

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.

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.

The House Education Committee created Act 46. During that process 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 small 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 Elementary school closed, Lincoln left the MAUSD district, formed their own district and chose to voucher all students in grades 7-12, 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. This might lead to consolidation of one or more of the current high schools in the county. Also 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 and the three districts, Middlebury, Bristol, and Vergennes would be responsible for their students in grades Pre-K through 8. This might lead to one school district for all Pre-K through 8 students in Addison County. However, 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 in Addison County. The current Lincoln school district has a community elementary K-6 school and vouchers students in grades 7-12. This proposal would eliminate vouchers for Lincoln students in grades 9-12.

Eventually, I would love to see one comprehensive high school for the 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 the best we can do for our students. I could also see perhaps two middle schools encompassing grades 6-8 and keeping to the extent possible the community based elementary schools.

Of course, the immediate challenge is how we move forward in a way that taxpayers can afford. There are two things that would bring immediate tax relief for many working class Vermonters and that is addressing the taxing cliffs in the current tax model. The first is the \$47,000 tax limit on total property taxes not to exceed 5%. Decades ago, during the last foundation formula years, taxes on households were limited to 5% for a combination of school and municipal taxes. This has never been adjusted for inflation and if it were to be indexed to perhaps median family income, it would be much higher and save low income Vermont homeowners millions. The second is the \$90,000 tax cliff for middle class homeowners that pay their education tax by income. This has not changed since the

passage of Act 60 in the 1997. This also would save middle class home owners millions. A third improvement to the tax structure would be to move toward higher income taxpayers paying their fair share of school taxes.

The foundation formula failed a court challenge because it was not equitable funding for Vermont school children. If the state should choose to return to a foundation formula, the base amount must bring more equity not less. It must also be indexed to either household income in the state or perhaps average per-pupil spending. Anything less does not meet our Vermont values nor would it increase equity but rather, make it worse. In addition we can assume that some communities will choose to spend more than the base allotted by the state. In that case the additional per=pupil spending tax rate should be levied on income according to the process used to calculate tax rates under Act 60/68. This will combine the proposal offered by the public assets institute and Sen. Scott Beck.

In order to continue on the path of equitable education for all our children, our Vermont schools must accept all the students from a community. Private academies must qualify as community schools. Those that do will remain under the supervision of the State Board of Education. Those that don't will not receive funding from Vermont taxpayers.

We need a comprehensive overhaul of the State Board of Education. Not only should the State Board have authority over private academies that qualify, it should also have additional authority to oversee all schools to assure all Vermont children attend schools that meet Vermont Educational Quality Standards. This authority can only be granted to a State Board that is less susceptible to political pressures and more responsive to educational best practices than the current board.

In the end, in addition to indexing the \$47,000 and \$90,000 cliffs, perhaps the 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