

House Education Committee Chair Kate Webb and Committee Members:

When The Legislature passed Act 46, they specifically stated five goals:

"Act 46 (2015) was designed to encourage and support LOCAL (My Caps) decisions and actions that:

- Provide substantial equity in the quality and variety of educational opportunities statewide;
- Lead students to achieve or exceed the State's Education Quality Standards, adopted as rules by the State Board of Education at the direction of the General Assembly;
- Maximize operational efficiencies through increased flexibility to manage, share, and transfer resources, with a goal of increasing the district-level ratio of students to full-time equivalent staff;
- Promote transparency and accountability; and
- Are delivered at a cost that parents, voters, and taxpayers value."

These are all terrific goals and we all should follow them.. However, when the Alternative Governance Committee (allowed in the ACT) from Windham Southeast Supervisory Union, went before the BOE, none of these goals was addressed by the BOE. It was very apparent that all the BOE wanted was just to consolidate schools throughout the state. Since that time, there is a whole new Board and a new Chairman who seem to want even larger mergers..

One of the things that has bothered me since the passage of Act 46 and particularly the implementation of the Act by the State Board of Education is the apparent lack of future assessment, tracking and evaluation of the process.

There is no system that I know of that allows Vermonters to get information that measures and judges the effects of Act 46. The Legislature needs to push for results based accountability for any agency of the State. Especially in education. The State needs to set up an accountability and evaluation plan that can measure the results of Act 46 at local and state levels and provide a clear analysis of costs and trends, especially after any of the incentives have gone away. Without having any accountability processes, how will we ever know if this forced consolidation has been better for our children, education or our pocketbooks or just for administrators and the SBE? Also with an accountability program set up, the State can easily know if a school needs help and provide it.

Another large issue for me is the assault on Vermont Democracy, something I never thought would happen in Vermont. Every town in our district voted overwhelmingly against merger, in a

large turnout vote. The State Board, except for two members absolutely ignored that, calling it just "Community Sentiment". Act 46 calls for a vote of towns. What right does the BOE have to ignore a "NO" vote but accept only a "YES" vote. What right do members of the BOE have as unelected board members to override legal voters?

Our district board has been struggling since being forced merged. There are nine board members representing Putney, Dummerston, Guilford and Brattleboro. Vernon is a non voting member as well as the high school and several special schools. The high school, particularly this year, has been taking most of the board's time and energy with issues particularly around the high school. The board is working very hard and are trying their best, but it is way too much to handle and give attention to all of our children. We are also searching for a new Superintendent, who will be our third in three years. In the past Superintendents have been with us for years. Our district had worked very well over the years as a Supervisory Union with individual boards for each member town.

Because many small towns with small community schools have or are trying to go back to local control and out of their merger, I know that the BOE will be asking your committee, the Senate Education Committee and the legislature to change the education law that allows a process for towns to get "a divorce" from a forced merger, I am writing to you to please think long and hard before making any changes. Please think about small community schools that are threatened with closure; kids on long and sometimes dangerous bus rides over Vermont hills; kids who are taken out of a family like community school; kids who are in smaller classes that enable a lot of hands on from their teachers, enabling better educational results and so many more benefits for a happy child who really wants to learn. There are so many of those small schools who better prepare their elementary students to go on to a high school. I know that our children were. I have had two children and two grandchildren go through our wonderful small school and hope that many more generations can do the same.

I hope you will listen and I thank you if you do

Sincerely,

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