



219 North Main Street, Suite 402
Barre, VT 05641 (p) 802-479-1030 | (f) 802-479-1835

Secretary's Proposed Plan Pursuant to Act 46, Sec. 10

Executive Summary

Legislative Mandate

- [Act 46](#) was enacted in July of 2015. It created three phases of voluntary school district merger and one non-voluntary phase to be mandated by the State Board of Education and implemented on July 1, 2019.
- This proposed plan is required by Act 46, Section 10 and is submitted to the State Board for its consideration as it begins to write the final statewide plan, to be issued on or before November 30, 2018.
- This proposed plan was written after consideration of [unmerged districts' proposals under Act 46, Section 9](#), and formal conversations with those districts' representatives as required by Act 46, Sec. 10.

Statewide Governance Context

Vermont's General Assembly passed Act 46 in response to, among other factors, a substantial change in the state's demographics. Over the past twenty years, consistent with trends across the northeast and rural states generally, Vermont's student population has shrunk by more than 24 percent. Some school districts now educate fewer than half the students they had 20 years ago. Act 46 offered districts a package of phased tax reductions and other transitional assistance in exchange for merging small, usually single-school, single-town school districts, into larger more sustainable governance units.

Many districts chose to take advantage of the voluntary merger phases. Taking into account earlier legislative programs offering tax rate reductions and transitional assistance for school district mergers, a total of **157** districts came together to create **39** new unified districts – a net reduction of **118** districts. Taken as a whole, this statewide shift in governance was a monumental effort undertaken through processes that included study committees, community outreach, local elections, and legislative feedback. As of June 1, 2018, nearly **68%** of all students are in merged districts or in districts the Legislature has deemed to be at a sustainable scale. In total:

- Voters in **146** towns
- Voted to merge **157** former districts
- Into **39** new unified districts
- In **33** former Supervisory Unions
- For a net reduction of **118** districts and **4** fewer supervisory unions

At the end of 2017, districts that had not merged under one of the voluntary merger programs and were not otherwise exempt under Act 46¹ were required to engage in a process of self-reflection and to submit a proposal for their own governance, either individually or in concert with neighboring districts. A total of **44** individual school districts *or* groups of school districts submitted written or verbal proposals to the State Board and Agency under Act 46, Sec. 9. The proposals represented the thinking of **95** school districts in **90** towns. The proposals ranged across a spectrum of options including proposing to maintain the current governance structure, recommending merger with a neighboring district or group of districts, or making no recommendation at all.

The Secretary, along with Agency of Education staff, held **42** formal conversations with school board representatives pursuant to Act 46, Sec. 10 regarding the **44** written or verbal Section 9 submissions. This proposed plan was written after participating in those conversations and analyzing each individual Section 9 Proposal.

Proposed Plan Highlights

This proposed plan addresses all **44** written and verbal proposals received, but the following proposed plan regroups them as a discussion of **43** individual districts or groups of districts. For example, the members of a union high school district might have submitted four separate proposals, but they are grouped below into one discussion. Conversely, a group of districts that submitted a single proposal might be discussed separately – for example, one discussion regarding a union high school district and all of its member districts and a separate discussion of a district that is not a member of the union district.

Regarding the 43 districts *or* groups of districts discussed below:

- The Secretary recommends merger with respect to **18**
- The Secretary proposes no action with respect to **3**, so that each community's ongoing voluntary merger process can proceed
- The Secretary does not recommend merger with respect to **12**, because merger is not practicable at this time and it would not advance the goals of Act 46
- The Secretary does not recommend merger with respect to **10**, because it is not legally possible due to differing operating/tuitioning structures within the region

¹ Nine supervisory districts (single-district supervisory unions) with an average daily membership greater than 900; two federally-sanctioned interstate school districts; and five single-town districts that received early State Board approval not to merge under either the 3-by-1 or 2-by-2-by-1 Program.