

Community Focus Forums

School Governance Merger

For the Districts of

Halifax – Readsboro – Stamford

Vermont Legislature Passes Act 46: An opportunity to consolidate

School Districts are to study unification to:

- Achieve sustainable governance
- Improve and increase educational opportunities
- Create greater economic and operational efficiencies

Why Merge?

Unifying Halifax, Readsboro, and Stamford would:

- Deliver tax incentives over four years (\$.08, \$.06, \$.04, \$.02)
- Keep small schools grants for the 3 schools
- Increase stability for small schools

What are the Penalties?

This is the first consolidation act that has negative consequences if we do nothing:

- No tax incentives
- Lose small schools grant
- Must complete Alternative Study
- May be unified or reassigned by the VT Board of Education

Most Frequently Asked Questions?

These questions have come up in other Supervisory Unions:

- Will my school be closed?
- Will school boards be changed?
- Will tax rates change and how?
- What will happen to our buildings in a unified union?
- Can the state step in after we unify?

SCHOOL GOVERNANCE MERGER VOTE ON MAY 31, 2017 TO JOIN SOUTHERN VALLEY UNIFIED UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT

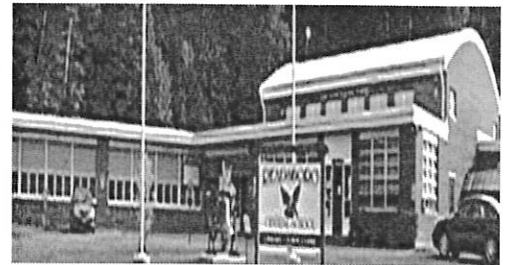
Halifax



Stamford



Readsboro



VERMONT LEGISLATURE PASSES ACT 46

Act 46, passed in 2015, encourages and eventually requires school districts to merge into larger units.

Under Act 46, each town is viewed initially as an individual district. The law states the intention is to reduce education costs and enhance student opportunities in Vermont through a simpler and more sustainable governance model through school district consolidation.

A group of school board members and community members have been working on studying district consolidation since the fall of 2015. In 2016 the school districts of Windham Southwest Supervisory Union, decided to form mergers to comply with Act 46.

Currently, there are 6 districts with their own School Boards under the Windham Southwest Supervisory Union. With unification there would be 3 districts under the WSSU – Wilmington/Whitingham as 1(Twin Valley Unified School District), Halifax, Readsboro, Stamford as 1(Southern Valley Unified School District) and if Searsburg is asked along it is 1. (Stand Alone as they have no school building)

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IMPORTANT HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SOUTHERN VALLEY UNIFIED UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT ARTICLES OF AGREEMENT

- The new school district will provide Pre-K -8 to all students in the district and high school choice to all grade 9-12 students.
- No school can close without a positive vote of the voters in the town the school is located **and** a board supermajority vote (80% of the board).
- The new district will comply with and honor current employee contracts and will commence negotiations or new contracts as required under Vermont law.
- The Southern Valley Unified Union School District recognizes the benefits from a district wide curricula and will offer consistent educational opportunities for all students across the district

These proposed districts would be a Side-By-Side configuration which means that:

- (1) each new district is formed by the merger of at least two existing districts;
- (2) each new district meets all criteria for RED (regional education district) formation other than the size criterion of Sec. 3(a)(1) of No. 153;
- (3) one of the new districts provides education in all elementary and secondary grades by operating one or more schools and the other new district or districts pay tuition for students in one or more grades;
- (4) each new district has the same effective date of merger;
- (5) the new districts, when merged, are members of one supervisory union; and
- (6) the new districts jointly satisfy the size criterion of Sec. 3(a)(1) of No. 153. (b) This section is repealed on July 1, 2017.

WHAT IF THE VOTE TO MERGE WITH SOUTHERN VALLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT DOES NOT PASS IN OUR TOWN?

Act 46 creates a multi-year process that provides tax incentives for communities that voluntarily merge into unified governance models.

July 1, 2017 is an important date.

Districts that **do-not** pursue or achieve a voluntary merger vote by July 1, 2017 must evaluate their ability to meet or exceed State goals and make proposals to the State Board.

If districts (town) **do not** voluntarily merge, the State of Vermont will determine the district's merging option. In 2018 the Vermont Secretary of Education will develop a proposal and the State Board will issue a final statewide design that realigns un-merged districts into sustainable models of governance that meet State goals. By being proactive, The Southern Valley Unified Union School District Study Committee seeks to assess the unification options and works to present a model for voter consideration that unifies our school governance, increases educational opportunities for all students, and meets the educational needs of our individual communities.

ARTICLES OF AGREEMENT CONTINUED:

- Operating deficits and/or surpluses of any of the combining districts shall become the property, and/or obligation of the newly formed Southern Valley Unified Union School District. Any encumbered funds voted by the electorate if the merging school district will be used in accordance of the said provisions. For example, funds in a town set aside for future capital improvements in that town, will be utilized in the future for capital improvements in that town only.
- Buildings, land and property will be conveyed to the new district. The property will return to the town for \$1.00 if at some future date the new school district does not use the building.
- If at least two of the school districts vote to approve the merger, The Southern Valley Unified Union School District will be formed and will commence full operation on July 1, 2018.



There would be one School Board for the new Southern Valley Unified Union School District. The initial board will consist of 3 members from each town of Halifax, Readsboro and Stamford. The representatives will be voted upon by the respective towns via Australian Ballot at Town Meeting.