

April 22, 2025

H. 454 - An act relating to transforming Vermont's education governance, quality, and finance systems

Nicol Whalen, Vice Chair, Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union Board

Arlington School District operates prek - 12 and is part of the Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union. Arlington previously operated within the Battenkill Valley Supervisory Union with Sandgate as a non-operating district. We were the smallest SU in the state and through Act 46, the State Board of Education dissolved the BVSU and moved Arlington and Sandgate into the SVSU. It should be noted that, while there were some operational efficiencies gained within the larger governance structure, there was no cost savings and no improvement in educational opportunities for the Arlington schools with this change.

Within Bennington County we have the SVSU (with just over 3000 students) and the Bennington Rutland Supervisory Union (with apx. 2200 students). Arlington is the only prek - 12 public school district in the county and Arlington Memorial High School is 1 of 2 public high schools in Bennington County.

- AMHS has an enrollment of 200 students (6-12)
- MAU MS/ HS has an enrollment of 1500 students (6-12)

In our region there are many operating structures:

- Arlington Prek - 12
- Sandgate - non-operating prek - 12
- Southwest Vermont Union elementary district prek - 5
- MAU MS/ HS 6 - 12
- N. Bennington - non-operating prek - 5 and a member of the MAU MS/ HS district
- Taconic & Green operates prek - 8 and is non-operating 9 - 12
- Southwest Tech

Through Act 129, allowing for public high school choice, Arlington usually has 11-14 students from MAU in grades 9 - 12; however, as you know no tuition follows these students, which impacts our ability to provide transportation and therefore limits access for families who can't provide their own transportation. As a side note...although Act 129 only addresses grades 9 - 12, for those students considering Arlington as a smaller high school option, it would be beneficial if they could make the transition in middle school, during this critical developmental stage.

For Arlington families who are looking for a larger high school, they can attend MAU in Bennington and there have been a few students in the past couple of years who make that choice. There are also some Arlington families who elect to send their student to BBA in Manchester. In these situations some families pay the \$23 - 24,000 non-resident tuition or BBA has made arrangements to offer scholarships to certain students.

We also have tuitioning students currently attending Arlington schools:

- Prek: 5 students from Sandgate and Sunderland
- Elementary: 16 from Sandgate, 1 North Bennington
- MS/ HS: 17 from Sandgate, 3 Sunderland, 1 Manchester, 1 Rupert, 2 Dorset

Arlington may be a smaller district but we are an important part of the educational system in our region.

\$9,803,830 FY26 Budget
350 students enrolled / 635.53 LTW ADM
\$13,417.92 Ed Spending / LTW ADM

Program Highlights:

- Art and Music offered at Fisher and AMHS w/ full-time instructors
- Chinese and French offered at AMHS
- STEM & woodshop program offered at AMHS
- 7 AP classes
- 23 students attending SW Tech
- 5 students participating in internship programs
- 75% of students that participate in cocurricular (sports, band, theater, clubs)

2024 Graduates: 39 students = 100% graduation rate

- 53% College
- 9% career education
- 3% military
- 27% employed
- 8% undecided/year off College
- 4 International Students from Mexico, Spain, Brazil

Colleges accepted/ attended:

- American University
- Clarkson University
- Duke
- Franklin Pierce
- Hudson Valley
- Le Moyne College
- Massachusetts College (MCLA)
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology
- Notre Dame
- Rhode Island School of Design
- Russell Sage
- UVM
- Vermont State University
- Wentworth Institute of Technology
- Williams College

When it comes to finding the right fit, a bigger school isn't necessarily a better school. Each of the schools in our region brings something unique to the table and, with the statewide conversations about structural changes, we have initiated conversations across the different districts and supervisory unions (and intend to include independent schools and the tech center) to see how we can collaborate to ensure that we are providing the best educational opportunities for students in our region.

My point is to say that many of the proposed changes in the Governor's plan, as well as the House bill, would negatively impact the Arlington School District which would have a detrimental impact on the quality of public educational opportunities in our region. As you craft your plan for changes to the educational system, please understand that one size does not fit all in Vermont, and strong, small schools are actually a critical part of our public school system.