

Testimony regarding H.361

Senate Hearing Wednesday, April 22, 2015

I disagree with the current bill's focus on "incentives" that will force many towns to ask, "Should we get a tax reduction for a few years in return for getting rid of our local school board?"

I believe the consolidation model proposed in this bill is focused on the wrong end of the spectrum. The place to consolidate, in my opinion, is at the top.

Here is a plan I'd like to see explored: Vermont should have one Superintendent per county and each county should have one administrative office to oversee Human Resources and Payroll for all schools. Most importantly, we should not allow the hiring of numerous Assistant Superintendents, as this would negatively offset the savings afforded by this plan. This consolidation would necessitate the adoption of a totally new governance model. Superintendents would not, and should not, attend every school board meeting. Perhaps the creation of Executive Boards representing all of the schools, or some rotational attendance model could be explored. I'm sure other states have examples of models that work. But to eliminate effective local school boards simply because it is inconvenient for Superintendents to go to so many meetings, is un-Democratic and demeans the quality and efficacy of local control. Remember, local school boards are FREE. They, along with Principals, truly affect outcomes at the building level—where our children are actually being taught.

If some schools choose to consolidate, that's great. But to create districts based on an arbitrary number of students for the convenience of overseeing them by an out-moded governance model is not in the best interest of Vermonters.

Respectfully submitted,

Joanne Breidenstein