

April 11, 2017

Dear Whitingham Selectboard Members,

Thank you for your letter requesting information and assistance with school funding in your district. I apologize for the delay, but needed to gather information about your district before I could respond.

You are correct that a reduced and changing student population is something we need to address. There are many reasons for rural population decline and these are impacting rural communities across the country, not only in Vermont. We need to take proactive steps to attract families and working young adults to our rural communities. In the meantime, many districts have found efficiencies and administrative savings through mergers, as encouraged by Act 46 and previous incentives.

In your letter, you connect the CLA with excess spending penalties. However, it is my understanding the CLA has no impact on this. The excess spending penalty is determined by education spending per equalized pupil and, for this purpose, education spending excludes spending on capital debt and several other categories of spending.

I certainly hope residents will stay in Whitingham and would like to see more people move there. There are some residents who are unaware they are eligible for education tax relief through "income sensitivity." More than seventy-six percent of Whitingham's resident homeowners are eligible for a property tax adjustment, but not everyone who is eligible participates. It might be helpful for the Select board to help inform residents to take advantage of that. If I can be helpful with this, please let me know. I would be happy to provide information, participate in a video conference with residents, or set up a local meeting during one of my southern Vermont days.

We just passed a bill in the Senate to address some Act 46 challenges. S.122 was created by the Senate Education committee after much research and testimony and it does allow districts greater flexibility to enter into merged districts within supervisory unions. The House will now review this, but I am hopeful it will pass and you may find new options for your district in these changes.

Thank you for your service and dedication to your community and schools.

Sincerely,

David Zuckerman, Lt. Governor