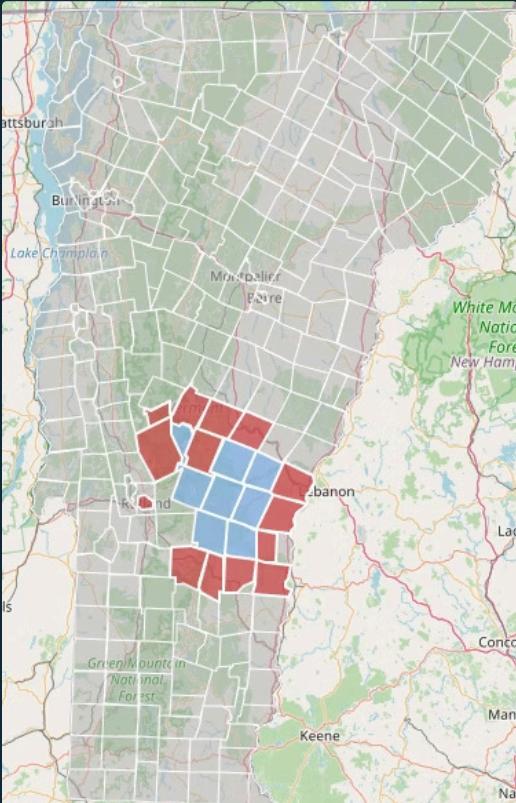
The background of the slide features a vibrant, stylized illustration of a rural landscape. In the foreground, there are several trees with autumn foliage in shades of orange, yellow, and red. A light-colored road curves through the landscape. In the middle ground, there is a cluster of three-story houses with light-colored exteriors and dark roofs. The background consists of rolling hills and mountains, with more trees and foliage visible across the distance.

LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY

# The Future of Public Education in Vermont

A comprehensive testimony on educational reform, district consolidation, and funding equity presented to the Senate and House Education Committees by Superintendent Sherry Sousa of Mountain Views Supervisory Union.

# Introduction: Three Decades of Vermont Education



For over 30 years, Vermont has maintained a reputation for progressive educational philosophy and unwavering commitment to meeting the needs of all children. As a superintendent serving seven communities with just over 1,000 students, this testimony reflects varied experiences as a special education teacher, building administrator, and district leader.

Vermont has consistently provided space for inspired educators and creative responses to challenging needs. This foundation of innovation and dedication continues to drive the vision for public education across the Green Mountain State, even as we face new challenges and opportunities for transformation.

# School District Redistricting Task Force: A Path Forward

The School District Redistricting Task Force undertook a herculean challenge: examining statewide consolidation options to improve equity, quality, and fiscal sustainability. Despite limited time and State data, this group of legislators and experienced Vermont educators demonstrated fierce commitment to designing actionable solutions.

## Equity Focus

Creating greater equity of educational experiences across all Vermont communities

## Vermont Context

Embracing the unique educational landscape of rural and diverse communities

## Efficiency Goals

Identifying opportunities for more efficient delivery of programs and services

The Task Force developed three strategic approaches that balance the need for educational excellence with fiscal responsibility, creating a research-based, data-driven roadmap for Vermont's educational future.



# Cooperative Education Service Areas: Proven Impact

Cooperative Education Service Areas (CESAs) represent a transformative vehicle for Vermont education—providing the scale and scope to access affordable resources while maintaining direct knowledge of individual community needs. Eight Southeast Supervisory Unions and Districts have already demonstrated the model's effectiveness.

## Responsive Evaluation Teams

Special education evaluation teams that adapt quickly to student needs and provide comprehensive assessments

## Staffing Solutions

Creative approaches to filling hard-to-staff positions, ensuring quality educators in every classroom

## Program Reviews

Comprehensive reviews supporting continuous improvement in special education and instructional practices

## Targeted Consultation

Customized consultation services tailored to district-identified needs and priorities

## Professional Development

High-quality training focused on building instructional capacity across general and special education

## Cooperative Purchasing

Joint purchasing initiatives that increase efficiency and reduce costs for member districts

# Legislative Partnerships: House 630 and Act 73

## House 630: CESA Foundation



House 630 brought Vermont the opportunity for Cooperative Education Service Agencies, representing significant legislation that positively impacts both student outcomes and financial efficiencies. This partnership between legislature and school leadership has created tangible improvements in educational delivery.

## Act 73: Comprehensive Reform



Act 73 codified educational challenges and established clear steps forward. Key highlights include minimum class sizes recognizing the coexistence of quality and efficiency, paths to access School Construction Aid, statewide calendar and graduation requirements, and the Foundation Formula for equitable funding.

# Foundation Formula: Equity vs. Equality

"Equal funding per student per district is not the same as equitable funding for Vermont students."

The Foundation Formula aims to provide equitable funding so that zip codes don't dictate educational quality. While it offers the same dollars per student, the reality is more complex: more efficacious districts can direct more dollars directly to students, while less effective districts deliver fewer dollars to each student.

O1

## **Evidence-Based Implementation**

Provide measurable positive impacts on schools, students, and taxpayers with clear documentation

O2

## **Comprehensive Analysis**

Analyze impacts across district sizes, demographics, and regions before structural changes

O3

## **Integrated Pathways**

Ensure formula accounts for both academic and CTE pathways without disadvantaging either

Until we elevate root causes of inequity and address them specifically in legislation, we will continue to see varied student outcomes and experiences across Vermont.

# School Construction Aid: Urgent Infrastructure Needs

The nineteen pages of Act 73 outlining School Construction Aid processes provided crucial relief for districts facing failing facilities. However, successful implementation requires firm commitment and legislative action to remove barriers.

1

## Identify Funding

Fully execute Act 73 requirements by identifying a dedicated funding source for construction aid

2

## Build Trust

Firm commitment engenders community trust and enables long-term planning for infrastructure

3

## Exclude Capital Costs

Pass legislation to exclude construction costs from "education spending" for excess spending calculations



**Critical Need:** Building needs across Vermont cannot be addressed at the cost of educational programs. Capital construction requires separate consideration in funding formulas.

# District Consolidation: Recommendations for Success

Supporting the work to reduce School Districts and Supervisory Unions requires careful planning, adequate resources, and realistic expectations. The transition represents deep, meaningful work that extends far beyond administrative reorganization.



# Mountain Views Supervisory District: A Success Story

The transformation from Supervisory Union to Supervisory District required 25 three-hour meetings and multiple town votes, but the results demonstrate the power of unified governance. Despite concerns about loss of Board control, the merger resulted in impressive student outcome growth and improved faculty retention.

## Unified Contracts

Single employment agreements creating consistency and fairness across the district

## Unified Budget

Financial resources aligned with strategic plan priorities

## Unified Leadership

Board structure allowing superintendent to serve as instructional leader

## Unified Curriculum

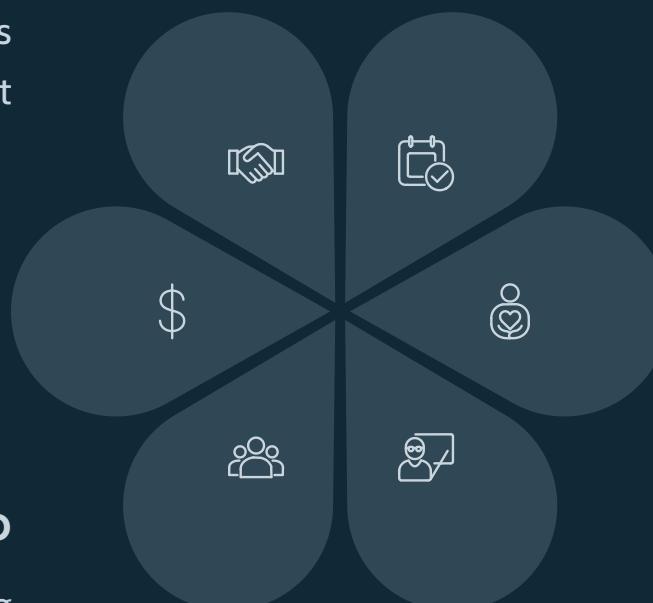
Coherent educational pathway from elementary through high school

## Unified Strategic Vision

Clear Portrait of a Graduate and aligned educational policies

## Unified Practices

Consistent instructional approaches informed by research and data

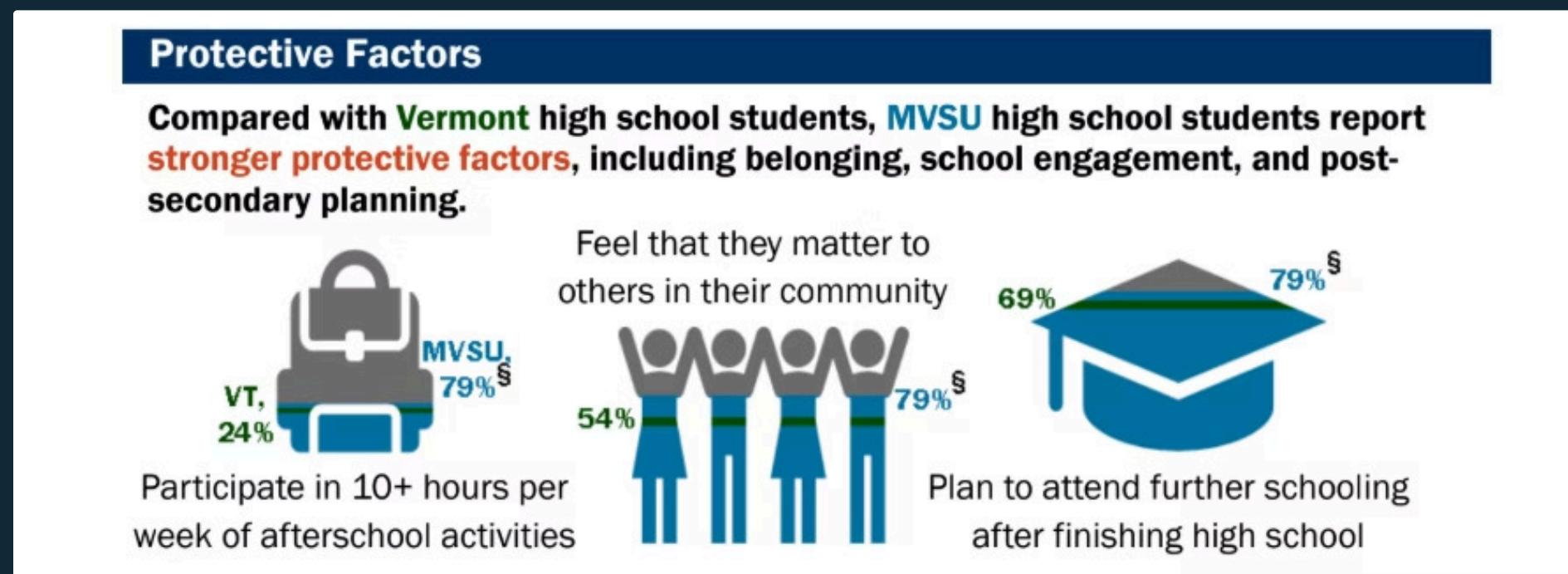


"In my experience, the term unified is synonymous with the terms opportunity, efficiency and effectiveness."

# VTCAP (State) Assessment

- 73% Proficient on 2025 VTCAP ELA
  - Up from 68% proficient in 2024 (4th SD in Vermont)
- 59% proficient on 2025 VTCAP Math
  - Up from 52% in 2024 (8th SD in Vermont)
- 62% proficient on 2025 VTCAP Science
  - Up from 56% proficient in 2024 (10th SD in Vermont)

## 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey: Selected High School Measures MVSU



# A Compass for Vermont's Educational Future

Vermont has an opportunity to respond to community expectations and fulfill our responsibility to educate children by attending directly to factors most impacting our mission. The evidence from Mountain Views Supervisory District demonstrates that collaboration, unified governance, and intentional resource allocation create vibrant learning environments.



## Create Equity

Does our work create more equitable educational experiences for all students?



## Support with Evidence

Is the work supported by research, data, and documented best practices?



## Expand Opportunities

Does it produce measurable positive impacts on student learning and outcomes?

These three reflective questions serve as compass points for creating a vision that builds on Vermont's reputation for progressive educational philosophy and commitment to meeting the needs of all children. By focusing on CESAs, supporting Act 73 implementation, ensuring equitable funding, addressing infrastructure needs, and promoting district consolidation with adequate resources, Vermont can continue to lead in educational innovation and excellence.