

State Board of Education

May 17, 2018

We Know...

- ...Act 46 allows supervisory unions to exist
- ...the provisions for small schools grants is flawed
- ...there are inherent contradictions and hypocrisy in the law
- ...it does not make sense that newly formed Unified Union Districts will receive small schools grants without any adherence to a metrics of standards.
- ...the amount of money we are talking about is a small amount relative to the State Education Fund, but that 7 to 8% of a schools revenue is meaningful.
- ...that small rural schools have higher poverty levels in Vermont, and nationally
- ...that ratios can fluctuate more quickly in small schools
- ...that long bus rides are not the kind of “equity of opportunity” we wish for our children.
- ...there is no good way to determine geographic isolation or excess capacity.
- ...Vermont recognizes the important role that a small school plays in the social and educational fabric of its community.
- ...the State Board did not write the law, and yet now must respond

We believe...

- ...in the past, present and promise of our small rural schools.
- ...our community-schools are assets and reject the narrative of small rural schools as deficit.
- ...that communities without schools are not vibrant and will likely decline further.
- ...we have a shared value in equity and appreciation for weighting for poverty, income sensitivity and current use.
- ...in the research that demonstrates that small schools often do more to mitigate the impact of poverty.
- ...any attempt to use state-wide student assessment data to determine “measurable success in achieving positive outcomes is flawed, antithetical to Vermont’s approach to learning and potentially unethical.
- ...in the original intent of small schools grants under Act 60, The Equal Education Opportunity Act of 1997. *1998 study on small schools.
- ...to keep Vermont’s democracy competitive and thriving, Vermont students must be afforded substantially equal access to a quality basic education.
- ...(at least we’d like to) that it is not the State’s intent to close its small schools, but rather to ensure that those schools have the opportunity to enjoy the expanded educational opportunities and economies of scale that are available to schools with larger, (questionably) more flexible governance models.
- ...in the value and wisdom of our State Board and inclination to do what is right

We Care...

...about the inter-dependence and relationship of school and community for our small schools

...about the identity and sustainability of our communities

...not only about our community schools, we care for our schools.

...because the loss of small schools grants will reduce much needed resources that directly impact learning for students from rural communities living in poverty.

...about public policy that ensures equity.

...about our sense of community as a State based on shared values, interdependence and reciprocity.

...about the State Board's difficult charge and provide our support to your efforts.

Act 60, The Equal Educational Opportunity Act, study on small schools in 1998 made one simple conclusion: "small schools in Vermont cost more to operate than larger schools, but they are worth the investment because of the value they add to student learning and community cohesion." Essentially, small schools grants were provided because of the recognition that small schools lacked an economy of scale. The study also made recommendations to expand funding to include more schools, consider changes in weighting and add the hold-harmless mechanism. Our context today may vary in some respects, yet remains more similar than different. However, twenty years later, we find far less optimism for small schools in public policy. Despite such, we persist and remain aspirational for our school-communities. Small, rural schools remain assets to our children, our families, our communities and our state.

We know ... if Vermont were a school, it would be a small school. Challenged by limited resources, absent an economy of scale and perceived lacking equity of opportunity when compared to other larger "schools--consider isolated, provincial, defining us as "rural" in a disparaging way, and dependent on external resources.

We believe ... our small rural schools are the heart of our communities and deserve our investment.

We Care ... for our school-communities and need the state board to care for our community-schools.

John A. Castle
NCSU Superintendent of Schools