

My name is Margaret MacLean I am a past VT State Board of Education member, a VT School Principal of the Year and a past employee of the Rural School and Community Trust a national organization supporting rural education in the United States.

Of the 33 districts I have been volunteering to support all have complied with the law, they chose to make an alternative merger application, because they understood it was a legal route to compliance with the law.

They were not swayed by coercive language “if you don’t do this the SBE will do it to you” they read the law. They were not swayed by tax incentives they believed the alternative route to compliance was a legitimate legal route to compliance. They agree with the goals of the law and demonstrated how they met or exceeded them. They felt this was the best decision for their communities and their kids.

The state board chose instead to merge them into the preferred box “wherever possible “ not “wherever necessary”. This is why they are appealing because they do not belong in the preferred box they have legitimate barriers to merger and well crafted plans to better meet the goals of the law.

These communities have been painted as bad actors who are non compliant-this is inaccurate. these are knowledgeable and informed communities who have grappled with these complex issues. These communities take responsibility for their schools and communities they represent the kind of engaged citizens and communities that make VT Education special. Other states would be grateful to have the problem you face - engaged committed community members who care about and support the best education possible for the kids in their communities.

Unlike Nicole Mace VSBA who just testified that communities should not decide when they are ready to implement I have faith in the ability of the school boards in these communities to discuss this and know what’s best for them in this current situation and vote on that.

Why not ask each school board to vote?

Do you want to merge by July 1 because you are ready to do so or do you want to merge by July 1st 2020 because you would benefit from more time to prepare for merger.

Instead you are continuing to fit them into boxes that may not be appropriate for them.

We asked for a simple delay H 39 v7.1 it has simple language it does not preclude anyone from merging sooner if they are ready to.

This amendment adds more complexity and distress and doesn’t solve the problem. It potentially exacerbates it.

Since 2014 I have been appealing for the state to partner with communities not micromanage them and tell them what is best for them. Perhaps this is an opportunity for you to begin that journey.

If Act 46 is going to be a success story it will only be a success story through partnership with communities. It will never be a success if it's foundation is coercion, micromanagement and force against the wishes of the electorate.

Let's work together so all communities can meet the goals of the law and fulfill the promise of Act 46.