

To: Senate Committee on Education

From: Andrew Haas, Superintendent, Windham Northeast Supervisory Union

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The North Star: A Student-Centered Approach

Logic, common sense, and a singular focus on what is “**best for our students**” must be our North Star. If we strengthen our state-level systems for measuring success, growth, and instructional practices, we can make clear, data-driven determinations about the effectiveness of any school, whether it is large or small, rural or urban. Every fiscal and structural recommendation below is designed to serve this primary goal.

1. The Benefits of CESAs (The BOCES Model)

Drawing from my experience with regional service agencies in other states and as a founding member of the **Vermont Learning Collaborative (VTLC)**—the state’s first BOCES, launched in January 2026—I have seen how this model creates essential scale without disrupting local governance.

A CESA is a **lean service provider**, not an administrative governing body; it consolidates functions to protect local control by making community schools more financially viable.

Service Category	Estimated Savings / Impact
Professional Development	66% average savings compared to individual hosting.
Evaluation Services	20% to 50% reduction (38% average savings).
Shared Staffing	50%+ savings per FTE for part-time/per diem roles.
Out-of-District Transport	Up to 85% reduction via local therapeutic programming.

Beyond these numbers, CESAs provide cooperative purchasing power and expert vetting of consultants at a fraction of typical costs. **Anecdotally**, I have observed a tendency for districts to want to "own" a resource 24/7, even if they only "need" it for a fraction of the time. This mentality drives up costs significantly. By moving to a shared model, we can provide schools the expertise they need without the unnecessary overhead of a full-time position for a part-time need.

2. Transitioning to a Foundation Formula

A foundation formula offers a path toward fiscal sanity by moving away from the volatility of annual budget cycles. Currently, my SU must develop five separate budgets. Because the SU budget contains essential shared services like Special Education and Transportation, any fluctuation in these costs creates immediate fiscal uncertainty for our local boards.

When combined with rising health insurance, yield, and CLA rates, we are often forced to present a "best guess" to our constituents. A foundation formula provides:

- **Multi-Year Predictability:** Enables strategic planning and steady staffing rather than reactive, year-to-year voting results.
- **Weighted Special Education Funding:** We must move away from census-based block grants. Funding must be tied to the student's specific needs, ensuring the "money follows the child" to provide appropriate education in the least restrictive environment.
- **Strong Oversight:** A weighted system requires state-level "guard rails" to ensure ethical identification and effective resource use.
- **Decoupled Capital Costs:** School construction bonds should be separated from per-pupil spending calculations so that essential infrastructure does not unfairly trigger spending caps or penalize a district's operational standing.

3. Voluntary vs. Forced Mergers (The Lessons of Act 46)

While we likely need to reduce the total number of districts in Vermont, there is little local support for forced consolidation. Our system is under immense stress, and forced mergers are highly disruptive to students and staff.

- **Effectiveness of Choice:** Voluntary mergers succeed because they occur when they make financial and geographic sense for "like operators".
- **The SU Advantage:** SUs like Windham Northeast (WNESU) are already models of efficiency, utilizing collective bargaining and coordinated curriculum while maintaining local programming.
- **Preserving Identity:** Top-down mandates often ignore the geographical realities and administrative structures that rural communities rely on.

We must remember the "bitter taste" left by Act 46. When communities are forced into change, human nature is to resist and fight. We should instead incentivize collaboration that respects local identity.

Conclusion

By decoupling capital costs from operations, moving to a needs-based weighted funding system, and embracing the scalable efficiency of the

CESAS/BOCES model, we can move away from the "mandated disruption" of the past. Vermont should prioritize voluntary collaboration and shared resources to create an education system that is both fiscally responsible and focused on what is best for our students.