

From: Campbell, Patrick [Patrick.Campbell@vermont.gov]
Sent: Thursday, September 01, 2016 11:41 AM
To: Pepper, James
Subject: FW: Education Governance - Your follow-up correspondence to the Governor

FYI 3

From: Russo-Savage, Donna
Sent: Monday, August 29, 2016 5:20 PM
To: Holcombe, Rebecca <Rebecca.Holcombe@vermont.gov>; Talbott, Bill <Bill.Talbott@vermont.gov>; James, Brad <Brad.James@vermont.gov>; Gaidys, Maureen <Maureen.Gaidys@vermont.gov>; Sprague, Suzanne <Suzanne.Sprague@vermont.gov>; Brackin, Stephanie <Stephanie.Brackin@vermont.gov>; Dover, Haley <Haley.Dover@vermont.gov>
Cc: Campbell, Patrick <Patrick.Campbell@vermont.gov>
Subject: FW: Education Governance - Your follow-up correspondence to the Governor

FYI – the latest e-mail from Donna Martin and my response.

From: Russo-Savage, Donna
Sent: Monday, August 29, 2016 5:18 PM
To: Donna Martin
Subject: RE: Education Governance - Your follow-up correspondence to the Governor

Dear Donna –

Your e-mail appears to address whether Act 46 is a good law for Vermont.

Only the Legislature has the authority to adopt laws and to change or repeal laws after they're adopted.

Neither the Agency of Education nor its Secretary has such authority.

As I explained earlier, we are tasked with helping people to understand education laws as they currently exist under the statutes the Legislature has adopted.

If you would like to see changes to the law, then I encourage you to contact your state legislators.

Best –

Donna

Donna Russo-Savage
Principal Assistant to the Secretary, School Governance
Vermont Agency of Education
Donna.RussoSavage@vermont.gov

802.479.1744

From: Donna Martin [<mailto:ax46ourschools@gmail.com>]

Sent: Friday, August 26, 2016 9:27 PM

To: Russo-Savage, Donna

Subject: Re: Education Governance - Your follow-up correspondence to the Governor

Dear Donna,

I will start off my letter with some direct quotes from some of our school board merger participants (WCSU) talking directly about Reading Elementary School.

"I will not support combined classrooms- " (*Reading has all combined classrooms.)

"I will not pay taxes to keep a school open with combined classrooms of 10 kids."

"Why would we (Woodstock) want to have to budget for your school to stay open while we have plenty of room in our schools to provide a better education at a lower cost."

"Your school is not sustainable."

Great right? ACT 46 is not about closing schools...

The NBA doesn't say "short people cannot be drafted into professional basketball" or "you don't meet the minimum height requirements"...and.... every once in awhile, a shortish guy does make it through (if you think 6'3" is short)....but we all know that it's basically a tall mans game.

ACT 46 is subtle....it put together an accelerated timeline with non-professional volunteers to implement it....and a series of carrots and sticks...with the ominous sounding "the state will have to step in and make recommendations for schools that do not participate..."

The tax part is even more subtle....basically it INFERS that savings are there to be had (no real data)....because it just makes sense right? The theory that "streaming" any "production line", cutting "extraneous costs" means cheaper goods right? You are all fools if you think the value of a young child's education comes from dollars...it comes from community, and teachers that care. You have lost your way in a sea of testing. You have lost your way in an unending quest to "level" everyone, never accounting for the community input, the personal investment.

Reading, with it's 60 kids, small school grant and just under a million dollar budget is like a turkey at a dinner party a few days from Thanksgiving where all the guests are assuring it that "we might not have turkey on Thanksgiving this year."

Well, people have turkey on Thanksgiving.

Both Rick and I, along with our neighbors and fellow residents- are confused and unhappy with this State.

Minimum school district student numbers? Minimum classroom sizes? How about reducing the number of superintendents?

Act 46 wants 900 kids to a district. What did you think was going to happen? The hunt for "butts to put in seats" begins.

Also, besides superintendents--- reduce the amazing number of "extraneous" educators and consultants... and studies....etc...

Why does a superintendent make 6 figures in a school district in Vermont (400-2000 students) where the same position, paying the same amount in other states serves 6000 students?

Reading will not "go gently into that good night..." I'm afraid. Nor will all the towns with school choice- or towns that don't want to travel 45 minutes(one way) to get to a sick child....(young kids are sick ALOT) from school.

Repeal this act- work with those towns that want to consolidate and support those that want too stay.

Increase our state revenue- make Vermont a place that families want to live.

We're doing our part as parents, taxpayers and community members.- you do yours.

dm

The goal of the larger school districts is to absorb as many of the neighboring communities students. period..

READING IS LIKE A TURKEY AT A DINNER PARTY A FEW DAYS FROM THANKSGIVING

Well.....I believe that Act 46 is a hasty, sloppy, ill-executed piece of legislation.....and the fact that you want to say it "does not have the intent of closing small schools" is probably true in the fact that nowhere does it explicitly state that small schools are too costly and have substandard educational opportunities.....but the consequences of your "minimum requirements....and equitable educational curriculum...and minimum # of students etc....you are not being truthful. The intent of the law has lost it's meaning in the implication of it and it needs to be repealed or changed.

The rough truth is the Act 46 merger and educational equity REQUIREMENTS leaves Reading Elementary DOA. It pits taxpayer against taxpayer- and parent against taxpayer and while we're all out here in the trenches- all of the powers up in Montpelier sit back and see what will happen.

The state has left serious decisions to volunteer school board members...the state has passed something so complex that even the most educated of us has difficulty understanding it. The state has provided incentives for those that comply and losses for those that don't- all under the inevitable loss of choice if you choose to wait it out.

We have combined, small classrooms- the merger board has in its articles of agreements that combined classrooms, and the minimum student requirements are not

On Mon, Aug 22, 2016 at 5:12 PM, Russo-Savage, Donna <Donna.RussoSavage@vermont.gov> wrote:

Good evening –

The Governor's Office forwarded your most recent correspondence to us. Here are a few thoughts:

Nothing in Act 46 contemplates closing small schools.

Act 46 requires that a small school grant (or combination of grants) be paid annually to a new union school district if the district is formed by one or more districts that received a small school grant. This annual grant would continue in perpetuity and could be terminated only if the voters decided to close the small school.

Consolidation of governance structure is not the same thing as consolidation (or closure) of a school building. The experience of the Smilie School in Chittenden East SU, which was facing the likelihood of closing prior to merger, suggests that a small school may even have a better chance of remaining open and viable if it is part of a larger, merged governing and taxing unit.

If you have any specific questions, then please don't hesitate to contact Brad James (cc'd) or me directly. We are tasked with helping individuals, school boards, and school administrators to

understand education governance and education funding laws as they currently exist. We would be happy to help you as we are able.

Best –

Donna