

AGENCY OF EDUCATION  
Barre, Vermont

**TEAM:** School Governance Team

**ACTION ITEM:** Will the State Board of Education find that the proposed unified union school district formed by all current member districts of the **FRANKLIN NORTHEAST SUPERVISORY UNION (FNESU)**, which would be its own supervisory district, or, alternatively, that the proposed unified union school district formed by all member districts identified as “necessary” and either one or none of those identified as “advisable” is “in the best interests of the State, the students, and the school districts,” and will the State Board therefore vote to approve the attached report of the FNESU Study Committee?

**SECRETARY’S RECOMMENDED ACTION:**

**That the State Board of Education finds:**

- (1) that the proposed formation of a new unified union school district by all member districts of the Franklin Northeast Supervisory Union, which will be its own supervisory district, is “in the best interests of the State, the students, and the school districts” pursuant to 16 V.S.A. § 706c(b); and alternatively**
- (2) that the proposed formation of a new unified union school district by all member districts identified as “necessary” and either one or none of those identified as “advisable” is “in the best interests of the State, the students, and the school districts” pursuant to 16 V.S.A. § 706c(b).**

**That the State Board of Education votes to approve the temporary assignment of the new unified union school district to the Franklin Northeast Supervisory Union for the purpose of receiving administrative and other transitional assistance. Assignment would be for the interim period beginning on the date on which the unified union school district becomes a legal entity pursuant to 16 V.S.A. § 706g and ending on July 1, 2017, and would not modify the governing structure of the existing system.**

**That the State Board of Education votes to approve the attached report of the Franklin Northeast Supervisory Union Study Committee.**

**STATUTORY AUTHORITY:** 16 V.S.A. § 706c; Act 46 of 2015, Sec. 6 (Accelerated Merger; Phase 1); Act 153 of 2010 as amended (“RED;” Phase 2); Act 46 of 2015, Sec. 7 (Conventional Merger; Phase 3)

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:** The FNESU consists of five towns, each of which is its own school district governed by its own board. The Enosburg and Richford School Districts both operate schools for their respective elementary and secondary students. The Bakersfield, Berkshire, and Montgomery School Districts each operate an elementary/middle school and pay tuition for students in grades 9-12.

The FNESU Study Committee recommends creation of a unified union school district (New Unified District) that would be its own supervisory district pursuant to the Accelerated Merger process and timeline created by Act 46, Sec. 6 (2015) or that would either be a Regional Education District (RED) under the Phase 2 voluntary merger process (Act 153 (2010)) or a Conventional Merger under Phase 3 (Act 46, Sec. 7 (2015)).<sup>1</sup>

The Berkshire, Enosburg, and Richford School Districts are identified as “necessary” districts pursuant to 16 V.S.A. § 706b(b)(1). The Bakersfield and Montgomery School Districts are identified as “advisable” districts pursuant to § 706b(b)(2).

The average daily membership (ADM) of the districts within the FNESU for FY2016 is as follows: Berkshire, Enosburg, and Richford (1,193.67); Bakersfield (214.07); and Montgomery (184.74).

The New Unified District, to be known as the Cold Hollow Unified Union School District, would provide for the education of all resident PK-12 students by operating one or more schools for each grade. If approved by all districts, the proposal would unify all existing school districts and the supervisory union into a single supervisory district responsible for operating five elementary/middle schools and two high schools. It would replace the six current governing bodies with one unified union board.

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<sup>1</sup> If all five districts vote in favor of merger, then the new district would satisfy all criteria of an Accelerated Merger and would be a unified union school district that is its own supervisory district. If four districts vote in favor, then the new district would satisfy the requirements of a RED and would be a unified union school district either that is its own SD or that is a member of a supervisory union. If only the three “necessary” districts vote in favor, then the new district would have a combined ADM in excess of 900 and would satisfy the requirements of a Phase 3 Conventional Merger if it were its own supervisory district. Because the proposal does not ask that a district formed through the Conventional Merger process be its own supervisory district, because there could be other potential mergers in the region, and because in the future the State Board may determine that it is in the best interests of the State for a three member unified union school district to be a member of a supervisory union rather than its own supervisory district, the Secretary of Education recommends that the State Board wait until after the merger vote is final to decide whether a three member district should be a supervisory district or a member of a supervisory union, if circumstances require such a decision to be made.

The New Unified District would be governed by a 9, 11, or 13 member school board depending upon the number of advisable districts that approve formation of the New Unified District. The board would include at least one member from each town. Board members would be nominated by and from among the electorate of the individual towns, with the number to be nominated by a single town being closely proportional to the fraction the town population bears to the total population of the New Unified District as determined by the 2010 federal census. Election of board members would be by the electorate of the town to which the board seat was apportioned. The Articles require the Board to recalculate board membership following the release of each decennial census.

A currently operating school building could be closed during the first ten years of the New Unified District's existence only if approved by a majority of the electorate of the municipality in which the building is located. Thereafter, a two-thirds majority vote of the Unified Board would be required to close a school. If the building were closed and would no longer be used for public education purposes, then the town in which the school building is located would have the right of first refusal and could purchase the property for \$1.00, provided that the town agreed to use the property for public and community purposes for a minimum of five years. The proposal includes provisions addressing use by the town for fewer than five years.

The proposal includes a "grandfathering" clause for those Bakersfield, Berkshire, and Montgomery students for whom the respective merging district pays tuition during the 2016-2017 academic year.

The electorate of each potentially merging district will vote on June 7, 2016 whether to approve creation of the New Unified District. If the voters in each of the three "necessary" districts vote in favor of the proposal and voters in one, two, or none of the "advisable" districts vote in favor, then the New Unified District will begin operation on July 1, 2017.

**POLICY IMPLICATIONS:** By enacting Act 46, the General Assembly declared the intention to move the State toward sustainable models of education governance designed to meet the goals set forth in Section 2 of the Act. It was primarily through the lens of those goals that the Secretary has considered whether the FNESU Study Committee's proposal is "in the best interests of the State, the students, and the school districts" pursuant to 16 V.S.A. § 706c.

**EDUCATION IMPLICATIONS:**

The FNESU Study Committee identified and discussed potential educational benefits of a merged system, including:

1. More effective allocation of resources to priorities, and fewer communication and coordination challenges between schools;
2. Sharing resources and students in ways that free up resources and avoid budget increases, so that programs are not cut.

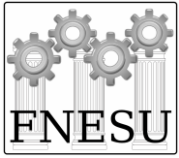
**FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:**

The FNESU already has centralized services and operations for special education, transportation, and other functions. The FNESU Study Committee was able to identify an additional \$1,525,000 in potential annual cost reductions related to audits, staffing reductions, board stipends, legal fees, food service, out-of-district tuitions, and special education. In addition, the Study Committee's report anticipates other potential cost reductions resulting from the formation of a unified union through, for example, sharing staff among schools and class size management. *See also* Act 46, Sec. 6 (2015), or alternatively Act 153 (2010) as amended or Act 46, Sec. 7 (2015), for cost implications to the State.

*See* the Study Committee's Worksheet (Appendix D) for an overview of those elements in the proposal that address the goals identified by Act 46, Section 2 and the potential for geographic isolation. In addition, a more detailed discussion of these elements appears in Appendices A, B and C to the Report.

The Study Committee's proposal is aligned with the goals of the General Assembly as set forth in Act 46 of 2015 and with the policy underlying the union school district formation statutes as articulated in 16 V.S.A. § 701.

**STAFF AVAILABLE:** Donna Russo-Savage, Principal Assistant to the Secretary,  
School Governance  
Brad James, Education Finance Manager  
Gregory Glennon, General Counsel  
Bill Talbott, Chief Financial Officer



## FRANKLIN NORTHEAST SUPERVISORY UNION

Post Office Building, P.O. Box 130, 80 Main Street, Richford, Vermont 05476

Tel: (802) 848-7661/Fax: (802) 848-3531

April 8, 2016

**Jay Nichols**  
**Superintendent**

Shirley Carlson  
Director  
Special Programs

Morgan Daybell  
Business Manager

Dominic DeRosia  
Director  
Technology

Jennifer Kennison  
Co-Director  
Instruction  
and Learning

Jamie McAllister  
Coordinator  
Human Resources

Robin Trushaw  
Assistant Director  
Special Programs

Jody Vaillancourt  
Co-Director  
Instruction  
and Learning

Donna Russo-Savage  
Vermont Agency of Education  
219 North Main Street, Suite 402  
Barre, Vermont 05641

Re: Franklin Northeast Supervisory Union  
Report of the Unification Study Committee  
April 4, 2016

Dear Ms. Russo-Savage,

Enclosed please find our original Report of the Franklin Northeast Supervisory Union Unification Study Committee along with all appropriate appendices, dated and signed by the committee on April 4, 2016, for submission to and consideration of the Vermont State Board of Education. Also enclosed is a letter from our supervisory union attorney, Pietro Lynn, which states that Board membership of our new union school district meets the requirements of the Equal Protection Clause of the United States Constitution.

Should you have any additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. We look forward to answering any questions the State Board of Education may have on April 19<sup>th</sup>.

Regards,

Jay Nichols

cc: Morgan Daybell, Business Manager, FNESU  
James Massingham, Consultant

Enclosures

# LYNN, LYNN, BLACKMAN & MANITSKY, P.C.

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March 14, 2016

Superintendent Jay Nichols  
Franklin Northeast Supervisory Union  
PO Box 130  
Richford, VT 05476

**Re: Proposed New Union School District Board Membership**

Dear Jay:

I am writing to confirm that the current proposal set forth by Franklin Northeast Supervisory Union (FNEU) pertaining to Board membership of the New Union School District meets the requirements of the Equal Protection Clause of the United States Constitution.

The FNESU Act 46 Study Committee members have drafted articles of agreement, as required by the Vermont Agency of Education, in relation to their discussions around creating a Supervisory District pursuant to Act 46. Article 6 of the Articles of Incorporation establishes four different variations of town representation on the initial Union School District Board of Directors based on which towns approve the merger. Under each variation, Article 6 provides that Board composition shall be recalculated following the release of each decennial census, in order to ensure that a town's representation on the Board is proportional to its population.

The Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment requires equal voting strength, and protects against dilution of the right to vote by disproportionate representation. This guarantee extends to the election of local school official who exercise general governmental powers. *Hadley v. Junior Coll. Dist.*, 397 U.S. 50, 53 (1970). Mathematical precision, however, is not necessary; rather "the overriding objective must be substantial equality of population among the various districts." *Reynolds v. Sims*, 377 U.S. 533, 569, 579 (1964). The Supreme Court has held that generally, an apportionment plan with a maximum population deviation under 10% is considered a minor deviation. *Brown v. Thomson*, 462 U.S. 835, 842 (1983). A plan with larger disparities, however, remains Constitutional if there is a rational basis for the larger deviation. *Reynolds*, 377 U.S. at 579.

Article 6 lays out four variations of initial Board membership. Under the first variation, if all necessary districts approve unification but no advisable district approves, the Board will consist of two members from Berkshire, four members from Enosburg, and three members from Richford. This would result in a maximum deviation of 20%.

Under the second variation, if all necessary districts approve unification along with the advisable

Superintendent Jay Nichols  
March 14, 2016  
Page 2

district of Bakersfield, but not the advisable district of Montgomery, the Board will consist of two members from Bakersfield, two members from Berkshire, four members from Enosburg, and three members from Richford. This would result in a maximum deviation of approximately 24.6%.

Under the third variation, if all necessary districts approve unification along with the advisable district of Montgomery, but not the advisable district of Bakersfield, the Board will consist of two members from Berkshire, four members from Enosburg, two members from Montgomery, and three members from Richford. This would result in a maximum deviation of approximately 32.6%.

Finally, under the fourth plan, if all necessary and advisable districts approve unification, the Board will consist of two members from Bakersfield, two members from Berkshire, four members from Enosburg, two members from Montgomery, and three members from Richford. This would result in a maximum deviation of approximately 32.6%.

The apportionment plans set forth in Article 6 include a maximum deviation of somewhere between 20% and 32.6%. Nonetheless, the Supreme Court has held that affording representation to political subdivisions is a "rational state policy" justifying a larger deviation. *Brown v. Thomson*, 462 U.S. at 847; *Manahan v. Howell*, 410 U.S. 315, 325-330 (1973). Preserving the integrity of the individual towns as representative districts is therefore a rational basis supporting the current apportionment.

Furthermore, there is no sign that any group of people being discriminated against based on the current apportionment plan. Nor is there evidence of gerrymandering to support some political party or belief. A comparison of the Board member apportionment shows that there is rough equivalence in the distribution of members. Enosburg has the largest population and the most votes, and there is a rational diminution in the number of Board members based on a town's population. In short, there is no indication that towns are being discriminated against.

Lacking any evidence of a bias tending to favor particular political interests or geographic areas, and considering the rational basis for the proposed Board member apportionment scheme, it is our opinion that the current apportionment plan would likely pass Constitutional muster.

Sincerely,

LYNN, LYNN, BLACKMAN & MANITSKY, P.C.



Pietro J. Lynn, Esq.  
plynn@lynnlawvt.com

**Franklin Northeast Supervisory Union**  
**Report of the Unification Study Committee**  
**April 4, 2016**



## Report of the Unification Study Committee

In September 2015, the school boards of all Franklin Northeast Supervisory Union (FNESU) member districts voted to form a Study Committee under Act 46. The objective of the Study Committee was to examine district merger options that would provide more educational opportunities and equity for students while creating more operational efficiencies through district level mergers. After eight months of research and analysis, community feedback and extensive committee member discussions, the Study Committee supports bringing to the voters a proposal to combine all FNESU districts into one school district.

**Our Current Structure** - The Franklin Northeast Supervisory Union has five autonomous but connected school districts which provide education to children. Two school districts—Enosburg and Richford—are responsible for the education of all of the children in these communities in grades PreK through 12. Three other school districts—Bakersfield, Berkshire and Montgomery—each operate elementary/middle schools providing prekindergarten through grade eight. Bakersfield, Berkshire and Montgomery are responsible for the education of their students in grades 9-12 even though they do not operate schools for those grades. To meet this responsibility, these three districts pay tuition to several districts within and outside of the supervisory union. Each of these five school districts is part of the FNESU, which also has its own school board, and provides services to all of its member school districts. Each of the school districts has a five-member school board. The Supervisory Union Board consists of 15 members (three from each town school district).

Meeting student needs and controlling costs is becoming more challenging. Our current governance structure is complicated, inefficient and time consuming, reducing our ability to meet our obligations to students and taxpayers. Each of the school boards separately hires staff, prepares and adopts budgets, and performs many of the functions of administering their respective schools. Many important and costly functions are administered at the FNESU level—including the Supervisory Union superintendent, senior administrators, special education, curriculum, policy, transportation, and negotiations with teacher and support staff unions. Many of these decisions are subject to review, ratification, or modification by the five school boards. Creation of one unified district would streamline many of these functions.

**Resources and Priorities** – In our current structure, prioritizing work and deploying resources across districts is very difficult. For example:

- Would limited dollars be better spent on a high school activity or a PreKindergarten program?
- We have World Languages at both high schools with small class sizes; could we better use these resources to provide World Languages study at the elementary schools?
- Can we build a PreK-12 grade curriculum based on universal access to technology in early grades? Should we improve high school technology infrastructure or buy computers for fourth graders?
- Should we replace windows in our elementary school buildings or in our high schools?

Conversations like this which involve addressing the highest overall priorities cannot happen in our fragmented governance structure. Our Superintendent and senior staff spend great amounts of their time trying to coordinate decisions among all of our boards instead of providing the educational leadership and financial management that is their core mission. Because our schools are in separate districts, elementary schools seldom share staff or facilities. Some elementary schools cut programs for students that could be maintained by sharing resources. Some maintain class sizes that are too small to be cost effective but don't have the option of sharing staff or moving students to address this problem.

When this governance structure was created, education was simpler and less expensive. Today our rapidly changing education needs are far more complicated and often expensive. We need a governance structure for our schools that allows us to address our students' needs from the start of their education through their graduation and compels us to make wise financial decisions for the entire system.

**A Unified System** - Students would be better served by a unified system. A single board, with input from all local schools, would set priorities and allocate resources where needed (regardless of grade) and avoid conflicts or communication breakdowns between different school districts. A unified system would enable administrative staff to focus more on educational quality and less on obtaining or aligning decisions from numerous boards. Resources could also be better shared among schools allowing staff to work more efficiently in a unified system.

Unification would produce a more efficient and cost effective system by creating a single budget for all educational needs rather than six separate budgets. We could better adapt to the ever-changing demands of educating students to protect our smaller communities from unpredictable swings in education costs and tax rates. Unification would reduce the likelihood of the new district exceeding the excess spending thresholds.

Unification provides property tax relief and preservation of small schools grants for the communities approving unification. If all five communities approve unification, the State will reduce the equalized homestead property tax rates by \$.10 in the first year after unification; \$.08 in the second year; \$.06 in the third year; \$.04 in the fourth year and \$.02 in the fifth year. If unification occurs with fewer than five districts, then there will be four years of tax incentives for districts that approve unification, beginning with the \$.08 reduction. During the years in which the new unified district receives tax incentives, a town with a rate lower than the incentive rate can increase by no more than 5% until it reaches the incentive rate. If all towns vote to approve, then all towns with rates higher than the incentive rate drop to that rate. If only three of four towns approve, then towns' rates can only decrease by 5% until they reach the incentive rate.

**Accountability and Local Control** - With the current complex governance comprised of multiple boards and committees, no single elected body is responsible for all the preK-12 program and budgeting decisions. Therefore, citizens are unable to address a single responsible body when they have concerns. Direct accountability is missing. Individual school boards have limited responsibility for their budgets with costs for special education, transportation, salaries, administration, and insurance set by other bodies. With a unified district, citizens can hold a single board accountable for all aspects of school governance.

By unifying our governance structure, many fear the loss of local control; but we are not strangers—we are colleagues and neighbors that have already united into a successful community to govern and educate grades PreK through 12, as many functions have already been successfully delegated to the supervisory union.

That said, committee members from Bakersfield, Berkshire and Montgomery feel strongly that their communities want to preserve the High School Choice option that is currently available to students and families of their towns. Current law, reinforced by recent ruling by the Vermont State Board of Education will not allow the new unified district to operate high schools and pay tuition for the same grades. If Bakersfield, Berkshire or Montgomery approves unification, then currently tuitioned students (includes those students committing for 2016/17) will be grandfathered. In addition, all students within the unified district will have access to the existing tuition-free public high school choice program available to students residing in districts that operate high schools. See Appendix A for additional clarification of high school choice.

The proposed unification plan brings our five separate school districts together under one school board, which will be responsible for the educational program for all students, PreK-12, at a cost that tax payers can support.

**Report Format** - This Planning Report uses a template developed by the Vermont Agency of Education. The Articles of Agreement for the proposed district will be submitted to voters on June 7, 2016.

Cold Hollow School District

Signature Page

The undersigned FNESU Unification Study Committee members support bringing the Unification Plan to FNESU voters.

Casey Blaney - Board Member, Richford

  
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Jean-Marie Clark - Board Member, Bakersfield

  
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Tennyson Doane - Board Member, Bakersfield, Chair

  
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Lisa Hango Board Member, Berkshire

  
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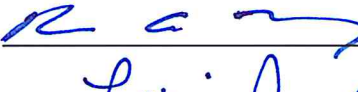
Paul Hatch - Board Member, Berkshire, Vice Chair

  
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Michael Howrigan II - Board Member, Enosburg

  
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Bruce Mercy - Board Member, Montgomery

  
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Lori Perley - Board Member, Enosburg

  
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Andrew Pond - Board Member, Richford

  
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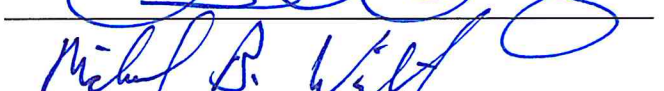
Jason Robtoy - Community Member, Enosburg

  
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Wallace Steinhour - Board Member, Richford

  
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Christina Suarez - Board Member, Montgomery

  
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Michael Wright - Board Member, Enosburg

  
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**Bakersfield School District; Berkshire School District;  
Enosburg School District; Montgomery School District; Richford School District**

FNESU Unification Study Committee Report  
April 4, 2016

**The Plan**

Authorization to engage in this Unified District Planning Committee process was voted in the affirmative by the following boards of directors on the following dates:

Bakersfield Board of Directors, on June 15, 2015  
Berkshire Board of Directors, on June 9, 2015  
Enosburg Board of Directors, on June 16, 2015  
Montgomery Board of Directors, on June 8, 2015  
Richford Board of Directors, on June 22, 2015  
Franklin Northeast Supervisory Union Board of Directors on September 29, 2015

The Secretary of Education was advised of the formation of this Unified School District Study Committee, pursuant to Title 16 V.S.A. § 706b, by letter dated August 4, 2015 and in that letter, Tennyson Doane was identified as chairperson of the Planning Committee.

Recommended Articles of Agreement, pursuant to the requirements of Title 16, Chapter 11, Subchapter 3, as are set forth herein below, were agreed upon by the Study Committee at its duly warned meeting of April 4, 2016.

**Unification Study Committee Membership**

Tennyson Doane – Board Member, Bakersfield, Chair  
Jean-Marie Clark – Board Member, Bakersfield  
Paul Hatch – Board Member, Berkshire, Vice Chair  
Lisa Hango – Board Member, Berkshire  
Lori Perley – Board Member, Enosburg  
Michael Wright – Board Member, Enosburg  
Michael Howrigan II – Board Member, Enosburg  
Jason Robtoy – Community Member, Enosburg  
Christina Suarez – Board Member, Montgomery  
Bruce Mercy – Board Member, Montgomery  
Casey Blaney – Board Member, Richford  
Andrew Pond – Board Member, Richford  
Wallace Steinhour – Board Member, Richford

## Introduction

The most significant aspect of this plan is to bring all local schools under the control of one unified school board. This new structure provides new opportunities for school leaders to improve student learning opportunities and to find modest cost reductions. It complies with the Act 46 objective that school districts move toward sustainable governance structures that meet statewide educational and fiscal goals, and it allows the new district to take advantage of Vermont tax reduction incentives and consolidation funding.

Following are Articles of Agreement which determine how the new governance structure will operate. If unification is approved, the new district will be formed when all legal 706g certifications have been filed (likely by July 15, 2016) and then will begin to transition to full operation, effective July 1, 2017. The existing school districts and boards, including Franklin Northeast Supervisory Union will remain in existence after June 30, 2017 for the sole purpose of completing any business not given to the Unified District.

If voters in one of the “necessary” member districts (Berkshire, Enosburg, and Richford) do not approve unification, the proposal fails and all current governance structures continue to operate. Act 46 requires that districts that do not take action by July, 2019 may be subject to financial and other consequences as listed below:

- Districts that do not engage in voluntary structural changes will not be able to secure tax incentives;
- After July 1, 2019, these districts will only be able to retain their small schools grant if the State Board determines they are geographically isolated or can demonstrate academic excellence and operational efficiency;
- After July 1, 2020, these districts will also lose any 3.5% ADM hold-harmless protection;
- Supervisory unions found to be out of compliance with Act 153 centralization provisions on July 1, 2017 will see a 5% tax penalty; and
- Act 46, Sec. 10 requires the State Board to issue a final statewide plan by November 30, 2018 that will require, to the extent possible, the merger and realignment of districts and supervisory unions into sustainable governance structures where necessary to meet statewide educational and fiscal goals.

If voters in the necessary districts approve the plan, but one or both “advisable” member districts (Bakersfield and Montgomery) do not approve the plan, the merger is approved, but districts voting not to approve will not be included in the merger. In this case, the supervisory union will continue to operate as the umbrella under which all districts function. The non-approving advisable districts will continue to operate as they are today and will be subject to some or all of the consequences listed above.

**ACT 46 Goals** - Act 46 is intended to move the State of Vermont toward sustainable models of education governance. It is designed to encourage and support local decisions and actions. The following list summarizes ways in which this plan addresses Act 46 goals. The District consolidation plan:

- ❖ provides substantial equity in the quality and variety of educational opportunities
  - One PreK-12 Board improves oversight of education for all students. Oversight by one Board increases the ability of the Board to focus on PreK-12 programs and the Superintendent’s Office to provide substantial equity in terms of course offerings, curriculum, assessment, and teaching practices.
- ❖ leads students to meet or exceed the State’s Education Quality Standards
  - We can use teaching resources to better serve all students by maximizing teachers’ instructional skills
  - Principals and other administration will have more time for instructional leadership since they will not have to spend so much time preparing for School Board meetings
- ❖ maximizes operational efficiencies through greater flexibility to manage, share, and transfer resources
  - We should be able to manage, share, and transfer resources
  - We will have the opportunity to share many services that we cannot now such as: custodians, food service personnel, administrative support, exploratory teachers, AP teachers

- ❖ promotes transparency and accountability
  - One set of financial records ensures greater accountability. We can better build systems and structures that are much more transparent for our audits and financial oversight
- ❖ Delivered at a cost that parents, voters, and taxpayers value
  - Depending on decisions made by the new Board, the opportunities for savings could be significant. The new Board will have to look at programs and make decisions accordingly, weighing the educational benefits to various savings at the financial level

## Unification Plan Bakersfield, Berkshire, Enosburg, Montgomery, and Richford

The Unification Study Committee supports bringing the following Articles of Agreement to voters on June 7, 2016. Approval by the electorate of each of the named school districts will create a Unified Union School District, to be named the Cold Hollow School District. Upon approval, Article 1, including all subsections, may be changed by a majority vote of the electorate of the Unified Union School District. Articles 2 through 15 may be changed by a majority vote of the school board of the Cold Hollow Unified Union.

### Article 1

The Cold Hollow Unified Union School District shall be established by approval of an article to be submitted to the voters of the Bakersfield, Berkshire, Enosburg, Montgomery and Richford town school districts at special meetings to be held on June 7, 2016. The article shall be adopted and a new district shall be created if approved by a majority of the electorate voting in each special meeting in each of the districts identified as “necessary” below and by any “advisable” district that also votes in the affirmative. The form of the article to be submitted to the voters appears below:

Shall the voters of the \_\_\_\_\_ Town School District vote to form the Cold Hollow Unified Union School District (the “Unified District”) on the following terms?

1. The districts listed below shall all be identified as “necessary” for the formation of the Unified District (referred to herein as “Necessary Districts”):
  - Berkshire Town School District;
  - Enosburg Town School District; and
  - Richford Town School District.
2. The districts listed below shall all be identified as “advisable” for the formation of the Unified District (referred to herein as “Advisable Districts”):
  - Bakersfield Town School District; and
  - Montgomery Town School District.
3. The Unified District shall be formed and the terms hereby voted shall become effective on the date this article is approved by a majority vote of the electorate of each Necessary District, and any Advisable District, voting in a meeting for adoption of this article and said votes become final per 16 V.S.A. 706g. If the Unified District is formed, then all districts voting in favor of the Article shall be referred to herein as the “Merging Districts”.
4. The Unified District shall be known as the Cold Hollow School District.
5. The Cold Hollow School District shall commence operating the above-mentioned schools on July 1, 2017 (“Operation Commencement Date”) provided this article shall have become effective by such date.
6. The Merging Districts will convey to the Cold Hollow School District all of their school-related real and personal property, for One Dollar, and the Cold Hollow School District will assume all capital debt associated therewith, on or after the effective date of this article but prior to the Operation Commencement Date. The Cold Hollow School District recognizes the long term financial investments and community relationships that each town has with its school properties. The Cold Hollow School District will encourage use of each building by the students and community according to the policies and procedures of the board of the Unified District.
7. Subject to the provisions of paragraph 8 of this Article 1, in the event that, and at such subsequent time as, the Cold Hollow School District determines that any of the real property, including land and buildings, conveyed to

it by one or more of the Merging Districts is or are unnecessary to the continued operation of the Cold Hollow School District and its educational programs, the Unified District shall convey such real property, for the sum of One Dollar, and subject to all encumbrances and debt to the town in which it is located. The conveyance of any of the above school properties shall be conditioned upon the town owning and utilizing the real property for community and public purposes for a minimum of five years. In the event a town elects to sell the real property prior to five years of ownership, the town shall compensate the Cold Hollow School District for all capital improvements and renovations completed after the formation of the Unified District and before the sale to the town. In the event a town elects not to acquire ownership of such real property, the Cold Hollow School District shall, pursuant to Vermont Statutes, sell the property upon such terms and conditions as established by the Unified District's Board of School Directors.

8. For a period of ten (10) years from the Operation Commencement Date, the Cold Hollow School District shall operate as public schools each of the following properties conveyed to it, pursuant to paragraph 6 of this Article 1:

Bakersfield Elementary School in Bakersfield (PreK-8);  
Berkshire Elementary School in Berkshire (PreK-8);  
Enosburg Elementary School in Enosburg (PreK-5);  
Enosburg Middle/High School in Enosburg (6-12);  
Montgomery Elementary School in Montgomery (PreK-8);  
Richford Elementary School in Richford (PreK-5);  
Richford Junior-Senior High School in Richford (6-12); and,  
Cold Hollow Career Center in Enosburg (11-12).

During the first ten (10) years of operation, the Cold Hollow School District may not close or reconfigure any of these schools without first obtaining approval of a majority of the electorate of the town in which the school is located. Upon expiration of this ten (10) year period, the Unified District's Board of Directors may vote to close any of these schools provided the board so votes by a two thirds (2/3) majority of the board.

9. The Cold Hollow School District shall operate schools to provide for the education of all legal pupils of the towns who are members of the Unified District for grades PreK through 12.
10. Any and all operating deficits and/or surpluses of any of the Merging Districts shall become the property, and/or the obligation of the Cold Hollow School District, on the Operation Commencement Date.
11. The Cold Hollow School District shall apportion its expenses in accordance with applicable law.
12. The Cold Hollow School District shall be governed by a 9, 11 or 13 member Board of Directors, depending on the number of Advisable Districts that approve unification.  
  
Directors shall be elected by the voters of the individual member towns with the number of directors elected by a single town being apportioned on the basis of town population as determined by the most recent U.S. Census. Membership on the initial Board of Directors shall be apportioned as set forth in Article 6.
13. The members of the initial Board of Directors shall be elected at the town school district special meetings to be held on June 7, 2016. The terms of the initial Board of Directors are set forth in the Articles of the Formation Plan, Article 7. Upon expiration of the respective terms of the initial Board of Directors, successors shall be elected for terms as specified by law.
14. The provisions of the Report, Formation Plan and Articles of Agreement approved by the State Board of Education on April 19, 2016, which is on file at the offices of the Franklin Northeast Supervisory Union, shall govern the Unified District.



## Article 2

The Cold Hollow School District shall continue the process already in existence among the member districts of the Franklin Northeast Supervisory Union to consolidate management and educational services, master employee contracts and to otherwise bring about effective and efficient operating procedures and practices. The formal and informal agreements, management systems and operating procedures that have evolved between and among these member school districts shall act as a foundation for the continued collaboration and efficiencies for the Unified District.

## Article 3

The Cold Hollow School District will provide, and/or contract for, any transportation which is to be provided for publicly funded students attending District schools in accordance with transportation policies adopted by the Board of School Directors.

## Article 4

The Cold Hollow School District will honor all pre-existing master agreements and individual employment contracts that are in place for the mergingschool districts on or before the Operation Commencement Date and shall comply with 16 V.S.A. chapter 53, subchapter 3 regarding transition of employees. These master and individual agreements will continue until their respective termination dates.

## Article 5

Cold Hollow School District recognizes its obligations to continue to establish district curricula, and to otherwise standardize operations within district boundaries.

## Article 6

A member town's representation on the School Board of the Cold Hollow School District will be closely proportional to the fraction that its population bears to the aggregate population of the Unified District. Initial fixed composition is based upon the most recent Federal Census (2010), and shall be recalculated promptly following the release of each subsequent decennial census. However, at no time will a member town have less than one school director on the District Board.

**If all Necessary districts approve unification and no Advisable district approves, the following board composition will take effect.**

**Number of School Board Members by District**

<b>Town</b>	<b>Board Members (population of town)</b>
Berkshire 1,692 (25%)	2 (22%)
Enosburg 2,781 (41%)	4 (44%)
Richford 2,308 (34%)	3 (33%)
Total 6,781 = 753/member	9 (99%)

If all Necessary districts approve unification and one Advisable district approves, one of the following board composition, will take effect, depending on which town approves.

**Number of School Board Members by District**

<b>Town</b>	<b>Board Members (population of town)</b>
Bakersfield 1,322 (16%)	2 (18%)
Berkshire 1,692 (21%)	2 (18%)
Enosburg 2,781 (34%)	4 (36%)
Richford 2,308 (28%)	3 (27%)
Total 8,103 = 737/member	11 (99%)

Or

**Number of School Board Members by District**

<b>Town</b>	<b>Board Members (population of town)</b>
Berkshire 1,692 (21%)	2 (18%)
Enosburg 2,781 (35%)	4 (36%)
Montgomery 1,201 (15%)	2 (18%)
Richford 2,308 (29%)	3 (27%)
Total 7,982 = 726/member	11 (99%)

If all Necessary and Advisable districts approve unification, the following board composition will take effect.

**Number of School Board Members by District**

<b>Town</b>	<b>Board Members (population of town)</b>
Bakersfield 1,322 (14%)	2 (15%)
Berkshire 1,692 (18%)	2 (15%)
Enosburg 2,781 (30%)	4 (31%)
Montgomery 1,201 (13%)	2 (15%)
Richford 2,308 (25%)	3 (23%)
Total 9,304 = 716/member	13 (99%)

**Article 7**

The Unified District Board of School Directors will be elected for three-year terms, except for those initially elected at the time of the formation of the Unified District. In the initial Unified District, School Director terms of office will be as follows:

**If all Necessary districts approve unification and no Advisable district approves, the following terms of office will take effect.**

**Distribution of Initial One-Year, Two-Year and Three-Year Terms**

Town	1 Year Term	2 Year Term	3 Year Term
Berkshire		1	1
Enosburg	2	1	1
Richford	1	1	1

**If all Necessary districts approve unification and one Advisable district approves, one of the following terms of office will take effect.**

**Distribution of Initial One-Year, Two-Year and Three-Year Terms**

Town	1 Year Term	2 Year Term	3 Year Term
Bakersfield	1	1	
Berkshire		1	1
Enosburg	2	1	1
Richford	1	1	1

or

**Distribution of Initial One-Year, Two-Year and Three-Year Terms**

Town	1 Year Term	2 Year Term	3 Year Term
Berkshire		1	1
Enosburg	2	1	1
Montgomery	1		1
Richford	1	1	1

If all Necessary districts and both Advisable districts approve, the following terms of office will take effect.

**Distribution of Initial One-Year, Two-Year and Three-Year Terms**

<b>Town</b>	<b>1 Year Term</b>	<b>2 Year Term</b>	<b>3 Year Term</b>
Bakersfield	1	1	
Berkshire		1	1
Enosburg	2	1	1
Montgomery	1		1
Richford	1	1	1

In the following years, the board terms shall continue to rotate on three year terms.

**Article 8**

As required by law, the initial Board of School Directors for the Cold Hollow School District will be elected on the same date, June 7, 2016. Nomination petitions must be filed not less than 30 nor more than 40 days prior to the June 7 election in the manner that follows. Nominations for the office of District School Director representing a town shall be made by filing with the clerk of that town, a statement of nomination signed by at least 30 voters in that town or one percent of the legal voters in the town, whichever is less and accepted in writing by the nominee.

**Article 9**

The Cold Hollow School District shall commence full educational operations on July 1, 2017. Upon an affirmative vote as set forth in Article 1, paragraph 3 and upon compliance with 16 V.S.A. § 706g, the Unified District shall have and exercise all of the authority which is necessary in order for it to prepare for full operation beginning on July 1, 2017. This includes all functions not specifically delegated to the Franklin Northeast Supervisory Union (see below).

**Article 10**

The Cold Hollow School District Board of School Directors shall propose annual budgets in accordance with 16 VSA Chapter 11.

The annual budget vote shall be conducted by Australian ballot as per 17 VSA Chapter 55. Voting will take place in each town and will be co-mingled before counting.

**Article 11**

The Merging Districts shall remain in existence after June 30, 2017 for the sole purpose of completing any business not given to the District under these articles. Such business shall be completed as soon as practical, but in no event any later than June 30, 2018, at which time the Merging District boards will be dissolved and the Merging Districts shall cease to exist. In addition, if all member districts of the current Franklin Northeast Supervisory Union vote in favor of Article 1, then the Supervisory Union shall cease to exist on June 30, 2018.

**Article 12**

The District's Cost Benefit/Efficiency Analysis may be found in Attachment A

**Article 13**

The Cold Hollow School District School Board shall provide timely and sufficient opportunity for local input on policy and budget development. Structures to support and encourage public participation within the Unified District will be established by the District Board of School Directors on or before January 1, 2017.

The Unified District Annual Meeting will be held within ten (10) days prior to March Town Meeting.

## **Article 14**

Students from Bakersfield, Berkshire or Montgomery, who are enrolled or attending a public or approved independent high school (grades 9-12) during the 2016-2017 school year at the expense of their local School District as tuitioned high school students shall be “grandfathered”. Such tuitioned students shall be permitted the option to continue to attend their current public or approved independent school and the Unified District shall pay tuition on their behalf pursuant to 16 VSA §824. Except as specifically approved by the Cold Hollow School District’s Board of School Directors, and consistent with the state law, the tuitioning of “grandfathered” high school students shall cease on June 30, 2020.

## **Article 15**

If, after one year of operation, a Merging District wishes to withdraw from the Cold Hollow School District, processes outlined in 16 V.S.A. §724 will be followed.

## **Appendix A**

### **Cost Benefit Analysis**

Efficiencies will be gained through the creation of the Cold Hollow School District in the following areas:

#### **Improved student opportunities and outcomes**

Currently elementary/middle school choice is available only if the sending school board or the family agrees to pay tuition. In a Unified District, the new Unified Board may elect to provide greater options for students and parents. The possibilities in this area are extensive. Policies and procedures could be written and revised to respond to exceptional circumstances and the needs of students, schools and communities. Currently, in FNESU, tuition is required for students to enroll in elementary schools outside of their town of residence. The flexibility and ability to avail school choice opportunities for elementary students and families has the potential to expand educational options.

In a district that operates a high school, Vermont statute allows high school students and families two methods of choice. First, pursuant to 16 V.S.A. §822a, students may apply to any public Vermont high school and attend that school on a space available basis without the need to pay tuition. Currently, Richford and Enosburg high school students are exercising this option. If unification is approved, all high school students in our new district will have this option. Second, the school board of an operating district can decide, on a case-by-case basis, to pay tuition for a student to attend an approved independent public school pursuant to §822(c).

If a district does not operate a high school, then the district pays tuition so their students can attend any in-state or out-of-state public or approved independent high school selected by the student. For example, Montgomery pays tuition for students to attend Stanstead Academy and North Country Union High School, Bakersfield pays tuition for high school students to attend BFA St. Albans, and Berkshire pays tuition for three students to attend schools outside of Enosburg and Richford. If they vote to approve the merger, the towns of Bakersfield, Berkshire and Montgomery would no longer have the ability to pay tuition vouchers to send students to out-of-district high schools (although currently tuitioned students would be “grandfathered”). However, these towns would have representation for the first time in the governance of the two high schools in the Cold Hollow School District. In addition, students living in these towns would have access to other high schools as explained in the previous paragraph. In FY 17, FNESU member districts anticipate paying over \$952,000 in tuition going outside of the SU.

Due to the mobility of our student population, school boards frequently budget for the same high needs elementary or high school tuition students. This creates duplications in budgets. As a Unified District, we would eliminate these duplications and realize budgets that more accurately show what we are spending. This promotes transparency and accountability, as required by Act 46.

Formation of the Cold Hollow School District would allow for flexibility in the use of facilities and resources. A Unified Board would be empowered to use all personnel, facilities and financial resources within the District to support all students and educational programs.

A Unified District would allow staff to be moved from one school to another in order to meet the needs of the student population and take advantage of staffing expertise. Currently, the local district employs the majority of staff. This significantly limits the administration’s ability to adjust staffing based on academic and social data. Because the current governance structure does not enable the transfer or sharing of staff between districts, districts make additional hires in response to needs that arise within their current district instead of studying the entire Supervisory Union to identify existing staff that could be reassigned. This is a cultural shift that has the prospect of saving money. A Unified District provides greater staff stability and reduces the need to hire and train new staff.

Equalized programming opportunities for all students within Franklin Northeast could be advanced with the formation of the Cold Hollow School District. Currently, resources, offerings, staffing and supplemental support varies across FNESU. One unified school district would reduce or eliminate the disparities in support services, staffing and programs that now exist (e.g. some schools have an enrichment program, others do not; instructional support varies between school districts; supplemental support is not equivalent or allocated based on SU-wide factors; infrastructure funding differs

from school district to school district and can vary year-to-year dependent on external factors out of the local school district's control). Vermont requires that school systems provide substantial equity in the quality and variety of educational opportunities. Unification helps us comply with state law in a way that is cost effective.

## **Technology**

The use of technology as a teaching and communication tool has expanded exponentially in the latter portion of the 20th Century and early part of the 21st Century. Parents, colleges/universities and employers are expecting students to be computer literate. Students must have strong technology skills and understand how to apply these in the workplace. All students must have equal opportunity and support in developing technology skills for the successful transition to the work force or higher education.

FNESU currently has a Director of Technology who oversees our technology systems. However, the quality and quantity of support and infrastructure is different in each building and district. The ability to perform these functions in an effective and efficient manner is significantly influenced by the variances in equipment, building support personnel and software within FNESU schools. There is a significant difference in the investment member school districts have made in technology over the past several years. A unified school district increases the likelihood of resources being distributed evenly and provides flexibility in the allocation of resources based on necessity. The versatility of a Unified District will allow schools to upgrade their technology systems to better support students, staff and families.

Again, Vermont requires that school systems provide substantial equity in the quality and variety of educational opportunities. Unification helps us comply in a way that is cost effective.

## **Teacher staffing**

As mentioned earlier in the report, flexibility in determining staffing levels empowers a Unified District to adjust staffing assignments based on need, current demographic realities and staff expertise. This authority also has the potential to save money and intensify continuity and coordination of personnel. Often, school districts are faced with the choice of reducing staff because of a shift in student population while a neighboring school district is considering adding staff. These decisions are often complicated because from year to year, grade-level populations ebb and flow. Administrators and school boards frequently deliberate about reducing or adding staff or maintaining staffing levels when faced with these grade level ebbs and flows. The ability to move teachers from one school to another has the prospect of improving continuity and saving money because the District would have the option of assigning staffing levels based on annual needs.

An additional benefit of the District's ability to assign staff is the district's realization of its investment in training newly hired employees. School-based training and mentoring involves a considerable investment in time and money. Keeping teachers in the system enables the District communities to realize the full potential of its financial commitment. This is especially important in FNESU where only 52% of our teachers have more than six years of experience within our Supervisory Union schools. Full-time teaching openings attract a more qualified pool of candidates than part-time positions. We believe we will build a more sustainable teaching staff in a Unified District than is possible in a Supervisory Union.

## **Non-teacher staffing**

Many of the efficiencies and benefits pertaining to teaching staff also relate to non-teaching staff members. A Unified District has the ability to shift and use personnel based on student population, student needs, staff needs, programming changes, building renovations and staff certifications (e.g. Master Electrician License, Master Plumber License, HVAC License, Athletic Trainer Certification, Counseling License etc.). This will reduce the need to contract with outside service providers. Furthermore, it is an efficient and cost effective method of aligning personnel to requirements, responsibilities and obligations.

The Cold Hollow School District Board may decide to redeploy custodial staff creating savings up to \$45,000.

## **Student data collection and reporting**

Collecting, reporting and analyzing student data from PreK-12 supports coordination, continuity and responsible allocation of resources. In a Unified District, a single board would govern a preK-12 system and hold schools accountable for student results at every level. Attention and accountability to every grade in the system would become a necessity because staff, administration and the board would be responsible for collective results. Strategic plans and action plans would be written and implemented for all students preK-12, rather than the current fragmented preK-5, preK-6, preK-8, 6-8, 7-12, and 9-12 planning process. Each grade would be a building block to complete a student's experience within the District. Currently, school boards focus on the needs and results of their local school district and not on the entire preK-12 system. We need to move in this direction to provide substantial equity in the quality and variety of educational opportunities to lead students to meet or exceed the State's Education Quality Standards.

## **Financial, accounting and budgeting (Central office functions)**

The formation of the District will streamline accounting systems by creating a single budget, eliminating assessments to member school districts for costs currently incurred at the supervisory union level, and eliminating the bill-backs required when employees are shared by more than one school district. Central office will be processing fewer checks.

There should be one treasurer for the District, resulting in reduced services required from town offices, thereby creating potential savings of about \$25,000. Budget proposals would be prepared at the school level. One final budget would be developed to be presented to voters by the District board. A single commercial audit would be conducted (compared to the six audits that are currently being prepared and audited). This would result in savings of \$17,000. The new District would be required to submit one statistical report and staff census to the state, creating considerable saving in staff time. These changes greatly promote transparency and accountability, as required by Act 46.

FNESU has made a sizeable investment in new accounting/human resource software. The hybrid nature of incurring costs and distributing revenue between the local school district and the SU complicates our accounting process. This structure inhibits the efficient functioning of this business software. We anticipate not needing to fill a 0.4 FTE position that is approved in the budget, as the Unified District will significantly reduce duplication at the Central Office. This will result in a savings of \$15,000.

As a single district, coordination and implementation of benefits will be more manageable. Determination of benefits (e.g. insurance, seniority, participation in retirement systems) eligibility would be more transparent and clear. This is a major benefit to employees, as well as office personnel charged with tracking employee records.

When submitting grants, viewing the District as a whole presents a stronger case due to combined enrollments. Student population is often a criterion in competitive grant opportunities. Some grants will not allow multiple districts to apply. Becoming a single school district increases our ability to apply for grants.

The reductions in duplication and increased efficiencies would allow for reallocation of staffing resources to facilities, coordination and human resources. These areas have been identified as in need of additional attention and services. Another potential area for savings would be to have one facilities director and one food service director for the District with district level positions being reallocated or eliminated as deemed appropriate.

## **Improved utilization of buildings and sport facilities**

Buildings could be utilized to support programs in any school when/as necessary. Sports teams could be combined in the Unified District when enrollment is a concern (e.g. ski teams, tennis, golf ...)

## **Centralized contracting**

In special education, becoming a Unified District would allow us to end many contracts with outside organizations which cost us over \$1,000,000 a year. With current projected caseloads, we believe we could reduce net expenses by a minimum of \$150,000 in this area by employing and training our own workers. Additionally, by moving these services in-house, we would be allowed to bill Medicaid, generating revenue of \$250,000 a year. Given the fluctuations of student population and local budgets, individual school districts are less able to provide the training, employee and fiscal stability that a Unified District could much more easily establish.



FNESU currently contracts for fuel and most food purchases. These joint efforts have been very successful and provided significant savings. The new District could expand our ability to contract with single providers for selected services (e.g. trash removal, supplies). This is difficult to do now given board priorities and budget constraints at the school district level. FNESU presently has a unified employment agreement for teachers.

Paraeducators could become one bargaining unit. This would simplify administration and therefore, towns would not be competing with each other to fill support staff positions.

## **Transportation**

Currently, four of the five towns participate in a FNESU contracted transportation system. If elementary school enrollment were based on residency and/or proximity to schools rather than town boundaries, we believe that we would be able to reduce the number of miles traveled, as well as the amount of time students ride the bus. Towns currently have different transportation policies and standards. One system would ensure greater equity of transportation/access for students in our communities.

## **Food service**

A Unified District would permit and encourage staff collaboration and networking for food services across FNESU. Schools could take advantage of the talents and skills of current food service staff who are employed by other districts. Innovations and techniques could be implemented throughout FNESU. This has the potential to improve quality/nutrition of meals, increase revenue, reduce costs, expand partnerships with local farmers, grow composting efforts and broaden purchasing power with suppliers and vendors. Currently, we have a model with five Food Service Managers. This could be replaced with one Manager in charge of Food Service across the Unified District with head cooks in each building, resulting in fewer hours billed. We believe we could eliminate two FTEs and perhaps realize other reductions generating savings up to \$45,000. These changes will maximize operational efficiencies through greater flexibility to manage, share, and transfer resources and would be delivered at a cost that parents, voters, and taxpayers value, as required by law.

## **Board operations**

Currently, FNESU has 25 board members (5 from each school district). The SU Board is made up of 15 board members (3 from each of the 5 districts). Each board member receives an annual stipend. Current board stipends range from \$450 to \$1,500 annually, with most receiving between \$500 and \$1,000. In the new Unified District arrangement, there will be nine or 11 or 13 board members, depending on the election results. Following is one example of potential Board Operations savings. In the Unified District, if a 13 member board were to set a stipend at \$1,000/yr., unification would result in a net savings of \$4,000 over the current SU total.

## **Appendix B School Choice Options**

### **Describe the grades that are presently served by the merging districts and their building configurations (before the proposed merger).**

- Elementary students grades PreK-8 in Bakersfield attend Bakersfield Elementary.
- Elementary students grades Prek-8 in Berkshire attend Berkshire Elementary.
- Elementary students grades PreK-5 from Enosburg attend Enosburg Elementary.
- Elementary students grades PreK-8 from Montgomery attend Montgomery Elementary.
- Elementary students grades PreK-5 from Richford attend Richford Elementary.
- Students in grades 6-8 in Enosburg attend Enosburg Middle School.
- Students in grades 9-12 in Enosburg attend Enosburg High School (EFHS)
- Students in grades 6-12 in Richford attend Richford Junior-Senior High School (RJSHS)
- Students in 9-12 in Bakersfield, Berkshire, and Montgomery have high school choice
- Students in 11-12 who attend either EFHS or RJSHS may attend Cold Hollow Career Center

### **Describe the grades that will be served by the District after unification and their building configurations.**

If all five districts approve unification, the Cold Hollow School District will serve grades Pre-Kindergarten – Grade 12 by providing for students’ education at public schools operated by the Unified District. Grade level configurations by building are as follows:

- Bakersfield Elementary – PreK through Grade 8
- Berkshire Elementary – PreK through Grade 8
- Enosburg Elementary – PreK through Grade 5
- Montgomery Elementary – PreK through Grade 8
- Richford Elementary – PreK through Grade 5
- Enosburg Middle/High School – Grade 6 through grade 12
- Richford Junior-Senior High School – Grade 6 through Grade 12
- Cold Hollow Career Center – Grade 11 through Grade 12

### **Describe any expansion or diminishment of school choice options that will result from the creation of the proposed Cold Hollow School District.**

#### **Elementary/Middle Schools**

Approval of the Unified District creates a situation where the new District school board may choose to offer school choice to students at the elementary and middle levels. This is currently not possible without tuition payments. For example, the new Unified Board might adopt a policy that allows a student who resides in one town to attend school in a different town if it is closer to home. If parents are responsible for transportation, there is no cost associated with this new benefit.

Elementary/middle school choice would be a great benefit to families that do not own a home and are subject to the fluctuations in the rental markets. Children in these families frequently are forced to change schools partway through the school year because they move a short distance.

#### **High School**

If unification is approved, there will be more choice for students in Enosburg and Richford, because it will be easier for them to enroll in the high school located in the other town. Statewide public high school choice will continue to be an option.

If unification is approved, opportunities for high school choice will be reduced in Bakersfield, Berkshire and Montgomery because, beginning in the 2020-2021 school year, students in those towns will attend one of the Unified District's two public high schools, and the new district will not pay tuition to other schools except on a case-by-case basis. Statewide public high school choice will be an option for these students as well. Currently, about 60 students from these three towns attend high schools outside of our supervisory union. Bakersfield, Berkshire, and Montgomery students who currently attend a high school out of FNESU for the 2016-2017 school year, will be "grandfathered" and permitted to continue to attend their existing schools.

**Describe any plans, or any discussions that have occurred, regarding designation of one or more public or private schools.**

No plans for designation are in place. Designation is only available to a district that does not operate a secondary school. This Unified District will be comprised of a PreK-12 system with three PreK-8 elementary schools, two PreK-5 elementary schools, one 6-12 Junior/Senior High School, one 6-12 Middle/High School, and a Career Center. The new Unified Board may adopt policies that allow school choice, within the Unified District, at specific and/or all grade levels.

**Appendix C**  
**Potential Annual Reductions**

<b>Potential Reductions in FNESU Merger</b>	<b>Amount</b>
District Treasurers/Payroll Officers/Board Secretaries	\$25,000
Audits	\$17,000
Board Stipends	\$4,000
.4 Reduction Central Office	\$15,000
Legal Fees	\$22,000
Food Service	\$45,000*
Out of district high school tuition	\$952,000
Maintenance/Head Custodian	\$45,000*
Special Education Plan (including Medicaid revenue)	\$400,000*
<b>Total Potential Budget Reductions</b>	<b>\$1,525,000*</b>

**\*Note: decisions by the new Unified Board will affect this amount**

**Appendix D**  
**Franklin Northeast Supervisory Union Unification Study Committee Report**

Current Supervisory Union or Unions	Potentially Merging Districts Pursuant to 16 V.S.A. § 706b(b)(1)-(2)	District is Identified as:	
		Necessary	Advisable
Franklin Northeast SU	Bakersfield		Y
	Berkshire	Y	
	Enosburg	Y	
	Montgomery		Y
	Richford	Y	
<b>Type of Merger, Dates, ADM, and Name</b>			
Regional Education District (RED) (Act 153, Secs. 2-3 (2010), as amended by Acts 156, Sec. 1 (2012) and 46, Sec. 16 (2015)) Depending on the districts approving merger, it could alternatively be an Accelerated Merger (phase 1) or a Conventional Merger (phase 2)			
Date on which the proposal will be submitted to the voters of each district (16 V.S.A. § 706b(b)(11)): 6/7/16			
Date on which the new district, if approved, will begin operating (16 V.S.A. § 706b(b)(12)): 7/1/17			
Combined ADM of all "necessary" districts in the current fiscal year: 1,193.67			
Proposed name of new district: Cold Hollow School District			

**Is the Proposal in the Best Interest of the State, Students, and Districts per 16 V.S.A. § 706c?**

Goal #1: The proposed union school district will provide substantial equity in the quality and variety of educational opportunities.  
*Act 46, Sec. 2(1)*

Goal #2: The proposed union school district will lead students to achieve or exceed the State's Education Quality Standards, adopted as rules by the State Board of Education at the direction of the General Assembly.  
*Act 46, Sec. 2(2)*

- Increases consistency and equity of opportunity by having a single board:
  - Single mission statement / unified vision
  - Single strategic plan
  - Consistency in curriculum development
  - Consistency in delivery of student support systems
- Increases ability of administrators to focus on “engaging in visionary instructional leadership:”
  - Centralized, professional oversight of building and grounds
  - Support provided for single board (rather than six)
  - Preparation of one budget (rather than six)
- Increases ability to recruit and retain skilled teachers throughout the district:
  - Sharing allows increased opportunity for formerly part-time positions in multiple districts to be one full-time position in unified district
  - Centralized contracts = consistency in wages and working conditions
- Increases programming options – shared staff and the enhanced ability to recruit and retain skilled teachers leads to more opportunities, not only in core subjects but also in the arts, before and after school programs, and sports
- Increases possibility for parents to select public elementary school within the new district
- Increases ability to equalize class sizes across system through flexibility re: staff assignments
- Committed to preserving character and unique culture of each school
- Supports coordinated PreK programming
- Increases consistency and equity of opportunity by having a single board:
  - Single mission statement / unified vision
  - Single strategic plan
  - Consistency in curriculum development
  - Consistency in delivery of student support systems
- Is a fully integrated PK-12 system

<p><u>Goal #3:</u> The proposed union school district will <u>maximize operational efficiencies</u> through increased <u>flexibility to manage, share, and transfer</u> resources, with a goal of increasing the district-level <u>ratio</u> of students to full-time equivalent staff.</p> <p><i>Act 46, Sec. 2(3)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increases potential for movement of staff and students among schools</li> <li>• Eliminates need to develop and approve six, including SU, separate budgets</li> <li>• Reduces number of VT, IRS, and other federal reports</li> <li>• Eliminates intergovernmental accounting transactions within the new Unified District</li> <li>• Centralized hiring permits greater sharing of both teaching and non-teaching staff</li> <li>• Increases ability to equalize class sizes across system through flexibility re: staff assignments</li> <li>• Increases operational efficiencies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Centralized, professional oversight of building and grounds</li> <li>○ Support for single board (rather than six, including SU)</li> <li>○ Single budget = fewer audits</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Supports consolidated efforts re: curriculum; instruction; transportation; delivery of student support systems; and overall finance operations</li> <li>• Supports coordinated PreK programming</li> <li>• Article 1, Section 8 adds additional protections to towns that fear their school will be closed over their objections. The committee believes these protections are necessary for public approval of unification. All elementary schools are currently full. There are no empty classrooms. FNESU districts have experienced very little decline in student population the last 10 years. There is no intent to close schools or reconfigure grade level offerings in the near future. Therefore, these protections will likely not have any effect of the flexibility of the Unified District School Board within the specified ten year period.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Goal #4:</u> The proposed union school district will promote <u>transparency</u> and accountability.</p> <p><i>Act 46, Sec. 2(4)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single budget for which electorate directly votes / eliminates allocation of SU costs</li> <li>• Eliminates need for additional explanations so electorate understands SU allocations</li> <li>• One board – not six – increases : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ transparency and</li> <li>○ administrators’ ability to focus on schools and leadership</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Transitional / New Board will establish structure to support community and family engagement</li> </ul>

Goal #5: The proposed union school district will deliver education at a cost that parents, voters, and taxpayers value.

*Act 46, Sec. 2(5)*

- Estimated savings of approximately \$1 million dollars a year
- Reduces the number of annual audits and the associated costs from six to one
- Streamlines accounting systems (e.g., one budget and no SU assessments)
- Increases purchasing power
- Strengthens negotiating position
- Reduces legal costs and time for negotiating centralized contracts
- Centralizes oversight of building and grounds
- Decreases likelihood that excess spending threshold will be reached
- Maintains Small School Support Grants as Merger Support Grants
- Maintains 3.5% hold harmless protection
- (Has already centralized transportation and special education services)
- (Recognizes that temporary tax relief is for transitional purposes by helping to stabilize property tax rates and is not itself the primary reason to merge)

Regional Effects:

What would be the regional effects of the proposed union school district, including: would the proposed union school district leave one or more other districts geographically isolated?

*Act 46, Section 8(a)(2)*

- Doesn't isolate any district that would be an obvious merging partner and that has no other options.
- Willing to work now and in the future with other districts in the region, either as collaborators or in connection with, the present/future merger. Informal conversation with Sheldon indicates that Sheldon may have an interest in joining the Cold Hollow School District at some time in the future. They did not participate in this study and are not prepared to act at this time.