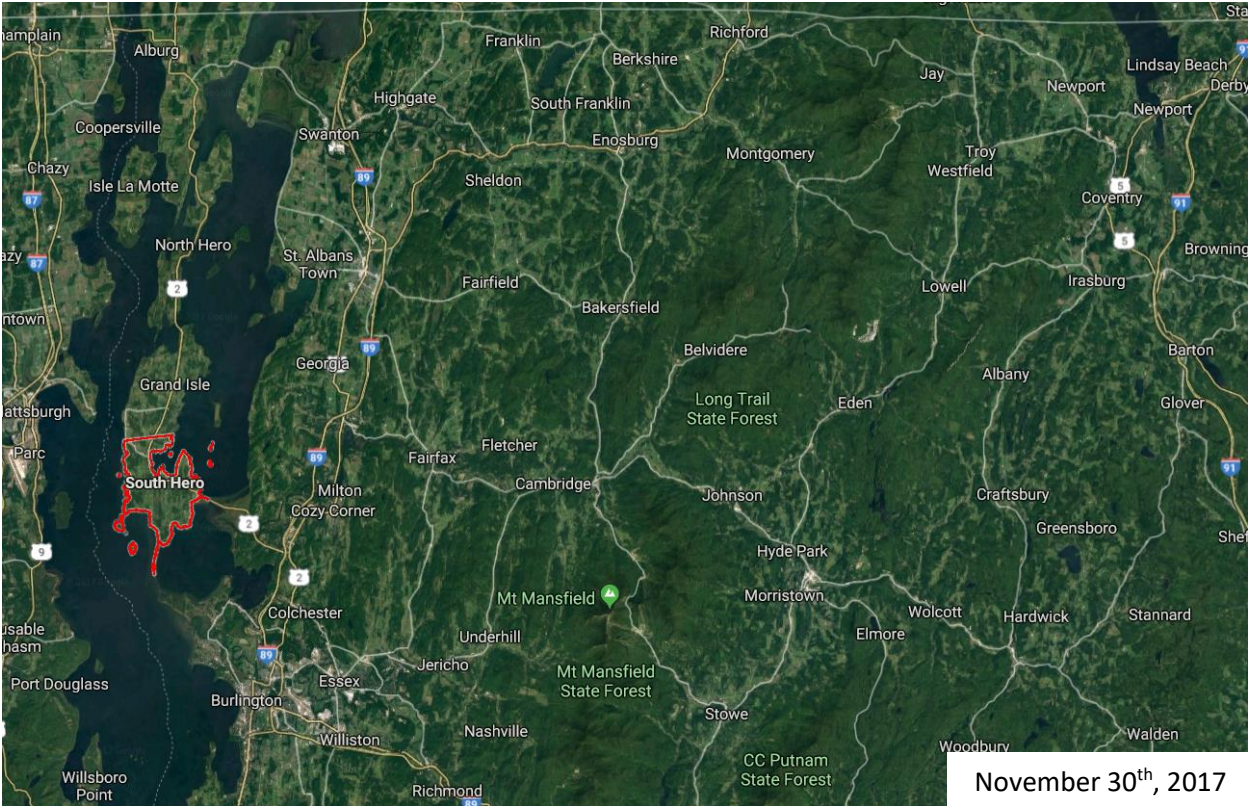


# Act 46 Alternative Governance Proposal for South Hero, Vermont



Folsom 8<sup>th</sup> Graders of FY17



November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2017

# Table of Contents

- Statement of Purpose ..... 3
- Introduction ..... 4
  - Folsom Education and Community Center ..... 5
    - Folsom by the Numbers ..... 6
  - South Hero’s Birthrate vs. Enrollment ..... 7
  - South Hero’s History with Act 46 ..... 9
  - Maintaining a Strong K-8 Structure ..... 9
  - South Hero’s Alternative Governance Proposal ..... 11
- Act 46 Goal 1: Equity ..... 12
  - Academic Schedule for Grades K-8 ..... 12
  - Personal Learning Plans at Folsom ..... 13
  - United Arts and Extracurricular Opportunities ..... 14
    - PE and Athletics ..... 14
    - Art ..... 15
    - French ..... 15
    - Music ..... 16
- Act 46 Goal 2: Quality ..... 18
  - Academic Performance ..... 18
    - Math Results per Grade ..... 19
    - ELA Results per Grade ..... 21
    - Science Results for 4th & 8th Grade ..... 23
    - Writing Results for 5th & 8th Grade ..... 23
  - Achievement Gap ..... 24
  - High School Performance and Continuing Education ..... 25
  - Turnover Data ..... 25
  - Professional Development Opportunities for Staff ..... 25
- Act 46 Goal 4: Transparency & Accountability ..... 26
- Act 46 Goals 3 & 5: Efficiency and Cost ..... 27
  - Efficiency ..... 27
  - Cost ..... 28
  - Cost Comparison ..... 29
- Conclusion ..... 29

## Prepared, Edited, and Reviewed By:

- Melanie Henderson, Folsom School Board
- David Cain, Folsom School Board
- Susan McKelvie, Folsom Principal
- Don Van Nostrand, Grand Isle Supervisory Union Superintendent
- Barbara Burrington, Former Superintendent and Manager of UVM’s Campus Children’s School
- Folsom School Board Members Bentley Vaughan, RJ Sweeney, and Tim Maxham

# Statement of Purpose

This Proposal is the result of two and a half years of rigorous self-study evaluating South Hero’s ability to meet and/or exceed the goals set forth in Act 46, Section 2. Our Proposal will encourage and support local decisions and actions that:

1. Provide substantial equity in the quality and variety of educational opportunities statewide
2. 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
3. Maximize operational efficiencies through increased flexibility to manage, share, and transfer resources, with a goal of increasing the district-level ratio of students to full-time equivalent staff
4. Promote transparency and accountability
5. Deliver these services at a cost that parents, voters, and taxpayers value (Act 46)

This Proposal outlines the context and evidence of that self-study process and includes data specific to each goal. Further, the content of this Proposal illustrates South Hero’s compliance to the processes mandated in Act 46 through its active participation and explicit consideration of all aspects of the law. This Proposal maintains that the best model to achieve these goals in the Champlain Islands region is a modified, sustainable continuation of the Supervisory Union, with South Hero pursuing an “alternative structure”. See the table below for an overview of the Grand Isle Supervisory Union structure.

## Grand Isle Supervisory Union Structure

		Grand Isle Supervisory Union					
		Town	Alburgh	Isle la Motte	North Hero	Grand Isle	South Hero
2017 - 2019	School District	Alburgh	Isle la Motte	North Hero	Grand Isle	Folsom	
	Operational & Tuitioning Structure	Operate PreK-8 Tuition 9-12	Operate K-6 Tuition 7-12	Operate PreK-6 Tuition 7-12	Operate K-8 Tuition 9-12	Operate K-8 Tuition PreK Tuition 9-12	
	Governance	5 Member Board	3 Member Board	5 Member Board	5 Member Board	5 Member Board	
2019 - Forward	School District	Alburgh (3x1 with CIUUSD)	Champlain Island Unified Union School District (CIUUSD)			Folsom (Proposed AGS, Independent Partner District within GISU)	
	Operational & Tuitioning Structure	Operate PreK-8 Tuition 9-12	Operate PreK-6 Tuition 7-12			Operate K-8 Tuition PreK Tuition 9-12	
	Governance	5 Member Board	1 Seat on the 5 Member Board	1 Seat on the 5 Member Board	3 Seats on the 5 Member Board	5 Member Board	

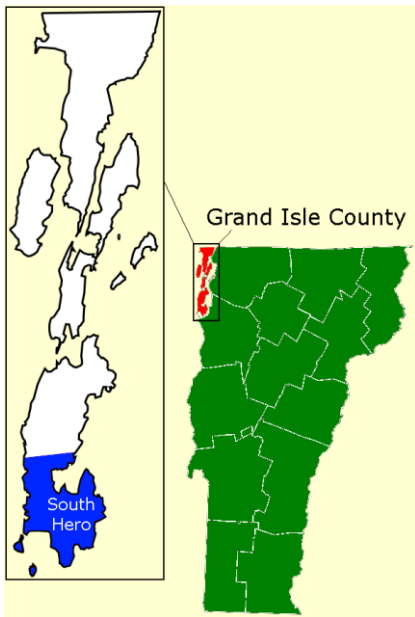
This Proposal supports all guidance in Section 5 of Act 46. By pursuing an Alternative Governance Structure as an independent partner district within the Grand Isle Supervisory Union, South Hero will be able to meet or exceed the State’s [education] goals, for the following reasons:

1. the Grand Isle Supervisory Union member districts will continue to be collectively responsible for the education of all students residing in Grand Isle County
2. the Supervisory Union is maximizing operational efficiencies
3. the Supervisory Union will have the smallest number of member school districts practicable, considering both geographic separation and the operational & tuitioning patterns
4. the Proposal is inclusive of all obvious partners and does not geographically or systematically isolate any district

Further, this Proposal rejects the conclusion of Act 49 that a 3x1 configuration is optimal for Grand Isle County, the most northwest region of Vermont, because it excludes one community (South Hero) from the Union. This report proposes that the best model of governance for the Champlain Island region is to continue a model of joint activity that honors the history, geography, growth, culture, and educational success of our island communities.

## Introduction

Welcome to South Hero, Vermont! Located at the southern end of the Lake Champlain Islands, South Hero is a small, beautiful, vibrant town. The local population was 1654 in the 2010 census, with 683 households. Of those, 187 households (27%) have children under the age of 18. South Hero has a strong agricultural system that combines multi-generational farming operations with newer sustainable and organic ventures. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms offer fresh vegetables and locally raised meat, while local vineyards prepare their own label wines. Apples are a mainstay crop, with multiple orchards throughout the town. Numerous dairy farms offer learning opportunities through Vermont’s Farm to School program.



South Hero in Grand Isle County



Folsom Kindergartners of FY2016, Walking Field Trip to Hackett's Orchard

The Champlain Islands Parent Child Center (CIPCC), located in South Hero, is an NAEYC accredited center offering high-quality childcare to families throughout the Champlain Islands region. Daycare is offered for infants, toddlers, and preschool-age children. CIPCC also offers after-school care and a summer day-camp within Folsom School, for students aged 5-12 years. South Hero’s Pre-K students are tuitioned at CIPCC.



CIPCC Toddlers on a Nature Walk



CIPCC Preschoolers Read to Younger Classmates

The Folsom Education and Community Center is a focal point for many events in South Hero, from library-based learning and community programming, to school-sponsored plays and athletic events. South Hero also hosts an annual marathon and half-marathon, which begins and ends in front of Folsom School. South Hero's annual 4<sup>th</sup> of July parade is enjoyed by residents throughout the Islands, while the summer concert series at the Snow Farm Vineyard attracts Vermonters from towns both on and off the Islands. A strong spirit of volunteerism unites the community, helping to attract families and draw youth back to South Hero after exploring the outside world.

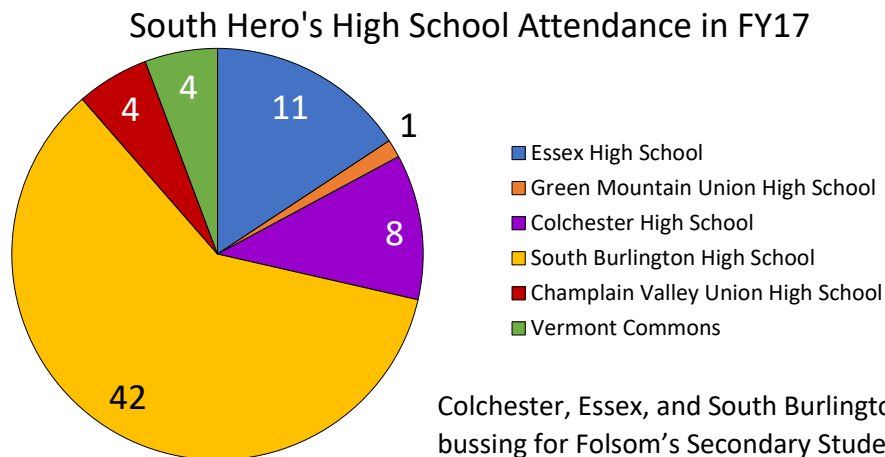


Snow Farm Vineyard's Summer Concert Series

(Sources: Wikipedia at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South\\_Hero,\\_Vermont](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Hero,_Vermont) and American Fact Finder at [https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community\\_facts.xhtml?src=bkml](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml?src=bkml))

## Folsom Education and Community Center

The Folsom Education and Community Center operates grades K-8, tuitions Pre-K students, and tuitions students in grades 9-12. Folsom's enrollment in FY17 was 135 students, while our 70 secondary students enjoyed school choice in our surrounding high school districts.



Colchester, Essex, and South Burlington High Schools provide bussing for Folsom's Secondary Students. Vermont Commons provides a van with a limited number of seats.

## Folsom by the Numbers

Grade	Enrollment by Grade					ADM by Grade				
	FY13	FY14	FY15	FY16	FY17	FY13	FY14	FY15	FY16	FY17
PreK						8.1	15.2	15	14.7	13.5
K	16	14	18	14	18	15	14	18	13	17.85
1st	8	14	13	19	14	8.06	15.25	13	19	13
2nd	16	9	16	16	20	16.1	9	16	14.4	20
3rd	9	14	11	15	14	9	14	9.8	14.04	13.07
4th	11	9	15	12	16	11	9	15	11.04	15.79
5th	17	13	8	16	12	17.18	13	7.75	15	12
6th	10	17	11	9	17	10	18.09	11	9	16.11
7th	13	10	17	13	10	13	9	16	12.86	9
8th	11	14	10	18	14	11	14	9	18	14.04
9th						17.76	12	15	15	22
10th						18	18	12	16	15
11th						18	19	16	12	18
12th						18.59	19.58	16.15	17	13
Adult						0	0	0	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>190.79</b>	<b>199.12</b>	<b>189.70</b>	<b>202.04</b>	<b>213.36</b>

Financial Head Counts						
Type	FY13	FY14	FY15	FY16	FY17	FY18
Equalized Pupils	224.77	216.90	209.31	201.98	194.91	204.62
EqPup w/o Phantoms	204.5	198.3	192.77	190.17	192.62	204.62
Phantom Students	20.27	18.6	16.54	11.81	2.29	0

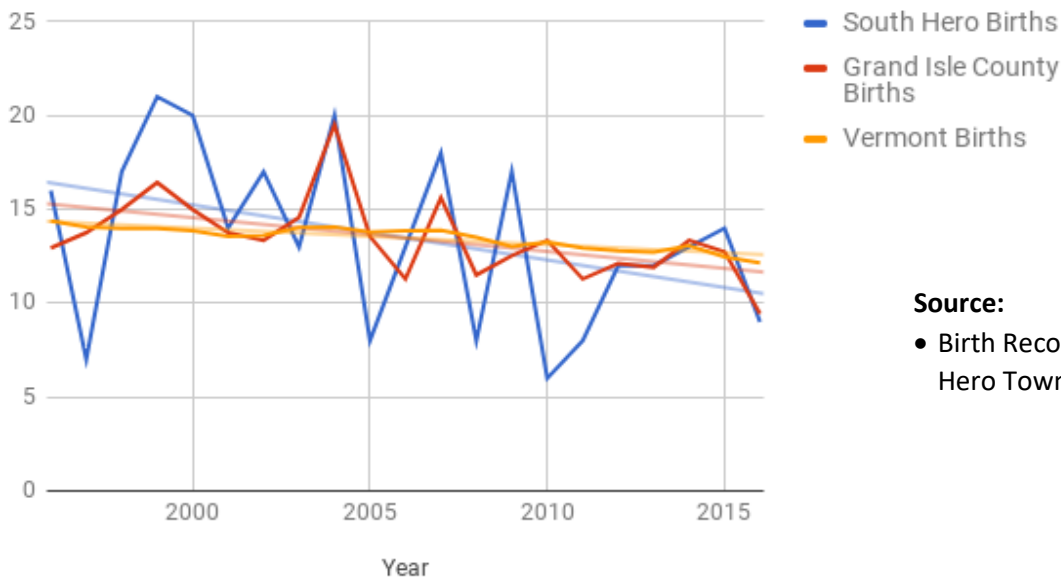
Ratios					
Type	FY13	FY14	FY15	FY16	FY17
Student:Teacher	9.02	9.78	9.33	10.72	11.67
Student:Admin	111	114	119	132	135
Teacher:Admin	13.3	13.5	14.36	13.8	12.6

Demographics					
Group	FY13	FY14	FY15	FY16	FY17
FRL	33%	33%	36%	31%	30%
No Support Services	88%	86%	80%	74%	71%
IEP	-	-	-	11%	14%
EST	-	-	10%	-	-
504 Plan	-	-	-	-	-
ELL	-	-	-	-	-

# South Hero's Birthrate vs. Enrollment

Like many towns in Vermont, South Hero's birth rate is declining. Over the past 20 years, the average number of births per year has dropped from 17 in 1995 to 11 in 2016.

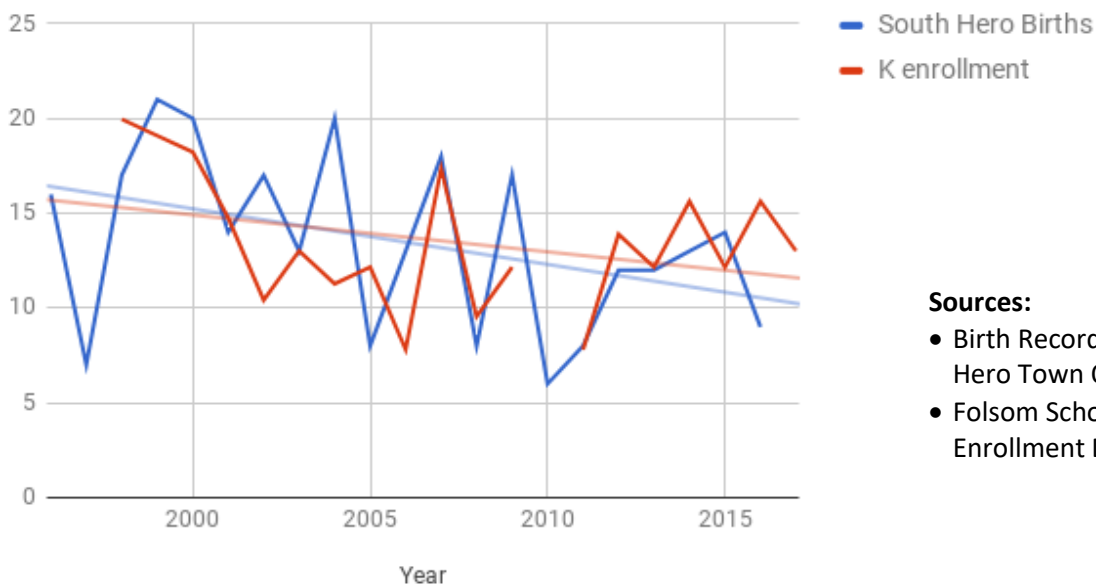
South Hero Births, Grand Isle County Births and Vermont Births



**Source:**  
 • Birth Records from South Hero Town Office

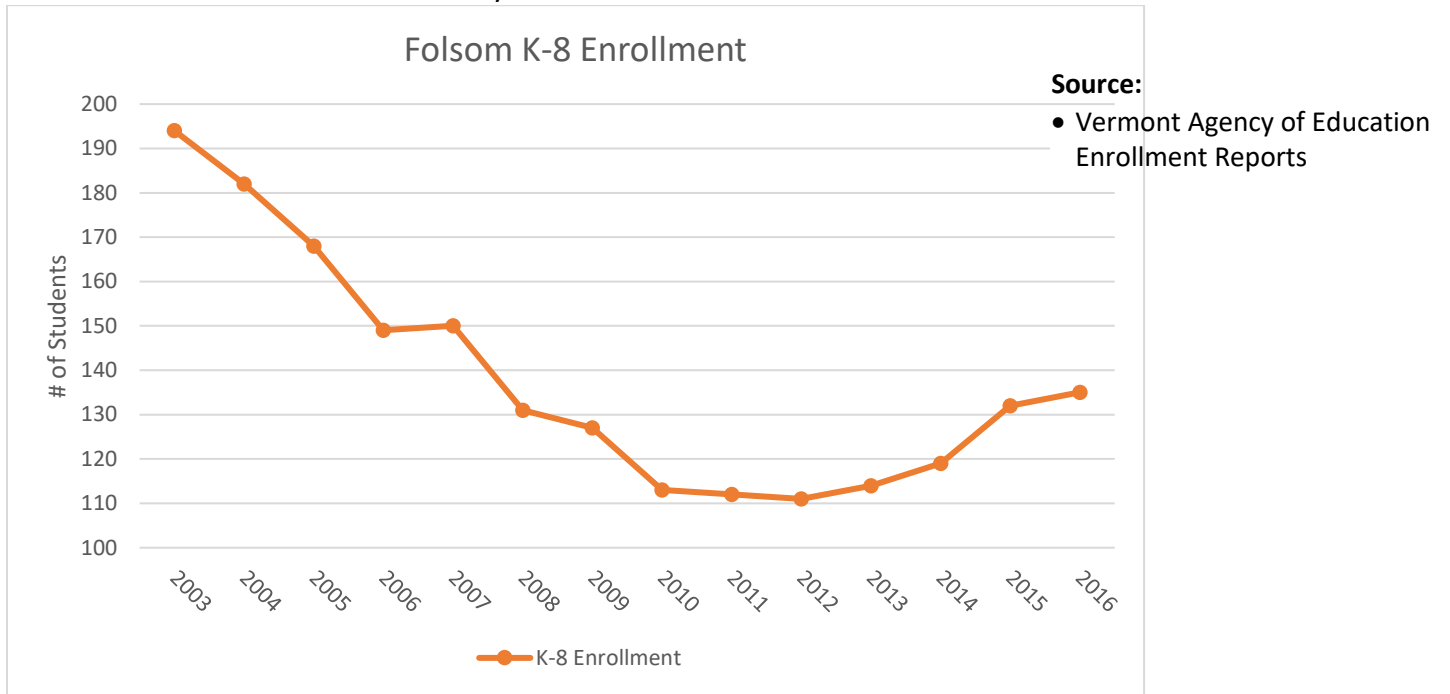
A similar trend exists when considering the number of children enrolled in Kindergarten at Folsom school over the past 20 years.

South Hero Births and K enrollment (20 years)

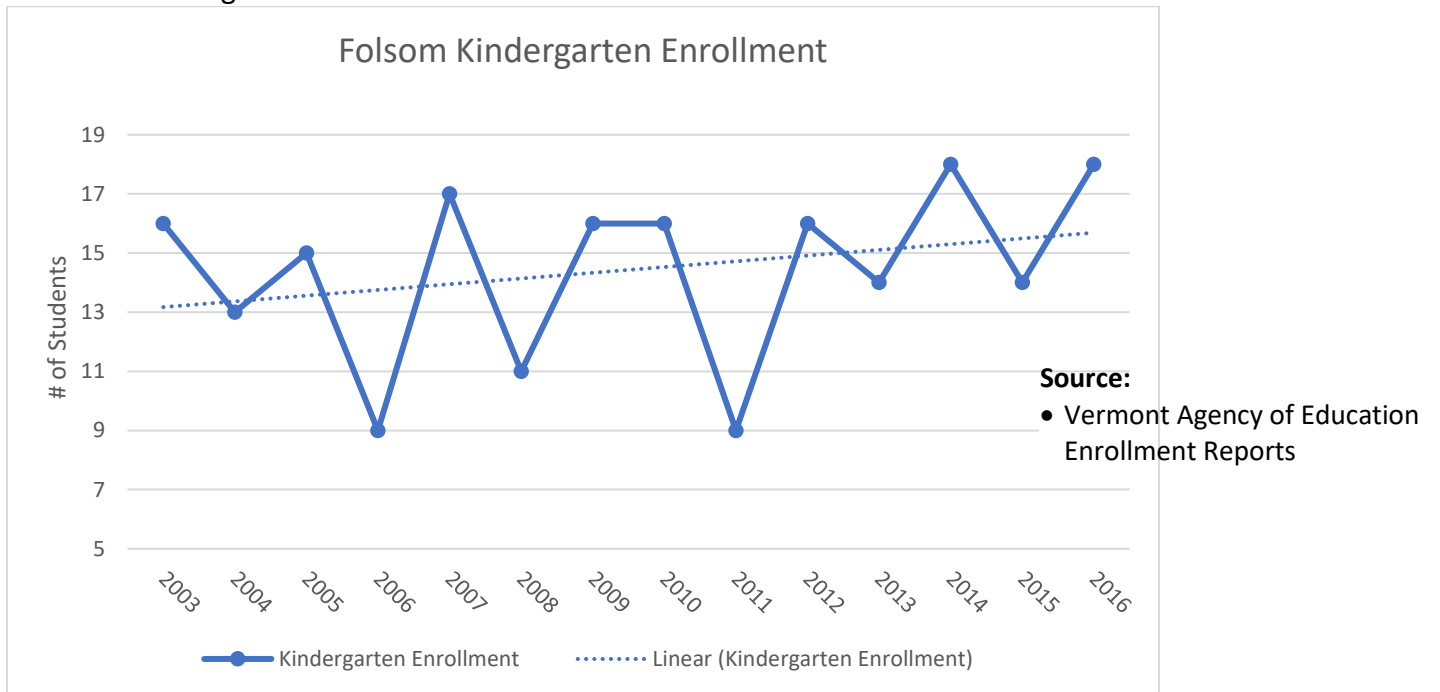


**Sources:**  
 • Birth Records from South Hero Town Office  
 • Folsom School Enrollment Data

However, when examining enrollment data at Folsom over the past 10 years, a new trend emerges. Folsom’s total enrollment (K-8) saw a dramatic drop from 194 students in 2003 to 111 students in 2012. Yet since then, the total enrollment has seen a steady increase to 135 in 2016.



Furthermore, although South Hero’s birthrate is dropping, the Kindergarten enrollment has been slowly increasing. Over the past 13 years, the average Kindergarten enrollment has risen from 13 students in 2003 to 18 students in 2016. This trend suggests that new families are moving to South Hero in sufficient numbers to exceed the falling birth rate.



Finally, conversations with local realtors suggest that the enrollment numbers may continue to slowly climb. New construction projects in town are expected to target first-time home buyers. As more affordable housing becomes available, we can expect to attract new families with elementary aged children to South Hero.



## South Hero's History with Act 46

Since its passage in 2015, the South Hero community has been actively complying with Act 46, and engaging students, parents, staff members, and taxpayers throughout the process. In August of 2015, the five member districts in the Grand Isle Supervisory Union (GISU) formed an Act 46 study committee. The committee was charged with studying the benefits and challenges of the merger options available under the law. After 10 months of research, education, and difficult debate, the committee finally recommended a five-town school district merger, comprising the towns of Alburgh, Grand Isle, Isle la Motte, North Hero, and South Hero. The new district, if approved by the voters, would have operated grades PreK-6, and tuitioned grades 7-12.

South Hero was deemed "advisable" in the proposed PreK-6 merger by a unanimous vote of the Act 46 Study Committee. Committee members recognized through public participation that South Hero's voters would likely reject the change to a PreK-6 structure, and did not want to lose momentum or divide communities further.

In the August Primary of 2016, South Hero held a non-binding referendum regarding the proposed PreK-6 merger. The referendum was advertised widely through Front Porch Forum (which is used throughout the community), the local newspaper (The Islander), and hand-made lawn signs. Public information sessions were held on July 14<sup>th</sup> and August 6<sup>th</sup> of 2016. On the day of the Primary Election, South Hero had the highest voter turn-out in the state. Of those who cast a ballot, 45% voted to pursue the merger, while 55% voted to reject the change to the PreK-6 operating structure.

A second, binding vote was held during the November Presidential Election of 2016. Again, the vote was advertised widely, with Public Information sessions held on November 3<sup>rd</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup>. The three Central Island towns (Grand Isle, North Hero, and Isle la Motte) voted to merge into a single PreK-6 district. Alburgh chose not to put the question on the ballot. The voters of South Hero again voted to reject the PreK-6 merger, with 34% in favor and 66% against.

Following the November election, South Hero engaged in exploratory conversations with our two closest neighboring PreK-8 schools, Alburgh (27.2 miles) and Georgia (21.1 miles). South Hero enjoys cordial and supportive relationships with both towns, but it soon became clear that a merger between our towns was unlikely. The following conclusions were reached:

- Alburgh's main goals are to retain their PreK-8 structure, retain high school choice, avoid a forced merger with lower performing districts, and maintain their current tax rate. They expressed concern that merging with South Hero might cause their taxes to rise. Alburgh has since voted to approve the 3x1 merger option made available under Act 49, along with the newly formed Central Island district (Grand Isle, North Hero, and Isle la Motte).
  - Note: A 3x1x1 merger option was considered under Act 49, but eventually struck from the law. With only the 3x1 merger option remaining, South Hero sought to join the Central Island towns. However, the Central Island district ultimately decided to partner with Alburgh.
- Georgia's main goals are the same: to retain their PreK-8 structure, retain high school choice, avoid a forced merger, and maintain their current tax rate. Georgia deeply values their current partnerships, and plans to pursue an Alternative Governance Structure with their neighboring towns (Fletcher and Fairfax).

Meeting minutes from these exploratory conversations can be found in the Appendix.

# Maintaining a Strong K-8 Structure

During South Hero's exploration of merger options, the relative merits of the K-6 vs. K-8 structure were hotly debated. While students could potentially be successful in either model, it was clear that the vast majority of South Hero parents and community members in attendance at public meetings felt impassioned about maintaining the success and integrity of the K-8 structure. These strong feelings were rooted in Folsom's history of preparing all students, academically and socially, to achieve success in school and in the larger community. The three main reasons for maintaining the K-8 structure can be summarized as follows:

## 1. K-8 is good for the 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> graders

- Folsom's 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> graders are surrounded and supported by the classmates they've known since Kindergarten. This familiarity gives students the security they need to explore and experiment outside their comfort zones. While students in traditional 6-8 Middle Schools are distracted by social pressures (like forging new social groups, and impressing older classmates), Folsom's 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> graders are able to focus on academics and push their own boundaries.
  - This trend is corroborated by the findings of a recent study on 90,000 students in 500 NYC schools. Students in K-8 schools reported less bullying, less fighting, feeling safer, and having a greater sense of belonging. In turn, these students had higher academic achievement.
  - <http://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2016/09/19/494232646/sixth-grade-is-tough-it-helps-to-be-top-dog>
- Folsom's award-winning Middle School teachers spend multiple years forging relationships with the 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> graders. This allows our teachers to develop deeper understandings of students' strengths and needs, target their instruction, and track students' progress.
  - Alison Perry, Folsom's Math teacher for 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades, received the University of Vermont's Outstanding Teacher Award in 2015
  - Samantha Cantell, Folsom's Science teacher for the 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades, received the Rising Star Award from the STEM Challenge Initiative, Inc. in 2017
- With Folsom's small size, every student is vital to the success of the team. Whether in sports, band, the school musical, or community outreach events, all students are welcomed, valued, and supported. In large Middle Schools, only the most skilled students make the cut. By contrast, every interested student at Folsom is given equal time on the field and a role on the stage. Extracurricular participation at Folsom is very high, and 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> graders enjoy opportunities that might not be available to them in a large Middle School.

## 2. K-8 is good for the K-6<sup>th</sup> graders

- By remaining in the same building as the elementary students, Folsom's 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> graders become role models for the younger students.
  - Many 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> graders choose to fulfill their community service requirement by volunteering in the elementary classrooms. For example, 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> graders may listen to Kindergarteners read or lead a math activity with the 1<sup>st</sup> graders.
  - 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> graders who participate in the World of Difference Leadership program often become mentors to elementary students. Older students play with the younger children at recess, sit with them at lunch, model expected behaviors, and help the elementary students make good choices.
  - 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> graders frequently volunteer to assist with the annual K-4 School Play. Middle schoolers interested in theater have blocked scenes and directed the elementary students. Other students act as Stage Crew, helping to change scenery and guide the younger children backstage.
  - At all-school assemblies, elementary students always reach out to the middle schoolers for high-fives and hugs. While the 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> graders enjoy a boost of self-esteem, they are reminded that the

younger students watch their behavior and look to them for guidance. Unlike the vacuum of a traditional 6-8 Middle School, where students are focused solely on their peers, the K-8 structure offers 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> graders the chance to experience both the rewards and responsibilities of leadership.

### **3. K-8 is good for the South Hero tax payers**

- In 2017, South Hero spent more on tuitioning secondary students than on the instructional costs for the K-8 students. In other words, more money went towards educating the oldest 1/3 of students than the younger 2/3.
  - If South Hero had changed to a PreK-6 structure, more students would have had to be tuitioned. Currently, 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> grade students who move to South Hero can be educated at Folsom at no extra cost. In a PreK-6 structure, any unanticipated 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> graders moving into the district would add tuition costs to the budget, easily creating a deficit.
  - Since tuitioning costs are outside of South Hero's control, any increase in tuition must be covered either by a decrease in spending at the elementary level or by an increase in tax rate. Since more students must be tuitioned in a PreK-6 structure, this effect would be even more pronounced, potentially resulting in loss of programming at the elementary level.

South Hero's parents and voters came to the conclusion that Folsom can educate our students more successfully and more cost-effectively in a K-8 structure. While we respect the choices of our neighboring districts, South Hero will not compromise on the model that works best for our children and our town.

## **South Hero's Alternative Governance Proposal**

South Hero spent a full year researching the merger options available under Act 46 and Act 49, conversing and negotiating with our neighboring districts, and listening to the educational priorities and philosophies of our voters. With the knowledge we have gained, we believe South Hero can best meet the goals of Act 46 by remaining an independent partner district within the Grand Isle Supervisory Union. Our reasons are as follows:

- South Hero will be able to maintain our current K-8 operating structure, which best suits the needs of our elementary students, middle school students, and tax payers.
- South Hero will be able to maintain our current, outstanding programming (including foreign language instruction), without the risk of programs being cut due to fiscal concerns in neighboring towns.
- South Hero will be able to analyze our budget, compare ourselves to similar districts, and engage voters in financial conversations more easily as an independent partner district.
- Decisions regarding the education of South Hero's children will be made by the South Hero voters.
  - If South Hero were to merge with a larger district, proportional representation would ensure that decisions regarding Folsom would be controlled by the large district's voters, who may have less interest in South Hero's success.
- Following the merger of the Central Island towns in 2019, South Hero's closest neighboring PreK-8 districts will be Alburgh and Georgia. South Hero and Alburgh are separated by 27.2 miles, or 36 minutes driving time door to door. Similarly, South Hero and Georgia are separated by 21.1 miles, or 25 minutes driving time door to door.
  - If South Hero were to merge with the nearest PreK-8 districts, the geographic distances involved in administering a merged district would be completely unwieldy.
- Following the merger of the Central Island towns in 2019, and considering the geographic separation of Alburgh and South Hero, the GISU will have the smallest number of member districts practicable.
- South Hero will be able to continue to share resources with our neighboring towns in the GISU.

- The member districts within the GISU (Alburgh, Isle la Motte, Grand Isle, North Hero, and South Hero) take collective responsibility for educating all PreK-12 students in the supervisory union. Through our Act 46 discussions, it has become clear that each district in the GISU approaches that obligation with passion and pride.
- For FY17, the GISU's ADM was 902.17, which is greater than the recommended 900 students.

## Act 46 Goal 1: Equity

Folsom students have access to high quality academic programming and many enrichment opportunities. A rigorous schedule of academic courses and unified arts programs offer our students meaningful and engaging instruction. Personal learning plans challenge our middle school students to meet high academic standards while simultaneously pursuing their interests. Folsom students also broaden their experience through sports, band, chorus, theater, and clubs, and participation in extra-curricular activities is high.

## Academic Schedule for Grades K-8

From Morning Meeting until afternoon dismissal, Folsom students' time and attention are in high demand. Finding the perfect balance between focused academics, artistic expression, and recuperative playtime is no easy task. To maximize both comprehension and well-being, Folsom's staff has experimented with the daily schedule in recent years. In FY17 & FY18, the K-4, and 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades have adhered to the following schedules:

Subject	FY17	FY18
Classroom Teambuilding	40	55
ELA	90	85
Math	60	40
Science or Social Studies †	50	45
United Arts	70	90
Intervention Blocks	35	45
Transitions	45	10
Lunch & Recess	35	50
<b>Total Minutes/Day</b>	<b>425</b>	<b>420</b>

Subject	FY17	FY18
Library/Media	70	45
Music	70	90
Art	70	90
PE ‡	70	90
Guidance	35	45
French	35	45
<b>Total UA Min/Week</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>405</b>

† - In the elementary grades, Science and Social Studies alternate daily

‡ - In both the elementary grades and middle school, PE is given twice a week

Subject	FY17	FY18
ELA	55	75
Math	55	75
Science	55	55
SS	55	55
United Arts	135	120
Intervention Blocks	30	0
Lunch/Recess	40	40
<b>Total Minutes/Day</b>	<b>425</b>	<b>420</b>

5 <sup>th</sup> – 8 <sup>th</sup> United Arts (Minutes/Week)								
Subject	5th		6th		7th		8th	
	FY17	FY18	FY17	FY18	FY17	FY18	FY17	FY18
Library/Media	45	40	45	40	45	40	0	0
Music	90	80	90	80	45	40	0	40
Art	90	80	90	80	90	80	90	80
PE <sup>‡</sup>	90	80	90	80	90	80	90	80
Guidance	45	40	45	40	45	40	45	40
French	90	80	90	80	90	120	180	160
Goals	90	80	90	40	135	40	135	40
Band/Chorus	135	120	135	160	135	160	135	160
<b>UA Min/Week</b>	<b>675</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>675</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>675</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>675</b>	<b>600</b>

When evaluating the daily schedules relative to the Education Quality Standards, we can make the following observations:

Folsom's FY18 Daily Schedule Relative to the VT Education Quality Standards									
EQS Content Area	ELA	Math	Science	Global Citizenship	Physical Education	Health	Artistic Expression	Transferrable Skills	Other
Definition	CCS Reading, Writing, etc.	CCS Math	Next Generation Science Standards	VT Framework Social Studies	NPES National PE Standards	NHES National Health Education Standards	Visual Media, Performing Arts National Standards	Technology, Innovation, Inquiry	French
K-4 Min/Week	425	200	112.5	112.5	90	0	180	Embedded	45
5 <sup>th</sup> – 8 <sup>th</sup> Min/Day	375	375	275	275	80	0	120-320 <sup>‡</sup>	Embedded	80-160 <sup>ℓ</sup>

‡ - Artistic expression varies based on grade and whether students elect to participate in Band or Chorus

ℓ - French varies by grade

At this time, Folsom does not have a NHES Health program. However, Folsom's school board plans to accelerate the accreditation of the Folsom Physical Education teacher in NHES Health instruction. Currently, some aspects of the required components of Health instruction are presented during Guidance.

## Personal Learning Plans at Folsom

Folsom has required 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> grade students to form and follow personalized learning plans (PLP's) since 2005. In 2015, Folsom extended the PLP program to the 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> graders. Folsom uses a goal-setting approach to PLP's, engaging students to direct their own learning and meet their own self-appointed goals. Each trimester (Fall, Winter, and Spring) brings a new project and specific skill to practice. To complete their goals, students are introduced to a host of technology tools, including Google Drive, Google Docs, and Google Slides.

- In 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> grade, PLP's focus on learning how to set a specific, measurable goal that leads to personal growth. In the Fall, students select their own topic of interest, focusing on time management and breaking problems into manageable bites. Students must use one technology tool to complete their project. In the Winter, a new topic is selected, and students must work in teams of 3-4 students. The group must learn how to work together while ensuring that each team member is a meaningful

contributor to the final group presentation. In the spring, students must pose a scientific question, and answer the question through specific measurable experiments. Again, students must select a technology tool and complete a research paper.

- In 7<sup>th</sup> grade, students further hone their goal-setting skills by integrating new technology tools and transferrable skills. In the Fall, students set two content area goals (literacy and math). Students must integrate one technology tool and two transferrable skills into their final report. In the Winter, two new goals are set (one academic and one personal). Students must select two new technology tools, and create a final presentation. In the Spring, students set 3 new goals (literacy, math, and personal learning). Each goal must include one transferrable skill and a new technology tool.
- In 8<sup>th</sup> grade, students set interdisciplinary goals to show their growth as a learner. A single topic is chosen for the year, and topics must integrate math, literacy (reading or writing), community involvement, and two transferrable skills. Technology tools are required, and must differ each trimester. The final presentation is given to a live audience, and the community is invited to attend. Students must reflect on all goal learning in both 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade.



In 2014-15, two students learned how an engine works by disassembling and repairing a lawnmower engine. They succeeded in fixing the motor!

*There was a knock on the **golden** door. "Come in" ordered the king. King James was a powerful man and anyone in their right mind knew to obey his orders. The blacksmith entered the throne room carrying a **white cloth folded carefully in his calloused hands**. He walked on the **sparkling tile** between the **path of shimmering columns holding up the palace**. **Sunlight shone in from the many glass windows all around the room**.*

*"It is finished sir" said the blacksmith, his **scruffy gray beard** moving up and down as he spoke.*

*"Ahhh at last!" exclaimed the king. The blacksmith made his way to King James throne and unraveled the cloth. In his hands he held a **shining golden crown, with brilliant emerald gemstones embedded on each arch of the crown**. The king lifted the crown in front of his face and smiled.*

*The day was January 1st. It had been exactly 18 years since Henry and Harry were born. The twins looked almost exactly the same except that Henry had a **large white scar starting under his left eye and traveling down to the corner of his mouth**. He had received the scar as a child while him and Harry were wrestling after dinner one night. Harry stumbled and sent Henry into the edge of the table leaving him scarred. Both princes were **tall and thin but very strong**. They had **bristly brown hair on top of their narrow faces**.*

Click here for an example of one 7<sup>th</sup> grade student's impressive PLP project using "VoiceThread":  
<https://voicethread.com/#thread/8373491/46523299/47237627>

## United Arts and Extracurricular Opportunities

The Folsom community is extremely proud of the enrichment opportunities that we provide to our students. Though larger districts may offer a wider variety of activities, Folsom's programs are unparalleled in quality and support. In FY17, 83% of Folsom's middle school students (44 out of 53) participated in sports, band, chorus, or theater. Students are invited to try new things and step outside their comfort zones, and newcomers are welcomed with patience and respect.

In large districts, student participation is often based on innate talent; slower students are cut from the sports teams, and off-key singers are passed over at auditions. At Folsom, students are prized for their effort and commitment. Every student who wants to participate is given a meaningful role, and the chance to learn. Equity is defined as "freedom from bias or favoritism", and Folsom exemplifies equity by welcoming, supporting, and valuing all students, regardless of experience or skill.

## PE and Athletics

PE classes focus on effort and participation while striving to instill a love of exercise. Middle school students of all experience and ability levels are encouraged to join the Boys and Girls Soccer and Basketball teams. With Folsom's small teams, every student is valued and supported, and every team member gets ample

opportunity to play! At the end of this year’s soccer season, after tremendous growth and learning, the Folsom Boys and Girls Soccer teams both won their “Pink Night Out” charitable soccer tournaments!



7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Boys Basketball in FY17



Middle School Girls Soccer in FY17  
Islands Charitable Soccer Tournament “Pink Night Out”

## Art

Art classes offer students a variety of topics and media to express their creativity, and student pieces are showcased throughout the building. During Folsom’s first “Hay Day” in FY17, community members were invited to organize and lead their own projects, both indoors and in nature. Over 30 activities were offered to students, and the children spent the day rotating through their top five choices.



2<sup>nd</sup> Grader paints gourds on Hay Day



3<sup>rd</sup> Grader with his papier-mâché sculpture called “Business Duck”

## French

French classes are offered to all students at Folsom, with the K-4 students attending once a week, and middle schoolers attending multiple times per week. Elementary students focus on learning vocabulary through games and toys like Mr. Potato Head (Monsieur Patate!). Middle schoolers delve into grammar, with biennial 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> grade field trips to Quebec to practice their language skills.



7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> Graders take a break in Quebec City



Students experience history firsthand in Quebec

## Music

Music is especially important to Folsom and the South Hero community. Band, chorus, and general music instruction is currently given by Karlie Kauffeld, recipient of the Vermont Outstanding New Music Educator Award in 2016. Starting in Kindergarten, students learn how to match pitch, match the beat, and perform with expression. In the K-4 Winter Concert, the children showcase their learning in “theater in the round”. Students perform in the center, surrounded by parents and community members, with numbers designed to engage the audience in movement and song. For middle schoolers, Winter Concerts incorporate both chorus and band performances, and allow students to perform pieces that they have selected themselves. Spring Concerts include singing and movement, and also showcase student artwork created in Art class.



Kindergarteners in the Winter Concert's "Theater in the Round"



8<sup>th</sup> Grade band students perform with their teacher at the 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Graduation Celebration



In addition to Winter and Spring concerts, the Middle School band participates in the Island County Music Festival, joining musicians from all five of the Island Towns. The Select Band, called the Raz MaTazz also performed on Church Street in FY17 in Burlington's Jazz Festival.



Grand Isle County Middle school students performing in the County Music Festival



Folsom's Raz MaTazz band performs on Church Street in the Burlington Jazz Festival

Nearly all Folsom middle school students choose to showcase their singing, dancing, and acting skills in the annual Middle School play. Auditions are held, but anyone who wants to join is welcomed. Rehearsals are scheduled after school, and students are expected to focus and work hard. The productions are truly impressive and thoroughly enjoyed by the community!



Middle schoolers set sail in FY16's "Anything Goes"



It rained on stage in FY17's "Singing in the Rain"!

Finally, the South Hero community looks forward each year to the annual K-4 Musical. The K-4 play includes all elementary students, and rehearsals occur during regularly scheduled music classes and after school. The Kindergarteners, 1<sup>st</sup>, and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade classes have "group roles", where all students perform in unison and each class has a showcase number. The 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> graders take on speaking roles, where every student has a unique role, individual lines to memorize, and at least one short solo. Beautiful sets and elaborate costumes are created by parents and community members. The Middle School students in the Raz MaTazz band perform the orchestral accompaniment to the K-4 performers, while other middle school students act as stage crew members. In addition, individual scenes are frequently conceived, blocked, and directed by 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> grade students. The K-4 play truly is an inclusive community experience!



3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> graders perform in FY16's "Peter Pan" (left)

Full K-4 cast in FY17's "Wonderland" (below)



## Act 46 Goal 2: Quality

Act 46's second stated goal is to "lead students to achieve or exceed the State's Education Quality Standards (EQS), adopted as rules by the State Board of Education at the direction of the General Assembly". Folsom meets the EQS through our strong support of core academics, world language, physical education, art, music and theater education, guidance, and technology integration.

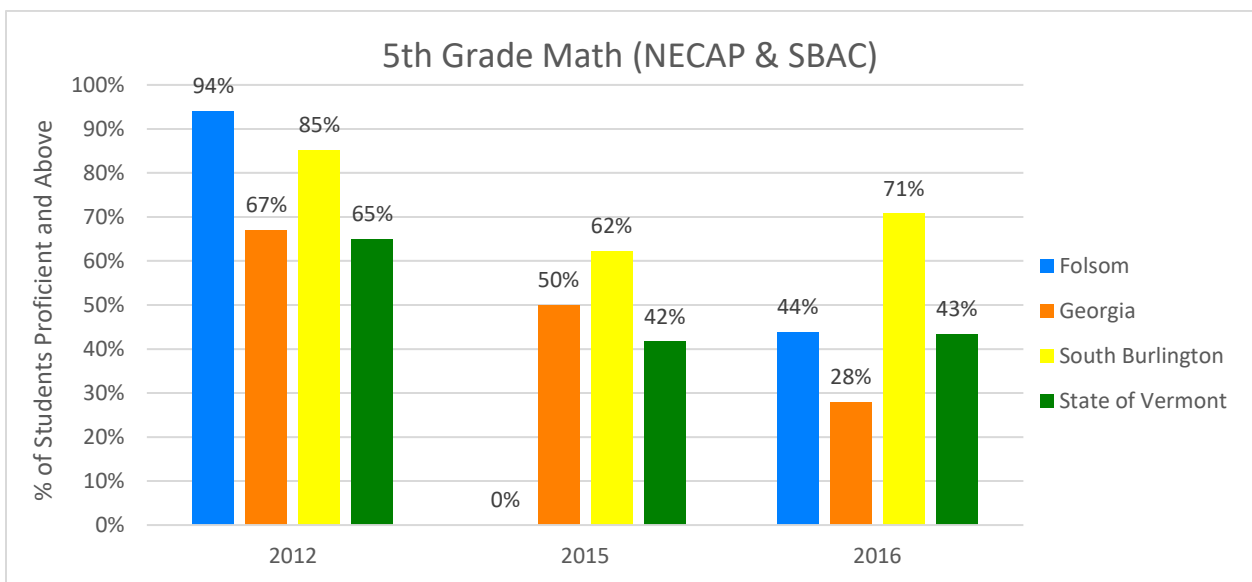
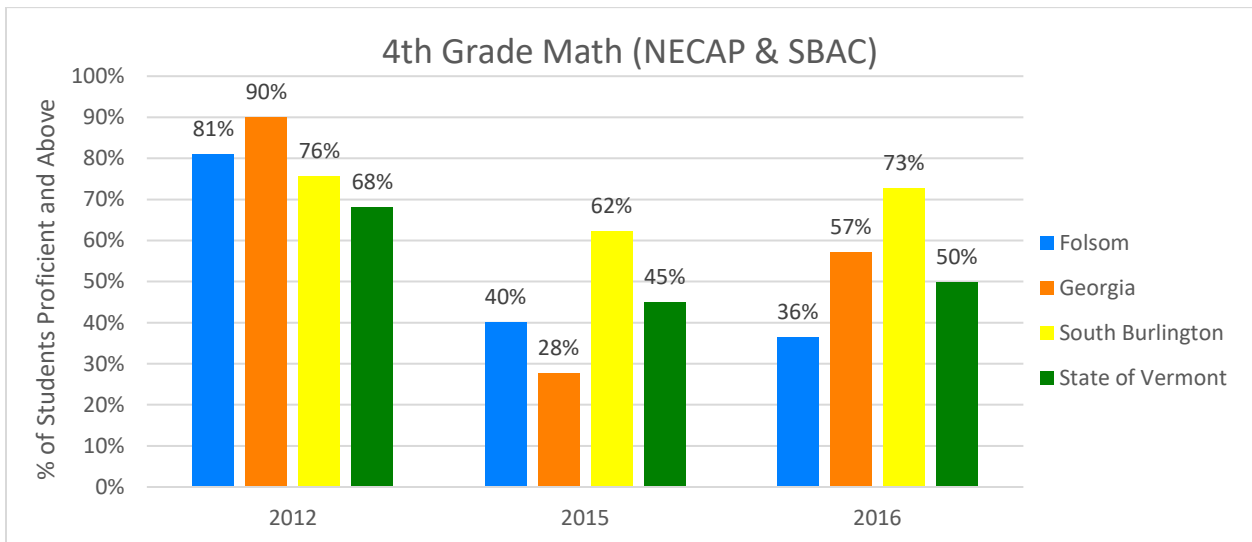
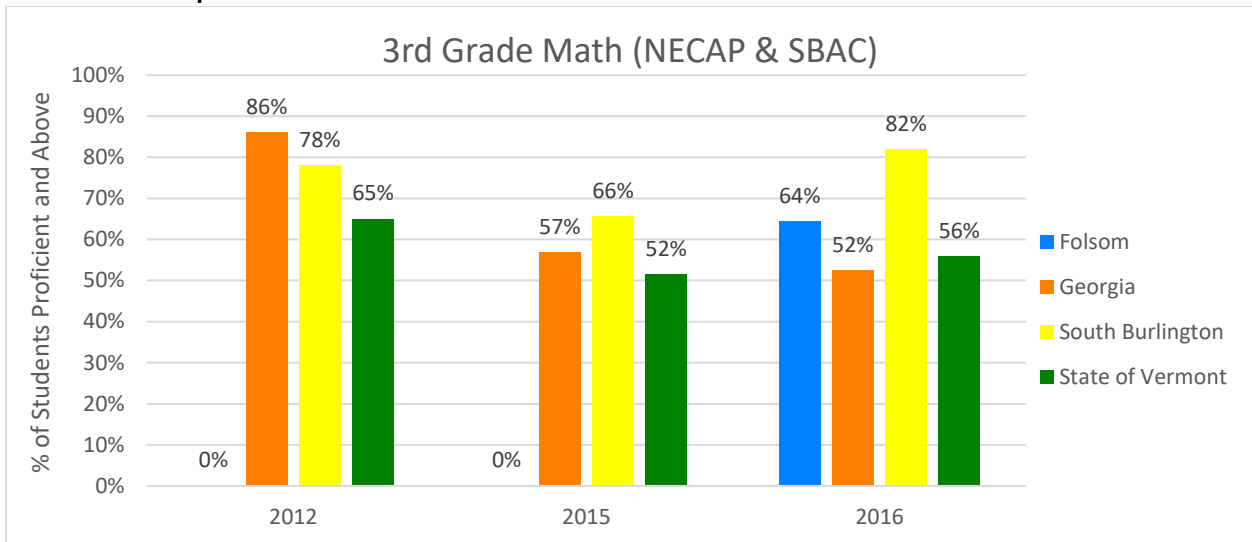
### Academic Performance

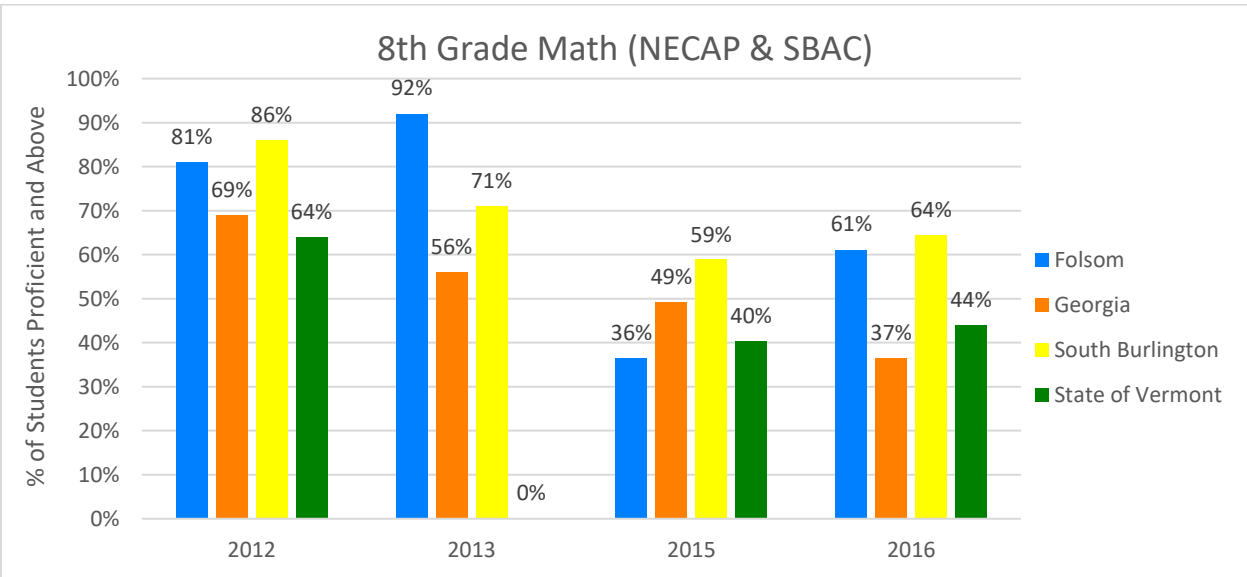
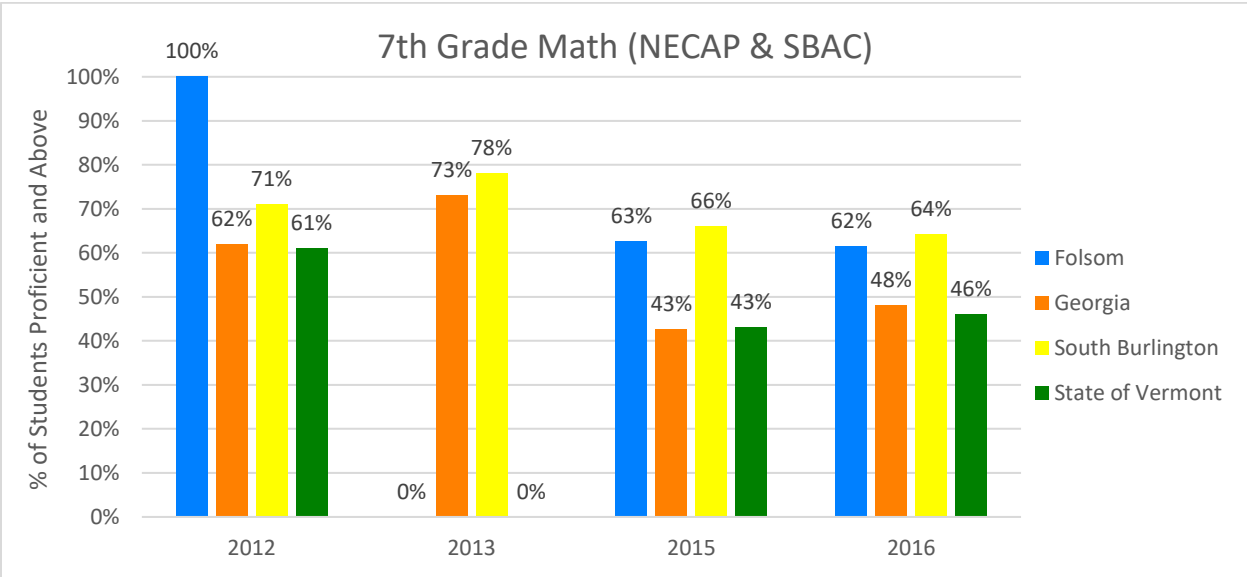
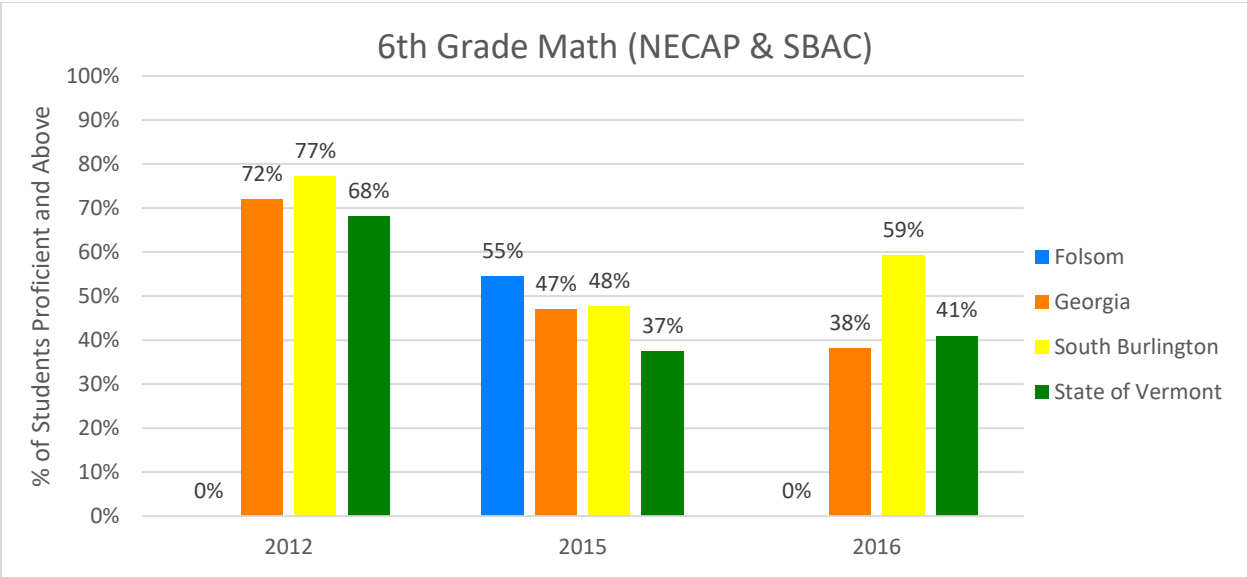
To understand Folsom's academic performance, standardized test scores were compared between Folsom and the State (shown in the graphs on pages 19-23). It is not always easy to see trends in the data, since the State only reports results for class sizes of  $\geq 11$  Students, and therefore some of Folsom's classes have no reported data. In addition, as the State transitioned in 2013-14 from the NECAPs to the SBACs in math and ELA, very few Statewide results are available for those years. However, for the 37 tests where data was available for both Folsom and the State, the following observations can be made:

- Folsom Students out-performed the State Average in 81% of those standardized tests (30 out of 37)
- Folsom's middle grades (7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup>) and elementary grades (3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup>) had similar results. The middle grades out-performed the State Average in 79% of tests (15 out of 19), while the elementary grades out-performed the State Average in 83% of tests (15 out of 18)

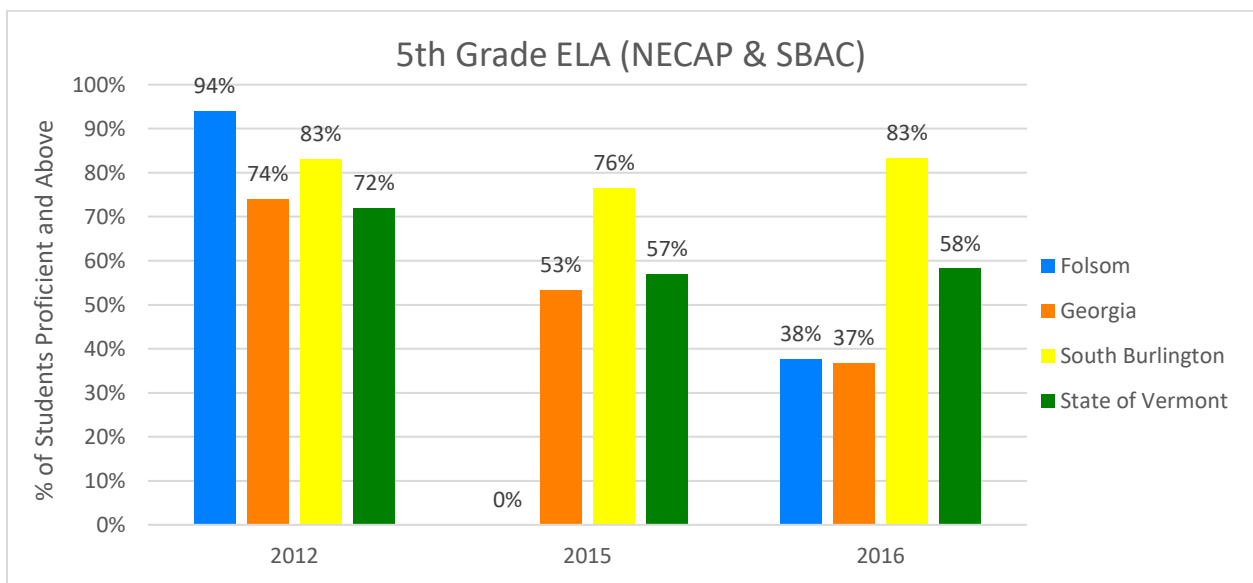
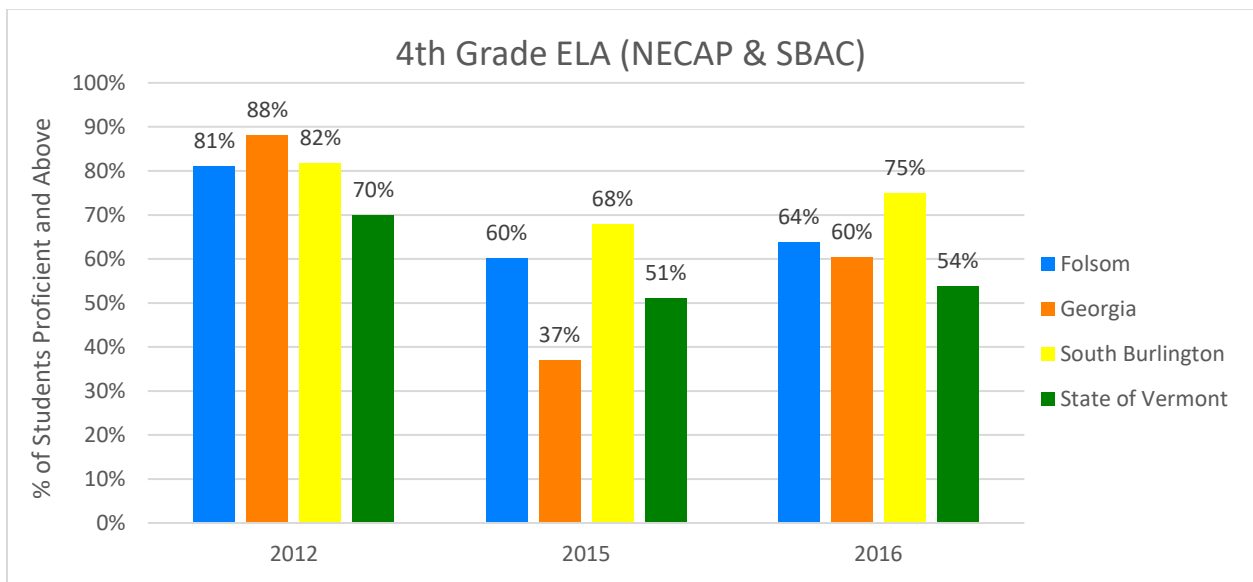
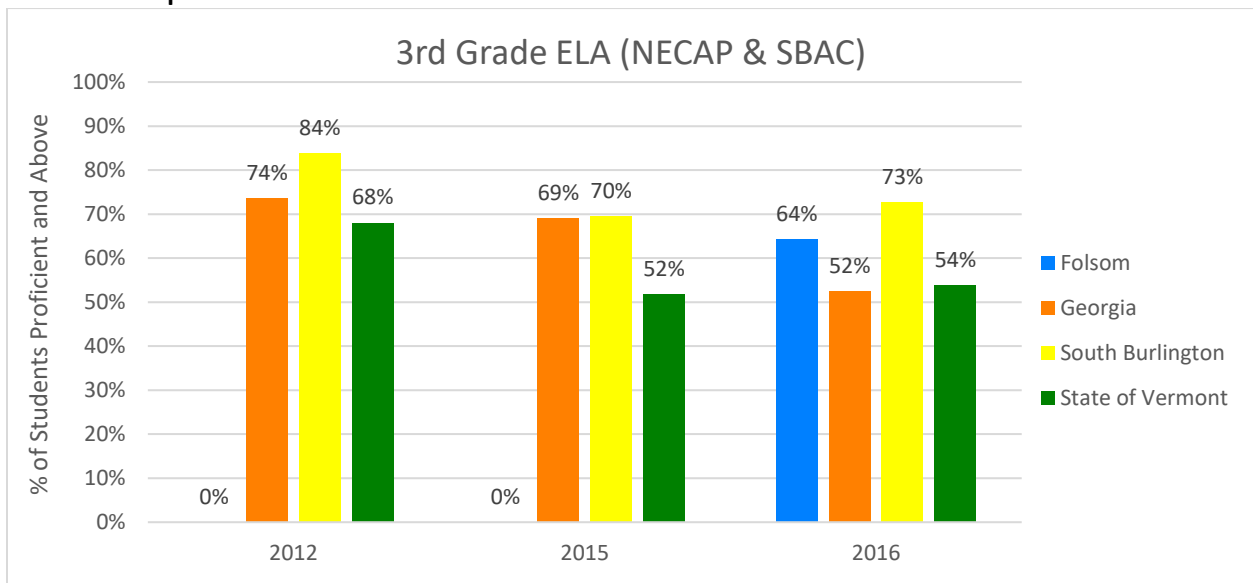
During South Hero's merger explorations, questions arose regarding Folsom's ability to offer the same quality of education as the large local middle schools. Therefore, in addition to comparisons with the State, Folsom compared its academic performance with that of Georgia and South Burlington.

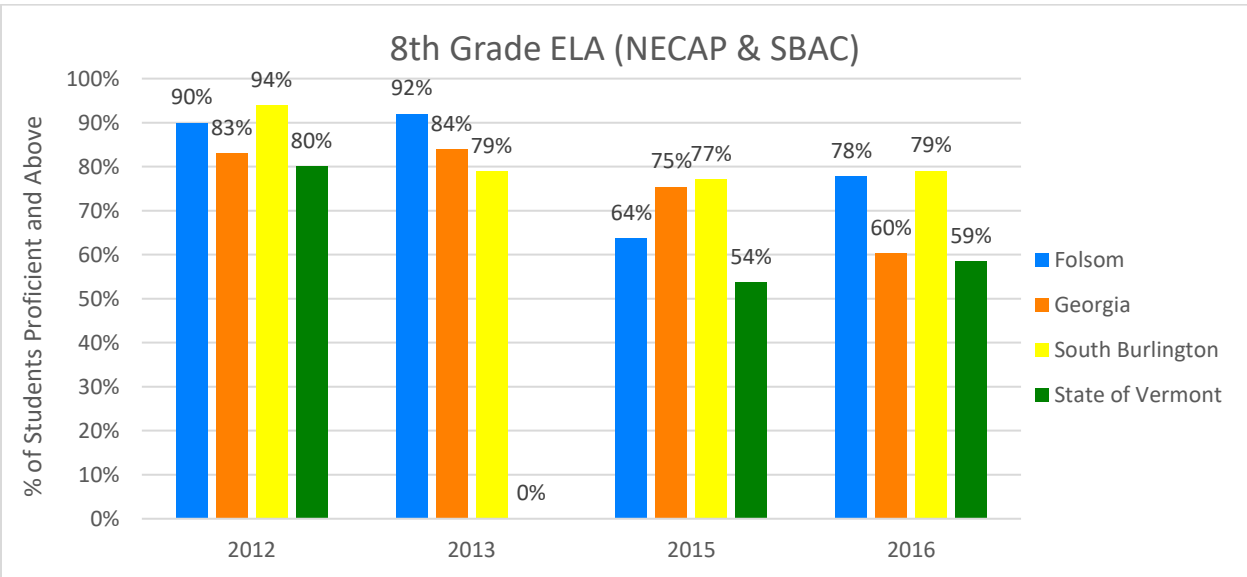
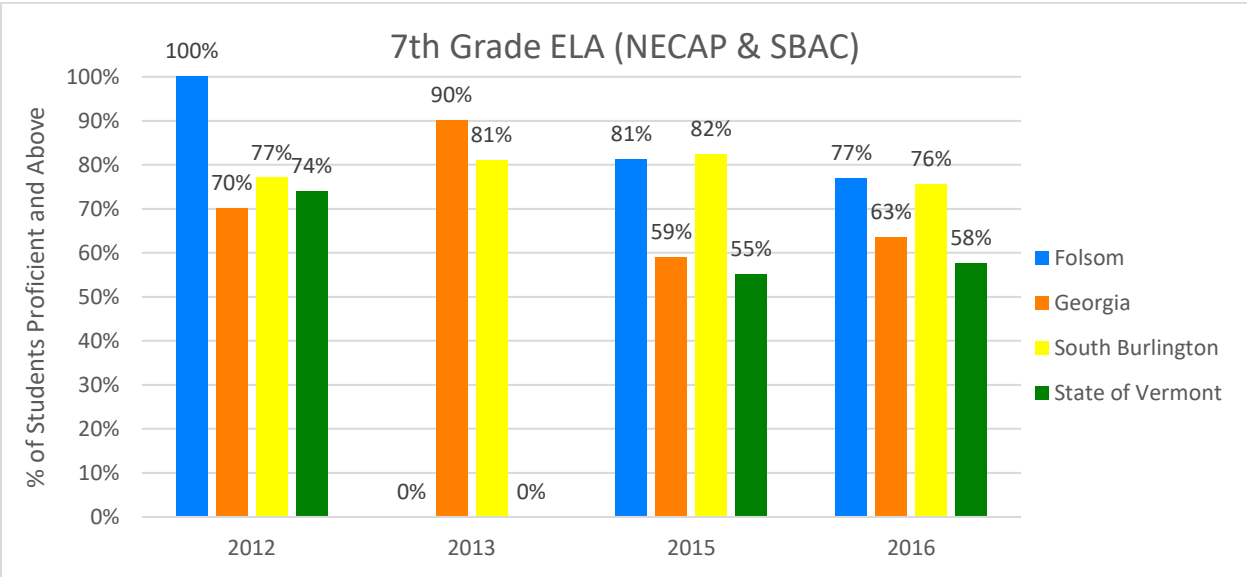
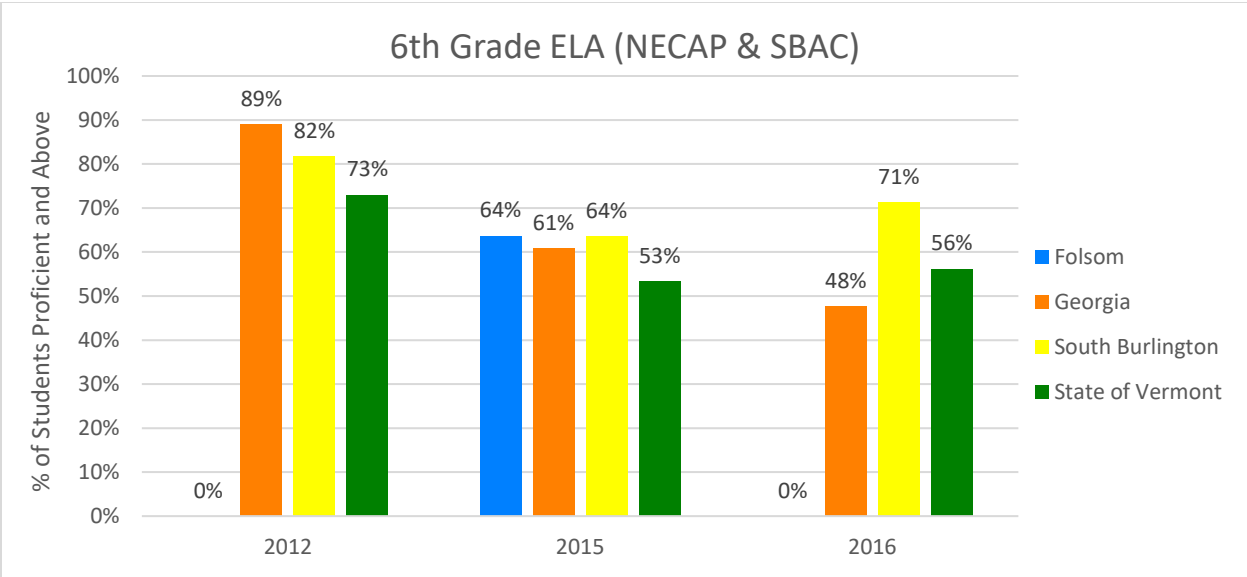
# Math Results per Grade



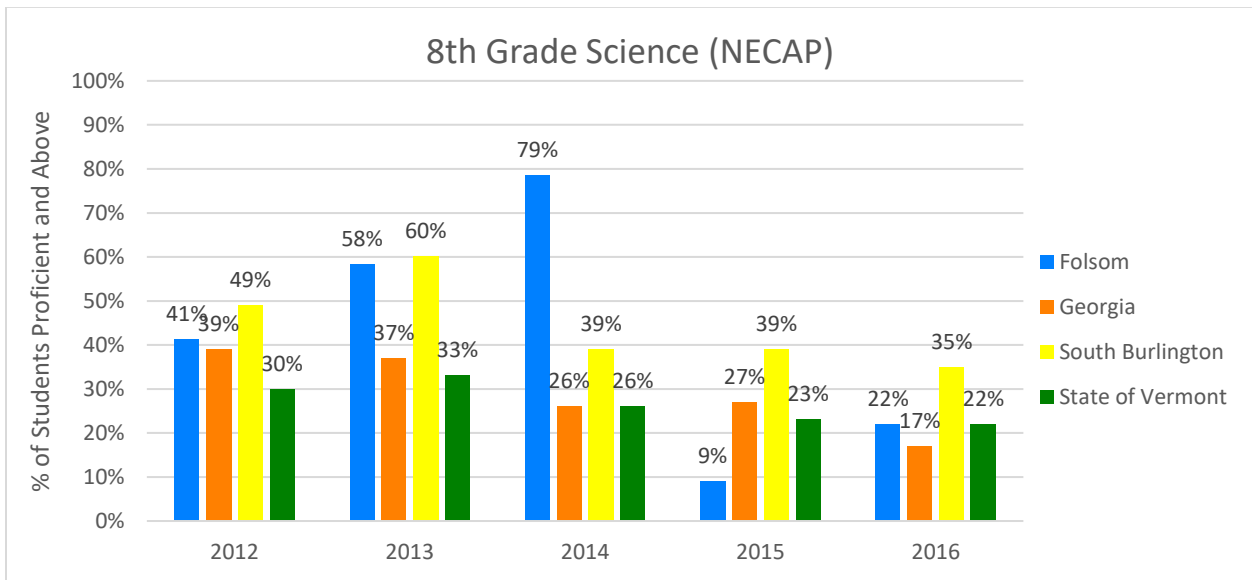
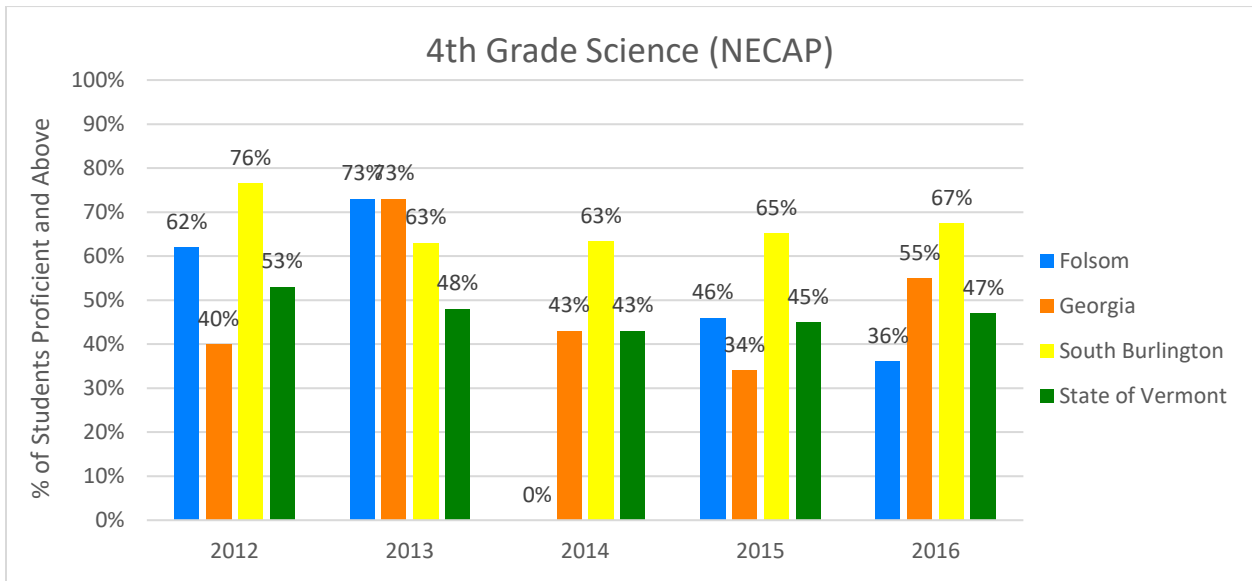


# ELA Results per Grade

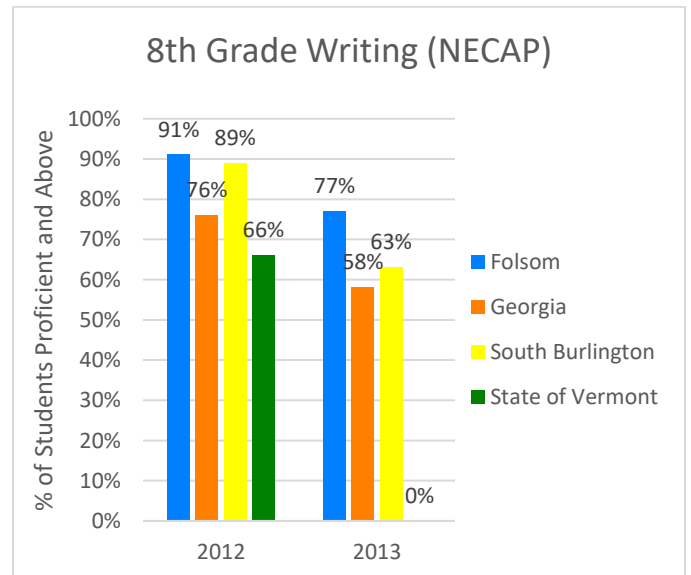
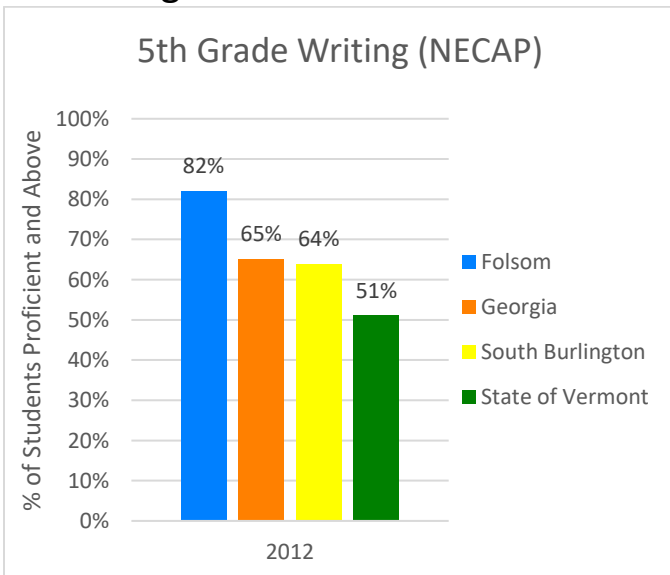




## Science Results for 4<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> Grade



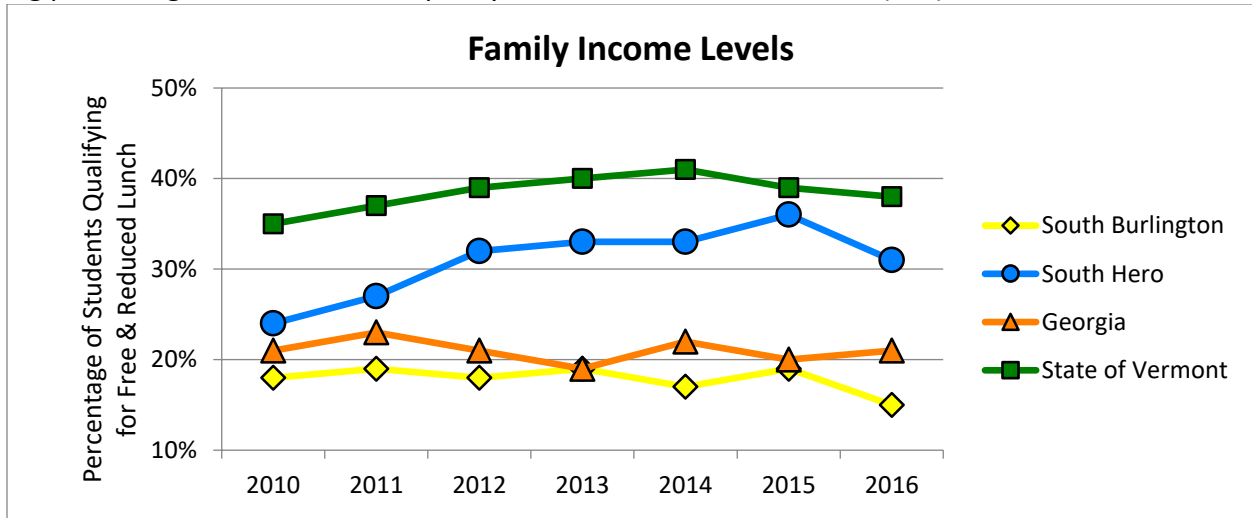
## Writing Results for 5<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> Grade



Over the past 5 years, there are 40 standardized tests for which Folsom data is available. As was previously stated, Folsom students out-performed the State Average in 81% of those standardized tests (30 out of 37 tests). In addition, in 34 of those tests (85%), Folsom’s academic performance matched or exceeded that of Georgia or South Burlington or both. Therefore, we can reasonably conclude that Folsom is indeed providing the same caliber of education in the core subjects as our large neighboring districts.

## Achievement Gap

One finding of Act 49 was that Vermont is “not as successful as we need to be in educating children from families with low income”. South Hero’s demographics have changed in recent years, with a generally increasing percentage of children who qualify for Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL).



It is important to South Hero that all of Folsom’s students are well-served and academically prepared. Consequently, we must understand our achievement gap. The achievement gap is a comparison of the academic proficiency of students who qualify for Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) with the proficiency of students from more affluent households (Non-FRL). This comparison is difficult for small schools, since the State does not report standardized test results for any groups with <11 students. However, a general observation can be made by *combining* the standardized test results for *all* students in 3<sup>rd</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grades.

ELA SBACs of FY16, Combined Grades 3-8: % of Students Who Achieved Proficiency or Above				
District	Overall	FRL	Non-FRL	Achievement Gap
Folsom	64%	50%	73%	23%
State of Vermont	56%	40%	68%	28%

Math SBACs of FY16, Combined Grades 3-8: % of Students Who Achieved Proficiency or Above				
District	Overall	FRL	Non-FRL	Achievement Gap
Folsom	54%	44%	61%	17%
State of Vermont	47%	31%	57%	27%

Based on these results, we can see that South Hero’s achievement gap is narrower than the statewide achievement gap (28% in ELA and 27% in Math). In addition, Folsom students out-performed the statewide averages in each sub-category (Overall, FRL, and Non-FRL). Therefore, we can conclude that Folsom is



preparing a higher percentage of our FRL students for academic success. South Hero will continue to monitor our performance, with the goal of further narrowing the achievement gap through the use of targeted instruction and intervention blocks.

## High School Performance and Continuing Education

During South Hero’s merger explorations, questions arose regarding the preparedness of Folsom students for high school, as compared with students from the large local middle schools. To answer this question, the following feedback was gathered from South Burlington High School, South Hero’s most popular tuitioning district:

Folsom Freshmen: Percentage on the Honor Roll in FY16	
Quarter 1	100%
Quarter 2	78%
Quarter 3	89%
Quarter 4	78%

Folsom Sophomores, Juniors, & Seniors: GPA Ranges from FY16	
4.0 and up	5 Students
3.1 – 3.9	10 Students
2.0 – 3.0	4 Students

South Burlington’s Guidance Outreach Coordinator, Debbie Beretta, said that “Generally speaking, Folsom students do very well here and contribute much to the South Burlington community!” Based on this feedback, we can conclude that Folsom students are well-prepared for 9<sup>th</sup> grade and beyond.

## Turnover Data

The Folsom family of staff and students is close-knit, welcoming, and well-supported by the South Hero community. Folsom parents are passionate in their advocacy for the school, and the school budgets consistently pass. Nevertheless, teacher salaries are significantly lower in Grand Isle county than in our neighboring Chittenden county. For example, the average teacher salary in the Grand Isle SU was \$50,500 in FY17, while the average teacher salary in the South Burlington SD was \$77,900 in FY17. In spite of this, Folsom frequently attracts new, talented staff members who are drawn to Folsom’s dedication to student success and South Hero’s supportive community.

Staff Turnover	FY15	FY16	FY17	FY18
New Teachers/Year	1	3	3	3
New Principals/Year	-	-	1	1
New Superintendents/Year	1	-	-	1

## Professional Development Opportunities for Staff

South Hero values our talented teachers, both for their existing experience and knowledge, as well as their intellectual curiosity and drive to improve student outcomes. Consequently, we invest both time and money towards our staff’s continuing education.

All staff are eligible for tuition reimbursement for 9 credit-hours over the course of two years. That reimbursement is available for teachers to use at their own discretion. An additional 3 credit-hours are available at the board’s discretion, especially for those pursuing a Master’s degree.

In addition, the GISU offers eight professional development “in-service” days to all staff. These workshops are reimbursed at 100%. Recent topics have included:

2014-2016:

- Courses/workshops in Science, Personalized Learning Plans, Math and Literacy
- Grade band discussions, and monthly/bimonthly meetings with the Curriculum Coordinator
- Professional development and technical assistance for the Leadership Team on implementation science, continuous improvement and inclusive education, made possible by the SWIFT grant and relationship with the AOE

2016-2017:

- Embedded Math professional development with an outside consultant, provided through grant funding
- Professional development for all staff on Trauma-Informed Practices
- Smarter Balanced Data Analysis training
- Personalized Learning Plan training with an outside consultant
- Professional development for the Leadership Team to develop tiered intervention models, made possible by the SWIFT grant
- Year-long professional learning cohorts, in which all teachers participated. Cohort topics included Data Literacy, Universal Design for Learning, Proficiency Based Learning, Co-Teaching, and Trauma Informed Practices

2017-2018:

- Workshops on future-ready school environments, proficiency based grading, and behavior screening
- Professional learning cohorts with a focus on proficiency based instruction
- Grade band team discussions and meetings with Curriculum Director for grade level specific curriculum training
- Professional development for the Leadership Team to develop tiered intervention models, made possible by the SWIFT grant

## Act 46 Goal 4: Transparency & Accountability

Act 46's fourth stated goal is to "promote transparency and accountability". Many Vermont voters will face a new challenge during budget season, as the old familiar spending figures are replaced by significantly larger combined budgets of the merged districts. The school boards of those newly merged districts will face a new challenge as well, as voters demand to know how the money is used and where (physically) it is spent.

By remaining an independent partner district, Folsom will retain its existing, familiar budgetary structure. South Hero voters will be able to see the exact cost of education in South Hero, and know that all education taxes will be spent solely on South Hero's children. Taxpayers will know how their tax dollars are distributed between the operation of Folsom, the tuitioning of secondary students, and the services purchased from the Grand Isle Supervisory Union. Finally, South Hero's voters will be able to easily compare spending from one year to the next, and know whether spending has increased.

The Folsom school board recognizes our responsibility to understand Folsom's academic and financial performance, and to clearly convey those results to the community. To ensure the transparency and accountability of the district, we present the proposed school budgets to the community on Town Meeting Day each year. For FY19, we will also prepare brief explanations of each line-item in the budget. The explanations will be given in clear, concise language, with the goal of improving voter comprehension. The budget and explanations will be made available in the Town Report, on the school's website, on the school's Facebook page, and on Front Porch Forum. Finally, a brief overview and Town Meeting Day information will be included in the Islander newspaper.

# Act 46 Goals 3 & 5: Efficiency and Cost

Act 46’s third stated goal is to “maximize operational efficiencies through increased flexibility to manage, share, and transfer resources, with a goal of increasing the district-level ratio of students to full-time equivalent staff”. The fifth and final stated goal is to “deliver services at a cost that parents, voters, and taxpayers value”. To maximize efficiency, Folsom shares many programmatic resources with our neighboring districts, and makes creative use of the skills of our talented staff members. Folsom is also fortunate to enjoy the support of the South Hero community, as demonstrated by the fact that the school budget has consistently passed *the first time* for many years.

## Efficiency

As was previously stated, Folsom has maintained the following student-to-adult ratios for the past 5 years:

Ratios						VT State
Type	FY13	FY14	FY15	FY16	FY17 <sup>ø</sup>	FY17
Student:Teacher Ratio	9.02	9.78	9.33	10.72	11.67	10.55
Student:Administrator Ratio	111	114	119	132	135	100.41
Teacher:Administrator Ratio	13.3	13.5	14.36	13.8	12.6	9.52

ø – The AOE has misinterpreted the number of administrators at Folsom in FY17. Though the State’s numbers suggest that there were two administrators, in fact, Folsom had only one Admin in FY17.

We can see that the Student:Teacher and Student:Administrator ratios at Folsom have been climbing over recent years. In addition, all of Folsom’s student and staffing ratios well exceed the Vermont State averages for FY17.

Meanwhile, to reduce expenditures and eliminate redundancy, Folsom shares many services with the other member districts in the GISU. Over the past two years, the Grand Isle Supervisory Union and member districts have worked to promote quality and ensure equity within the county’s schools. This history of collaboration reinforces the desirableness of a continued partnership between Folsom, Alburgh, and the Champlain Islands Unified Union School District within the Grand Isle Supervisory Union structure. The activities and initiatives include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. The GISU centralizes all professional special education staff and services. These services include administering the IDEA and IDEAB grants, as well as shared special education staffing, specialists, mentoring, training, assessments, software/licenses, and a wide array of instructional materials.
2. The GISU centralizes transportation services.
3. The GISU centralizes curriculum development, assessments, and assessment data, as well as related professional development activities for staff members.
5. The GISU centralizes Technology Services, most recently completing a comprehensive technology audit. The findings will allow the GISU to reorganize services to better support technology integration throughout the districts and across all grade levels, and achieve efficiencies across the SU.
6. The GISU centralizes Behavioral Support Services, and employs two Behavior Support Specialists whose services are shared among districts. These staff members conduct Functional Behavior Assessments, mentor Behavioral Interventionists, and provide emergency behavioral services in the GISU schools.
7. During the FY17 school year, the GISU participated in the Vermont Agency of Education’s Integrated Field Review Pilot, and prepared a written response to the feedback inclusive of all GISU districts.

8. The GISU operates Professional Learning Cohorts (PLC's) that are inclusive of administrators and teachers from every school in the GISU. PLC's meet regularly to address the most pressing professional development needs, as identified through an annual District Capacity Assessment process.
9. The GISU is entering its third year of constructing an intervention model of Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). The GISU's MTSS supports all learners academically, and per Vermont's Educational Quality Standards, is inclusive of Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS).
10. The GISU centralizes Early Childhood Special Education Services, and serves PreK students with identified needs from all member districts.
11. Students attending the PreK-6 CIUUSD schools will have the option to attend Folsom school for their 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> grades (via tuitioning). Folsom's curriculum is fully aligned to learning experiences, programs, strategies and multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) in the elementary grades.

## Cost

Folsom's finances for the past five years can be summarized as follows:

	FY13	FY14	FY15	FY16	FY17
Education Spending	\$2,539,587	\$2,619,481	\$2,798,682	\$2,955,519	\$2,905,459
Equalized Pupils	224.77	216.90	209.31	201.98	194.91
Phantom Students	20.27	18.60	16.54	11.81	2.29
Small Schools Grant Received	\$95,591	\$103,453	\$98,270	\$93,029	\$81,578
Education Spending per Equalized Pupil	\$11,299	\$12,077	\$13,371	\$14,633	\$14,907
Change in Education Spending per Equalized Pupil from Previous Year	-	7%	11%	9%	2%
Education Spending per Equalized Pupil minus Phantom Students	\$12,419	\$13,210	\$14,518	\$15,541	\$15,084
Education Spending per Equalized Pupil minus Small Schools Grant	\$11,724	\$12,554	\$13,840	\$15,093	\$15,325
	FY13	FY14	FY15	FY16	FY17
Instructional Spending: K-8	\$1,065,174	\$983,502	\$1,001,860	\$1,005,741	\$1,000,685
Instructional Spending: Tuition (9-12)	\$919,886	\$905,787	\$868,934	\$906,723	\$1,030,282
Instructional Spending: Total	\$1,985,060	\$1,889,290	\$1,870,794	\$1,912,464	\$2,030,967
Change in K-8 Spending from Previous Year	-	-8%	2%	0%	-1%
Change in 9-12 Spending from Previous Year	-	-2%	-4%	4%	14%
Change in Total Spending from Previous Year	-	-5%	-1%	2%	6%

Note: FY17 spending reflects budgeted numbers only, since Actuals are not yet available

Based on this information, a few trends can be seen. First, the Phantom students have dropped to zero as Folsom's enrollment has increased. Second, while the instructional spending on K-8 has remained largely constant, the instructional spending on tuitioning secondary students has risen. In FY17, it cost more to educate the oldest 1/3 of our students than it did to educate the youngest 2/3 combined. Had South Hero voted to change our operating structure to a K-6 school, we would have been required to pay the higher tuition rates for even more students. Undoubtedly, tuitioning more students would have further increased South Hero's education spending.

Folsom's teacher contract has one of the lowest salary structures in the state, with a base rate of \$35,500 in the next two fiscal years. Remaining in the GISU will allow South Hero to retain a very cost competitive salary structure. If South Hero were to merge with another district, the salary structure would undoubtedly increase, raising the cost of education not only in South Hero but in the state as a whole.

## Cost Comparison

To better understand how Folsom compares to our peers, we reviewed the budgets of six similar Vermont schools: Alburgh, Dorset, Georgia, Marlboro, Montgomery, and Waterford. All schools have the same basic structure, operating K-8 and offering choice for grades 9-12. Most meet or exceed the academic performance of VT State. By necessity, they ranged in size from 134.89 equalized pupils (Marlboro) to 843.39 equalized pupils (Georgia). The budgetary data was taken from each town's 2016 Town Report.

Based on the data gathered, we learned that Folsom's budget is apportioned similarly to our peers. Most schools spend ~30% of their budget on K-8 instruction, ~30% on tuitioning their secondary students, and ~10% on Special Education Services. The final ~30% of the budget is distributed fairly evenly between the remaining functions, such as guidance, health services, library, SU assessments, principal's office, plant operation, and transportation.

## Conclusion

Folsom is a remarkable school. Over the past five years, Folsom's academic performance has matched or exceeded the State's performance on 81% of standardized tests. In addition, Folsom's Achievement Gap is narrower than that of the State, meaning South Hero's FRL students are receiving the support they need to achieve academic success. These outcomes have been achieved even as Folsom maintains a higher student-to-adult ratio than the State average. Furthermore, Folsom offers outstanding academic, artistic, and extracurricular opportunities to our students, including Personal Learning Plans for 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> graders, PE, sports, art, French, music, and theater. The success of Folsom's programming is undeniable, and as Folsom attracts new families to South Hero, our enrollment is steadily increasing.

For the past two years, Folsom's school board has engaged South Hero and the surrounding communities in meaningful, passionate conversations regarding structure, finances, and partners. The proposal to change Folsom to a PreK-6 school was put before South Hero's voters twice, and twice the voters rejected the idea. South Hero is committed to the K-8 structure, which we believe is best for our middle schoolers, elementary children, and taxpayers.

South Hero is both structurally and geographically isolated. By remaining an independent partner district within the GISU, we will be able to retain our successful K-8 structure, easily analyze and understand Folsom's spending, and ensure transparency by clearly demonstrating that spending to the voters. South Hero deeply values our collaboration and partnerships with the other Island communities. We intend to continue and strengthen those relationships by pursuing an AGS as an independent partner district within the GISU.

On behalf of the South Hero Community, the School Board presents this Alternative Governance Proposal for the South Hero School District to be considered by the Vermont Secretary of Education and Vermont Board of Education.



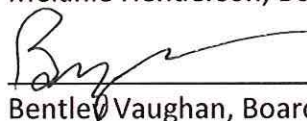
David Cain, Board Chair



Melanie Henderson, Board Vice-Chair



Tim Maxham, Board Member



Bentley Vaughan, Board Member



RJ Sweeney, Board Member



# Appendix: Act 46 Alternative Governance Proposal for South Hero, Vermont

## Table of Contents

Minutes from 1st Informal Meeting between South Hero & Georgia .....	2
Minutes from Informal Meeting between South Hero & Alburgh .....	5
Minutes from 2nd Informal Meeting between South Hero & Georgia .....	7

## Minutes from 1<sup>st</sup> Informal Meeting between South Hero & Georgia

**Meeting Date:** Dec. 20<sup>th</sup>, 2016

**Attendees:** Ben Chiappinelli & Fred Grimm (Georgia), Tim Maxham, Bentley Vaughan, & Melanie Henderson (South Hero)

### Minutes:

- Ben Chiappinelli expressed his concern about the future of the FWSU, since the State has complete control over the supervisory unions. Ben stated that the three FWSU towns have worked very hard to combine their systems (special education, contracts, etc.), and that he appreciates the dedication and involvement of Ned Kirsch (FWSU Superintendent). Ben is concerned that the work they've done to strengthen their SU will be lost, and is worried about the future for Fletcher and Fairfax
- Bentley Vaughan brought up similar concerns regarding the GISU. Bentley feels that since the five Island towns are already working together, it's unclear what additional gains can be achieved by consolidation
- Tim Maxham stated that combining SU's could reduce the number of expensive, high-level positions. However, he emphasized that the work itself still needs to be done, so there are limits to the amount that can be saved
- Tim Maxham also wants to know what's going to happen with the SU's if the State combines all of the districts that are geographically separated but have similar structures
- Ben Chiappinelli asked why Alburgh chose not to join the Islands merger. Melanie Henderson answered that there were no obvious benefits for Alburgh, either financially or structurally
- Tim Maxham mentioned his feeling that the State Board of Education was sold on the idea that South Hero would put the K6 merger to a vote. If they had known that South Hero was unlikely to join the merger, the State may not have approved the merger plan
- Ben Chiappinelli said that Georgia considered joining the K12 FWSU merger as an advisable town. However, since it was unlikely that Georgia would have joined, they felt that would have been a waste of resources
- Ben Chiappinelli mentioned that FWSU also considered merging into a large district with St. Albans, allowing the two high schools to focus on different academic and extracurricular specialties. However, Georgia lost interest when the voters heard the word "choice" replaced by "limited choice"
- Ben Chiappinelli stated that from his experience with the failed FWSU merger, scare tactics don't work with voters. Many Georgia voters said they'd rather incur additional costs than lose choice
- Tim asked whether South Burlington sends a bus to Georgia. Ben Chiappinelli confirmed that they do, and that South Burlington has said that it's worth it to them to offer a bus service if they are receiving >4 students from a town
- Tim Maxham thinks that we need to look at the practical options for each town, from a state-wide level. He suspects that the State hasn't even considered how the merger plan is going to work in 2018. Tim suggests organizing a coalition of unmerged towns, and going to Montpelier to ask some pointed questions about the State's plan
- Tim Maxham suggested meeting with Ned Kirsch and Barbara Burrington to discuss the best way to approach the State. He also suggested contacting our local legislators to find out who's on the education committee. Bentley Vaughan agreed that having the Superintendents join us in approaching the State would add some weight
- Ben Chiappinelli likes the idea of inviting other towns to meet with the State Board of Education, and suggested sending them a letter. However, he would like to approach the State from a stance of cooperation. He feels that many towns are willing to be flexible, but cannot act without knowing what the State expects (practically speaking)
- Fred Grimm said that the Franklin/Gl/Chittenden counties are growing (or holding steady), while the rest of the state is shrinking. He wondered if the law was written to allow the easy districts to merge, and to address problems in the shrinking parts of the state. For all other areas, he wonders if the State is just bluffing, since they don't appear to

have a plan. He believes the State is trying to intimidate the towns into taking action, and that it's a question of who folds first

- Tim Maxham isn't sure how the State is planning to cover the 10¢ tax incentive that the big towns are going to enjoy. He feels that the small towns are already stretched too thin, and mentioned the example of new, retroactive taxes on the town ambulance services
- Ben Chiappinelli is concerned that when the State enacts its alignment plan in 2018, it may shove the single, unmerged towns into existing mergers. A voluntary merger is supposed to protect the newly merged district from receiving unexpected partners. However, Ben is concerned that the State may break that promise when faced with the merger map in 2018
- Fred Grimm wonders how the consolidation happened 100 years ago, when Vermont dropped from ~1000 schools to ~300
- Tim Maxham expressed concern at the apparent lack of urgency among some South Hero school board members towards forming a new plan for Act 46. Tim wants to make sure that South Hero keeps moving, rather than wait for the State to make the choice for us
- Ben Chiappinelli feels some of the Georgia school board members are confident that Georgia can stand alone. Ben prefers to proactively find a merger partner, rather than wait to see whether the State will respect their request. Fred Grimm feels that the decision either to merge or stand alone has to be a conscious choice, and that the Georgia school board must be prepared to show their research and defend that choice
- Tim Maxham asked if anyone from the K8 sub-committee has gone to Alburgh's school board meetings, and suggested that South Hero contact them. Alburgh may not be interested in working with South Hero, but we need to at least make the effort
- Ben Chiappinelli wondered if Fletcher would be interested in combining with the K6 Central Island towns
- Ben Chiappinelli also wondered if Fletcher would be willing to combine with Georgia, and thought it may be worth discussing the possibility with them. (That idea was originally scrapped because it left Fairfax without a partner.) However, Fred Grimm mentioned that Fairfax may not like that idea, since many of Fletcher's 7/8 kids currently attend Fairfax
- Ben Chiappinelli feels that Georgia is happy with the size and state of their school now, and that it's going to be hard to get them excited about any merger. However, Fred Grimm felt that most people in Georgia simply aren't paying attention
- Melanie Henderson agreed that Georgia voters will need to be convinced of the merits of a merger with South Hero, since they're already close to the 900 ADM limit
- Tim Maxham asked Ben Chiappinelli if he thought Georgia would meet the 900 number in the future. Ben said it's unclear. Houses are being built in Georgia, but Ben feels that it's unlikely that an additional 50 students will enroll. Fred Grimm thought that an additional 25 students may be possible
- Fred Grimm asked if South Hero's population is going up. Melanie Henderson stated that it seems to be slowly rising (now up to 205)
- Tim Maxham suggested clarifying the known aspects of a merger between South Hero and Georgia. To convince the voters, we have to explain that the merger would be eligible for the temporary tax incentives, small schools grant (for Folsom), and protection from unexpected partners. Tim also suggested exploring a combined budget, determining what South Hero can bring to Georgia, and explaining what a merger would do to Georgia's tax rate
- Tim Maxham acknowledged that Folsom is a good school, with good programs, teachers, and outcomes. He also acknowledged that the South Hero community is really involved and committed to the school. However, he also mentioned that Folsom has some work to do, since some of our test scores are slipping
- Ben Chiappinelli is worried about the cost that may be required to extend Georgia's tech program to other schools. He feels that reproducing their environment would be very expensive, and suggested transporting students to Georgia to use the equipment instead



- Melanie Henderson mentioned that Folsom has computers in every classroom. So although South Hero's per pupil spending is high, Folsom may not require as much investment to reach Georgia's level as some other towns. However, Melanie would like to find a positive way to express that fact, since some Georgia voters may view it as more of a scare tactic
- Ben Chiappinelli mentioned that "equity" really means that all students graduate with the same level of preparedness for high school and beyond. "Equity" does not mean "identical programming". Different programs will work better for the different sizes of schools, and that's okay
- Ben Chiappinelli mentioned the idea of sharing "choice option" teachers between the schools. There may not be enough students at one school to justify a FTE, but the combined population of the two schools may make it worthwhile. Ben suggested asking Georgia's United Arts departments if they have any projects that they'd like to add
- Ben Chiappinelli mentioned that Georgia has replaced many of their para-educators with teaching specialists, and have seen a lot of positive outcomes
- Fred Grimm feels that South Hero would be an excellent dance partner for Georgia, since the towns have a similar philosophy and approach to education

**Actions:**

- Ben Chiappinelli will draft a letter inviting other districts to approach the state
- Melanie Henderson will provide a list of potential towns, and will also proof-read the letter (if Ben Chiappinelli is comfortable)
- Melanie Henderson & Bentley Vaughan will work on collecting information for Georgia's requested report
- Ben Chiappinelli will contact some Georgia voters to gauge their interest in a merger with South Hero (now that there's no longer the prospect of losing high school choice)
- Melanie Henderson and Ben Chiappinelli will contact the United Arts teachers at Folsom and Georgia (respectively) to discuss their project wish-lists, and how a merger might make them possible
- Ben Chiappinelli will contact Ned Kirsch, and Melanie Henderson will contact Barbara Burrington, to invite them to join our next meeting and discuss approaching the state

**Next Meeting:**

- Tuesday, Jan. 10<sup>th</sup> at 6pm at Blue Paddle Restaurant

## Minutes from Informal Meeting between South Hero & Alburgh

**Meeting Date:** Jan. 31<sup>st</sup>, 2017

**Attendees:** Mike Savage & John Goodrich (Alburgh), Barbara Burrington (GISU), Tim Maxham & Melanie Henderson (South Hero)

### Minutes:

- John Goodrich asked what we hoped to learn during the meeting. Melanie Henderson said she hoped to meet Mike & John, and learn more about Alburgh's challenges and goals
- John Goodrich stated that Alburgh's main goals are to keep high school choice, and prevent taxes from rising
- Mike Savage added that Alburgh also wants to avoid merging with a town that has lower academic performance (such as some of the towns in Franklin county)
- Barbara Burrington mentioned that Alburgh is systematically evaluating their performance relative to the Education Quality Standards, and is preparing a report that will serve as a long term roadmap for the school
- Mike Savage also believes that keeping their K8 structure is a priority, although Alburgh residents have not clearly stated their preference. Mike observed that South Hero's parents seem to be very involved, while Alburgh's parents give very little feedback
- Mike Savage said that remaining within the GISU is not necessarily a priority. As long as their goals are satisfied (K8, high school choice, maintaining current tax level, and avoiding detrimental mergers), they are comfortable with merging off-island
- Barbara Burrington believes that South Hero's tax rate is 20¢ higher than Alburgh's tax rate (\$1.64 vs. \$1.44). Barbara explained that South Hero has a lower cost per pupil than Alburgh, but because we have ~100 fewer students, our tax rate is higher. However, Barbara pointed out that all of the Island towns have significantly lower spending per pupil than the state average
- Melanie Henderson observed that the 20¢ difference could be a stumbling block for a potential merger between the two towns, since Alburgh's tax rate would likely rise. Mike Savage said that Alburgh would be happy to work with South Hero, but that a merger would have to make sense financially for their town
- Mike Savage explained that Alburgh originally tried to merge with a town in NY state, but was told that would require approval from the United States Congress. Alburgh gets better feedback from the NY state high schools than the Vermont high schools, but most of their students attend BFA St. Albans
- Barbara Burrington added that none of the Island schools get sufficient feedback from any of the Vermont high schools
- Tim Maxham asked what would happen to the GISU if Alburgh and South Hero *don't* merge. Barbara Burrington thinks the worst case scenario is that the SU would be broken up, and the towns absorbed into other SU's. However, she doubts that the Islands SU will be the first one to be targeted for absorption
- John Goodrich asked what the value would be to South Hero and Alburgh if we *did* merge. Barbara Burrington mentioned opportunities like economies of scale, shared tech support, reduced number of audits, savings from buying licenses in bulk, perhaps sharing sports coaches
- Barbara Burrington also mentioned proposed changes to the law. Melanie Henderson pointed to a proposal by Rep. Janet Ancel that would establish a 500 student threshold for alternative mergers. A merger between South Hero and Alburgh would meet that threshold. However, it remains unclear whether such an alternative merger would qualify for incentives
- Barbara Burrington suggested listing the Pros and Cons of merging governance structures, for both towns. What would we stand to gain or lose by merging school boards and budgets?
- John Goodrich wondered whether the Agency of Education would forcibly merge our two towns, and whether they could impose harsh changes. Barbara Burrington doesn't believe the State intends to punish towns, or create arbitrary mergers. Barbara also stated that even forcible mergers would still be free to write Articles of Agreement

- Since Alburgh has little to lose, Mike Savage believes it probably makes sense for Alburgh to apply to be a stand alone district
- Barbara Burrington stated that if South Hero and Alburgh want to propose standing alone, we need to be aggressive and apply quickly. It's likely that many districts will propose standing alone, and she suggests being first in line ahead of the pack. That way, if the proposals are rejected, there will still be time to pursue a merger
- Barbara Burrington clarified that proposing to stand alone does not require approval from the voters. However, it does require a massive report from the towns, proving that we should be allowed to stand alone. Barbara Burrington suggests really pushing the geographic isolation argument in the proposals to the state. She also recommends asking Mitzi Johnson or Ben Joseph to clarify the definition of geographic isolation (since it's possible we already meet it)
- Barbara Burrington suggests assembling the stand alone proposals by this summer. Tim Maxham asked whether there were any time constraints, such as required reviews by the AoE or legal teams. Barbara stated that since the proposal won't go before the voters, the only deadline is Nov. 2017 (when such a report will have to be submitted anyway)
- Barbara Burrington suggested that Alburgh and South Hero share their stand alone proposal reports, and seek each other's advice and suggestions
- John Goodrich mentioned that he misses the days when the Agency of Education responded to the needs of the towns, rather than the other way around. Barbara Burrington stated that the AoE is now at the beck and call of the Legislature, and that they are all waiting to see what changes will come with the new administration.
- John Goodrich asked if there was anyone from the AoE who could meet with us to answer questions. Barbara Burrington said that Donna Russo Savage is the most knowledgeable resource at the AoE. However, Barbara cautioned that Donna Russo Savage is a bureaucrat, and only applies the policies...she has no power to make decisions
- John Goodrich asked whether it would make sense for the Alburgh and South Hero school boards to meet, and suggested scheduling a discussion after Town Meeting Day
- Tim Maxham asked when the new Central Islands district board would meet. Barbara Burrington stated that their first meeting will be on Feb. 23<sup>rd</sup>

**Actions:**

- Melanie Henderson will reach out to Rep. Janet Ancel, and ask her to clarify whether the proposed alternative structure would be eligible for incentives

**Next Meeting:**

- TBD

## Minutes from 2<sup>nd</sup> Informal Meeting between South Hero & Georgia

**Meeting Date:** Feb. 20<sup>th</sup>, 2017

**Attendees:** Ben Chiappinelli (Georgia), Tim Maxham, Jen Lyon-Horne, & Melanie Henderson (South Hero)

### Minutes:

- Ben Chiappinelli asked Melanie Henderson to review our visit to the State House on Jan. 27<sup>th</sup>
- Melanie explained that our newly elected Rep. Ben Joseph of North Hero arranged for us to address the House Committee on Education. The testimony went well, the Committee members were clearly engaged, and they asked many questions. Some members seemed sympathetic to the challenges faced by small towns, while others made it clear that they favor consolidation into larger districts. For example, Rep. Kate Webb of Shelburne Farms asked with notable exasperation why South Hero voted against merging when tuitioning would have given our 7/8<sup>th</sup> students access to multiple foreign languages. Melanie Henderson responded that South Hero already offers one foreign language, and that tuitioning our 7/8<sup>th</sup> students would have cost them the community, leadership experience, and mentorship opportunities that they currently enjoy
- Melanie Henderson also mentioned that she was contacted after testifying by Vermonters from several towns, including Peacham, Barnard, and Marlboro. These districts are also frustrated by Act 46, and concerned by merger proposals being considered by their voters on Town Meeting Day
- Jen Lyon stated that there are many unknowns, especially considering the changes that have been proposed to the law. She believes that the votes on Town Meeting Day may influence the legislature, depending on how many mergers pass or fail
- Tim Maxham cautioned that if change is to happen, it must pass the House, Senate, and Governor. He is concerned that the branches of government may not cooperate, and mentioned the frustration of Rep. Mitzi Johnson of South Hero, Speaker of the House, after Gov. Scott's recent proposal to fund PreK and higher education from the K-12 education fund
- Melanie Henderson added that the Senate appear to be content with the law as is (based on updates from a Calais voter who has been attending the Senate Education sessions)
- Jen Lyon mentioned the Franklin Northeast towns (Richford, Enosburgh, Montgomery, Berkshire, and Bakersfield) which would qualify for a side-by-side merger, but have chosen to take no action and wait to see what the State will do
- Ben Chiappinelli wonders what will happen to the isolated towns that take no action, and whether the state will shove them into an existing merger. He feels that the State has done a poor job of explaining the goals of the law and selling it to Vermonters
- Melanie Henderson mentioned a comment made by the GISU Superintendent, Barbara Burrington. Barbara said that the State is unlikely to create random mergers in 2018. Even if districts are forced to merge, the State is likely to partner neighboring towns that have already explored merger options
- Melanie Henderson speculated that even if we cannot sell a merger between Georgia and South Hero to the voters, the State could still be influenced towards such a merger in the statewide plan in 2018. By exploring the options and financials of a Georgia/South Hero merger, we could create a "path of least resistance" for the State to follow
- Ben Chiappinelli asked what South Hero ultimately wants from a merger. Melanie Henderson and Jen Lyon confirmed that our priorities are to remain a PreK-8 school district with high school choice...that's all
- Ben Chiappinelli said that Georgia shares the same goal. He discussed Georgia's earlier proposal to build a high school, and believes that the town would have eventually come to love it. However, he understands that Georgia values choice. He and Jen Lyon agreed that families are drawn to choice towns, and that choice keeps property values up
- Ben Chiappinelli mentioned his concerns regarding South Hero's higher tax rate. (South Hero's residential tax rate in FY2016 was \$1.53, vs Georgia's \$1.35). Ben asked for more information on South Hero's "gold town" status, and

Melanie explained that South Hero collects ~\$7 million in taxes, but that half of it is non-residential and therefore sent directly to the State. Only ~\$3 million is spent on our school

- Tim Maxham explained that all residents pay the residential tax rate on the value of their home plus 2 acres. Any additional land or other buildings are taxed at the non-residential tax rate. (He further explained that farm lands that are in-use are taxed at a lower agricultural rate, but that the outbuildings on the farm are still taxed at the non-residential rate.)
- Melanie Henderson acknowledged that South Hero's tax rate is high, but that we're proud of the programming that we offer and our outcomes. Ben Chiappinelli agreed with the principle, but is concerned that our higher tax rate will make a merger between South Hero and Georgia harder to sell. Melanie sympathized and acknowledged the challenge
- Melanie Henderson also explained that South Hero is not pushing for a speedy timeline. Since our student population has continued to (gently) climb, the financial aid that Folsom receives from the State has dropped dramatically. Consequently, although South Hero still wants to merge, there is less financial (and time) pressure
- Ben Chiappinelli was glad to hear that the pressure is off. He's happy to continue to work with us, and try to sell the merits of a South Hero merger to the voters in Georgia. However, he wasn't excited about doing that work under a time pressure!
- Melanie Henderson also mentioned that although South Hero's tax rate is admittedly high, we also have robust programming. Other school districts may have lower tax rates, but may require a higher expenditure to bring their programming up to Georgia's level
- Ben Chiappinelli agreed, mentioning Georgia's two enrichment teachers as an example. The teachers allow Georgia to meet all of their students' needs, including high academic achievers who need additional challenge. Ben is worried that if Georgia is forcibly merged with a town that has a lower tax rate, the partner town may not value Georgia's programming, and may try to reduce offerings to save taxes
- Ben Chiappinelli asked what South Hero's options currently include. Melanie Henderson listed 3 options: a conventional merger with Georgia, applying to the State to stand alone, or possibly taking advantage of a proposed change to the law that would allow a 3x1 side-by-side with the Central Island towns
- Melanie Henderson mentioned Barbara Burrington's suggestion to apply to the State early to stand alone. It's likely that many districts will do so, and therefore it makes sense to stay ahead of the pack. Barbara suggests preparing and delivering such a report no later than this summer (2017)
- Ben Chiappinelli asked whether South Hero would be willing to consider a merger including more K-8 towns, such as Sheldon or Alburgh. Melanie Henderson said that several South Hero voters expressed concern for Alburgh after the November vote, and would welcome working with them. However, Tim Maxham also cautioned that the Island towns have a history, and some residents would oppose merging with Alburgh

**Actions:**

- Ben Chiappinelli will ask the FWSU and Georgia administrators to complete Georgia's merger "resume", and send it to South Hero
- Melanie Henderson will start reviewing the Islands Merger report, and consider what comparable information would need to be gathered for Georgia and South Hero

**Next Meeting:**

- After Town Meeting Day, exact date TBD