

Dear Vermont House Education Committee Members,

I have been a school board member on the Brattleboro Town (Elementary) School District for over 10 years. We have three schools, oversee the regional Head Start/Early Head Start programs, and have 12 private preschool partners. We are in union with four smaller towns school districts, two K-6 and two K-8, each having between 125- 160 students. One of them, Vernon, has secondary school choice.

In a vote that had a higher level of participation than the previous gubernatorial election, all of our towns rejected articles of merger by a margin greater than two to one. Despite this, and a well-developed Alternative Governance Proposal, the State Board has ordered us to merge, without Vernon. The process had been and continues to be very divisive and distracting.

This ongoing divisiveness has meant we are unable to establish an Amendment Committee to propose changes to the Default Articles that could reconcile some of the disagreements, such as representation on the Transition Board and the creation of School Councils.

There is strong concern on all sides, and I don't think the healing can begin if we are not given time to avoid having a very unrepresentative board forced on us. We will be further divided if we have to rush to create a budget with hardly any transparency. Any budget that is not carefully developed and explained fully to voters will likely be rejected, with little time to present another. The timeline mandated by the State Board's final ruling for the Windham Southeast Supervisory Union has created a lot of confusion among the local school boards as they prepare budgets. In fact, the Guilford board was so uncertain that they decided not to warn a budget. If the court orders another stay or injunction, they will have to scramble and hold a special Town Meeting.

A major issue for our SU is the situation regarding Vernon School District. As it currently stands, Vernon is now facing orphan status due to their policy of school choice for secondary grades. They have been a successful partner with the other towns in our Supervisory Union for 60 years. We have a path to including Vernon, but we are also confused, under-informed, and divided on it. Vernon wants to say allied with contiguous neighbors Guilford and Brattleboro and the other towns in our current SU. If we have more time we can work that out.

Keeping Vernon in the fold is especially important for those in Windham - 1, the legislative district consisting of Vernon & Guilford.

If we continue on this high-pressure, highly opaque path, I fully expect we will end up on July 1 with a defeated budget and will have to work under a budget equal to the combined budgets of the four towns from 2018-19. That is what happens when a budget is not approved in time.

As for Vernon, we will not have time to work out a solution that allows them to remain in our union.

This recipe is perfect for even more passion and anger, and probably some layoffs. These will seem like the good old days compared to the rancor this rush will produce. A delay in imposing mergers until after the court has ruled on the legal appeals would be

prudent, and allow us to unravel some of these very complex and important issues facing our schools and communities.

Please support a delay in imposing forced mergers.

Thank you,

David Schoales

Member, Brattleboro Town School Board
Member, Brattleboro Town Select Board

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David Schoales
Brattleboro

“What we see emerging is a notion of democracy that is being steadily stripped of its popular component — democracy without a demos,”

Peter Mair, 2006