

# Stowe School District

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March 31, 2015

Dear Sir/Madam,

As you consider education reform this spring, we would like to weigh in on two provisions currently included in H.361—mandatory governance consolidation and spending caps.

We support the hard work you are doing to address problematic statewide trends in education and are in agreement with the education policy goals outlined in the bill. Working with stable leadership at the supervisory union and district levels, the Pre-K – Grade 12 school districts of Stowe, Morristown and Elmore have realized the benefits of collaboration, including cost efficiencies, strong academic achievement, high levels of parental and community involvement, and lower than average student/staff-to-teacher ratios.

We have critically asked ourselves as a board what significant changes would result from consolidated governance. Given the existing level of collaboration within Lamoille South Supervisory Union, the short answer is loss of local decision-making. Through three extensive studies of consolidation over four years (the Phase I Study of Governance Options, Optional Educational Structures Committee, and the Regional Education District study), —both governance and school—we know that maintaining local control is important to our communities.

We ask that you consider adopting language that would clarify and facilitate a waiver process. As written, the criteria are vague and at the discretion of the State Board of Education. School districts that meet the educational policy goals of H.361 should have clear options for preserving their existing governance structures and maintaining local control.

We would also like to add our voice to the chorus of opposition to spending caps. Spending caps do not take into account the complexity and variability of local budgets, and would further erode local decision-making by negating voters' ability to approve a local budget.

In addition to this letter, we respectfully submit resolutions pertaining to H.361 that have been adopted by our board with input from the community.

Sincerely,

Cam Page, Chair, Richard Bland, Emily Bradbury, Jim Brochhausen, Susan Segal  
Stowe School District Board of Directors

From the School Board

This week, the Vermont House of Representatives is scheduled to continue discussion of H.361, an education reform bill with significant changes in education funding, spending and governance. While the bill still has many steps before becoming law, the Stowe School Board has adopted resolutions addressing our concerns with two specific provisions of this legislation—mandatory governance consolidation and spending caps. As the bill appears to have momentum, our intent with the resolutions is to be sure our voice is heard in Montpelier, and that we are proactively representing the best interests of Stowe students and taxpayers.

H.361 attempts to address statewide trends in education that are concerning to all of us. Declines in enrollment statewide, increasing costs, and rising property taxes are taking their toll on Vermont's education system.

At issue is a loss of local control. The bill expresses legislative preference to require governance consolidation—meaning one school board making decisions for a larger “Integrated Education System.” There is too much uncertainty around when and how a waiver would be granted.

We have asked our legislators to adopt language that would clarify a waiver process for districts operating Pre-K through Grade 12 school systems that objectively meet the education policy objectives. As written, the legislation does provide for a waiver process, but does not offer specific requirements for existing districts that meet the policy goals of the bill.

The second point we address in our resolutions is the spending caps. Again, the issue here is local decision-making. Spending caps do not take into account the complexity and variability of local budgets, and would further erode local decision-making by negating voters' ability to approve a local budget.

Under the stable leadership of the Lamoille South Supervisory Union, Stowe has worked with Morristown and Elmore to find efficiencies and opportunities for collaboration that benefits both students and taxpayers in our communities. We feel that what we have is working, as evidenced by strong academic achievement, high levels of parental and community involvement, higher than average student-to-teacher ratios, and per pupil spending below statewide averages. Existing Pre-K through Grade 12 education systems that meet the education policy goals should be preserved, including those benefiting from increased enrollment.

We will continue to monitor this legislation as it moves to the Senate Education and Finance committees, and to offer testimony in Montpelier. As always, our meetings are open to the public and we welcome input. Our next meeting is on Monday, April 6 at Stowe Elementary School.

## Stowe School District Board of Directors

*Stowe - Proudly Providing High-Quality Pre-K-Grade 12 Education*

### Resolutions Regarding H.361

The Stowe School District Board of Directors supports the alignment of pre-Kindergarten to Grade 12 school districts. Stowe's school children, together with the community of Stowe, have experienced firsthand the benefits associated with a high-quality, cost-effective pre-K to Grade 12 education system.

The Board of Directors supports affordable, transparent and accountable education systems and governance structures, and agrees with all of the education policy goals of H.361 which increase equity in the quality, variety and delivery of educational opportunities available to students; operate cost-efficiently; equitably manage and deploy resources; share best practices and continually strive to improve student performance; and foster stronger relationships between schools and the community through stable school leadership and opportunities for community engagement.

- We also believe that there are pre-K to Grade 12 school districts and supervisory unions that already meet the beneficial policy objectives of H.361 and should be preserved, and we therefore **oppose** any legislation that would eliminate or change those educational governance structures and erode local control of those highly functional education systems.

Further, the Stowe School District Board of Directors recognizes that, while the local effects of Acts 60 and 68 are challenging for the community of Stowe, the state of Vermont has significantly improved equity of statewide access to revenue for public education. And yet, the expanded access to revenue has not, in all cases, led to equity in local education expenditures across Vermont for numerous, unintentional reasons. Not all students in Vermont are well-served. The consequences of these shortcomings affect us all.

- While we agree that specific measures can and should be taken to provide greater equity in local education spending, we also **oppose** any legislation that would impose inequitable and harmful caps on local education spending.