

## **Vermont School District Governance Modernization**

### **Purpose**

To modernize Vermont's school district governance structure in a manner that:

- Improves governance efficiency
- Enables higher quality educational delivery
- Moderates the growth rate of education spending
- Preserves local voice where it demonstrably supports quality and cost effectiveness
- Is sensitive and responsive to the diverse needs of our state
- Uses a structured voluntary process first, with limited and targeted involuntary mechanisms only if necessary to meet statewide goals

### **Structural Vision (3-Year Horizon)**

Current state:

- 52 high level governance units managed by 52 superintendents
  - 26 supervisory districts
  - 2 interstate districts (assume they are out of scope)
  - 24 supervisory unions with 91 member school districts
  - Total of 119 school districts

Target Governance Framework (end state after three year period):

- 25 high level governance units managed by 25 superintendents (> 50% reduction)
- No more than 11 Supervisory Unions (SUs) statewide (> 50% reduction)
  - No more than 45 member school districts total within those SU's
  - 1 SU (Franklin West) converted into a supervisory district (assume that this could be further merged into a nearby supervisory district)
- No more than 12 Supervisory Districts (SDs) statewide
  - 9 rural and small supervisory districts would become school districts within larger supervisory unions as part of a statutorily directed supervisory union map to take effect in three years
  - 17 remaining supervisory districts would be consolidated into 9 (>50% reduction)
- No more than 56 total school districts across Vermont (50% reduction)

This represents a rationalized governance structure that reduces fragmentation while preserving regional identity, local autonomy, and local voice.

Providing an opportunity for local communities to make their own merger decisions through a voluntary process will help drive an outcome that maximizes buy and will result in a map that is most reflective of local and regional considerations. A hard target with a firm deadline and potential risk of involuntary merger will ensure that these conversations happen and will encourage voluntary consolidation.

### **Year 1 Legislative Action**

The Legislature would establish a three-year consolidation process:

1. Establish and fix geographic boundaries for the future 11 supervisory unions, which will guide future merger activity within those supervisory unions. This would result in a reduction of 13 supervisory unions (from 24 to 11).
2. Set a target for reduction of supervisory districts and school districts by the end of the three-year consolidation window, with the intent that supervisory districts and school districts voluntarily merge to help meet the statutory statewide target.
3. Encourage supervisory districts and school districts to use the existing statutory processes to merge voluntarily during the three-year window.
4. If the statewide target has not been achieved by the end of year 2, direct the State Board of Education to order the merger of supervisory districts and school districts necessary to meet the statewide target.
5. Provide a mechanism for supervisory districts and school districts to petition the state board of education to remain independent if the State Board is forced to mandate consolidation of districts.
6. Prohibit the State Board of Education from merging districts with dissimilar operating structures, but permit the voluntary merger of districts with dissimilar operating structures.
7. Direct the State Board of Education to develop an objective evaluation criteria to consider the merits of petitions for supervisory districts and school districts to remain independent, which shall focus on the district's ability to deliver quality education in a cost-effective manner. If a district can meet the criteria, it can remain independent.
8. Districts that voluntarily merge would not be subject to further consolidation by the State Board of Education unless the State Board of

Education was unable to achieve the consolidation targets solely through mandatory consolidation of unmerged districts.

