

Memorandum

To: Members of the Senate Education Committee
Members of the Senate Finance Committee

From: Sue Ceglowski, Executive Director, Vermont School Boards Association
Jeff Francis, Executive Director, Vermont Superintendents Association

Re: Districts without approved budgets as of April 9, 2019

Date: April 9, 2020

Yesterday, we held a meeting with the superintendents serving school districts that have yet to pass a budget for Fiscal Year 2021 which begins on July 1, 2020.

There are eighteen such districts. Nine districts have experienced a budget defeat in the first presentation to voters. Nine districts have yet to vote.

The purpose of the meeting was to affirm with superintendents their concerns, and those of their districts and school boards, related to voting dynamics and future economic conditions in light of the COVID-19 crisis.

Simply stated, local school officials are concerned about when and whether school district budget votes will take place. Of equal, and perhaps greater concern, are the potential implications of a COVID-19 economy that may diminish resources in general, and will likely create greater challenges in seeing school district budgets approved.

In our meeting with the superintendents (twelve out of thirteen superintendents serving the affected districts participated) we discussed draft legislation currently under discussion in the Senate Education Committee and the fact that the concern for, and interest in, the status of these eighteen districts is under discussion or consideration in several legislative committee - both in the House and the Senate.

The superintendents with whom we spoke expressed appreciation for legislative attention to this issue and reiterated their significant concern about the dynamics confronting these eighteen districts.

With respect to [draft 1.1](#) discussed in the Senate Education Committee on Tuesday, April 8, which included a provision for legislatively approved spending authority for

FY2021 at a level of FY2020 spending authority plus an inflator equal to the average statewide increase in education spending for already approved district budgets, most superintendents considered that proposal workable. Two superintendents expressed concerns about the proposal because of significant increases in their district's equalized pupils for FY2021 (more students to educate), with one of these superintendents citing the considerable needs of the new students.

Regarding [draft 2.2](#) which proposes legislatively approved spending authority at FY2020 levels, the superintendents considered that proposal to be problematic because of the cuts in personnel and operating costs that it would necessitate and the instability that would be introduced in an already unstable time. The reductions would necessitate reductions in staff which would be complicated by the timing of contracts and the uncertainty about the ability to conduct budget votes.

Last night, after receiving a briefing on everything indicated above, the VSBA Board unanimously voted to support the approach set out in draft 1.1 with the addition of more time beyond June 30 for presenting district-prepared budgets to voters for approval. The superintendents with whom we spoke support the concept of extending the voting deadline.

In closing, we want to state emphatically that the interest on the part of VSA and VSBA on behalf of the eighteen districts is to stabilize the fiscal condition of these districts and place them on similar footing to those that have already approved budgets. These districts, their school communities and the children that they serve should not be disadvantaged by COVID-19 related voting dynamics and economic consequences beyond those that will impact districts with already approved budgets.

We are advocating for an approach that will provide relative stability for the school communities in an era of unprecedented instability. Our interest is in seeing all Vermont school districts as prepared to move into FY2021 as possible, given the fact that the future for all districts is likely to be extraordinarily challenging.

Thank you for your consideration.

Districts With Defeated Budgets:

Alburgh School District
First Branch Unified School District
Harwood Unified Union School District
Milton Town School District
Slate Valley Unified Union School District
South Burlington School District
Springfield School District
Strafford School District
Windham School District

Districts Yet To Vote:

Caledonia Cooperative School District
Essex-Westford School District
Granville-Hancock Unified District
Oxbow Unified Union School District
Rochester-Stockbridge Unified School District
Waits River Valley Union School District
West River Modified Union Education District
Windham Northeast Union Elementary School District
Windham Southeast School District