

2/13/16

My name is Dan MacArthur, I am the Chair of the Marlboro School Board, a member of the Windham Central SU Board, and until this last year was a multi-term Regional Representative to the VSBA from the Windham Region. Marlboro is a single-town school district and my Board has placed an item on the March Australian Ballot to see if the voters will vote to close our small school and become a non-operating school district. We did not do this lightly and the public has been engaged in a number of public sessions to explore our options and preferences, looking as deeply as we can into our future prospects. You will all recognize that this is a major move for a small town with a long history of educational independence- we are definitely not advocating for sticking to the status quo. The reasons are both financial and educational- our student numbers are dropping even faster than the State average so the cost per pupil is escalating, and the classes are getting so small that educators and parents feel that things are missing from the classroom dynamic. ( I point out that I attended this same school with 4 grades per classroom in the 1950s, along with all of my siblings, and the experience has left me with an abiding appreciation of the different populations that live on our towns. And both of my kids and all of my grandchildren have attended this school as well).

My thanks to you all for taking the time to hear me today. I want to make 3 central points about small and rural schools, in response to a recent proposal by Representative Conlon which would create arbitrary maps for merging districts, would eliminate SUs, and would eliminate non-operating Districts.

- 1) I will start with that last item. Small non-operating single-town districts are an important feature in Vermont's educational landscape. They can be both financially and educationally beneficial. As it currently stands, and unless the Legislature pulls the rug out from under our planning, if the March ballot issue passes Marlboro's students will be able to attend any number of adjoining public schools of their choice- Halifax, Wilmington, Dover, Newfane, Dummerston, Brattleboro and Guilford all have schools which our students could attend. We would pay the established tuition rate which is less per pupil that it costs us to

operate our school, saving taxpayers money. And parents and students could choose by geographical and philosophical alignment, which has been one of the positive factors that parents have pointed to during the discussions and will reinforce the concept of local educational engagement.

2) that small school districts, whether operating or non-operating, benefit by being a part of a larger support system. In Marlboro's case we are members of the Windham Central SU and this is a long and productive partnership. WCSU serves only small rural schools so the issues facing the schools are similar. The SU manages the financial and Special Ed programs for all of the schools as well as providing support for Curriculum, Food Services, Transportation, Facility Management etc, all of which can be done more efficiently on this larger scale while at the same time allowing the individual schools to maintain a sense of the community which they represent and which pays for their operation. When SU boards work together well all students can benefit from the collaboration.

3) that our Supervisory Union, WCSU, is a member of the recently-formed first BOCES in Vermont. This is a collaboration between a number of neighboring SUs and it further consolidates into larger units the administrative needs of small schools, again saving costs and providing non-educational support on a larger scale. Here is a quote from Secretary Saunders acknowledging this effort in her approval of the Articles of Agreement:

FROM: Zoie Saunders, Secretary of Education;

“This is an exciting step forward in regionalizing and improving education service delivery and I thank you for your sustained and focused efforts to stand up this first BOCES in Vermont.”

So in closing I ask you:

1: Support flexibility for rural sparsely populated non operating districts.

2. Support supervisory unions with effective leadership working with and between local school boards.

3. Support CESA/BOCES to provide cost effectiveness for services at a regional scale.