

Chittenden County CESA Pilot- Proposal

Implementing the Task Force's Three Complementary Strategies

A Phased, Evidence-Based Roadmap for Regional Cooperation

Task Force Recommendation

"The Task Force recommends a phased roadmap that advances **three complementary strategies**"

"The evidence pointed toward targeted, regional approaches that strengthen opportunity while respecting Vermont's rural geography, community identity, and limited statewide capacity for major structural change."

Roadmap Benefits

- *Immediate gains through shared services*
- *Long-term improvements through community-driven mergers*
- *Feasible, staged implementation path*

Source: Task Force Report, Page 3,4

Three Complementary Strategies

1

CESAs

Cooperative Education Service Areas

Regional shared services for special education, transportation, staffing, purchasing, finance, data systems

✓ *Primary focus for Chittenden pilot*

2

Strategic Voluntary Mergers

Community-Driven Consolidation

Only where communities identify shared educational purpose and feasibility shows value

○ *Not required for pilot*

3

Regional High Schools

Comprehensive Educational Access

Regionally governed for advanced coursework, world languages, technical education

○ *Future opportunity,*

Task Force vs. Chittenden County Pilot



Task Force Approach (Statewide)

Scope: 5 CESAs covering all of Vermont

Timeline: 4+ year phased implementation

Starting Point: Regional readiness planning (Year 1)

Functions: Conceptual framework identified

Savings: Not quantified by Task Force

Barrier: AOE "simply chose not to do the work" (Act 168, 2023)

✓ Chittenden County Pilot

Scope: 1 CESA, 8 districts, 21,700 students

Timeline: Can start immediately as voluntary pilot

Starting Point: Detailed analysis already complete

Functions: Specific savings quantified by function

Savings: \$20M-\$30M annually (estimate ready)

Advantage: Bypasses AOE limitations, demonstrates model

Performance Partnership Districts: Voluntary Framework with State Support

Addressing the "mandate vs. purely voluntary" challenge through structured incentives

THE CHALLENGE

✘ Top-Down Mandates Don't Work

- Governor's 5-region map is a hard sell
- Community identity concerns
- Political toxicity

✘ Purely Voluntary Doesn't Work Either

- No district goes first
- Risk-averse boards
- No coordination
- No momentum

THE SOLUTION

✓ Performance Partnership Districts

DISTRICTS CHOOSE TO PARTICIPATE:

- No mandate, voluntary application
- Board vote required, Community consent maintained

STATE PROVIDES INCENTIVES:

- Transition funding for implementation
- Technical assistance (AOE support)
- Multi-year tax rate protection
- Priority access to Ed Fund resources
- Early adopter recognition

EARLY SUCCESS ATTRACTS OTHERS:

- Phase 2 demonstrates savings, Voluntary expansion based on value
- Proof-of-concept visible

KEY INSIGHT: Districts won't volunteer for hassle alone, but WILL volunteer for clear benefits + state support + proven model. Performance Partnership Districts provide the structure that makes voluntary participation viable.

Chittenden Pilot, Four-Phase Implementation Strategy

1. Initiation: Months 1-6

Regional Readiness & Shared Baseline

- Convene 8 superintendents + boards
- Map services, staffing, facilities
- Identify quick wins
- Establish CESA governance

2. Launch Pilot: Months 6-18

Early Action - Back Office Functions

- Finance, HR, IT, Purchasing
- Food service consolidation
- Facilities/maintenance consolidation
- **Target: \$12-15M Year 1 savings**

3. Extend Execution: Months 18-36

Expand CESA Functions for complexity

- Special education coordination
- Curriculum development
- Transportation coordination
- **Target: \$5-\$10M potential savings**

4. Get ready for Community driven: Years 3+

Long-Term Integration

- Expand successful models
- Support approved mergers (if any)
- Serve as Vermont model
- Continuous improvement

Based on Task Force Implementation Strategy (Pages 17-18)

Special Education: Phased Approach

Special Education Coordination: Phase 3 Function

Task Force includes special education in CESA model. For Chittenden County pilot, recommend starting with back-office functions (Phase 2) to build trust and demonstrate savings, then expanding to special education coordination (Phase 3) after initial success.

Rationale: Special education is educationally sensitive and requires more stakeholder engagement. Starting with non-controversial back-office consolidation builds momentum and credibility for later expansion.

Implementation Strategy:

Phase 2(Months 6-18)
Back Office/Admin Only
\$12-15M documented

Phase 3 (Months 18-36)
Add Special Ed. Coordination
\$5-\$10M potential savings

Phase 2 Functions: Back Office Consolidation

Months 6-18 • Documented savings: \$12-15M annually

Finance & Business

Current: 205 FTE, \$7.2M
Target: 120-130 FTE, \$5M
Savings: \$2.2M-\$2.5M

HR & Payroll

Current: 85 FTE, \$6.5M
Target: 50-55 FTE, \$4M
Savings: \$2.0M-\$2.5M

Information Technology

Current: 53 FTE, \$3.4M
Target: 30-35 FTE, \$2.2M
Savings: \$1.2M-\$1.5M

Facilities & Maintenance

Current: 315 FTE, \$13.8M
Target: 200-220 FTE, \$9.3M
Savings: \$4.1M-\$5.5M

Purchasing

Current: 8 separate operations
Target: Centralized county
Savings: \$1.5M-\$2M

Food Service

Current: 205 FTE, \$6.1M
Target: 150-160 FTE, \$4.6M
Savings: \$1.5M-\$2.1M

Phase 3 Functions: Educational Support

Months 18-36 • Potential additional savings: \$5-10M

Special Education

Current: 25 directors, \$3M

Benefit: County coordination + shared specialists

Curriculum Development

Current: 15 directors, \$1.7M

Benefit: Consistent standards, shared resources

Transportation

Current: 8 separate operations

Benefit: Optimized routing & scheduling

Data Systems

Current: Multiple systems

Benefit: Unified infrastructure, better analytics

What About Superintendent & Leadership Positions?

Phase 2 & 3 Savings (\$17-25M) Preserve All Current Leadership

Back office consolidation does not require any district to give up its superintendent, principals, or school-level administrators. Leadership consolidation is a voluntary Phase 4 option for districts that choose to pursue it after demonstrating success.

Current Approach vs. Potential Phase 4

✓ Phases 2-3: Leadership Preserved

- All 8 superintendents retained
- All 54 principals retained
- All 30 assistant principals retained
- School-level autonomy maintained
- Community identity preserved
- **Focus: Back office only**

○ Phase 4: Voluntary Option (Years 3+)

- 8 superintendents → 1 county superintendent
- Add 1-2 assistant county superintendents
- Potential savings: ~\$1M annually
- **Only if districts voluntarily choose**
- After demonstrating Phase 2-3 success
- **Decision: District-driven, not mandated**

Administrative Growth Context (2020-2025)

Administrative positions grew 22% (2020-2025). Phase 2-3 focus on back office first. Administrative consolidation is a Phase 4 voluntary opportunity after demonstrating initial success.

The Growth

2020: 145 FTE, \$17.5M

2025: 177 FTE, \$21.3M

Growth: +32 FTE (+22%)
+\$3.8M (+22%)

Key Areas:

- Special Ed: +8 FTE
- CTE/Adult Ed: +8 FTE
- Asst Principals: +6 FTE
- ESS Coordinators: +5 FTE

Why Not Phase 2-3?

Strategic Focus:

Phase 2-3 targets back office only to build trust through clear wins

Complexity:

- Educational positions
- Parents care about these roles
- Some growth may be mandated

Approach:

- Prove back-office model first
- Demonstrate savings & trust
- Evaluate admin in Phase 4

Phase 4 Opportunity

After Phase 2-3 success, county coordination could reduce duplication:

Consolidation Options:

- Special Ed Directors
25 → 18 FTE (~\$830K)
- Curriculum Directors
15 → 8-10 FTE (~\$700K)
- CTE/Adult Ed
11.5 → 6 FTE (~\$660K)

Total Potential: \$3-5M

Total Projected Savings

Phase 2: Back Office

\$12-15M

Documented & Quantified

Phase 3: Educational

\$5-10M

Potential Additional Savings

**Total Range: \$17-25M annually
(without benefits)**

The Phased Opportunity: Build Trust, Demonstrate Value, Scale Impact

PHASE 2

Months 6-18

Back Office

- ✓ Finance & HR
- ✓ IT & Facilities
- ✓ Purchasing
- ✓ Food Service

All superintendents
& principals retained

\$16-21M

With benefits

PHASE 3

Months 18-36

Add Educational

- ✓ Special Ed coord
- ✓ Curriculum dev
- ✓ Transportation
- ✓ Data systems

After demonstrating
Phase 2 success

+\$7-14M

With benefits

PHASE 4

Years 3+

Voluntary Options

- Admin consolidation
- Superintendent merger
- District mergers

Only if districts
voluntarily choose

+\$4-7M

With benefits

Why This Works

1. Low Risk Start

Back-office consolidation is non-controversial. No jobs threatened. Easy wins build trust.

2. Proven Success

Phase 2 demonstrates model works. \$12-15M in real savings. Momentum for Phase 3.

3. Voluntary Expansion

Each phase is a choice. Districts can opt in based on demonstrated value. No mandates.

4. Scalable Model

Success in Chittenden validates approach for statewide expansion.

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**Total Potential: \$27-41M Annual Savings |
Zero Educational Impact**

Performance Partner Districts(PPD) Incentive Scheme

Incentive	Cost to State	Purpose	Example	Rationale
1. Transition funding	\$500k per participating district \$1.5M for 3 districts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cover one-time implementation costs Training, Technology integration 	3 districts in Phase 2 (SB, CVSD, EWD)	Districts volunteering cannot bear upfront costs
2. Technical Assistance	Full time AOE team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide dedicated expertise & resources: 	\$400k annually (3 FTE+ Legal support)	Districts lack capacity to navigate consolidation
3. Tax rate protection	State protects unseen cost increases for pilot (\$4-5M based on 21,700 student in CC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protect districts who are leading the effort 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cover \$100/student Tax increase in year 1 Declining coverage in Year 2 & 3 Year 4 standalone operation 	State addresses any political risk in transition

Performance Partner Districts(PPD) Incentive Scheme (cont'd)

Incentive	Cost to State	Purpose	Example	Rationale
4. Priority access	Zero	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early access to AOE initiatives • Support for capital projects • Access to funding requests 	PPD can pilot AOE programs to lead the way	Non-financial incentive that appeals to districts
5. Savings Retention	State education fund impact from savings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PPD districts keep 100% savings in 1st 5 years 	Districts could invest in CTE, programs etc.,	Districts get to use efficiency that they create.
6. Early Adopter	Minimal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition & Branding with official “ PPD” designation • Promote success stories 	Formalize Model District Status	Positive recognition for our leaders and districts

Potential Voluntary Enrollment: Districts Already Exploring?

South Burlington

- Board Chair exploring Essex-Westford shared services model
- ~4,000 students
- Already seeking voluntary consolidation partners

Champlain Valley SD (CVSD)

- Already operating as successful multi-town SU
- Williston, Richmond, Bolton, Huntington, Jericho
- ~2,400 students
- Rep. Arsenault (former Board Chair 2021-2024) validates success

Essex-Westford

- Proven shared services model since 2017
- Essex + Westford towns
- ~3,000 students
- Template for voluntary consolidation

Three entities representing ~9,400 students (43% of Chittenden total) are already exploring and experienced in prior consolidation. This pilot formalizes and expands what's emerging organically.

Why Chittenden County is the Perfect Pilot

✓ **Geographic proximity:**

8 districts within single county, making coordination practical

✓ **Sufficient scale:**

21,700 students = critical mass for efficient shared services

✓ **Detailed analysis complete:**

Unlike Task Force's conceptual framework, specific savings quantified for Phase 1, verify potential for Phase 2

✓ **Voluntary participation:**

Can bypass state bureaucracy and AOE limitations

✓ **Concept in place for Legislative support** : Rep. Burkhardt (SB), Rep. Ram Hinsdale (Education Committee), Rep. Brady (Education Committee, Williston), Sen. Lyons (Senate Education)

✓ **Demonstrates model:**

Chittenden County Success validates Task Force recommendations for statewide expansion

Suggested Next Steps

Immediate

- Brief Education Committee legislators
- Present to superintendents of interested districts (SB, CVSD, Essex-Westford)
- Engage school boards already exploring (voluntary enrollment)

Short-Term

- Form CESA planning committee
- Draft governance documents
- Develop Phase 1 timeline

Medium-Term

- Launch Phase 1 functions
- Track & report savings
- Prepare for Phase 2 expansion

Thank you!