

**Vermont House of Representatives  
House Education Committee**

**Testimony of Jamie Kinnarney, Superintendent of Schools, White River  
Valley Supervisory Union**

**H.454 Sec. 1. THE COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC  
EDUCATION; REPORT**

I want to begin by thanking the committee for allowing me to testify along with my other colleagues that have joined the Rural School Community Alliance. My name is Jamie Kinnarney and I have the privilege of serving as the Superintendent of Schools of the White River Valley Supervisory Union. I will refer to our supervisory union as the WRVSU for the remainder of my testimony.

The WRVSU serves ten towns and six school districts. The towns served are Bethel - Chelsea - Granville - Hancock - Rochester - Royalton - Sharon - Stockbridge - Strafford - Tunbridge. We were formed through the consolidation of the Windsor Northwest Supervisory Union and Orange Windsor Supervisory Union. We also consolidated from ten town school districts into six (four unified and two town school districts) during the implementation period of Act 46. In addition, our supervisory union serves towns from across three counties (Addison, Orange, and Windsor). I share all of this to give you a visual representation of the size and scope of the work that occurs at the WRVSU.

The WRVSU serves approximately 1700 students via the following operational structures:

District	Grades Operated
Granville/Hancock	Non-operational
Rochester/Stockbridge	PreK-6
White River Unified District (Bethel and Royalton)	PreK-12
First Branch Unified District (Chelsea and Tunbridge)	PreK-8
Sharon	PreK-6
Strafford	K-8

The WRVSU is a truly interdependent system that provides for the ability to meet the unique needs of our districts' students through the supervisory union structure while upholding the interests and desires of each of our districts. We provide for this while delivering on fiscal responsibility/sustainability and increased student achievement while emphasizing the tenants and pillars of Community Schools. I share this upfront to be clear that I believe there is a false narrative occurring regarding the supervisory union structure. I believe that the supervisory union structure is somehow being blamed for the cost drivers that are placing stress on the education fund. I have come to this conclusion based on the fact that one thing that appears to be common throughout the policy proposals, testimony, and introduced bills provided up to now is that we must move forward with the supervisory district structure while eliminating the remaining supervisory unions.

I continue to ask myself why this is the only method of moving forward, and the only conclusion that I can come up with is that there is a sense that, "Bigger Equates to Better" and that "Bigger will result in Future Savings". Otherwise, why would we create law that strips away local control further, while creating governance structures that will surely result in more middle level management without the ability for personalized oversight?

I continue to review testimony, policy proposals, and bills that have been introduced with a lack of clarity on what our current state data provides in regards to education spending among some of our larger and smaller districts, while being very clear that the data on spending via the supervisory union and district structure doesn't provide any clear evidence of projected savings. In fact, our rural school districts that make up supervisory union structures are often some of our most fiscally responsible districts throughout the state.

Furthermore, when you begin to research the economy of scale throughout research conducted across the country you begin to realize that the research is either contrary or

inconclusive in nature (I've heard this referred to as nuanced). That can't be glanced over when we are talking about creating a future policy proposal that promises savings; while knowing full well that the only projected savings that the policy proposal promises is if local community schools are closed while also requiring students to be placed on expensive school buses (yes, those contracted services are incredibly expensive) for upwards to 90 minutes. I base this claim on 90 minutes because the bills introduced on elementary school district structures would require ALL of my elementary schools to close and combine into two centralized elementary schools that would result in many of our students being on buses upwards to 75-90 minutes. That's a big decision, and it is one that better have clear data and research behind it because if we get this wrong, the results are going to be incredibly harmful to our students and the greater trajectory of our state.

What family chooses to move to a town that requires their six-year-old to be placed on a bus for more than 75 minutes? That question within itself poses a litany of concern for me when we speak of equity and doing right by our students.

I come back to my earlier conclusion regarding "why" everyone seems to be in consensus that the supervisory union structure is to blame for our current fiscal concerns with the education fund. The only conclusion that I can come to regarding the "why" is because the proposed change in governance removes local control and creates an "opportunity" for larger districts to close schools without having any true sense of the impact or harm that might occur to those towns and our students currently served.

What might my solutions be regarding how we create better efficiency and sustainability given our perceived crisis given the rhetoric that we've all been subjected to over the past two years?

- 1) Create a commission that researches and provides a report on the actual cost drivers and stressors on the education fund.
  - a) There has been a tremendous amount of increase in the number of FTEs throughout the state in response to the pandemic, with specific attention needed in the area of student support services.
  - b) We continue to see increased health insurance premiums in the double digits year-in and year-out.
- 2) Create accountability measures to combat these cost drivers that hold school districts accountable for delivering on education quality standards while ensuring a comprehensive system of supports and early intervention system is fully operational and implemented with fidelity.

- 3) Create a plan of stability and sustainability that looks at the broader picture of an interconnected framework of health and human services and the agency of education that focuses on preventative and proactive models of student support instead of reactionary measures that result in increased spending.
  - a) Are these cost drivers most transparent in the education fund or the general fund?
- 4) Provide for a funding system that has accountability measures built within it.
- 5) Work closely with the field and task your field experts with creating proposals that work to best support students while creating efficiency and sustainability.
  - a) The field is only being included to check a box, and it hasn't resulted in true and authentic engagement.
  - b) It feels like the rural community school and town voice has been lost and not engaged in finding common sense solutions.
  - c) Not to rush into anything that might have long-standing negative impacts on our current and future students.

I want to conclude by acknowledging that I'm a product of our public education system. I'm a first-generation college graduate who was raised by an incredibly hard-working farm family. I attended both Lyndon State (BS) and Castleton State (MA), where I was provided an opportunity to receive my college education while being supported by my teachers and professors as an individual.

Hence, why I am so incredibly passionate about the importance of our Community School work. I am a product of those efforts, and that personalization is why I'm privileged enough to be able to sit in front of you all to deliver this testimony today. I ask that we all pause in these reactionary times to make certain that we have an education plan moving forward that doesn't allow for any of our students to fall through the cracks, ensures a personalized education, and has the supports and enrichment needed for every learner to reach their greatest potential.

I believe that creating a charge to a commission that can't provide for the supervisory union structure does just that, it rushes to a solution before all the required research and facts have been thoroughly analyzed and concluded.

Respectfully submitted,

Jamie Kinnarney, Superintendent of Schools, WRVSU