



RUTLAND NORTHEAST SUPERVISORY UNION

49 Court Drive, Brandon, Vermont 05733

802.247.5757 - www.rnesu.org

...dedicated to the development of character, competence, creativity and community.

May 17, 2021

Mr. John Carroll- Chair
Vermont State Board of Education
1 National Life Drive, Davis 5
Montpelier, Vermont 05602-2501.

RE: Ripton Withdrawal and Rutland Northeast Supervisory Union

Jeanne Collins

Superintendent of Schools
jcollins@rnesu.org

Dear Chair Carroll and Members of the Board:

Brenda L. Fleming

Director of Business & Finance
bfleming@rnesu.org

As Chair of the Rutland Northeast Supervisory Union Board, I write to you today to provide Rutland Northeast Supervisory Union's ("RNESU") and its member districts' views regarding the potential for Ripton to be placed, involuntarily, within the RNESU and potentially as part of the Otter Valley Unified Union School District. The Boards of the RNESU believe strongly that there are too many hurdles, whether structurally or financially, which would arise from the addition of Ripton as a district of the RNESU. As such, we cannot support any decision which would place Ripton within our districts or Supervisory Union.

Marsha F. Bruce

Director of Special Services
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As you are aware, RNESU and its member towns, unlike many towns and school districts in Vermont, earnestly undertook discussions in 2015 upon the passage of Act 46 to determine if consolidation/merger of its districts: 1) was feasible, 2) would permit the districts to meet or exceed the Education Quality Standards, and 3) would maximize operational efficiencies.

Kristin Hubert

Director of Curriculum,
Instruction and Assessment
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On January 19, 2016, the communities of RNESU voted to establish "preferred districts" in two side by side unified districts. The first district, Barstow Unified Union School District (BUUSD), operates a PreK- eighth grade school for the students of Chittenden and Mendon. Those students then have tuition "choice" for ninth through twelfth grade. The second district, Otter Valley Unified Union School District (OVUUSD), encompasses Brandon, Goshen, Leicester, Pittsford, Sudbury and Whiting. In this district, the elementary schools provide education for PreK- sixth grade, with the students attending Otter Valley for seventh through twelfth grade. At the time of the decision to merge, the districts of the RNESU had enjoyed and benefited from a long history of collaboration and utilization of resources such as a unified teachers' contract for over 30 years; centralized special education services for over 30 years; consolidated transportation services for over 13 years; consolidated food services for over 5 years; and a lengthy history of successful consolidation of superintendent services/oversight, centralized curriculum, and centralized financial services.

Alexis Blake

Director of Technology
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RNESU's concerns about the possibility of the addition of Ripton are focused on financial and organizational/structural matters.

If Ripton is placed within the RNESU (and OVUUSD), it would alter OVUUSD's current balance under the Title I Comparable Test, which requires RNESU to demonstrate that it provides "at least" the same staff/teacher ratios at the most economically disadvantaged schools as the other schools in the district. It is our understanding that Ripton is a PreK-6 school with approximately 30-40 students. While we do not have the full count of their staffing levels, it is reasonable to assume that Ripton has a lower staff/teacher ratio than the Neshobe School with its K-6 enrollment of 350-375 students. Under Title 1's Comparable Test, RNESU would therefore have to "match" Ripton's staffing ratio at Neshobe, Lothrop, and Otter Creek

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Academy. This would require RNESU to **increase** staffing at other schools within the OVUUSD, resulting in a negative impact on the efficiencies RNESU taxpayers realized through the Act 46 merger activities. In other words, taxes may have to go up in all the towns of the OVUUSD to accommodate the inclusion of Ripton, a consequence antithetical to one of the major underpinnings of Act 46 and consolidation.

The Articles of Agreement for OVUUSD provide for a hybrid model of representation for both its proportional and at-large directors. The OVUUSD finds that this model has served it well. While the 2020 Census numbers have not been released, Ripton's 2010 numbers would provide it one proportional director on the OVUUSD board.

Such representation becomes important for the citizens of Ripton considering that the Agency of Education has opined that its reading of 16 V.S.A. §72.4 may preclude a district which is placed unilaterally within a unified district by State Board of Education Order from withdrawing from a unified union district. While we make no representation whether we agree **with** such an interpretation of the statute, it should be noted that the Articles of Agreement currently in effect for OVUUSD provide for school closure by a two-thirds (2/3) majority of the board as OVUUSD has been in existence for more than four years. Currently the OVUUSD Board is looking at all of its facilities to determine how each would be used and if any should be closed or given to their respective towns. The Ripton community should be aware that such a provision exists, and school closure would be decided upon by the OVUUSD Board.

RNESU respects that the voters of Ripton exercised their right to address their concerns with their current partnership with ACSD. It is our view that they should seek a new partnership with a district more closely aligned with their needs, size and representation model. To that end, we understand that there have been preliminary discussions between White River Valley Supervisory Union's Superintendent and the Ripton representatives.

On behalf of the RNESU and member districts, we appreciate the Board's consideration of our position. If the SBE Board has additional questions, please feel free to contact either Superintendent Collins or myself as OVUU and RNESU Board Chair.

Sincerely,



Laurie Bertrand

OVUU/ RNESU Board Chair