

Eight Reasons to Oppose H.727, the Small School Closure Bill

1. Towns seeking to protect their school are withdrawing from school districts because residents feel their students are better off in their elementary school, not because towns want “local control”. Parents know better what is best for their children than the State.
2. High risk students can do better in a family and community-based learning environment. The powerful forces that want to close schools that benefit disadvantaged students are on the wrong side of Vermont’s push for student equity.
3. The only financial analysis conducted concerning the rural schools targeted by H.727 shows that withdrawing is basically a wash, neither increasing nor decreasing education expenses to any appreciable degree. Those that claim a negative financial impact on the Education Fund have produced no supporting evidence.
4. If the Legislature wants to promote cost savings in Vermont education, it should ask school districts to follow the recommendations of the Legislature’s Picus Oden report, and reduce extravagant central office administration and management expenses.
5. Those that claim that schools should be prevented from withdrawing in order to follow the policies of Act 46 are wrong. The Legislature declared in Act 46 that district consolidation must not be used as an excuse for closing small schools.
6. The H.727 withdrawal section as drafted will make it virtually impossible for a town to withdraw from a unified union school district, even if the voters of the town have good reason to do so. The withdrawal section as drafted gives the State veto power over a withdrawal, and the State has made clear it has no intention of ever allowing a town to withdraw.
7. The State Board of Education, in violation of the law, manufactured a crisis for students in small schools, and then asked the Legislature to fix the problem it created. The Board has refused to assign small school districts to a supervisory district for purposes of supervisory services such as special education, in violation of 16 V.S.A. section 261(a), and has designated small school districts as their own supervisory district, in violation of 16 V.S.A. section 261(c).
8. H.727 as drafted seeks to overturn withdrawal elections which have been or will be conducted properly under the laws in effect at the time of the elections. In so doing, the bill represents an extreme violation of voter rights. At a time of reprehensible voter suppression in some states, and an attempt to overturn an election nationally, it would be ironic in the extreme if Vermont, with its long reputation for a strong, vibrant democracy, should succumb to such dark political impulses.

Herb Olson, Starksboro Save Our Schools herb.liz@gmavt.net 401-829-1679