded. Nothing has changed except the governance of their school district.

56% of the 7-12 students in our district currently attend the public schools in Salem and Granville, New York. The most common avenue for their access to the dual enrollment program is through the Upward Bound Program at Castleton University. Upward Bound is a federally funded program that helps low income/first generation high school students prepare themselves for college.

During the academic year, Upward Bound students receive academic counseling and support, study skills training and other services to help them fine-tune their academic skills and confidence.

During the summer, Upward Bound students participate in a six-week residential program with an academic program consisting of intensive enrichment courses. The Upward Bound staff coordinates Vermont students' applications for dual enrollment so that they can earn college credit for one of the classes they take during the summer. Due to lack of transportation and other access issues, most Upward Bound students are not able to participate in dual enrollment during the school year.

The Upward Bound Program at Castleton University has informed us that the Vermont Agency of Education is denying vouchers to Vermont students who are attending Granville and Salem New York public schools because their schools are no longer the designated schools for our district.

It is not equitable to deny dual enrollment to these students or any of the other publicly funded Vermont students who attend the public schools in Granville and Salem, New York.

Please support the amendment to S.164 offered by Representative Robin Chesnut-Tangerman today. It is a narrow provision which would allow publicly funded Vermont students attending previously designated schools in Granville and Salem, New York continued access to the dual enrollment program.

Thank you.