

January 24, 2019

Dear Members of the House Education Committee, and my local House and Senate legislators,

My name is Emily Hartz, current Chair of the Guilford Town School Board. I am writing regarding the possible delay of school district mergers as required by Act 46 and recommended by the Vermont Board of Education on November 30, 2018.

I reached out last week, and am writing again because I understand that you are hearing from members of the Brattleboro Town School Board today.

A merger delay would be financially very challenging for Guilford. And, I still believe that a Unified Union District will best serve our students and families and a delay has educational costs in addition to financial hardships.

As a Board Member this is an incredibly challenging time to develop a budget as it is. On Monday we learned that we did receive a Small Schools Grant again this year, for which I am grateful. That money will offset the rising cost of healthcare for our staff. A merger delay at this point further complicates our process, please stay the course.

Several years ago Guilford citizens voted to send our seventh and eighth graders to the Brattleboro Area Middle School. We are at the end of a transition agreement for the tuition for those students. If our merge with our neighboring towns is delayed, we will be assessed the full tuition rate for our middle schoolers - a \$92,000 increase (to our budget of \$3 million). Since we heard that a delay was possible, our board and school administration have already begun to discuss what positions and programs we might reduce (music, counseling, nurse, academic support) and eliminate (afterschool programs). Our only other alternative would be to maintain programming and go over the cap for per pupil spending, thus triggering penalties and an even higher tax rate. I am not confident that our town would support such a budget.

While this is only my second year on the School Board, I understand that Board members, administrators, and many community members have spent significant time and energy on Act 46 in the last five years. Our situation is complex and there are still diverse opinions and strong feelings within our community - Guilford citizens voted against a merger and Guilford School Board voted in favor of a merger. I hear from folks on both "sides" on a regular basis. And, I still personally believe in the premise of the law - to make education more equitable across communities and efficient with taxpayer money - and that a delay is bad for Guilford.

Respectfully submitted,
Emily Hartz
Guilford, Vermont

