

AGENCY OF EDUCATION
Barre, Vermont

TEAM: School Governance

ITEM: Will the State Board of Education approve the North County Union High School District's (NCUHSD's) proposal to include the Westfield School District as a member of the NCUHSD for Grades 7 and 8 pursuant to 16 V.S.A. § 721(b).

OVERVIEW: The NCUHSD was created in 1964 to provide education to resident students in Grades 7 through 12. In 1965, the NCUHSD granted admission to additional members with the proviso that no member "shall be obliged" to send its Grades 7 and 8 students to the school operated by the NCUHSD.

As a result of this provision, some current members of the NCUHSD are members for Grades 7 through 12 and others – including Westfield – are members solely for Grades 9 through 12.

The boards of both the NCUHSD and the Westfield School District now wish their voters to consider whether Westfield should also be a member of the unified district for Grades 7 and 8.

16 V.S.A. § 721 provides a process by which a district can become a member of an existing union school district. Subsection (a) sets out the process if initiated by the district that wishes to join. Subsection (b) sets out the process if the union school district initiates it. The process is substantively the same in both instances: The initiating district prepares a "plan" and upon receiving approval from the State Board presents the proposal to its voters. If the voters approve, then the voters of the other district have the opportunity to vote.

Unlike the process for creating a new unified district, 16 V.S.A. § 721 does not require creation of a study committee, consideration of particular issues, or preparation of specific documents. In addition, § 721 does not require the Secretary to review and make a recommendation regarding the initiating district's plan prior to when the district presents it to the State Board for approval.

The Agency has prepared this document solely to provide context for the NCUHSD's request that the State Board approve its plan to include the Westfield School District as a member of the NCUHSD for Grades 7 and 8 pursuant to 16 V.S.A. § 721(b). The superintendent serving both districts will be present at the State Board's February 2018 meeting to provide detailed information regarding the districts' review of the proposed unification and to answer any questions. It is the stated intention of both boards to present the question to both sets of voters in March 2018.

STATUTORY AUTHORITY: 16 V.S.A. § 721