

Dear Chair Webb and Members of the House Education Committee:

I am very glad to hear that you will be taking testimony Tuesday on the several bills in front of you today.

While I am very much in favor of what all of these bills are proposing, what I mainly wish to address today is postponing the implementation until July 1, 2020 when hopefully all legal issues will be adjudicated. I am a school board member, but I am speaking personally. There are so many issues revolving around the BOE's order to merge school districts, that I strongly feel we need to take the time to allow the courts to address them. This can not be done without allowing enough time for the process to play out. If districts go ahead with merging, and the court finds for the plaintiffs, unraveling the mergers will not only be time consuming and costly, it most definitely will take the focus away from our children and this will be doing the most harm. Already, the last three years have had their toll on the students, as school board members, administration and community members have been focusing on merging instead of doing all the wonderful things they could have been doing

Extending the deadline would do no harm to anyone. The districts that have merged willingly and have taken the incentives etc. will go about their business as usual.

On another note, I listened to the testimony of Jill Stahl-Tyler last Friday. First of all, I was very surprised that she was testifying, as it was our understanding that you were not taking testimony at this time. I was also surprised that she was testifying as the Chair of the Brattleboro Board, and not as a citizen, as her board had not voted for her to testify for them.

I would also like to note some misrepresentations in her testimony. I feel that I can not let these go unchallenged.

1 - She talks about a "vocal minority" being against merging. In actuality, every one of the four towns in our Supervisory Union voted overwhelmingly 2 to 1 not to merge.

Dummerston actually voted 5 to 1 not to merge. All of the Town Clerks stated that this was a large turnout, especially for a one issue election. This does not sound

like a minority to me.

2- I do not believe she should have been speculating and testifying about what some of the other school districts and principals feel.

3 - She presented a lot of anecdotal evidence such as: "talking with teachers", other town's parents feelings, "I talk with a lot of people" etc.

4 - She talks about the budgeting process saying that towns are not preparing their own budgets for their local Town Meetings, but are waiting for the transition board. I

personally know that Dummerston not only has prepared its budget, but has sent both budget and warning to their Town Clerk for their Town Report. I have read the minutes of our other SU boards and it appears that other school boards are doing the same. All of our SU's boards began working on their budgets in late fall

and they were basically finished by the time that the AOE directed the administration not to prepare a local budget but to start preparing the merged budget. Preparing a

local budget really is the safe thing to do. If a merger ends up being forced, all the budgets can but put together for the merged budget. If towns do not prepare, then it

will take a lot of time and money to call a special Town Meeting to present a budget.

5 - She goes so far as to comment about Dummerston students entering the high school: She says: "are the kids from Dummerston the same level as the kids that come in

from OakGrove? NO". (Oak grove is one of the three Brattleboro elementary schools). What she fails to say is that the students from Dummerston do very well when

they enter high school as freshmen. Brattleboro schools and the Guilford school enter the Brattleboro Middle School (BAMS) after 6th grade, so I will compare

Dummerston's 7&8 grade's SBAC scores with those of BAMS' 7th and 8th grade's scores.

In 2015-2016: Total Proficient and above in Math: Grade 7 - Dummerston 75%

Grade 8 - Dummerston 80%

BAMS - 7th grade 54%

BAMS - 8th grade 49%

Total Proficient and above in Language Arts: Grade 7 - Dummerston 93%

Grade 8 - Dummerston 86%

BAMS - 7th grade 62%

BAMS - 8th Grade 60%

In 2016-2017: Total Proficient and above in math: Grade 7 - Dummerston 63%

Grade 8 - Dummerston 93%

BAMS - 7th Grade 46%

BAMS - 8th Grade 49%

Total Proficient and above in language arts: Grade 7 - Dummerston 66%

Grade 8 - Dummerston 93%

BAMS - 7TH Grade 63%

BAMS - 8th Grade 59%

In 2017-2018: **Different presentation - just found a graph, not actual figures**

Math Grade 7 - Dummerston about 80% proficient

Grade 8 - Dummerston about 72% proficient

BAMS - 7th Grade about 43% proficient

BAMS - 8th Grade About 42% proficient

English Language - Grade 7 - Dummerston about 87% proficient

Grade 8 - Dummerston about 72% proficient

BAMS - 7th Grade about 56% proficient

BAMS - 8th Grade about 66% proficient

I thank you for taking the time to listen. I hope you will back the legislators who are asking for a year's delay in postponing implementation until July 2020, giving the court the time to fully adjudicate all of the issues.

Sincerely,

Jody Normandeau
Dummerston