



LAMOILLE SOUTH UNIFIED UNION

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September 7, 2022

Mr. Oliver Olsen, Chair
Vermont State Board of Education
1 National Life Drive, Davis 5
Montpelier, Vermont 05602-2501

RE: School Withdrawal and the Lamoille South Unified Union School District

Dear Chair Olsen,

After consulting with the Lamoille South Unified Union School Board, we would like to respond to your request for the district to consider absorbing the newly formed Lincoln School District within our organization. At this time, we are confident **this would not be an effective or efficient solution for the students of Lincoln or the three towns that make up our current district.** This would also not meet the goals of Act 46. The legislature's intent when writing Act 46 was to "create more sustainable and efficient school governance structures and improve access to quality PreK-12 education for all Vermont students." There are many reasons why a forced merger with Lincoln, which is 47 miles away, would pose a significant barrier to meeting those goals.

A significant attribute of a high performing school district or supervisory union is a leadership team that meets frequently, is visible in the schools, and supports one another throughout the year. Last week our central office administrators have visited every one of our schools multiple times to provide support, build relationships, attend meetings, and ensure operations are in line with the expectations of our community and best practice. Having a school in a location that is very inaccessible would create a significant hurdle to that process and provide many challenges around communication, response to emergencies, professional development offerings, curriculum development, and strategic planning. It would clearly take attention away from our students who require and deserve high level support at all times, but especially during this challenging moment of recovery and healing in our schools.

As the State Board is aware, our current district has been in a very difficult position over the past few years following the forced merger of our three towns - Elmore, Morristown, and Stowe. The merger, although certainly resulting in some positives, has taken a substantial amount of energy away from our most important focus - the education of our children. All three towns voted to allow Stowe to withdraw from the unified union and reconstitute the prior supervisory union structure. The unanimous approval of these towns was based on a plan to return to two high-performing school districts with separate high schools not to take on another district. The geographic distance between our schools currently poses a challenge and to add any more distance would be extremely difficult to navigate. The recent decision by the board to allow our towns to revert back to the supervisory union structure that worked well for many years is already a significant shift that will require many hours of paperwork, budgeting, meetings, negotiations, and reorganization. We will be in a transitional phase that will require an intensive level of

Oliver Olsen, Chair
September 7, 2022
Page Two

support to each of our seven schools and approximately 325 educators. To add another element would certainly bring more stress and anxiety into this process with no tangible benefit to any student. Additionally, several of our schools require a substantial investment in capital improvements. This was a primary motivation behind the return to a supervisory union structure. School Board members have expressed an urgent interest in proposing a bond to the three towns within the next two years. This will be another focus area that will demand a great deal of attention and planning from our central office.

In summary, the Lamoille South Unified Union School Board and the administration are in clear agreement that a consideration of adding Lincoln to our school district or future supervisory union is not in the best interest of our students or the students of Lincoln. We understand their desire to satisfy the legal requirements of their independent school district but ask that the State Board find a better, more efficient solution to this dilemma that does not impact teaching and learning.

Sincerely,



David Bickford, Chair
Board of School Directors



Ryan Heraty
Superintendent