

From: Scott Gillette <info@amalgamatedtransaesthetics.com>
Sent: Friday, October 14, 2022 4:32 PM
To: French, Daniel <Daniel.French@vermont.gov>; Samuelson, Jennifer <Jennifer.Samuelson@vermont.gov>
Cc: kgalluzzo@wrvsu.org <kgalluzzo@wrvsu.org>
Subject: Re: Please do not add Lincoln to WRVSU

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Secretary French and Ms. Samuelson-

I am writing as a parent of school age children, and as a taxpayer, in the White River Valley Supervisory Union. I urge you not to expand our already overburdened and geographically overstretched SU by adding Lincoln to it.

We are having enough trouble providing administrative, special education, and other services to our schools and students, spread as we are across ten towns in three counties, spanning 41 miles between our most far flung towns and across the Northfield mountain range. We struggle to find people who will commute these long distances and challenging drives in poor weather, given the limits of what our less wealthy tax base can afford to pay them. Adding an additional town that is not even contiguous to the SU over the road, and another 30 miles and 45 minutes of driving across a second mountain range (again, in good weather) is simply a bridge too far for our existing personnel. It would be necessary for the SU to hire an additional staff just for the Lincoln Community School.

Additionally, food services would need to be provided to Lincoln. Due to the geographic distance of Lincoln from the WRVSU, there would be no economy of scale in this assignment, as food service costs could not be shared. Rather, the increased expense of solely serving Lincoln would be an additional burden for all the other taxpayers in the SU.

Likewise with transportation services, Lincoln's discontinuous location on the highway system would result in a dedicated transportation system for Lincoln at the expense of the WRVSU taxpayers. In our current merged SU, the creation of which involved many sacrifices by taxpayers and students alike, some children must ride the bus for over an hour to get to school. It is not equitable or fair to these students to create a situation where Lincoln has a bespoke bus service, and the students and taxpayers of Lincoln sacrifice nothing.

While this would be an ideal result for a well-to-do bedroom community like Lincoln- to have a dedicated administrative and support staff, food service, and transportation funded primarily by taxpayers from other towns, it isn't likely to sit well with the taxpayers and voters of the working class towns that would be stuck paying the bill.

At the secondary level, Lincoln presently sends students to Mt. Abraham. The working class towns of MAUSD lose greatly with Lincoln's secession from the district, to the point where the continued viability of Mt. Abe is in question. Lincoln gains school choice with their secession and proposed merger with WRVSU. Will Lincoln students attend secondary school in the WRVSU? They will not. They will take their tuition vouchers to the schools of their choice, which will have much better resources than WRVSU can provide. In the meantime, the drain of tuitioning these students out of the WRVSU threatens the continued viability of our own secondary school.

I feel that Lincoln has identified WRVSU as its ideal candidate for the State Board of Education to, as their letter to the SBE explicitly states, "assign Lincoln to a Supervisory Union regardless of an SU's expressed degree of interest" due to our lower socio-economic status and concomitant lack of political influence. That, coupled with our SU's Articles of Agreement prohibiting the closure of schools without an affirmative vote from that school district's voters, and the option of secondary school choice, are what make WRVSU their first choice.

In sum, Lincoln's position seems to be that they want to be merged with an SU that can't close their school, will be forced to subsidize private school tuition for secondary students, and will be forced to provide an SU's services to Lincoln, paid for from the pockets of taxpayers outside of Lincoln, and Lincoln has not thought at all about what that merger might cost WRVSU and its taxpayers, nor have they indicated anything that would make them a good fit or benefit for us. This is articulated most clearly in Owen McClain's letter to the SBE where he produces a reading of statute indicating that it matters not what the voters of our SU think- the SBE has authority to assign Lincoln to us, whether we want them or not, and makes little mention of whether or not we have the ability to accommodate them (frankly, the fact that Lincoln has the resources to retain Sheehey, Furlong & Behm illustrates plenty about the socio-economic gulf between Lincoln and the towns of the WRVSU). As I hope I've made clear above, the taxpayers of the WRVSU do not have the ability to subsidize Lincoln as Lincoln would like.

Please reject this selfish proposal.

Sincerely,
Scott Gillette
Hancock, VT

cc WRVSU board chair Kathy Galuzzo