

TO THE HONORABLE SENATE

The Committee on Education to which was referred House Bill No. H. 39, entitled "An act relating to the extension of the deadline of school district mergers required by the State Board of Education"

respectfully reports that it has considered the same and recommends that the Senate propose to the House to amend the bill by striking out all after the enacting clause and inserting in lieu thereof the following:

Sec. 1. SCHOOL DISTRICT MERGERS; STATE BOARD OF
EDUCATION ORDER

(a) Statement of intent.

(1) 2017 Acts and Resolves No. 49 made "useful changes to the merger time lines" contained in 2015 Acts and Resolves No. 46 "without weakening or eliminating the Act's fundamental phased merger and incentive structures and requirements." Act 49 reemphasized this point by noting that "[n]othing in this act should be interpreted to suggest that it is acceptable for a school district to fail to take reasonable and robust action to seek to meet the goals of Act 46."

(2) Similarly, nothing in this act, which permits a final extension of the deadline for mergers required by the State Board of Education, should be interpreted to weaken or undermine in any way the State Board's final merger order of November 28, 2018 or to encourage delay for school districts that want to merge on July 1, 2019. Except as modified by this act, school districts remain under all obligations under Acts 46 and 49, whether or not they choose to delay the operational date of their merger.

(b) Definitions. As used in this section:

(1) "Default Articles" means the Default Articles of Agreement issued with the State Board Report.

(2) "Existing district" means a union school district created by vote of the electorate on or after July 1, 2014 into which a merging district is ordered by the State Board Order to merge.

(3) "Forming district" means a school district that is ordered by the State Board Order to merge with other forming districts to create a newly formed district.

(4) "Initial members" mean the initial members of the board of a newly formed district elected under Article 10 of the default articles.

(5) "Merging district" means a school district that is ordered by the State Board Order to merge into an existing district.

(6) "Newly formed district" means a union school district that is formed

by the State Board Order by merging forming districts.

(7) “State Board Order” means the section of the State Board Report entitled “State Board of Education’s ‘order merging and realigning districts and supervisory unions where necessary pursuant to Act 46, Sec. 10(b).’”

(8) “State Board Report” means the “Final Report of the Decisions and Order on Statewide School District Merger Decisions Pursuant to Act 46, Sections 8(b) and 10” issued by the State Board of Education dated November 28, 2018.

(c) Notwithstanding any provision of law to the contrary:

(1) Merger deadline extension.

(A) Except as provided in subdivisions (1)(B) and (C) of this subsection, the operational deadline for school district mergers under the State Board Order shall be on July 1, 2019 or July 1, 2020.

(i) For the mergers of forming districts into a newly formed district, the school board of the newly formed district, operating in accordance with the default articles, shall, on or before June 30, 2019, determine, by majority vote of the initial members representing a quorum, the operational date of merger.

(ii) For the merger of a merging district into an existing district, the school board of the existing district shall, on or before June 30, 2019, determine, by majority vote of members representing a quorum, the operational date of merger.

(B) The operational deadline for school district mergers under the State Board Order shall be on July 1, 2019 if the relevant board does not, on or before June 30, 2019, determine the operational date of the merger under subdivision (1)(A) of this subsection.

(C) The deadline for mergers that, in the State Board Order, are conditioned upon approval of voters of the existing district shall be as specified in the State Board Order.

(2) Default Articles. The Default Articles for each newly formed district that has an operational deadline of July 1, 2020 are amended as follows:

(A) by striking out the date “June 30, 2019” wherever it appears and inserting in lieu thereof the date “June 30, 2020”;

(B) by striking out the date “July 1, 2019” wherever it appears and inserting in lieu thereof the date “July 1, 2020”; provided, however, the date “July 1, 2019” shall not be changed in Article 9;

(C) by striking out the date “December 31, 2019” wherever it

appears and inserting in lieu thereof the date “December 31, 2020”;

(D) by striking out the date “July 1, 2020” wherever it appears and inserting in lieu thereof the date “July 1, 2021”;

(E) by striking out the academic year “2019–2020” wherever it appears and inserting in lieu thereof the academic year “2020–2021”;

(F) by striking out the academic year “2020–2021” wherever it appears and inserting in lieu thereof the academic year “2021–2022”;

(G) by striking out the academic year “2021–2022” wherever it appears and inserting in lieu thereof the academic year “2022–2023”; and

(H) by striking out the fiscal year “2020” wherever it appears and inserting in lieu thereof the fiscal year “2021”.

(3) Small schools grant.

(A) If a forming district or merging district that merges under the State Board Order has an operational merger date of July 1, 2019, and that district was an “eligible school district” as defined in 16 V.S.A. § 4015, as in effect on June 30, 2019, that received a small schools support grant under that section in the fiscal year two years prior to the first fiscal year of merger, then the newly formed district or existing district, as applicable, shall receive an annual small schools support grant in an amount equal to the small schools support grant received by the forming district or merging district, as applicable, in the fiscal year two years prior to the first fiscal year of merger. If more than one forming district or merging district was an eligible school district and merged into the same newly formed district or existing district, as applicable, then the small schools support grant for the newly formed district or existing district, as applicable, shall be in an amount equal to the total combined small schools support grants the forming districts or the merging districts, as applicable, received in the fiscal year two years prior to the first fiscal year of merger.

(B) Payment of the grant under subdivision (3)(A) of this subsection shall continue annually unless explicitly repealed by the General Assembly; provided, however, that the Secretary shall discontinue payment of the grant in the fiscal year following closure by the school district of a school that qualified the district for the grant; and further provided that if a school building that housed a school that qualified the district for the grant is closed in order to consolidate with another school into a renovated or new school building, then the Secretary shall continue to pay the grant during the repayment term of any bonded indebtedness incurred in connection with the consolidation-related renovation or construction.

(4) Union school district budget.

(A) If the first budget of a newly formed district has not been approved by voters on or before June 30 for the 2020 or 2021 fiscal year, the Agency of Education shall authorize an amount of education spending for that newly formed district equal to:

(i) the cumulative education spending amount authorized by the most recently voter approved school budgets of the forming districts; multiplied by

(ii) the percentage that represents the average statewide increase from the prior fiscal year to the current fiscal year in school district education spending authorized by voter approved school district budgets, based on data received by the Agency of Education on or before June 14 of the prior fiscal year. As used in this subdivision (ii), for mergers under the State Board Order that are operational on July 1, 2019, the prior fiscal year shall be fiscal year 2019 and the current fiscal year shall be fiscal year 2020, and for mergers under the State Board Order that are operational on July 1, 2020, the prior fiscal year shall be fiscal year 2020 and the current fiscal year shall be fiscal year 2021.

(B) The amount authorized by the Agency of Education under subdivision (4)(A) of this subsection shall be the “education spending” of the newly formed district for the relevant fiscal year under 16 V.S.A. chapter 133.

(C) The school board of the newly formed district, operating in accordance with the default articles, shall determine how funds shall be expended in the relevant fiscal year under this subdivision (4). In addition, the school board of the newly formed district shall have the authority to expend any other funds received from other sources in the relevant fiscal year under this subdivision (4), including endowments, parental fundraising, federal funds, nongovernmental grants, or other State funds such as special education funds paid under 16 V.S.A. chapter 101.

Sec. 2. 16 V.S.A. § 4015 is amended to read:

§ 4015. SMALL SCHOOL SUPPORT

(a) In this section:

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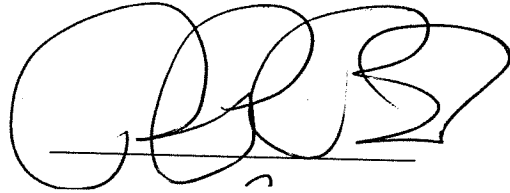
(2) “Enrollment” means the number of students who are enrolled in a school operated by the district on October 1. A student shall be counted as one whether the student is enrolled as a full-time or part-time student. Students enrolled in prekindergarten programs shall not be counted.

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Sec. 3. EFFECTIVE DATES

This act shall take effect on passage, except that Sec. 2 (small school support) shall take effect on July 1, 2019.

(Committee vote: 5-1-0)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. Baruth', written over a horizontal line.

Senator Baruth
FOR THE COMMITTEE