

From Vermont Edition, VPR Sept 26, 2016 minute 38

Heather in Elmore:

...We've witnessed firsthand during the past 4 months what Act 46 has done to small towns and it isn't pretty. Heather would like to know should Act 46 be mandatory, what about making it voluntary

PS

Well I disagree with that. Act 46 is voluntary, any community that doesn't want to change its school district doesn't have to.

BK

Well the board of ed has the authority that if a small district hasn't merged with another district by 2019 then the state of education board could actually mandate that they merge with another district.

PS

Well that is very unlikely to happen against a town's will. I think the legislation encourages towns through tax incentives to find a more sensible delivery system, and you can't tell me... that structural change in our education system, just like in healthcare, couldn't bring about better outcomes for less money.

And I think Act 46 is a great example of how things should happen. It's directed from Montpelier, in other words, no question, Montpelier is saying "we want you to have these conversations about how you can build a more efficient school system that will cost less money and most importantly give students additional opportunities to students to improve quality. But it doesn't say 'you must'. And in the legislation if you end up on that date with a community who hasn't merged you have the opportunity to go to the board and say, "this is what we want to do" and the board can say "Ok, great, Keep it up"

I don't think you are going to see, ever, in Vermont, a Board saying to communities "you shall do this". They will encourage them they will cajole them to think about other options. But I think Act 46 is optional.

Nan East wallingford minute 42

...Schools can be forced with whatever the districts the legislators decide on... While it is voluntary to begin with, it's not voluntary. I At least of two different districts that I know of have merged out of fear of what would happen if they didn't do it. So to say that it is voluntary is not true

Well I disagree... What the law says is that the State Board has the authority... in an extreme case, tell a community what they would do. My point is I think that is very unlikely outcome. The State Board is appointed by the governor and I don't you will see any State Board of Ed going against the will of a community unless it is in extremely, er, unusual circumstance. It's really not the intent of the law, the intent of the law is to have conversations about a better outcome. We have more bureaucracy in our school system than we should for a small state and I think the conversations are going well...