



Vermont Superintendents Association

Testimony to the Senate and House Education Committees - January 22, 2026

Regarding Redistricting Maps and Act 73 Implementation

Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Amy Minor, President of VSA and Superintendent of the Colchester School District.

We are here on behalf of the Vermont Superintendents Association (VSA). Our testimony today reaffirms the positions VSA has consistently articulated throughout this legislative session and in prior testimony before this Committee.

I am Patrick Reen, Trustee of VSA and Superintendent of the Mount Abraham Unified School District.

I am Brooke Olsen-Farrell, President-Elect of VSA and Superintendent of the Slate Valley Unified Union School District.

Patrick and I both lead districts that transitioned from supervisory unions to unified school districts under Act 46. We can speak directly to the governance, operational, and instructional benefits of district-based systems, which inform VSA's position on redistricting under Act 73. Each of our districts has had different experiences with consolidation.

In 2019, the former Addison Rutland Supervisory Union merged to form the Slate Valley Unified Union School District, serving approximately 1,300 students across four elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. The district's consolidation occurred in two phases: first as a Modified Unified Union School District, and the following year when the remaining district, Orwell, was merged into Slate Valley through State Board action.

From the outset, unification created both the opportunity and responsibility to operate more efficiently and sustainably. District operations were centralized wherever possible, reducing redundancy and strengthening governance coherence. Since unification, Slate Valley has reduced more than 45 positions over time, largely through attrition, while maintaining services. Today, Slate Valley is among the lowest-spending districts in the state and serves one of the highest-poverty student populations in Vermont.

In July 2022, the district took further consolidation steps. The Castleton middle school was closed and sold back to the Town of Castleton, elementary schools were reorganized as PK–6, and, using the majority of ESSER funds, the existing high school in Fair Haven was reconfigured to serve all students in grades 7–12. These decisions were difficult but deliberate, community-engaged, and focused on long-term sustainability.

Importantly, these structural changes have supported improved student outcomes. Despite low spending and high need, Slate Valley has steadily increased academic performance over time and is now among the higher-performing districts in the region, with student outcomes at or above state averages.

The Slate Valley experience demonstrates that district-based systems function fundamentally differently from supervisory unions. Unification enables coherent governance, operational efficiency, and instructional alignment in ways that fragmented structures cannot, lessons that are directly relevant as the Legislature considers system design and redistricting under Act 73.

In July of 2018, what were six school districts in the Addison Northeast Supervisory Union became one, the Mount Abraham Unified School District, serving approximately 1,400 students. Unification significantly increased equity for students across our five elementary schools and one middle-high school. Prior to unification, middle school teachers could often identify which town a student came from based on what that student knew and could do. That is no longer the case. Today, our students arrive with far more consistent preparation, regardless of their home community, reflecting greater coherence in curriculum, expectations, and programming.

Becoming a unified district has also allowed us to respond more effectively and efficiently to changing student needs. We can now reassign staff across schools as needs shift from year to year—or even within a single year—something that was extremely difficult under the supervisory union model. This flexibility has made us both more responsive to students and more responsible stewards of public resources. This also improves job security for staff. As an SU if we needed less staffing in one school (which was its own district), and more staffing in another school (which was a separate

district) we would need to issue a reduction in force in one school and require the least senior staff member to apply for the job in the other. If they were successful in being selected for the job in the other school their seniority date would reset because they were now working for a different employer. This process took time and was unsettling for the person who received the reduction in force notice. Today, making the same shift can happen the next day and there is no question about the employee's job security or seniority.

Since unifying in July of 2018, we have reduced more than 40 positions almost entirely through attrition, while continuing to perform around the statewide average on student performance measures. Largely due to unification we are currently engaged in the critical work of examining operational efficiencies and rethinking educational delivery models that can improve learning for students, strengthen the teaching experience for educators, and enhance affordability for taxpayers. This involves looking at using fewer buildings and reorganizing the grades served in the buildings we will use. That said, in MAUSD towns hold the authority to close schools. Whether or not any of our towns will be willing to do so is quite unclear.

Engaging in this work would be far more difficult—if not impossible—under our former structure. As a supervisory union made up of single-town districts operating small elementary schools, our opportunities to find efficiencies were extremely limited. Unification has given us the flexibility, and coherence necessary to better serve students and communities, both educationally and financially.

VSA wants to be very clear: we reaffirm what we have previously testified since last January 2025. Our position is still the same. Change must happen in Vermont's education system. Maintaining the status quo is not an option if the state is serious about improving quality, equity, and affordability.

We agree that scale matters, and we support the Legislature's intent to pursue structural change. However, how scale is achieved matters, and change must be intentional, research-based, and supported by state policy.

As an association, we cannot and will not produce our own redistricting maps. That is not our role, nor would it be appropriate for a professional association representing superintendents across diverse regions of the state.

Superintendents serve as executive leaders, charged with implementing policy and advising local school boards. School boards are the governing bodies with statutory authority over district structure, governance, and long-term direction. In many cases, a superintendent's professional assessment of what may be operationally efficient or

educationally sound may differ from the policy direction or preferences of a locally-elected board.

For VSA to produce maps would place superintendents in the position of advocating for specific governance outcomes on behalf of communities and boards we do not govern, potentially undermining local decision-making, board authority, and trust at the community level.

Instead, VSA's appropriate role is to articulate research-based principles and operational criteria that support student opportunity, fiscal responsibility, and system coherence. We can then support redistricting maps, developed through the appropriate state and local processes, that align with those principles.

This approach allows superintendents to continue fulfilling their professional responsibilities, preserves the integrity of local governance, and ensures that redistricting decisions remain grounded in both evidence and democratic accountability.

We understand, however, that the current emphasis is on maps, so, in that regard, VSA supports redistricting that reflects clear, research-based guidelines. Our responsibility is to articulate those principles so that state policymakers can evaluate whether proposed configurations are likely to achieve the goals of Act 73.

The maps presented by Secretary Saunders were developed as models intended to conform to Act 73's parameters, including the 4,000–8,000 student enrollment target. VSA has consistently testified that this target is not grounded in research and risks creating districts that are too large to deliver the intended efficiencies or maintain educational quality, especially when considering the Vermont context.

As Patrick Reen stated in [VSA testimony](#) on January 13, 2026, very large districts often introduce new administrative complexity and higher costs, while diminishing responsiveness to student and community needs. The 4,000–8,000 target has also contributed to mistrust, because it lacks a clear research foundation and Vermont-specific rationale.

VSA reiterates the following research-based principles that we have shared previously:

- Efficiency gains occur when small districts consolidate into moderate-sized districts (e.g., Andrews, Duncombe, & Yinger, 2002; Duncombe & Yinger, 2007, 2010).

- Very large districts often lose efficiency due to administrative and bureaucratic complexity (see references above).
- True benefits come from unified governance, program alignment, and staffing flexibility, not from maps alone (Nitta, Holley, & Wrobel, 2008; Donis-Keller, O'Hara-Miklavic, & Fairman, 2013; Baker & Geller, 2015).

[See also: [District Size Research](#), [When is Small Too Small? Efficiency, Equity & the Organization of Vermont Public Schools](#)]

District scale must always be evaluated against student-centered outcomes, including access to programming, instructional coherence, and equitable distribution of resources.

VSA continues to strongly support a system of school districts rather than a mix of districts and supervisory unions.

Based on superintendent experience across the state, district governance:

- Improves operational efficiency
- Expands student opportunity and access
- Supports more effective facilities planning
- Reduces governance fragmentation
- Allows districts to respond more effectively to demographic and enrollment trends

We also point out that VSBA regions were created solely for association governance and business and were never intended to serve as templates for school district configuration.

Similarly, reliance on historic regional high school infrastructure reflects past delivery models rather than a future-focused system, particularly as Act 73 requires strategic planning for facilities investment.

VSA can support redistricting that adheres to the following guidelines:

1. Establish districts statewide, not a mix of districts and supervisory unions.
2. Set a minimum district size of approximately 2,000 students, with:

- PreK–12 continuity
 - Recognition that declining enrollment may warrant a minimum closer to 2,500 students in some regions.
3. Respect regional history, geography, transportation patterns, and existing collaborations, achieving minimum scale except in sparsely populated areas.
 4. Provide a clear statutory and regulatory pathway to unification, rather than relying on local processes to reinvent transitions.

Redistricting must reduce fragmentation without creating overly large, bureaucratic systems, and it must expand student opportunity rather than simply reorganize governance.

Finally, we reaffirm that drawing a redistricting map alone will not deliver efficiency or opportunity. The state must also:

- Support districts in achieving school-level scale and efficiency
- Make a firm commitment to capital investment in school facilities
- Allow non-operating districts to designate compliant receiving schools
- Address rising healthcare costs (see [VSBA issues brief](#))
- Implement Act 73 class-size minimums with fidelity
- Establish Cooperative Education Services Areas, as recommended by the Task Force

VSA remains committed to working with the Legislature, the Agency of Education, and our partners to achieve meaningful, research-based change. We believe the principles we have outlined, restated today, offer a credible, Vermont-specific path forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. We are happy to answer any questions.