

Good afternoon,

I'm John Castle. I greatly appreciate the Senate Education Committee taking testimony today. I currently serve as superintendent of schools for North Country Supervisory Union.

I'm proud to serve our supervisory union where a board member summed it up in five words in reference to the increase in assessment for our supervisory union special services budget, "they are all our children." It is my hope that your committee and our General Assembly cares deeply about "all our children" across the state.

We address the needs that may exist in one school differently than another as we address the needs of a classroom or a particular child differently. Likewise, our Legislature must recognize the variation of need between districts, and regions for that matter. We have disparity of opportunity given our economic circumstances and a variation of need due to the same.

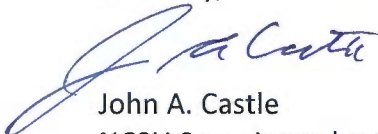
The high percentage of students with needs, especially in small, rural schools in our supervisory union require substantial supports to meet those collective needs. Issues of equity transcend districts or supervisory unions and must be addressed as a state. The needs being illustrated in testimony today are real. I believe this testimony, in concert with the weighting study, clearly shines a light on the need for more resources to support students living in poverty.

I recognize the call for more resources is counter to the narrative of declining enrollment, schools having too many cars in the parking lot and property taxes being too high. The reality is schools need more capacity, and robust social service organizations to partner with, to shift the tide for families living in poverty. We need it now.

We've lived complacently while the forces of poverty have adversely impacted far more people than our current public health crisis. Where is the sense of urgency and call for action that is justified to support the financial, social/emotional and mental health needs that for too long have disrupted, diminished, and devastated the lives of our children.

Justice too long delayed is justice denied. I truly hope that our Legislature believes, "they are all our children!"

Sincerely,



John A. Castle  
NCSU Superintendent of Schools  
Vermont Rural Education Collaborative Board Member



## Kingdom East School District

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**Burke Concord Lyndon Lunenburg Miller's Run Newark Sutton**

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March 10, 2020

Dear Senate Education Committee,

My name is Jennifer Botzjorns and I am in my 4th year serving as the Superintendent of Schools for Kingdom East School District. We operate seven schools in the Northeast Kingdom towns of Burke, Concord, Lunenburg, Lyndon, Newark, Sheffield, Sutton and Wheelock. Prior to this role I served for four years as the assistant superintendent in Chittenden East, and for seven years as the principal at Mt Mansfield Union High School. Prior to that I served as a math, Latin and English teacher.

I am here today to share data to make the argument that the legislature must take action on the weighting study. This legislative session.

31 Teachers in our sparsely populated district have emergency or provisional licenses. This means reading, writing, math, science and other content areas are taught by someone who does not yet have the full qualifications to teach in the field.

177 days our elementary school students engage in reading, writing and math, sitting right next to sewage ejector pumps because we have not been able to fix the HVAC infrastructure to address facilities needs.

177 days our middle school students did not have access to a make space, STEM lab or enrichment because the school space was full of lead, mold and/ or standing brackish water.

20%, on average, of our teachers in our high poverty schools leave each year. They exit the region for a number of reasons including spouse employment, low pay rates and the lack of available amenities in our rural communities.

37 days of teaching and learning, in this past year, were interrupted or completely halted due to unsafe buildings. This includes complete school day closures due to air quality or septic in schools. Plays, sporting events, concerts and talent shows cancelled due to safety of our buildings and PE classes held in hallways,

This data tells a tale of two Vermonts. Children should not have opportunities determined by their zip code.

Can you imagine if CP Smith had 20% of its teachers leave each year? Or if every day of the year children at Main Street Middle School sat next to sewage ejection pumps? Or if at Northeast Primary School a third of the teachers had provisional licenses, or at Montpelier High School 37 days of learning were interrupted or cancelled? In low poverty more densely populated areas of the state you would

never see the conditions I see every day. The data shared only skims the surface of the inequities and challenges our schools face.

The data tells a tale of two Vermonts. I have worked in one of the wealthiest districts, and given my current role in a high poverty sparsely populated area, I can assure you with scores more examples. that we have two Vermonts.

The weighting study was developed through comprehensive research on educational programs. The Vermont constitution guarantees education for all children. Children throughout the state should have equal access to opportunities; currently they do not.

Please take action on the UVM weighting study, this legislative session.

Thank you for your time, I appreciate all that you do.

Sincerely,

Jenifer Botzjorns  
Superintendent of Schools

## **Press Conference, 3/11, 2:30 pm, Montpelier, State House**

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Good Afternoon,

My name is Al Claussen and I am the Vice Chair for the West River Education District in Windham County. I am the proud father of four boys who have and continue to go through our educational system, including one who is studying Computer Science at the University of Vermont. My wife Tammy Claussen is a Physical Education teacher and Varsity Softball Coach and has been at Leland and Gray Union High School in Townshend for the last 30 years.

Why am I giving you this lengthy bio? I want you to understand that my family is fully invested in the educational decision-making of our government on a personal and professional level.

To gain a better perspective on where we are right now, let's look at some of the tragic events that have happened over the last 20 years...

- 9/11
- The longest war in the history of the United States
- The Great Recession - not everyone has recovered
- Hurricane Irene - we still have the scars and have not recovered the Townshend Dam recreational area for swimming and fishing

On top of these macro events, we also have the current local crises of...

- Double-digit increases in health care costs annually
- Higher needs and costs in special education and mental health services
- The opioid epidemic, straining our social services to the brink
- An aging population with a fixed income
- A declining student population

These compound crises serve as a backdrop for the School Boards and Administrators who, to the best of their abilities, craft budgets in the face of the erosion of our socio-economic infrastructure. And despite our best efforts at West River with a 2.88% increase in the school budget this year, we have exceeded the spending threshold, sending hard earned dollars back into the system to be distributed at the discretion of our state government.

In the midst of our Board's budget deliberations in early January 2020 we learned of the findings and recommendations of the Study of Pupil Weights in Vermont's Education Funding Formula. One word...hope!

Hope that our state government will implement the findings of the study and restore equity for our students and incorporate new cost factors and weights. The time to do the right thing is NOW!  
The people of the West River Education District are suffering with a high tax burden.

Schools have outlasted their expected lifetimes and have many overdue repairs yet we continue to kick the can down the road.

We need this reform...

Lower tax rates draw people and businesses to increase our population and bring back a vibrancy to the fabric of our community. They also restore a sense of confidence and hope for our next generation...our students.

This is an opportunity to hit the reset button.

Now, this cannot stop with the implementation of the weighting study recommendations...

The issues are much deeper...

Try explaining to your taxpayers how a 3% increase in the school budget translates to a 15% increase in their tax rate.

The funding formula is broken!

The findings in the weighting study need to be the catalyst for education funding reform.

We need to be able to provide this generation of students with the resources, tools, and environment that helps them thrive, while balancing the needs of our stretched taxpayers in the West River Valley. Our people work hard and expect a greater return on investment from the state of Vermont.

And they want it now...not phased in.

The State of Vermont has spent 20 years phasing out rural areas...economically disadvantaged areas...areas with ever-growing unfunded needs.

It's time to rebuild and restore trust in our institutions that can bring relief with the stroke of a pen.

The time for action is NOW!

Give us...students, board members, schools and the taxpayers of the West River Valley hope for a brighter future!

Thank You!

March 3, 2020

Marlboro Residents' Petition to the Vermont Legislature:

Questions were asked at Marlboro's recent Pre-Town Meeting to understand why Marlboro is anticipating an 18% increase in our education tax rate. It seems that trying to understand the convoluted methodology of the "equalized pupil" system is like trying to follow a shell game.

As it was explained, the 2019 Pupil Weighting Study Report showed that the system hasn't been fairly applied in 20 years, and that finally the legislature is going to take a look at revising it. It's hard to comprehend that the Agency of Education and Legislature, the agency charged with the oversight of this legislation, neglected to do their job.

Now Marlboro residents are being hit with an exorbitant tax increase which will have a devastating effect on many households in town. This increase is largely due to the penalty being assessed by the State as a result of the faulty equalized-pupil system. Even though the legislature has acknowledged that it has been being applied incorrectly for 20 years, the town is still being assessed a huge penalty. There is no legitimate justification for this decision ~ our town has to pay an exorbitant penalty to the State based on a program that our state government now acknowledge has placed an unfair burden on many Vermont communities like Marlboro while benefiting others.

Because of the financial inequities of the "equalized pupil" system over the years, the Marlboro School Board has put off many necessary repairs to our school building due to the increased tax burden that would have been placed on Marlboro residents. These repairs will very probably be much more costly to implement in the future due to added deterioration over the years.

There should be absolutely no question that this penalty should be waived, and the inequities of the program should be immediately addressed and corrected by the legislature. The citizens of Marlboro should not have to pay for the egregious failure of the Agency of Education and Legislation to do their job!

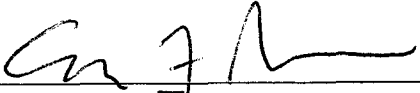
Thank you for your consideration of our concerns.

Signed by the following Residents of Marlboro, Vermont:

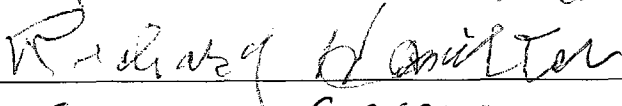
  
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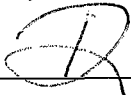
  
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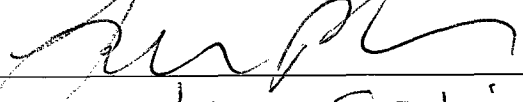
  
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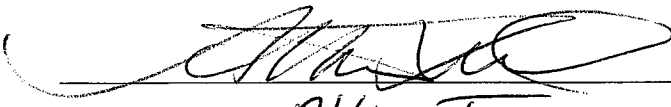
  
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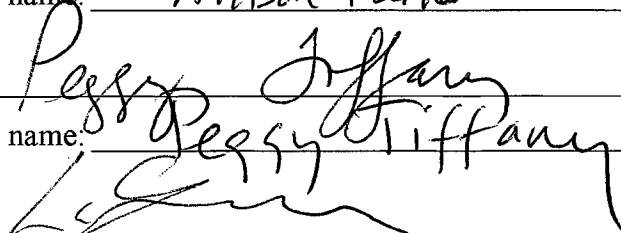
  
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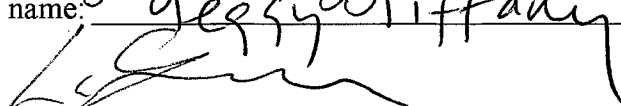
  
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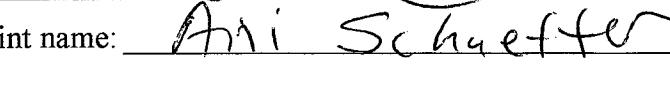
  
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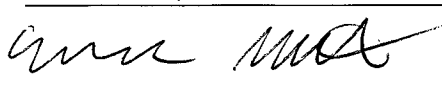
  
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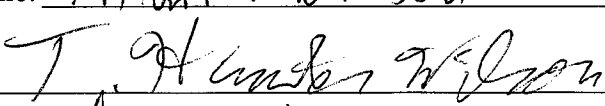
  
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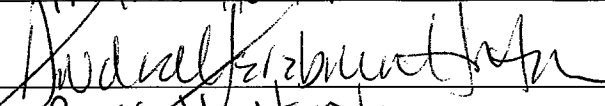
  
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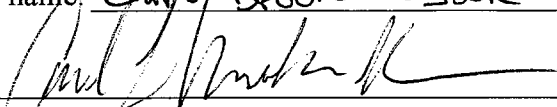
  
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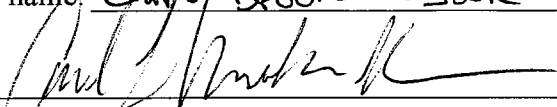
  
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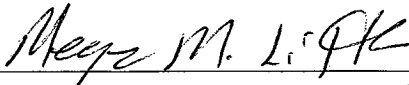
  
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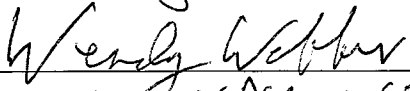
  
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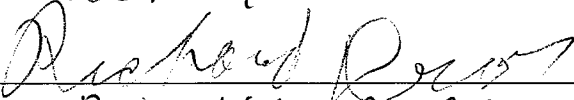
  
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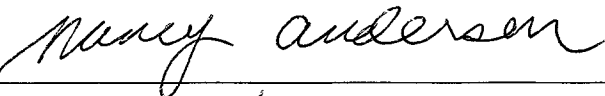


  
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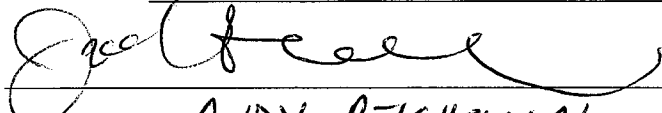
  
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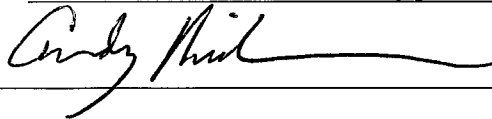
  
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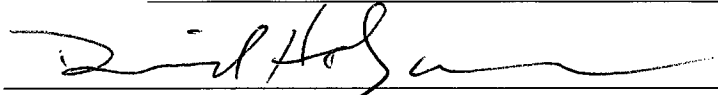
  
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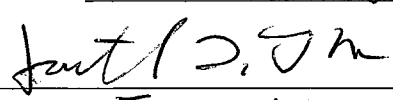
  
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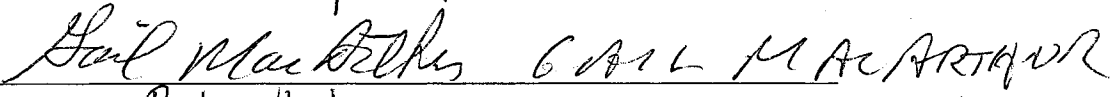
  
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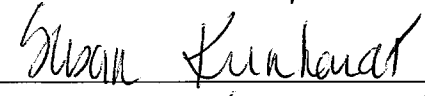
  
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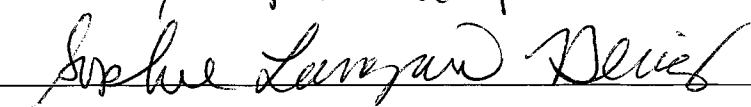
  
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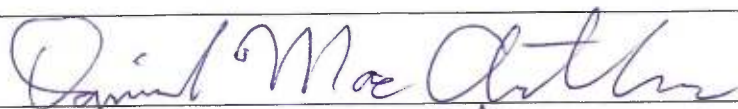
  
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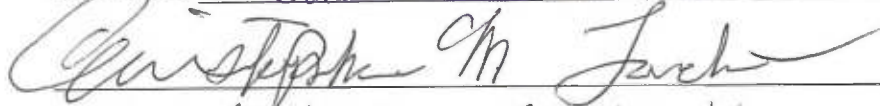
  
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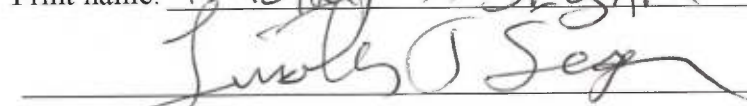


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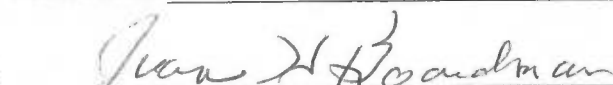


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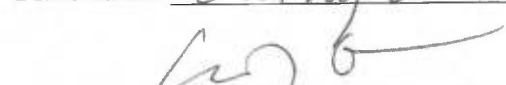
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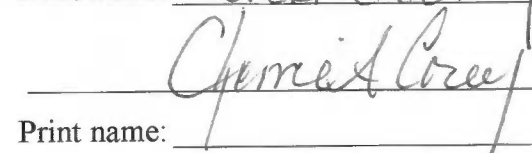
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