

November 2, 2022

As former members of the South Burlington School Board, we are writing to encourage and support the expansion of elected Board membership from five to seven members. We are aware that the City Council is also considering this organizational change and believe that expanding representation on the School Board and Council reflects the growth in our city and the increasingly complex needs that demand time and attention, diverse expertise, community input, and taxpayer support.

The chart below documents the Districts and Supervisory Unions (SUs) that make up Chittenden County public schools. The average number of Board members across these seven organizations is just over 9 people. Even if you exclude the SUs from the calculation the average board members is about 7 members. The large SU's are comprised of several towns, which elect school board representatives for their respective populations. These are larger Boards which represent unique geographic interests. Though South Burlington is not as geographically diverse, the increasing enrollment and required taxpayer-approved budget support a broader base of representation, as evidenced below with over eight board members as a comparative target

DISTRICT/SU	ENROLLMENT	2022-23 BUDGET (3)	# BOARD MEMBERS (4)	NO. FACILITIES
Burlington	3260 (1)	\$98 MN	12	9
Essex Westford (SU)	4143 (2)	86 MN	10	9
Chittenden East (SU)	2600	52 MN	15	8
Chittenden South (SU)	3877	89 MN	12	5-6
Colchester	2100	48 MN	5	5
Winooski	800	21 MN	5	2
South Burlington	2600	58 MN	5	5

<b>Chittenden Cty. Avg.</b>	<b>2,768</b>	<b>\$64.6 MN</b>	<b>9.1</b>	
<b>Avg without SUs</b>	<b>2,190</b>	<b>\$56.3 MN</b>	<b>6.8</b>	

- (1) May need to be adjusted for some of 256 Tech Ctr. Students
- (2) Adjusted for 357 Tech Ctr. Students
- (3) Annual Operating Budget (excludes Bonds...)
- (4) Excludes student members

Then, there is the work of the Board. We want to encourage people to volunteer for Board service and recognize that the minimum number of warned meetings alone can be 30-40/year. In the period between the last election in March of this year and the prior year, there were 40 warned meetings. The full Board was not available for 35% of those meetings, with only 3-4 members present. This has the potential to limit the work the Board can accomplish and result in tied votes on motions, which would fail as a result and stall board efforts. This is exacerbated when Board members may have to recuse themselves from voting due to conflicts of interest, as may be the case with the current Board regarding

collective bargaining contracts. Expanding the number of Board seats would enhance some critical mass of Board attendance, discussion of issues, and ultimately, action. Adding staggered terms for the newly added members would encourage effective onboarding of new Board members and continuity of decision-making capacity related to matters before the Board at the time of election..

Boards around the state often work through sub-committees, which reflect their unique interests and may align with their professional and life experience. This structure allows “deeper dives” in such areas as a) Community Engagement, b) Finance, Facilities, and Operations, c) Policy and Governance, d) Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and e) Personnel and Curriculum, , without violating the open meeting law. These sub-committees would have responsibility to report to the full Board with information and/or recommendations for Board action. Of course, other sub-committees are formed on more of a short-term basis, at the discretion of the Board and with Administrative support. An expanded Board would allow full participation in this sub-committee work without unduly taxing the same elected representatives repeatedly. This would, hopefully, encourage broader community participation in running for election and re-election to the Board.

The challenges facing school boards across the state are many. By way of example, the funding formula for public education based on weighted pupils has changed and will directly impact the resources available to the South Burlington school district; special education grant funding has changed; three of our facilities are overcrowded resulting in short-term fixes costing millions of dollars; learning losses and social-emotional needs associated with COVID affect many of our students; staff are stretched thin on a daily basis; healthcare costs are expected to increase by almost 13%; and one-time ESSER funds are expiring.

This is an opportunity to shore up community oversight and representation over one of South Burlington’s vital assets, it’s public school system. The reputation of the school district is what has attracted many of our burgeoning population to South Burlington, and it is what keeps families here long after their children have grown.

We urge you to recommend an increase of the School Board to seven members.

Thank you.

Julie Beatty

Rich Cassidy

Diane Bugbee

Elizabeth Fitzgerald

Bridget Burkhardt

Patrick Leduc