

Subject: the Marlboro situation

Dear Nader and Members of the Senate Education Committee,

I write to thank you for your time on Senate Ed and thank you Nader for the question you asked in the Senate Ed hearing last week about Marlboro and what I saw as the shipwrecks ahead as we in Marlboro struggle with how to gracefully and effectively close our small school. I appreciated the chance to explain and define our issues and I would like to express further concerns in writing for your Committee:

I write as the Chair of the Board of a small rural school district and in no other capacity. These thoughts are my own. Marlboro is a small town in the middle of abutting towns all of which currently operate schools and all off which are seeing declining student numbers.

Here is the main issue facing Marlboro: right now the Marlboro Town Meeting Australian Ballot includes an Article asking voters to vote on whether to close the school or not. This Article was formulated and approved by the school board before the Legislature began the January Session and is the result of declining enrollment and increasing per pupil costs. The school board chose this route based on the concept that, if the ballot measure passes and we close the school, our students and families will be able to choose among the approximately ten nearby public schools serving preK-12 in our region. If approved on March 3, this change would provide families with both geographical and philosophical diversity- families will choose based on where they work, where they live, and how they feel their kids will be best served. Because of our location essentially every one of our kids will be attending public schools.

Halifax, Twin Valley in Wilmington, Dover, NewBrook in Newfane, Dummerston, all of the Brattleboro schools, and Guilford all operate elementary schools and Twin Valley, Brattleboro and Leland and Grey are nearby high schools that Marlboro students have attended in the past. Most have the capacity for some or all of our students.

But- some of the proposals coming out of Montpelier since we placed this Article on the Warning are formulated specifically to eliminate non operating Districts. This is at least partially driven by a desire to limit school choice among independent schools. If new Legislation means that Marlboro is merged into one particular part of our region because we are a non-operating District, thereby eliminating some of the local public options for our kids, Marlboro will have lost the one silver lining that we saw in closing our school. Marlboro's students should not lose opportunity by being caught up in the public vs. independent discussion or any other arbitrary merging proposals.

By the time any Legislation is passed this year Marlboro will have made its choice, Marlboro families will be enrolling in local schools, and if the Legislature then removes some of these schools as options Marlboro families will again be thrown into the chaotic situation of changing schools and commutes. We are committed to working with you and

all Legislators to assure that Marlboro does not, as they say, get thrown under the public/independent bus and lose the currently-available options.

If the Legislature wants to further reduce the amount of public money flowing to private schools the way to accomplish this is NOT to eliminate non-operating districts which are small and geographically isolated. Marlboro, for example, if the vote to become non-operating passes, will see benefits for our students and for our taxpayers and there will be substantial local tax money flowing to the neighboring public school districts. I recognize that these issues are hard for Legislators because there are widely divergent thoughts in Montpelier, but simply eliminating non-operating Districts is a punitive way to approach any Legislation. Small non-operating school districts should not be penalized in the larger discussion.

Sincerely,

Dan MacArthur Marlboro School Board Chair