

From: Mishaan, Jessica
Sent: Monday, September 12, 2016 4:44 PM
To: oliver@oliverolsen.com
Subject: response to public records request

Dear Representative Olsen,

Attached please find records in response to your public records request dated September 7, 2016. Weekly reports to the Governor have been withheld as executive privileged communications pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 317(c)(1) & (4). Several emails between Secretary of Education Rebecca Holcombe and James Pepper have also been withheld as executive privileged communications pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 317(c)(1) & (4). Personal contact information has been redacted pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 317(c)(7).

If you feel any records have been withheld in error, you may appeal to the Governor's Chief of Staff, Darren Springer.

Thank you,

Jessica Mishaan | Paralegal
Office of the Governor
109 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05609-0101
802.828.3333

From: Pepper, James [James.Pepper@vermont.gov]
Sent: Monday, August 08, 2016 1:29 PM
To: 'oliver@oliverolsen.com'
Subject: FW: Request

Here you go.

From: Holcombe, Rebecca
Sent: Friday, August 05, 2016 1:54 PM
To: Pepper, James <James.Pepper@vermont.gov>
Subject: Fwd: Request

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----- Forwarded message -----

From: "Stephan Morse" <stephan@sover.net>
Date: Fri, Aug 5, 2016 at 11:38 AM -0400
Subject: RE: Request
To: "Holcombe, Rebecca" <Rebecca.Holcombe@vermont.gov>

Rebecca: I would ask you & the Agency to delay submitting the proposed Independent School Rules to the ICAR Board.

It is my sense that the Board needs to discuss further and I would ask that this issue be placed on the August SBE agenda.

Thank you for your assistance. Stephan

Mishaan, Jessica

From: Campbell, Patrick
Sent: Thursday, September 01, 2016 11:45 AM
To: Pepper, James
Subject: Act 46/ [REDACTED]

Hey James,

I just sent you three emails relating to Act 46 and communication we have received on it from a [REDACTED]. So far, we have responded to all of [REDACTED] letters or had the Agency of Education do so with more details, which are the three emails I just sent to you. We received more communication from [REDACTED] today, which I will copy below. I believe at this point there isn't much more to say or do, however, because your our education point person, I wanted to send it to you, in case you wanted to respond or had any suggestions. Just let me know if you'd like me to do anything with this. Thanks!

Original/Latest Correspondence:

Mr Shumlin,

I have been emailing you about ACT 46. This is a hasty piece of legislation- with impossible timelines- expected to be implemented by non-education school board volunteers- and is so poorly and hypocritically written to be not about small school closings that it begs the question, "Do they really think anyone believes that?"

Elementary schools, the lifeblood of these towns, should have been exempt from the legislation. Small schools provide valuable family and community support. Without a local elementary school- house values fall and real estate sales plummet. Low income families with local child care and transportation issues- suffer-

Our youngest students need the financial investment from the state. Our small town will raise the bulk of the money and provide the hours and hours of volunteer work.

Most people accept and support the combination of the 7-12 students. As they get older parental involvement tends to reduce and they are more independent. It also gives those students access to sports teams and a greater peer base.

Pre-K- 6 is a different story.

if anyone in your office is actually interested in this- feel free to contact me as I have already been re-routed to other offices which say "we can only help with questions on the existing legislation- if you feel a change should be made contact your representatives...."

Reading Elementary will not "go gently into that good night".

[REDACTED]

Patrick Campbell
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(802) 828-3333

Patrick.Campbell@vermont.gov

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Mishaan, Jessica

From: Campbell, Patrick
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 [REDACTED] and my response.

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

Dear [REDACTED] –

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: [REDACTED] [mailto:[REDACTED]]
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 [REDACTED] 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.

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

Mishaan, Jessica

From: Campbell, Patrick
Sent: Thursday, September 01, 2016 11:41 AM
To: Pepper, James
Subject: FW: From the Office of the Governor [REDACTED]

FYI

From: Campbell, Patrick
Sent: Monday, August 22, 2016 4:31 PM
To: James, Brad <Brad.James@vermont.gov>; Russo-Savage, Donna <Donna.RussoSavage@vermont.gov>; Gaidys, Maureen <Maureen.Gaidys@vermont.gov>
Cc: Talbott, Bill <Bill.Talbott@vermont.gov>
Subject: RE: From the Office of the Governor [REDACTED]

Hey all,

Thank you for the prompt response. I agree that sounds like a good idea. I do not know the details of the merger in Chittenden East or many more details pertaining to this issue particularly, and am not sure I can speak intelligently enough to the issue to draft a response that may satisfy [REDACTED]. I don't know if one of you would mind drafting a response that could be sent from your office? I would really appreciate it, as we have already responded to [REDACTED] on behalf of us to a previous response, and this is essentially [REDACTED] response to that letter.

Thank you again for taking a look at this and keeping us in the loop!

Best,
Patrick Campbell
Office of the Governor
109 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05609
(802) 828-3333

Patrick.Campbell@vermont.gov

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From: James, Brad
Sent: Monday, August 22, 2016 3:58 PM
To: Campbell, Patrick <Patrick.Campbell@vermont.gov>; Russo-Savage, Donna <Donna.RussoSavage@vermont.gov>; Gaidys, Maureen <Maureen.Gaidys@vermont.gov>
Cc: Talbott, Bill <Bill.Talbott@vermont.gov>
Subject: RE: From the Office of the Governor [REDACTED]

Hi, Patrick.

I just reread the e-mail from [REDACTED]. Donna and I discussed a response briefly and pretty much all I could add to Donna's suggestion is to show the total dollars in the Education Fund from FY2010 through FY2016 or FY2017 in response to his statement that the State of Vermont has, "... been reducing its education funding since 2010- with the hope that small towns upon feeling a deeper pinch of costs would be all too willing to consolidate."

I'm not sure including that information would be a useful response. He suggests leaving small school alone until the voters decide to close them themselves -- essentially what Act 46 is offering. I don't think a discussion of the statewide nature of our funding system would be of use. I think Donna's suggestion of using the Smilie School in Bolton as an example of a merger (Chittenden East) saving a small school is the best bet. That can get at the issue of consolidating governance versus consolidating schools.

Brad

From: Campbell, Patrick
Sent: Monday, August 22, 2016 8:49 AM
To: Russo-Savage, Donna; Gaidys, Maureen
Cc: Talbott, Bill; James, Brad
Subject: RE: From the Office of the Governor [REDACTED]

Hey all,

I just wanted to check in and see if there were any updates on this. It looks as though you may be meeting today based on the email below, but I wanted to check in incase there was anything new. Thank you so much again for taking a look and for keeping us in the loop!

Best,

Patrick Campbell
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From: Russo-Savage, Donna
Sent: Thursday, August 11, 2016 3:39 PM
To: Gaidys, Maureen <Maureen.Gaidys@vermont.gov>
Cc: Talbott, Bill <Bill.Talbott@vermont.gov>; Campbell, Patrick <Patrick.Campbell@vermont.gov>; James, Brad <Brad.James@vermont.gov>
Subject: RE: From the Office of the Governor [REDACTED]

Hi -

I can take a stab at a response to at least one part of this - e.g., that nothing in Act 46 contemplates closing small schools, that small school grants continue indefinitely in a merged district, and that the experience in Chittenden East suggest that a small school is more likely to stay open if it is part of a larger governing / taxing unit.

On quick review, many of the issues seem to be tax- and funding-related. Perhaps Bill and/or Brad and I can come up with something. I added Brad to the cc'd names. I'm flat out for the rest of this week and am on vacation for all of next, but could meet to discuss when I return on August 22.

Donna

Donna Russo-Savage
Principal Assistant to the Secretary, School Governance
Vermont Agency of Education
Donna.RussoSavage@vermont.gov
802.479.1744

From: Gaidys, Maureen
Sent: Thursday, August 11, 2016 3:05 PM
To: Russo-Savage, Donna
Cc: Talbott, Bill
Subject: FW: From the Office of the Governor [REDACTED]

Donna,

Are you able to please respond to the forwarded constituent inquiry below that was forwarded to us from the Gov's Office? Please mention in your response that this was forwarded to us from the Gov's Office and please copy both myself and Patrick on the response to the constituent.

Thank you,

Maureen

Maureen Gaidys
Executive Assistant
Vermont Agency of Education – Secretary's Office
219 North Main Street, Suite 402
Barre, VT 05641
802-479-1060 (phone) 802-479-1835 (fax)

My email address has changed: maureen.gaidys@vermont.gov

PLEASE READ CAREFULLY: Due to the nature of the Secretary's duties to the State of Vermont and its citizens, there are occasions when the Secretary needs to cancel and/or postpone meetings or events in order to attend to pressing state matters. Please keep this in mind when planning for events.

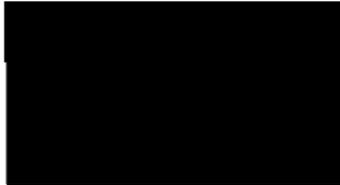
From: Campbell, Patrick
Sent: Thursday, August 11, 2016 2:44 PM
To: Gaidys, Maureen
Subject: From the Office of the Governor [REDACTED]

Hey Maureen,

Our office received the following correspondence from the constituent below. We had sent [REDACTED] some information regarding our position on Act 46 in response to a letter [REDACTED] wrote us, yet [REDACTED] still seems frustrated with the answers [REDACTED] is receiving. I was hoping someone from your office could take a look and possibly draft a response from your office that could respond more directly to some of [REDACTED] concerns.

Thank you so much for taking a look and for keeping our office in the loop!

Original Correspondence:



Subject: Re: Re: Responding to your message

Mr. Shumlin,

Maintaining our local involvement, as parent taxpayers, to our youngest learners, with our local non-child taxpayers having a direct and impactful voice as for the budgets of these small schools— is at the heart of Vermont life. These small schools are in small voter towns. These voters voices will be watered down under consolidation. School boards will serve the predominant towns which will vote in and out members to suit the needs that the receiving towns(of our students) want.

You , along with the rest of our representatives should really realize that at some point, Vermont becomes a scenic playground for the wealthy This Act 46 hurts our most economically disadvantaged the most, folks that rely heavily on local childcare, close to schools for aftercare and emergency "sick child" care while they work. They have transportation issues and family issues that are accommodated by neighbors in our local towns.

My family moved here for the small town feel of things. If Act 46 were to place finances and this illusion of school equity into play, then we have already discussed moving back to Connecticut, where we had very good schools, with all the bells and whistles. Both private school kids, we are devoted to our children attending public schools, with two already having established successful careers having attended state colleges.

Education is expensive. Period. It is up to you to figure out a way to compensate these small towns with increased funding until such a time that the individual towns decide to close their school themselves.

After just a cursory look at our state compared to others it seems a fair suggestion to increase "user" based taxes. The state of Vermont has been reducing its education funding since 2010- with the hope that small towns upon feeling a deeper pinch of costs would be all too willing to consolidate.

A some point, you lose the intrinsic nature of these towns which may, for the sake of argument go the way of many of the "second home" towns we all know. Manicured lawns, mowed by the few locals that serve the area- lights that go on for 9 weekends a year if the foliage and snow cooperates....ho hmmm....Some towns may be on the outs ---but Reading is not one of them...certainly not now.

It is a lie and a fallacy that there will be any savings- any "savings" will reabsorbed into the ever expanding list of new requirements and extraneous costs that large entities incur.

Reading already decided, itself, to send our 7-12 students to Woodstock-- giving up choice years ago--- it did not save us money.

The younger kids(pre-k-through 6) do extremely well here. The town has a life and a vitality to it that would be lost.

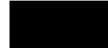
If you're betting that these small towns in Vermont are just going to roll over, you would be wrong.

Small business support, and encouragement, user based -tourism-taxes on rooms etc..., the wealthy residents and visitors paying fair taxes on their "use" of Vermont would help. We may not have a large indigenous population but we have millions of visitors.

Certainly, you realize that it is very difficult to suggest to a parent that their children will get a better education further away and that one extra gym class a week is soon important ---and equally difficult, convincing a taxpayer that their education tax dollars will go further in the town 30 minutes away.

You were hasty. It will have a consequence. The population of Vermont will continue to dwindle and it will become the Northeastern version of Florida. What a shame.

We'll still come and visit after we move, if that's any consolation. Because if the "equitable education " items outlined in Act 46 are really that important- we made the wrong decision in moving here.



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