

Hi I'm Dave Sharpe, First a few words about my background. I've participated in building over 20 homes, owned and operated an auto repair business for 20 years, taught for 20 years at the Essex Technical Center in the auto technology, building trades, and natural resources departments, and served in the Vermont legislature for 16 years, the last four as chair of the Education Committee. My wife, Pat and I have raised two boys and now have three grandchildren.

One could say that the education funding system has worked. Last year budgets went down and school boards responded by cutting costs. However, most people in education know that more needs to be done.

When I think about change I think about what we are trying to fix or improve. When it comes to public education, I think about improving program opportunities for students in a funding system and demographic situation that is challenging. The number of Vermont PreK-12 students in Vermont has decreased substantially in the last couple of decades and although the student population has stabilized somewhat it has been increasingly difficult to maintain educational programs needed to prepare our student for further education and/or employment after high school.

While we graduate roughly 98% of our students which is more students than nearly every other state; only 50% go on to college. What about the other 50%?

We know that our unemployment level is low and employers are having a difficult time finding trained and qualified individuals to employ. Businesses and schools may be able to find qualified employees outside of Vermont however the lack of housing makes it very difficult to import those individuals or families to Vermont.

Together these facts lead us to realize that at least in the short term we need to grow our own qualified employees. How do we do that? One way is to improve access to career and technical education and training.

There are at least two significant barriers to greater student numbers in our career and technical centers. First, sending schools must budget the cost of tuition in their annual budget on a per pupil basis to pay for student attendance at a CT Center. In Addison County that number is roughly \$34,000. This is significantly more than the average cost of student per pupil costs in Vermont, because most technical programs require additional costs in equipment and other instructional requirements. And secondly, because it is very difficult to attain any economies of scale when so few students are attending CT classes. This cost is challenging for our academic high schools to budget for and leads to a competition for students for budgeting reasons. That situation is not good for our students or our schools.

The other significant barrier is geography. When a student has to leave their friends and travel a half hour each way to a technical center the disincentive is high.

One solution is to have comprehensive regional high schools. Each with a technical center included. There should be no barrier to taking AP Calculus in the morning and electrician training in the afternoon. Students actually need this because in many trades employees need advanced math, writing, and computer skills to be successful and advance in their profession.

I'd like you to consider what might be the best plan for pre-K thru 12 educational experiences for children in Addison County. I am aware that Addison County is not the same as Chittenden County or Rutland or Bennington or Brattleboro and I don't know nearly as much as I thought I knew a few years ago. My thinking has evolved as I imagine yours has on what are the best improvements are for our educational system.

During the process House Education Committee created Act 46 we heard a lot of testimony that the demographic problem was really at the high school level and that there were clearly several high schools that should be closed. So we put protection in the bill to forestall the closure of community elementary schools. Nevertheless, the first thing that all three districts in Addison County did was to propose closing of community elementary schools. The result: Addison Town Elementary school remains closed, Lincoln left the MAUSD district and formed their own district, and Ripton left the Middlebury district only to be forced back in by the State Board of Education. In hindsight, one aspect of what Act 46 created was a tension between primary and secondary education. Each Unified District in Addison County could only solve their financial challenges within their own district and, in order to maintain sufficient programming at the high school level, had to close one or more elementary schools.

Addison County currently has five school districts. One of the districts, The Hannaford Career Center District is a county wide district. That district could be changed by the legislature to encompass the education of all students in grades 9-12 in Addison County. County residents would vote on the budget and the Hannaford School District would be responsible for the education of all students in grades 9-12 in Addison County. Just this should erase the financing concern and help direct more students to participate in career and technical classes. This might eventually lead to consolidation of one or more of the current high schools in the county. An incentive could be added that construction support from the state would be limited to comprehensive high schools which have merged with at least one other academic high school and have a technical center seamlessly integrated in the school.

The remaining grades Pre-K through 8 could remain in their existing districts. I believe that the current biggest challenge in Vermont public education is providing equitable opportunities for our children at the high school level and that further consolidation of elementary schools is best left to the existing districts.

Eventually, I would love to see one comprehensive high school for our county which would seamlessly encompass career and technical education. The ability to offer a broad scope of opportunities for the children of Addison County at a cost the taxpayers would support would be a resounding success. Such things do not happen overnight and, I believe, the structure I put before you would lead in that direction. The vision we are striving for is creating the best education system for our students. I could also for see perhaps two middle schools encompassing grades 6-8 and keeping to the extent possible the community based elementary schools.

In the end perhaps the best next step is for a summer study committee to consider what might be the best way forward. If this proposal for a Career/Technical Center School District in Addison County is applicable for each technical center region then that might be a path forward for school district configuration. If not, then perhaps something different for other regions.

Thank you for taking time to listen and I am happy to answer any questions