

March 18, 2026 Testimony to the Senate Education Committee

From: Keri Bristow, School Board Chair for Mountain Views Supervisory District

Good afternoon and thank you, Senator Bongartz and Senators. for inviting me to speak today about the current Senate map and its implications for Vermont schools. I'd like to also thank you for your visit to our school this past fall, and your conversations with students, teachers, administrators, board members and community members. I'm a retired educator with 44 years of teaching French and Spanish in Vermont, grades PreK-12. I am currently the Board Chair for Mountain Views Supervisory District.

Throughout my career in Vermont education, I have seen education regularly reinvent itself with new initiatives, consolidations through various Acts, and now Act 73, which has thrown the whole state into upheaval, confusion, distrust and fear. Especially fear. Fear of losing our communities, our local schools which are regarded as centers of the community, and in many towns there are generational traditions. Distrust that consolidation will bring the financial promises of savings, which have yet to be modeled in any of the maps. Confusion over loss of identities when schools close without any evidence that it will improve education. And upheaval after many of our communities spent years trying to hammer out articles of agreement to consolidate under Act 46, which has shown little financial gains despite the promises. All this to say is that I understand and agree with these serious concerns, having lived through it as an educator.

In looking at the Senate map, I'm glad to see that the current school districts and supervisory unions will stay intact, instead of what some maps have shown, ripping apart towns and putting them with new districts they have never been part of. In order to be proactive, we in Mountain Views reached out to two other districts geographically and educationally aligned with us and with whom we all share a CTC. We had a board meeting of the chairs in MVSU, Windsor Southeast and Hartford School District and agreed that we had much in common, and if we were told we had to

consolidate, we are logical partners. We sent a letter to the Redistricting Task Force and spoke about it at a meeting, and they thanked us for our forward thinking. We know that other districts have similar burgeoning partnerships and voluntary collaborations that should be encouraged and supported.

Enacting CESAs – as our region has done – is a proven way of forging relationships that are mutually beneficial in terms of operational and technical resource sharing that supports greater access to educational opportunities for all students while actually reducing operating costs. CESAs also support district-to-district relationships that could be foundational for voluntary mergers.

As you no doubt know, our seven communities approved two small bonds for necessary repair work in order to keep the high school middle school open, and we passed a major bond, with high margins, to build a new school before the current building becomes uninhabitable. We have an approved preliminary plan and a bond, and we are looking to our next steps in securing state construction aid. The data shows our middle and high schools are providing high quality educational opportunities in our region, and strong support for the new school bond – even in this difficult economic environment – shows how important it is for our regional towns. We must not lose it.

Currently, there are three high schools in our CTC region. If our high school fails and can't be rebuilt, our district geography would be too far for students to be bused from the western border towns in our district such as Pittsfield, Killington and Plymouth. Through Act 46, these communities all chose to stay in our district and are fully integrated educationally and operationally – it would be harmful to those families to be split off.

We have heard that we need more students if we want to build a new high school. We say, bring them in! However most schools are locked into districts or supervisory unions through articles of agreement that are difficult to break. We have been in contact with neighboring towns who are

interested in joining our district. Yet they have no immediate mechanism to move into a different district. We ask that the legislature and AOE envision a transitional period that quickly facilitates those voluntary shifts.

With the three supervisory units that have agreed to consider being partners, we could look at all of our schools over time and consider ways of offering students the options to attend one of the three high schools, not restrained by where they live. We could begin to diversify curricula and create educational pathways that meet the needs of all students. These are conversations that can be challenging, and they require trust, flexibility, and time. We welcome assistance from the Agency of Education as we build a school that is in line with their vision. In Mountain Views Supervisory District, after consolidation with Act 46, we had many such conversations while creating a common curriculum, a common CBA, and many other aspects of what it means to consolidate and unify. Bigger supervisory units will need time, patience and perseverance to make progress towards a cohesive educational outcome for all students. This is best done among willing partners coming together voluntarily with the shared purpose of providing the best for our area students, families, and communities while leveraging such collaborations to drive down operating costs.

Thank you for your work, your good intentions, and willingness to hear from the educational community.

Sincerely,  
Keri Bristow