

Sec. A. TEMPORARY MORATORIUM ON UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT SCHOOL CLOSURES

(a) Notwithstanding any provision of law to the contrary, a union school district shall not close, repurpose, or otherwise terminate the elementary school program in a member town or city for students resident in the town or city in any of grades K-8 without the approval of the voters in the town or city.

(b) This section is repealed on July 1, 2023.

Sec. B. UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT CLOSURES; REPORT

On or before January 15, 2023, the Agency of Education shall issue a written report to the Senate and House Committees on Education on union school district school closures, as defined in Sec. A of this act. In preparing the report, the Agency shall consult with the State Board of Education, the Vermont School Boards Association, the Vermont Principals' Association, the Vermont Superintendents Association, the Vermont National Education Association, and any town or city that notifies the Agency of its desire to participate in the Agency's review and consultations. The Agency shall also solicit and consider comments from the public. Any conclusions reached by the Agency related to financial matters shall be supported by credible data, and by reasonable assumptions, and shall be shared with study participants and the public with an opportunity to comment before the report is completed. The report shall include:

(1) an examination of examples of and recent school closures, or attempted school closures, within union school districts and identification of common trends and issues;

(2) an examination of the impact school closures have had or are anticipated to have on towns or member districts seeking to withdraw from a union school district;

(3) an examination of the issues leading a school board to consider closing a school, the options to address the issue that could be employed instead of school closure, and the impact the inability to close a school building has had or is expected to have on the union school district or any of the towns or member districts within it;

(4) an examination of the issues leading a town or city to oppose plans to close a school, the efforts made by residents of the town or city to retain the school, the options to address the issue that could be employed instead of school closure, and the impact school closure has had or is expected to have on the students of the town or city school, and on the town or city community;

(5) an examination of the advantages and disadvantages of creating a consistent statewide process for union school district school closures and a common definition of what actions constitute a closure;

(6) an examination of Articles of Agreement related to school closures, and whether in a merger of two union school districts where one district has Articles of Agreement relating to school closure, the new merged district should be prohibited from closing a school without compliance with such Articles of Agreement in the original district.

(7) recommendations on school closure standards and processes;
and

(8) recommendations for legislative action, including recommended legislative language.

Sec. C. UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT WITHDRAWAL; REPORT

On or before January 15, 2023, the Agency of Education shall issue a written report to the Senate and House Committees on Education on the union school district withdrawal process. In preparing the report, the Agency shall consult with the State Board of Education, the Vermont School Boards Association, the Vermont Principals' Association, the Vermont Superintendents Association, the Vermont National Education Association, and any town or city that notifies the Agency of its desire to participate in the Agency's consultations.. The Agency shall also solicit and consider comments from the public. Any conclusions reached by the Agency relating to financial matters shall be supported by credible data and by reasonable assumptions, and shared with study participants and the public, with an opportunity to comment. The report shall include:

(1) an examination of the advantages and disadvantages of the withdrawal process in place on January 1, 2022 for union school districts;

(2) identification of alternative withdrawal process options and an examination of the advantages and disadvantages of each;

(3) identification and examination of any other issues related to the withdrawal process;

(4) recommendations for changes to the withdrawal process and related issues; and

(5) recommendations for legislative action, including recommended legislative language.