

Secretary's Report to the State Board of Education

Results of most recent merger votes (November 21 and November 28):

	Yes votes	No votes
Voted to Merge		
Pawlet	259	201
Rupert	150	142
Voted to Merge:		
Bakersfield	130	39
Berkshire	114	43
<i>Advisable but not required:</i>		
Montgomery	137	151
Merger vote failed:		
Enosburg	157	65
Richford	99	108
Voted to merge:		
Rochester	290	11
Stockbridge	96	49
Voted to close their high school and merge:		
Ludlow	344	172
Mt. Holly	341	66
Total votes:	2117 yes	1047 no
Total % voting to merge	67%	

Governance changes reviewed and voted on by the State Board of Education in 2017:

Approved by Voters or in Reconsideration Period:	SBE Meeting
NEK Choice School District	1.17.17
Quarry Valley UUSD	1.17.17
Slate Valley MUUSD	1.17.17
Wells Springs UUSD	1.17.17
Granville-Hancock	2.21.17
Windsor Central MUUSD	2.21.17

Central Vermont UUSD	3.21.17
Green Mountain USD	3.21.17
Orange-Washington UUSD	3.21.17
Caledonia Cooperative UUSD	4.18.17

*Halifax now discussing withdrawal
--can't begin the process until July
2018*

Southern Valley UUSD	4.18.17
Twin Valley Unified Union District	4.18.17
Montpelier-Roxbury School District	5.16.17
White River Unified District	8.30.17

First Branch USD -(Chelsea-Tunbridge)	9.20.17
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*yes – but Chelsea reconsidering in a
Jan. 9 vote*

*no – but Woodford reconsidering in
a Jan. 9 vote, if “yes”, a MUUSD
will form*

Mt Anthony MUUSD	9.20.17
Franklin NE PK-8/9-12 UUSD	10.18.17
Franklin NE PK-12 UUSD	10.18.17
Ludlow-Mount Holly UUSD	10.18.17
Mettawee School District (v. #2)	10.18.17
Roch-Stock Unified District	10.18.17

yes – in reconsideration period

no – in reconsideration period

yes – in reconsideration period

yes – in reconsideration period

yes – in reconsideration period

SBE

Rejected by Voters:

Meeting

White River USD #1	2.21.17
First Branch USD #1	2.21.17
(Mill River USD + Mt. Holly)	4.18.17
Cabot-Danville-Twinfield	5.16.17
Windham Southeast UUSD	9.20.17

SBE

Other:

Meeting

Bethel Rochester “fallback” proposal	5.16.17
Withdrawal of Beth-Roch fallback	8.30.17
Mettawee #1 – SBE did not approve	9.20.17

3-1 and 2-2-1 (none a decision on merger; only the "1" hadn't been decided before):

Rutland Town	8.30.17
Ira	8.30.17
Alburgh	9.20.17
Marlboro	9.20.17
Pittsfield	11.13.17

Withdrawal from Existing UHSD:

Study on supporting Struggling Learners, completed by the District Management Group (DMG) at the request of and funded by the Legislature

The AOE just released a report prepared by the District Management Group (DMG). This report was based on the contributions of over 700 educators in 10 SUs/SDs from every region in the state. We are very grateful for the quality of feedback these individuals provided, and the insight they give us on our next level of work with respect to improving education and support for struggling learners in the State of Vermont.

The study findings are very powerful. First, DMG noted the very strong commitment our Vermont educators have to making sure every child receives all the support we can offer. At the same time, the report makes clear that our current practices to support students and our understanding of what our children need can be adapted to improve outcomes for students. By evaluating our current efforts against the best practices, we can determine where we are using the right “play book” and where we need to innovate.

Tony Wagner once wrote that often, when schools need to change, it is not because they have been doing a bad job, but because what we need them to do has changed. We expect higher levels of education from all students, we know more about how to intervene to improve learning, our resources are more constrained and our children are entering our schools having experienced more disadvantage and trauma than before.

DMG found strategies for serving struggling students are very consistent across all systems. If anything, what is unique about Vermont is our local belief in our local uniqueness. In fact, DMG noted that schools within the state tend to act fairly similarly in terms of how they support struggling students, but as a whole, the state is very different from neighboring states with respect to how schools serve struggling students.

In summary, the DMG report finds that in Vermont we need to:

1. Improve the instructional core and universal first instruction for all students.
2. Provide struggling students with more experience in the instructional core- a “core plus more” model.
3. Ensure that learners who struggle receive their primary core instruction from highly skilled teachers rather than paraprofessionals.
4. Provide our educators with more support around creating and strengthening a systems-wide approach to supporting positive student behaviors based on best practice expert support.
5. Provide students with the most intensive needs specialized instruction from skilled and trained experts. Our overreliance on paras is keeping us from asking what skills students need-- and what skills those who teach those children need-- in order to help these learners acquire those skills and knowledge. This is a hard conversation because it challenges educators to challenge assumptions about how we best support our children. It invites criticism from those who look for opportunities to criticize schools, and

especially those schools that serve larger proportions of students who have experienced disadvantage. It is a conversation we are able and willing to have only because of the strong, demonstrated commitment of our educators to continuously improve our practice and to advocate for the best we can provide our children. The AOE is and will continue to support schools as they respond to the report.

Schools sometimes face pushback when they provide interventions to accelerate the learning of struggling students. However, when we invest early and effectively to bring the skills of struggling students up to grade level, all students benefit. Schools that address the needs of struggling learners experience fewer disruptive behaviors, greater focus on learning, and a more positive school culture. And in the long run, we all benefit when more of our graduates leave school to participate in a 21st century economy and able to participate with peers in a pluralist democracy.

Special Education Funding Study

Next week, we expect to receive the report on special education funding that was commissioned by and funded by the Legislature. Work is being done by Tammy Kolbe and Kieran Killeen at UVM. Some of you may remember Dr. Kolbe from her presentation before the Board a few years ago. This report is not yet done, but as soon as it is available, we will share it with the Board. The AOE has been working with UVM to support the study, and is confident it will provide a valuable and nuanced resource as we work to more effectively support the children of Vermont in a time of scarce resources.

If handled sensitively and carefully, this study, in concert with the DMG study on practices, could inform policy and practice changes that over the next five to ten years, could substantially improve supports for struggling and/or traumatized learners and ease burdens on taxpayers. If we are not careful or move too quickly, we will do a lot of damage to the most vulnerable children in the state.

Statewide and in our public schools in particular, we are hearing about an increase in students who are struggling with the effects of trauma, exposure to opiates and parents who are unable to advocate or care for them. In some areas, the increased incidence of students with emotional disturbances is quite striking. Our challenge is not that schools are not working hard or don't care; it is that the demands we place on them and the challenges they need to address are profound and different than what they have coped with in the past.

Schools need to change because the communities around them have changed. And, our system of social supports and care is fragmented, so that we need to rethink how we support children in schools to make sure the investment we make in their care is effective.

Again, it is not simply that schools are bad; the problem is the task we are demanding they do has changed, which means they are compelled to change as well. Educators need new skill sets and ways of working. Many of our students with disadvantage are increasingly isolated in schools that struggle to support them, and in some places, teachers are burning out from the

challenges of supporting them. Families with means appear to be concentrating in communities with greater means. In less prosperous areas, we see concentrating disadvantage.

As a pair, the two legislative studies on special education funding and supports for struggling learners complement each other and suggest a partnership of changes in practice and changes in funding that could make a great difference. Both are predicated on the assumption of more coherent, coordinated systems of delivery, and both will be easier to achieve in coherent districts that operate at scale. Both sets of changes will need:

- (1) at least a five year implementation plan and
- (2) a strong commitment to the belief that public schools play a critical role in ensuring all children grow up healthy and strong.

Again, part of using these studies well will depend on rethinking systems of delivery, achieving scale and allowing enough time for careful transition and implementation. And again, if we don't do this carefully, we will do tremendous damage to the state's most vulnerable children and communities.

In addition, the special education study suggests that in Vermont, more than any other state that the authors have studied, there is a very strong correlation between poverty and eligibility for special education, and that as our level of poverty rises, the demand for special education services rises. This raises the possibility that a very large portion of special education costs in the State of Vermont may also represent dollars spent to create a safety net for our most disadvantaged students. In other words, schools may be using special education spending to compensate for absent or fragmented social opportunity and supports.

Early Childhood Workforce

A working group through BBF's Early Learning and Development Committee is interested in pursuing a professional license through the Office of Professional Regulation for early childhood workers. The AOE has shared with the working group that such a license could result in additional obstacles to recruiting the workforce and could also lead to complications for licensed teachers who would then need two licenses as the SLPs do now. We introduced the working group to Colin Benjamin at OPR. The group assures us that this is part of a "5 year plan" and not something they intend to act immediately upon. They did send out a survey to multiple individuals regarding the desirability of such an action suggesting that it may become part of the discourse related to early childhood.

Secretary of State and Licensing

The AOE is preparing our response to the legislative request made last year in the Senate Education committee that asked us to meet with the Office of Professional Regulation to determine if there is an opportunity to have Speech and Language Pathologists have a single location for obtaining their licenses. We are approaching our last meeting and we are constructing five models as follows:

1. SLPs continue in the current state, receiving two licenses, one from OPR and one from AOE.
2. SLPs return to the prior state, receiving one license from AOE.
3. SLPs receive their license through OPR and OPR parallels existing AOE practices through shared agreements.
4. SLPs receive their license through OPR and OPR sets its own course that differs from AOE.
5. SLPs receive their license through OPR and OPR parallels some, but not all, of AOE practices.

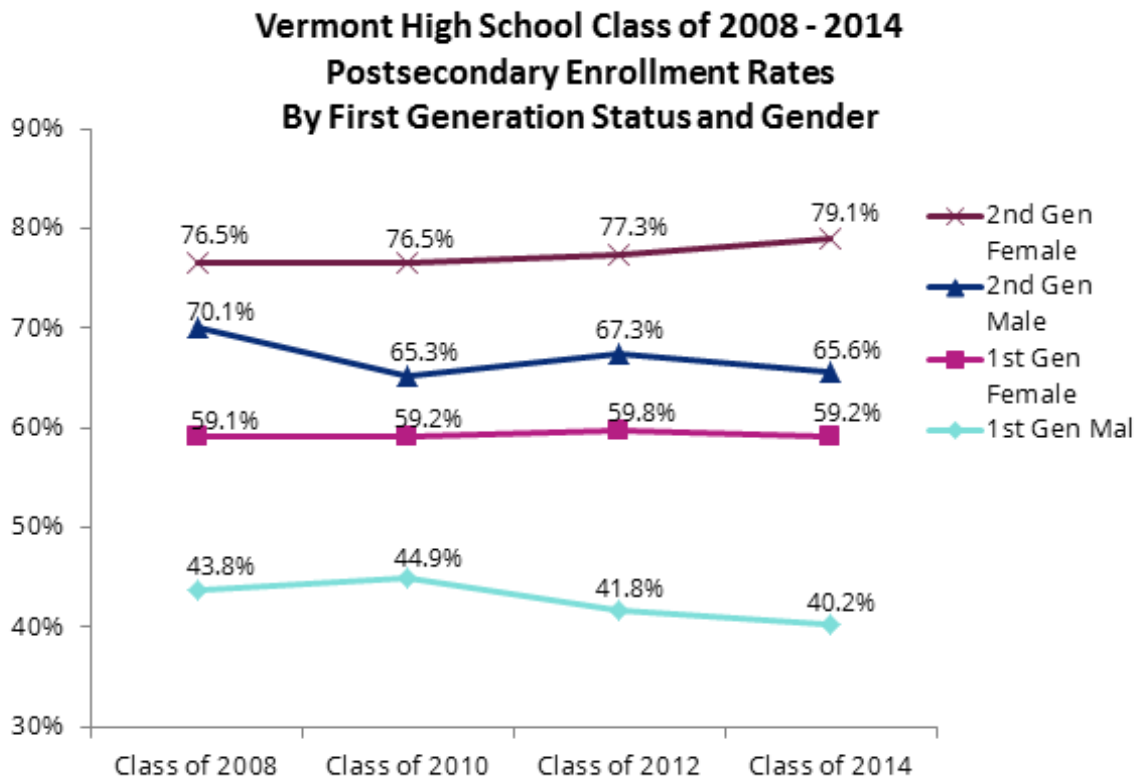
For each model, we are describing the impact of the model on stakeholders including SLP educators, SLP clinicians, other licensed educators, school HR staff, university programs, staff at the Treasurer's Office, and others. No model will satisfy all constituents. The AOE will note that we support models that do not raise fees to licensees (Model 1 or 2). All of models 3-5 would require new investments that are currently not required of the state agencies and would necessitate a new revenue stream, and most likely an increase in fees.

VT Postsecondary Enrollment

The figure below, created by VSAC, shows post secondary enrollment by gender and whether or not students are the first in their families to attend college. A major policy challenge for the state is that our boys who live in poverty and who do not have parents who participated in postsecondary education or training are not only the least likely to seek training after high school, but also the number of them that do is declining.

Of note, even as we have been increasing investment in early college and dual enrollment and directly in the colleges out of the Education Fund, the post-secondary enrollment of this group is deteriorating. To make the change we need to make, we may need to think about targeting support at the students for whom we need to make the greatest difference.

This understanding is a core focus of our career readiness and career pathways work.



Source: VSAC, Senior Survey and NSC data

EQR/ESSA Information Sessions and Feedback

The AOE hosted the last two sessions for school leadership teams to learn more about the state Education Quality Reviews and ESSA implementation. Roughly 250 individuals across the state were trained with costs covered by a grant from the Nellie Mae foundation. An attendee sent this message following its completion:

“Would you please pass my appreciation on to Amy and Patrick for the ESSA plan workshop yesterday. I have spent my full professional career in VT and have attended many AOE workshops. Amy and Patrick were clear, had good handouts and their timing was excellent. They seemed to work well together and each spent just the right amount of time allowing for any questions that came up. One of the most important aspects of the training was the fact that neither of them were defensive, no matter the questions or concerns. This has not always been the case with presenters from the AOE.”

AOE’s Hour of Code Event

The AOE hosted an Hour of Code event on Monday, December 5, 2017. The Hour of Code takes place each year during Computer Science Education Week to encourage every student to learn computer science. At the AOE’s event, students from Montpelier High School, Montpelier Middle School and East Montpelier Elementary School taught legislators and AOE staff how to

code and showed them how to use robotics. You can [watch video clips from the event](#) on the AOE's Facebook page.

PBIS Exemplar Schools

The Vermont Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (VTPBiS) State team, led by the Vermont PBiS Team at the University of Vermont, is recognizing 27 schools as Exemplar Schools for the 2016-17 school year. The AOE contracts with the Center on Disability and Community Inclusion (CDCI) at the University of Vermont to coordinate the technical assistance, training, and coaching to support VTPBiS schools.

The 27 recognized schools have demonstrated that school staff, administrators, and family members work together to create positive and safe learning environments by teaching and supporting behavioral expectations in all school settings.

PBIS is a systemic approach within a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) that uses data to guide selection, integration, and implementation of the best evidence-based behavioral practices.

Governor's School Safety Training Conference

More than 300 people attended the Governor's annual Statewide School Safety Training Conference at the Sheraton in Burlington on Thursday, November 30, 2017. School executive leaders, members of Vermont's first response community, mental health providers, and school crisis planning team members gathered for the day-long training on individual and organizational resiliency after a critical incident.

Brigham challenge/Whitingham Lawsuit

As you know from news accounts, the towns of Wilmington and Whitingham recently filed a Brigham lawsuit, challenging the State's education funding system. The plaintiffs withdrew their request for a preliminary injunction (PI) hearing. The parties then agreed on, and the Court approved, a proposed trial schedule with a normal discovery process and a trial ready date of July 31. This will be after the Whitingham/Wilmington merger becomes effective.