

From: Dan Morris - PMSD Brd Vice Chair* <dmorris@cvsu.org>
Sent: Monday, November 14, 2022 6:27 PM
To: French, Daniel <Daniel.French@vermont.gov>; Samuelson, Jennifer <Jennifer.Samuelson@vermont.gov>
Subject: Public comment on Lincoln question for SBE 11/16/22

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Dear Secretary French and Chair Samuelson,

My name is Dan Morris, and I write as a member of the Board of Directors for both Paine Mountain School District and Central Vermont Supervisory Union. I am deeply opposed to the proposed merger between Lincoln School District and CVSU, largely because of reasons that our Superintendent, Matthew Fedders, has already articulated. As he stated in his letter of 11/9/22, merging LSD and CVSU would not realize any new efficiencies given the negative effects the merger would have on travel, curriculum planning, salaries, and taxes.

In addition to those important concerns, though, I would add two other points.

First, the realization of greater efficiency in such a merger is highly dependent upon Lincoln's students attending a CVSU middle/high school (meaning either Northfield Middle High or Williamstown Middle High) after they complete their studies at Lincoln Elementary. Including students from Lincoln in our middle/high schools could result in certain efficiencies in terms of curriculum (i.e., more dynamic course offerings to serve a larger student population) and finance (i.e., tuition dollars). However, these efficiencies would never be realized, given the fact that Lincoln students would never opt to enroll in our schools. They would not choose to enroll in CVSU schools mainly because of distance and travel routes. Lincoln Gap closes in the winter, which means Lincoln students would need to travel by bus over the Appalachian Gap (Rt. 17) and the Moretown/Northfield Falls mountain road, which is highly impractical. Even so, with that as a chosen route, Lincoln students would be driving past Mt. Abraham and Harwood High Schools in order to get to Northfield or Williamstown. Another route might avoid the Moretown/Northfield Falls mountain road, and this would require Lincoln students to drive past Montpelier schools to get to ours. A third route would avoid all mountain roads, but Lincoln students would need to travel north to Richmond to get on I-89, driving past Champlain Valley Union. Without being forced to designate our middle/high schools and in a climate of school choice, it is unimaginable that any students or their families would choose to enroll in Northfield or Williamstown instead of Mt. Abraham, Harwood, Montpelier, or CVU. (CVSU is already facing an analogous situation: many students from Orange and Washington choose to attend middle/high schools other than Williamstown and Northfield, and we are all in the same supervisory union.) Meanwhile, the other middle/high schools that are closer options for Lincoln students would reap benefits of tuition dollars and more students to justify dynamic programming, while CVSU does the work of running LSD. In short, CVSU would be taking on the administrative and financial burdens of operating Lincoln School District without realizing any financial or curricular advantages, which would go to other schools in closer proximity to Lincoln.

Second, the difficulty of merging in general has not been adequately acknowledged in the SBE's conversation about Lincoln's departure from the Mount Abraham Unified School District. Merging school districts takes an enormous amount of time and energy. Our administrators, boards, and teachers have dedicated tireless work to merging schools in Orange, Washington, Williamstown, and Northfield into one SU. Wading through disparities in finance and facilities, contracts, transportation,

special services, extra-curriculars, and many other issues has required intense focus, commitment, and time away from families and jobs. The communities in CVSU have done this difficult work without complaint, and we are now beginning to find our groove in terms of finance, programming, and culture. I am not claiming that CVSU is unique in this regard—surely the process has been similarly intense for other merged districts and SUs in Vermont. My point is simply this: adding LSD to any district or SU that opposes such a merger would generate an enormous amount of work, on top of what's already been done, for the district or SU in question. The pace of progress would be hindered by resentment from communities that rightly believe they have no voice in the process and feel slighted by seeing tax rates increase because of Lincoln's decision. If the question at hand is one of efficiency, surely the best options are to absorb Lincoln back into MAUSD (which has already included Lincoln and could do so again with relative ease) or leaving Lincoln to be its own district (which is, after all, what Lincoln opted to do in the first place). The question has already required a significant amount of work for those of us in CVSU, and I'm certain the same is true for White River Valley Supervisory Union. Merging Lincoln with a district or SU that has never had a relationship with LSD is surely not an efficient way for any of the parties in question to proceed.

Thank you for reading and considering this comment, and we look forward to an efficient, democratic, and equitable resolution to this problem.

Sincerely,
Dan Morris

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Dan Morris
Vice Chair, PMSD
Clerk, CVSU