

Act 46 Staff Concerns

(These are concerns/comments staff raised in the survey done by the Act 46 Committee)

Concerns/comments about a large regional board

If our current system works why would we change it?

Act 46 was enacted in 2015 and requires that we change our governance structure.

I'm concerned that small schools will be disadvantaged with a large board.

The Board's role is to create a vision and monitor progress towards that vision, develop policy, hire a superintendent, adopt a budget, and engage the community. We already have all that in place in OCSU. Our proposed Articles of Agreement call for the formation of Advisory Councils that would be the link between the school community and the large board.

Decisions will be made that cause schools to lose their ability to be unique.

It is the building principal in collaboration with staff that make schools unique. That won't change. Our proposed Advisory Councils can provide support in this area as well.

Decisions will be made in name of cost cutting.

Decisions are already being made in the name of cost cutting.

Small schools aren't equitable and lack options.

In some cases this is true and by merging governance we may be able to address some of the inequities.

Concern about management not attuned to needs "on the ground."

Schools will continue to be managed by their principals, that won't change.

Local boards more appropriate for elementary schools.

The Board's role is to create a vision and monitor progress towards that vision, develop policy, hire a superintendent, adopt a budget, and engage the community. We already have all that in place in OCSU. Our proposed Articles of Agreement call for the formation of Advisory Councils that would be the link between the school community and the large board. Elementary schools will continue to be managed by their principals.

Better dissemination of good ideas and resources.

Our Boards have worked closely with each other ever since the formation of the Executive Committee a few years ago. Our administrators also work closely together to share ideas. It will definitely be easier to share resources once we're consolidated.

Make boards for each age group (is. Pre-K, k-5, 6-8, high school).

The law does not allow for this.

Concerns/comments about a regional budget instead of individual school budgets

Don't want to pay for expenses of other schools

Budgets are developed based on the needs of the students. It is important that we consider all students and not just students on a town-by-town basis. Our preschool budget and our high school budget is based on the needs of students from all of our towns.

Will make education more expensive.

Boards and administration will work to continue to develop budgets that are fiscally responsible.

Necessary to deal with declining enrollment.

Yes. In some of our schools we have some very small classes which are not optimal for teaching and learning.

Concern that this leads to more uniformity and discourages teachers. Want to allow each school to maintain "specialness".

It is the building principal in collaboration with staff that make schools unique. That won't change.

Concern/questions how things will "equal out"

Consolidation is meant to facilitate equity, not equality. It is important that we continue to focus on student needs and work to ensure that each student receives what they need.

Will make winners and losers.

It is important that we continue to focus on student needs and work to ensure that each student receives what they need.

Concern "responsible" schools will subsidize "irresponsible".

It is important that we continue to focus on student needs and work to ensure that each student receives what they need.

Maybe offer better system-wide positions in special education.

Special education teachers and paras have been consolidated for a number of years. That won't change.

Concern administration will be prioritized over students.

It is important that we continue to focus on student needs and work to ensure that each student receives what they need.

Comments/concerns about joint ownership of schools/assets

Towns worked hard to build/maintain schools.

Schools will now be owned/maintained by the school district. If we are able to have proportional representation on the Board (that is contingent on getting a "yes" vote) there would be members from each town on that Board.

Concern over what would happen if school closes.

If we get a “yes” vote there is an article that states that no schools will be closed during the first 4 years. If we get a “no” vote the state may have a different plan.

Concern about losing access to schools for community activities.

We believe there would be no change in the ability of community members to access their school for community activities.

Don't want to assume debt for another school especially if that school subsequently closes.

There is only one town that will have any debt on July 1, 2019. State law says that debt must be assumed by the new district.

Worried that new structure will make it harder to improve schools.

Principals and school leadership teams will continue to create continuous improvement plans with input from stakeholders. These plans will continue to be based on needs assessments, that won't change.

Concerns/comments about areas of inequity between schools and level of importance

Not necessary to merge to deal with inequities.

It will be much easier to mitigate inequities in a consolidated model.

Question of whether merging will lead to equality.

It should lead to equity not equality.

Differences not significant compared to differences with other areas of the state.

It is definitely more difficult for all students to get what they need in some of our schools compared to others.

Want improvement, not watering down.

It is important that we continue to focus on student needs and work to ensure that each student receives what they need.

Current inequities in support staffing makes schools hard to run.

It is important that we continue to focus on student needs and work to ensure that each student receives what they need.

Current model of specials (art, music, pe) makes it hard for teachers to achieve proficiency.

It is important that we continue to focus on student needs and work to ensure that each student receives what they need.

Want schools to have access but choice of whether to use or not.

We are not sure what you mean by this. It is important that we continue to focus on student needs and work to ensure that each student receives what they need.

Different schools have different needs.

It is important that we continue to focus on student needs and work to ensure that each student receives what they need.

Hard to get people for half time positions.

This is true. In our current model even if teachers work in multiple schools they are not provided benefits unless they are hired by OCSU. This would change if we are consolidated

Merging could benefit students

Need to reorganize schools to decrease inequity.

Reorganizing schools may happen, but it does not have to happen when we consolidate.

Might be hard on kids to comingle different towns.

Currently our preschool students come from different towns and our high school students come from different towns.

Inequality is due to differences in communities not finances.

Inequities are definitely caused by finances. It is important that we continue to focus on student needs and work to ensure that each student receives what they need.

Concern over longer bussing as an equity issue.

Act 46 is about merging governance and will not necessarily mean that schools themselves are merged. If schools were to be merged bus routes would need to be adjusted.

Merging would help if all students were in one building.

There are currently no plans to put all students in one building. If we get a “no” vote the state will make a plan for us.

Skeptical that there is any benefit to students.

If we are able to mitigate inequities there will be definite benefits to students. It really is about making sure that all students get what they need.

Might be beneficial to some students but harmful to others.

It is important that we continue to focus on student needs and work to ensure that each student receives what they need.

Merging to help with cost containment

Centralized services already too expensive and merging would make it worse.

We have lots of evidence that centralized services are saving us money. Examples of this are services for transportation, business office services, and technology.

Need to centralize state-wide

Depending on the governor and legislature that may happen someday.

Only if students are grouped in fewer buildings

That would be one way to contain costs, but there are many other ways as well.

Some centralization of buying leads to bad buying decisions

These decisions are always made based on need and no one person makes decisions. Centralization would not affect that.

Needs to be done carefully otherwise people will view all merging negatively (ie. new centralized menu).

In regards to the centralized menu that decision was made by all food service employees at a meeting.

Concern about losing \$500,000 in small school grants

Schools are already underfunded.

Some of our schools have had to cut multiple positions for next year. If they lose the small schools grant more positions will have to be cut.

Money is currently being wasted.

Schools that get the small schools grant get about \$100,000 each. None of our schools are wasting that much money.

Don't believe the state would follow through on cuts.

There is a deficit in the education fund and it will have to be made up somewhere. We believe the state will absolutely follow through on this.

Not worth merging over.

For those employees who will lose their jobs, they absolutely believe it is worth merging over.

Lost money would lead to fewer teachers, loss of extras.

Absolutely!

Concerns about job status

Could lead to school closure.

If we don't consolidate we will most likely have to close some schools.

Concerns about current conflicts of interest - maybe merging would lead to more professionalism?

We are unaware of current conflicts of interest.

Middle school teachers might be especially vulnerable.

They will be vulnerable even if we don't consolidate as some schools may not be able to continue to operate those grades.

Concerns that merging will result in more pressure to cut staff and that newly hired are vulnerable.

Some schools are already dealing with this and we anticipate that more schools and staff will be affected each year.

Teachers may be forced to move to a new school against their will.

Teachers are already being “forced” to move as positions are being cut.

Concern that school cohesion will be eroded by teachers moving around more.

There is always staff turnover. Strong systems can more easily withstand change.

Uncertainty is threatening.

Absolutely! Without consolidation there will be much more uncertainty as we face shifts in enrollment and budget constraints.

Concern whether seniority would restart with merging.

Seniority would be handled through the negotiations process.

Opportunities under Act 46

Fewer meetings for superintendents.

We are not sure there would be fewer meetings, but less redundancy in meetings.

Moderate tax increases.

Financial efficiencies could lead to more manageable increases.

Potential for a union middle school.

Consolidation would open up this possibility.

Keeping small school grants.

As the law stands now it would allow us to keep that grant.

Less division between “our students” vs “their students”.

We already have a unified preschool and a unified high school so it’s just the students in between who get labeled “ours” and “theirs”.

More focus on students’ individual needs.

We should always be focused on students’ needs.

Potential for better socialization of students in cases where there are too few students currently.

Social issues are definitely more challenging in some of our smaller cohorts.

We have good/dedicated teachers.

Absolutely!

Reading and writing have improved, math is stagnant and science is declining.
Data shows that math is definitely improving as well. There is a new science assessment this year that is mapped to NGSS, we'll be analyzing those results in order to improve student outcomes.

More opportunities and extra-curriculars.

We have seen this with middle school athletics. Many of our schools rarely have enough students to field a team for any given sport, and have combined in order to provide opportunities for students.

Obstacles or drawbacks to merging

Losing local control of things that work well.

It is unclear what people mean when they say "local control". Schools will still be led by principals. Local Advisory Councils will provide a link between school communities and the Board.

Increasing taxes to pay for other schools.

If we are focused on the needs of all of our students it shouldn't matter which town they live in. Currently it doesn't matter for our preschool or high school students.

Obstacle of view "us" vs. "them"

Again, this seems to happen only for our students in between preschool and high school.

Losing good teachers

We will definitely lose good teachers if we don't consolidate. That is already happening.

Increased travel for students

Merging governance doesn't necessarily mean merging actual school buildings. If we were to do so then bus routes would be adjusted.

Lack of public support.

We're not sure if you mean lack of public support for Act 46 or lack of public support for our schools. Act 46 is the law and it is unlikely that it will be repealed at this point.

Many other reforms have been proposed only to be abandoned after a few years leading to skepticism.

School district consolidation has happened throughout Vermont history. It happened when neighborhood schools consolidated into one town school. It happened when high schools merged to form union high schools. It seems like this is the next step.

Anticipated savings don't materialize.

The state is now collecting data on the savings being realized by newly merged districts. We will be looking closely at that data and learning from those places.

Loss of individuality of each school and its ties to local community.

It is the building principal in collaboration with staff that make schools unique. That won't change. Local Advisory Councils will provide a link between the school community and the Board.

Uncertainty in staffing and budgeting.

There is lots of uncertainty in staffing and budgeting in our schools currently.

Concern that strong attributes of some schools will be sacrificed in name of equity.

It is important that we continue to focus on student needs and work to ensure that each student receives what they need.

Loss of schools as one of the few places in modern world where people get connection to place.

This does not need to change with consolidation.

Sad to see schools that have been maintained and improved potentially closed.

This has a higher probability of happening if we don't consolidate.

Concern that getting community involvement may be harder and that it is already lacking.

It is the building principal in collaboration with staff that reach out to parents and community members to offer community engagement activities. That won't change.