

I hope this correspondence can be shared with the whole education committee.

As a long time member of the Westminster School Board, I urge you to allow districts to pursue the goals of Act 46 in a format that actually will work, as opposed to a forced merger that adds nothing in terms of opportunity, efficiency, or transparency (and in fact would work counter to each of these goals).

To briefly articulate the reasons our voters and board members oppose the forced merger:

- * There were provisions in Act 46 for AGS (and this is a reason many legislators voted for it)
 - * Mergers don't make sense for some districts on any logical, "effectiveness" grounds, except to merely follow the law/edict even if it is more costly and less transparent while doing nothing to increase opportunities or equity. Athens-Grafton and Westminster have no realistic way of sharing resources being so far apart.
 - * It is not legal/constitutional/reasonable to foist debt on citizens who didn't vote for it (Athens-Grafton would have to assume debt for our Westminster gym)
 - * It isn't legal for the state to force municipalities to sell their assets (a school building) for \$1
 - * Mixing districts with highly different tax rates will cause big problems. Either one district (Ath-Graf) has a 25% increase to meet ours, or they push to lower ours by 25% to match theirs (at a huge cost to ed programming at our school)
 - * The forced merger rules were created without any of the public review rule making process required by law
 - * Voters in our towns voted strongly against the merger (and the law asked for voter approval)
 - * There may be no community members in our towns who will serve on the forced merger board.
 - * There are good reasons why the "hold out" districts didn't merge despite the incentives to and the threats from the state. It wasn't out of protecting our school board positions or to be confrontational to the state law but because we were committed to the goals of act 46 and feel the best (and only) way to achieve this in our SU was through the AGS proposal we had for an improved SU structure with more collaboration and attention to equity. The forced merger of Westminster and Ath-Graf and another of Rockingham-BFUHS is actually much less efficient and equitable and opportunity promoting than our AGS. But we can't be merged all together since our districts have 7-8 choice and they don't. It's a perfect example of why forcing mergers everywhere is not at all effective for the goals of act 46 except if the goal is to show the state can impose ineffective structures on our districts.
 - * Finally, the argument about unfairness seems groundless if you actually think merging has benefits. If merging is a good thing and saves money and increases opportunities, you'd think any place that merged would have done so gladly and is enjoying all these benefits and wouldn't care what other, presumably ill informed districts decide to do to not enjoy these benefits. Why would they find it unfair that other districts weren't getting such benefits?
- If on the other hand, all the districts already merged felt forced to do so against their will and it is providing little or no benefits, I can see why it seems unfair if other districts don't have to suffer the same ills. But if this is the case, why was/is the state pushing this merger idea that is so despicable districts feel slighted if others don't have to suffer similarly?

Thanks for your consideration of the unique conditions in different parts of the state and your interest in actually achieving the goals of act 46 to develop a variety of structures to make a difference for our kids and communities.

Sincerely,
Rick Gordon, PhD.
Westminster School Board Director