

Windham Southwest Supervisory Union



Act 46 Study Committee's Final Report & Articles of Agreement For Twin Valley Study Committee Southern Valley Study Committee Searsburg Self Study

Preamble of the Windham Southwest Supervisory Union Act 46 Report

The following study and report of the two Windham Southwest Supervisory Union (hereinafter known as the WSSU) Act 46 Study Committees and an Alternative Model, is the product of an 18 month study by the Twin Valley Act 46 Study Committee and the Southern Valley Act 46 Study Committee, working both independently and collectively. Also, the non-operating district of Searsburg has been working to find non-operating partners during this study period. The six districts in the WSSU concluded that a joint effort and study would best meet the needs of all member districts.

The study you are about to review was predated by a number of inquiries and meetings with other school districts in the surrounding areas and an earlier report to the Vermont Agency of Education. After comprehensive exploration, negotiations, and community decisions, the study committee believes this plan will best meet the needs of all children in the six participating districts. Both Act 46 Study Committees understand that unification may not solve the fiscal challenges caused by decreasing enrollments in the districts but will give them greater capacity to help address these problems.

The plan presented is inclusive and does not leave any school districts isolated. Looking at the WSSU region, the Windham Southeast Supervisory Union borders to the east, the Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union borders to the west, the Windham Central Supervisory Union borders on the north and the Massachusetts border serves as its southern boundary.

The current structure of the WSSU includes the towns of Wilmington, Whitingham, Halifax, Readsboro, Stamford and Searsburg. Five out of the six towns operate their own schools within the district. Searsburg, a non-operating district, pays tuition for PreK-12 students. Wilmington and Whitingham currently make up the Twin Valley Schools and contract to operate their schools jointly with a grade PreK-5 school located in Wilmington and a grade 6-12 middle-high school that is located in Whitingham. Readsboro, Stamford, and Halifax, the Southern Valley Towns, all operate grade PreK-8 schools, and pay tuition for grades 9-12.

WSSU encompasses approximately 246 square miles, traversed by mountain roads. It spans Vermont's entire southern border with Massachusetts except for the towns of Pownal on the west, and Vernon and Guilford on the east. It is important to understand the geography of the land to understand the distance between these districts and the difficulty, time, and hazards of traveling many of these roads. Although towns are next to each other on a map, in most cases there is no direct route that buses can travel without putting the safety of students at risk. It takes an average time of 30 minutes to travel between schools in adjoining towns. With bus routes, traffic, and adverse weather conditions, travel time can double; at times, roads are impassable. If schools were closed or if students attended classes at other schools, they would likely get on the bus as early as 5:30 a.m. and get home as late as 6:00 p.m.

For approximately twenty years, WSSU had one superintendent. This administrator developed a knowledge of the communities, but focused on the operation of the supervisory union. Each town school district evolved independently with its school board and principal taking responsibility for the direction and operation of the individual town school.

In October of 2012 when the superintendent retired, the Vermont State Board required the WSSU to conduct a boundary study to determine whether WSSU districts would be better served by being realigned with different supervisory unions, and a temporary superintendent was hired. The boundary study was completed by April, 2014. Two VSBA consultants, Wayne Gersen and John Everitt, conducted the boundary study (Appendix to the Preamble). The report described commonalities and differences among the districts comprising the WSSU, and offered proposals for alternative boundary configurations that were declined by the individual districts and the surrounding supervisory unions. The outcome of this 2014 Boundary Study was that the WSSU member school districts remain the same.

In the three years since this study, there has been further discussion about cooperation between the Windham Central and Windham Southwest Supervisory Unions. Discussions are now on hold pending resolution of changes that need to be made within each supervisory union to meet the requirements of Act 46. In those discussions during the fall of 2015, there were no significant educational benefits for students or financial benefits for taxpayers identified.

A new superintendent was hired in July of 2014. In the past few years, the Vermont legislature changed governance of supervisory unions, assigning new responsibilities at the SU level. The new responsibilities of the supervisory union have called on WSSU to develop a different relationship with the member town school districts, and the superintendent has successfully implemented those changes. The changes required were not simple ones for the WSSU and profoundly influenced a change in culture and operation. Before the change, the WSSU Board and central office had responsibilities that could be delivered cooperatively, but individually, to the town school districts. After the change, a much more collaborative and integrated delivery of services was needed. To accomplish the increased responsibilities of WSSU, substantive change was needed from the WSSU Board, the town school district boards, and the central office administration. Curriculum responsibilities changed from coordination to more direct control, with the hiring of a full-time curriculum and technology integration coordinator. Special education changed from building-based to a supervisory union responsibility, with a special education coordinator and centralized hiring of teachers and non-professional staff. Transportation and the fiscal side of food service are now managed at the central office. Beginning with 2017, the supervisory union will negotiate a contract for each school district with hope that by doing so each district's contract will share common terms, language, salary schedules and benefits. All WSSU schools are governed by policy manuals that are closely aligned in regards to supervision and evaluation, hiring practices, professional development, and central office business practices.

During the past 18 months Windham Southwest has reached out to various towns outside of our Supervisory Union. Several public meetings were held at the Readsboro Central School which had participation by the schools districts of Dover, Wardsboro and Marlboro. These meetings were to explore the various options for the small schools that have similar student populations. The Southern Valley subcommittee had several meetings with the Marlboro School that is part of Windham Central Supervisory Union. During these meetings, the Southern Valley subcommittee had asked the Marlboro School to join them as part of a side by side. After several meetings, and looking at the financials, it was determined that the Marlboro School had a much higher per pupil spending than the other three schools of Readsboro, Halifax and Stamford. The higher per pupil spending in Marlboro would have increased the taxes of Readsboro by (0.1644), Stamford by (0.2011), Halifax by (0.0002) and would have reduced the taxes in Marlboro by (0.33). This was not acceptable to Readsboro, Stamford, and Halifax; however, they still wanted to explore and invite Marlboro to the table. After several months of talking, Marlboro was not willing to commit to being part of the Southern Valley study committee, so the committee continued without Marlboro.

Searsburg and Stratton were considering the implications of becoming a non-operating unified district. They tried to find a common ground but found the distance between the two districts and the disparity in tax rates prevented further negotiations.

Windham Southwest has been actively working with other districts and supervisory unions in Windham County to insure that no district would be left isolated; however, we have had no luck in getting any districts outside of Windham Southwest to commit to unification or a change in supervisory union boundaries.

The Twin Valley and Southern Valley Act 46 Study Committees are recommending to the Vermont State Board of Education that the Windham Southwest Supervisory Union create two Unified Union Districts that would meet the requirements of the side by side model. This proposal would reduce the number of districts in the supervisory union from six (6) districts to three (3) districts. Wilmington and Whitingham (PreK-12), currently contracted to operated schools jointly, propose to form a Unified Union School District and become one side of a side by side. Halifax, Readsboro and Stamford, which operate PreK-8 schools and pay tuition for grades 9-12 students, would vote to form a Unified Union School District and become the second side of a side by side. We are also suggesting the inclusion of Searsburg in the Supervisory Union as a non-operating district. It would be extremely important to not leave Searsburg isolated.

Map and Size of the Windham Southwest Supervisory Union



Town	Sq. Mile Area	Population	Year
Somerset	28.1	2	2011
Stamford	39.5	824	2010
Readsboro	36.5	763	2010
Searsburg	21.6	109	2010
Whitingham	39.3	1357	2010
Wilmington	41.3	1876	2010
Halifax	39.8	720	2010
Totals	246.1	5,651	
Population Density per a sq. mile	22.96		

Appendix to the Preamble
Interim Report:
Windham Southwest Boundary Change Study

Background Information:

In October 2012, the Vermont State Board placed the Windham Southwest Supervisory Union under the consideration for a supervisory union boundary change, limiting them to hiring a Superintendent of schools for a two year period while a boundary study was completed. The board action called for the district to complete the boundary study with final recommendations by April 30, 2014, and to submit an interim progress report in October 2013.

Action Taken to Date:

In the winter of 2012-13, Windham Central Supervisory Union (WCSU) agreed to partner with Windham Southwest Supervisory Union (WSSU) in the boundary study. Because they were undergoing a RED governance study and had at least one town whose students paid tuition to attend Twin Valley secondary schools, WCSU was open to engaging within the boundary study and perceived potential mutual benefits as a result of their participation.

In June 2013 WSSU hired the Vermont School Board Association to conduct the boundary study. At a meeting with the consultant, the WCSU Board Chair and Superintendent, the WSSU Board Chair determined that the next step would be to convene a meeting of all contiguous districts to determine the feasibility of making boundary changes in the entire region.

On October 2, 2013, the chairs and superintendents from four of the five southern Vermont supervisory unions- WSSU, WCSU, Windham Northeast Supervisory Union (WNESU), and Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union (SVSU)-- met and reviewed various boundary options. Representatives from Windham Southeast Supervisory Union (WSESU) were invited but were unable to attend.

Findings to Date:

- There was no interest in realignment among those districts present at the meeting, though a representative from the Halifax Board indicated their district might be open to aligning with Windham Southeast Supervisory Union since the majority of their students attend Brattleboro High School.
- There was interest in pursuing the establishment of a district serving districts without operating schools. In the five Supervisory Unions in Southern Vermont there are five communities that meet these criteria: Glastenbury (SVSU); Searsburg and Somerset (WSSU); and Stratton and Winhall (WCSU).
- There was some interest in exploring the possibility of Stamford creating an interstate district with Massachusetts since the majority of their students opt to attend North Adams High School.

Wayne Gersen, Vermont School Boards Association Educational Consultant

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Section 1: Committee Members

MEMBERSHIP OF THE TWIN VALLEY (WILMINGTON, WHITINGHAM) ACT 46 STUDY COMMITTEE

Seth Boyd (Chairperson)	Whitingham
Sharon Berry	Whitingham
John Doty	Whitingham
Janna Ewart	Wilmington
Kathy Larsen	Wilmington
Therese Lounsbury	Wilmington

MEMBERSHIP OF THE SOUTHERN VALLEY (HALIFAX, STAMFORD & READSBORO) ACT 46 STUDY COMMITTEE

Homer Sumner (Chairperson)	Halifax
Paul Blais	Halifax
Mary King	Readsboro
Susan Bailey	Readsboro
Cynthia Lamore	Stamford
Erika Bailey	Stamford
Barbara Malinowski	Stamford

Supporting the Committees

Christopher A. Pratt	Superintendent
Karen Atwood	Business Administrator
Mike RobbGrieco	Director of Curriculum and Tech. Integration
Pietro Lynn	Attorney
Steve Sanborn	Act 46 Project Consultant

Section 2:

Twin Valley Unified Union School District

Vermont State Worksheet

Study Committee Worksheet for All Phases of Voluntary Merger

Current Supervisory Union or Unions (list each)	Potentially Merging Districts Pursuant to 16 V.S.A. § 706b(b)(1)-(2) (list each)	Is the District:	
		Necessary	Advisable
Windham Southwest Supervisory Union	Wilmington	yes	
	Whitingham	yes	

Type of Merger	
<i>Please refer to the related eligibility worksheets to determine baseline eligibility for each merger type.</i>	(column reserved for agency use)
<input type="checkbox"/> Accelerated Merger (Act 46, Section 6)	
<p>A Regional Education District (RED) or one of its variations (Act 153 (2010) and Act 156 (2012))</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> RED (Act 153, Secs. 2-3, as amended by Act 156 , Sec. 1 and Act 46, Sec. 16)</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Side by Side Merger (Act 156 , Sec. 15) Districts involved in the related merger:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Layered Merger (Union Elementary School District) (Act 156, Sec. 16)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Modified Unified Union School District (MUUSD) (Act 156, Sec. 17, as amended by Act 56 (2013), Sec. 3)</p>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Conventional Merger – merger into a preferred structure after deadline for an Accelerated Merger (Act 46, Section 7)	

Dates, ADM, and Name	
Date on which the proposal will be submitted to the voters of each district (16 V.S.A. § 706b(b)(11)): May 23, 2017	
Date on which the new district, if approved, will begin operating (16 V.S.A. § 706b(b)(12)): July 1, 2018	
Combined ADM of all “necessary” districts in the current fiscal year: 406.5	
Proposed name of new district: Twin Valley Unified Union District	

The Proposed School District is in the Best Interest of the State, Students, and School Districts – as required by 16 V.S.A. § 706c		
<p><u>Goal #1:</u> The proposed union school district will provide substantial equity in the quality and variety of educational opportunities.</p> <p><i>Act 46, Sec. 2(1)</i></p>	<p>Twin Valley has already contracted to operate their schools jointly. This unification will enhance the work already started.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vertical and horizontal alignment of curriculum • Single k-12 action plan • Narrowed focus on age-appropriate learning opportunities • Common local assessments SU wide • Sharing of resources between schools • Improved curriculum consistency across SU • Greater opportunity to extend transition planning between the elementary school and the middle/high school 	
<p><u>Goal #2:</u> The proposed union school district will 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.</p>	<p>The district faces immediate pressures to address and comply with the significant requirements of the Education Quality Standards. Increasing and developing the opportunities below would increase student achievement and opportunities.</p>	

<p><i>Act 46, Sec. 2(2)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● SU wide development of PBL, MTSS, PBIS, PLP's ● Technology integration ● Increase opportunities through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Virtual/Blended Learning through all grade levels k-12 ○ Expansion of Dual Enrollment & Early College ○ Community based Businesses – School Collaboratives 	
<p><u>Goal #3:</u> The proposed union school district will 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.</p> <p><i>Act 46, Sec. 2(3)</i></p>	<p>Because Twin Valley is moving from a contract to operate schools jointly to a Unified Union many of the efficiencies have already been realized.</p>	
<p><u>Goal #4:</u> The proposed union school district will promote transparency and accountability.</p> <p><i>Act 46, Sec. 2(4)</i></p>	<p>Transparency and accountability will be increased by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Using technology to actively involve and inform the public ● Stronger, more robust teacher and administrative evaluation system that raises the bar of accountability ● Consistent use of common board policies and protocols ● Development of SU wide communication plan with all stakeholders in the schools and community ● Shared Telecommunication Infrastructure 	

<p><u>Goal #5:</u> The proposed union school district will deliver education at a cost that parents, voters, and taxpayers value. <i>Act 46, Sec. 2(5)</i></p>	<p>Twin Valley has seen significant savings under their joint contract model, and has controlled education spending. However, because of the current education funding formula and recent changes in “Phantom Student” calculations, as well as a decrease in state revenues, both towns of Wilmington and Whitingham are experiencing significant education tax rate increases.</p>	
<p><u>Regional Effects:</u> What would be the regional effects of the proposed union school district, including: would the proposed union school district leave one or more other districts geographically isolated? <i>Act 46, Section 8(a)(2)</i></p>	<p>All school districts in WSSU would be part of the side by side model or an alternative structure. No districts are left isolated in the WSSU. Although Somerset is also part of the SU, they do not operate a school, have no students, and don’t have a school board. Somerset is considered a non-established town by the state.</p>	

Articles of Agreement – as required by 16 V.S.A. § 706b(b)(3) - (10), (13)		
<p>(3) The grades to be operated by the proposed union school district The grades, if any, for which the proposed union school district shall pay tuition</p>	<p>Grades PreK – 12</p>	
<p>(4) The cost and general location of any proposed new schools to be constructed The cost and general description of any proposed renovations</p>	<p>No new schools are anticipated.</p>	
<p>(5) A plan for the first year of the proposed union school district's operation for: (A) the transportation of students (B) the assignment of staff (C) curriculum The plan must be consistent with existing contracts, collective bargaining agreements, and other provisions of law, including 16 V.S.A. chapter 53, subchapter 3 (transition of employees)</p>	<p>(a) The board shall determine, in accordance with the state and federal law, the transportation services that will be provided to students in the two Unified Districts. This is already happening in Twin Valley (b) The Board shall honor all individual employment</p>	

	<p>contracts that are in place for the Twin Valley Unified Union School District on July 1st, 2018 until their respective termination dates. New contracts will be negotiated.</p> <p>(c) The forming districts recognize the benefits to be gained from establishing a district-wide curriculum as well as their obligations to do so, and to otherwise standardize their operations on or before July 1st 2018.</p>	
<p>(6) The indebtedness of the proposed merging districts that the proposed union school district shall assume.</p>	<p>Any and all operating deficits and surpluses of Wilmington and Whitingham school districts shall become property and/or obligations of the Twin Valley Union District, effective July 1st 2018.</p>	
<p>(7) The specific pieces of real property owned by the proposed merging districts that the proposed union school district shall acquire, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * their valuation * how the proposed union school district shall pay for them 	<p>Debt Service Capital Assets</p> <p>Wilmington 1,688,473 5,292,837</p> <p>Whitingham 4,085,884 10,372,827</p>	
<p>(8) <i>[repealed 2004 Acts and Resolves No. 130, Sec. 15]</i></p>		

<p>(9) Consistent with the proportional representation requirements of the Equal Protection Clause, the method of apportioning the representation that each proposed member town shall have on the proposed union school board</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * no more than 18 members total * each member town is entitled to at least one representative * see also 16 V.S.A. § 706k(c): one or more at-large directors * see also 16 V.S.A. § 707(c): weighted voting 	<p>Proportional Representation</p> <p>Wilmington 4</p> <p>Whitingham 3</p>	
<p>(10) The term of office of directors initially elected, to be arranged so that one-third expire on the day of each annual meeting of the proposed union school district, beginning on the second annual meeting, or as near to that proportion as possible</p>	<p>Wilmington will have a 1 year term, a 2 year term, and (2) 3 year terms</p> <p>Whitingham will have a 1 year term, a 2 year term and a 3 year term</p>	
<p>(13) Any other matters that the study committee considers pertinent, including whether votes on the union school district budget or public questions shall be by Australian ballot</p> <p><i>(please list each matter separately)</i></p>	<p>Both budget and school board member votes shall be Australian ballot</p>	

Executive Summary for the Twin Valley Unified Union School District

The plan of the Twin Valley Act 46 Study Committee is to form the Twin Valley Unified Union School District. The result would be a merger of Wilmington and Whitingham into one PreK-12 Unified District with approximately 430 students and two school buildings. The two districts currently contract to operate their schools jointly. Both school districts are necessary for the establishment of the Unified Union School District which will provide Pre-K through grade twelve education to all students in the newly formed unified district.

Approximately 12 years ago the two communities believed that the best solution to increased poverty in the area and declining student enrollments was to contract to operate their schools jointly. The decision was both politically and emotionally challenging. Wilmington High School was closed and PreK-5 education was offered in Wilmington and grades 6-12 education was moved to a newly renovated school in Whitingham. Over the years, the contract to operate schools jointly has reduced spending, increased opportunities and found efficiencies. The formation of a Unified Union would be the next logical step for these two communities. Both would continue to benefit from a more inclusive partnership.

The Unified Union School Board will comply with statutory requirements, recognizing existing collective bargaining agreements and commencing negotiations upon formation of the new district. The Unified Union District shall assume ownership and operate existing school facilities and property through conveyance. Subsequent sale shall first be offered to the towns including the assumption or payment of outstanding bonds and notes and the repayment of any school construction aid or grants as required by law, to the town in which it is located.

No school shall close during the first four years unless the electorate of the town in which the school is located consents to closure. Thereafter, closing will require a super-majority (greater than 70%) consent of the school board and a majority vote of the town in which the school is located.

The School Board representation is proportional to the population in each town, totaling seven (7) members: 4 from Wilmington and 3 from Whitingham.

The School Board or the statutory public school secondary school choice program shall determine the transportation, attendance, boundaries, and school choice.

The proposal will be presented to the voters of each forming school district on May 23, 2017 along with candidates for the Unified Union School Board.

This unique and statutorily contemplated merger allows the schools to continue to offer greater educational opportunity, improved services and supports, as well as expanded efficiencies through unified governance.

The Twin Valley Unified Union School District will continue to benefit from the efficient and cost-effective centralization of services including administration, bargaining, transportation, food service, enrichment, technology (infrastructure and integration), school safety and crisis prevention and intervention.

The study committee unanimously recommends approval of the proposed merger, as it will provide efficiencies and enhanced opportunities for all students in partnership with families and community members. The Twin Valley Unified Union School District shall serve all students in the two member towns collectively and equitably.

Articles of Agreement
Twin Valley Unified Union District
Serving the schools of the communities of:
Whitingham and Wilmington

The Study Committee recommends that the following Articles of Agreement be adopted by each necessary and/or advisable school district for the creation of a Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 12 district to be named **Twin Valley Unified Union District**, hereinafter referred to as the “Unified Union District”.

Article 1

The school districts of Whitingham and Wilmington are both **necessary** for the establishment of the Unified Union District. There are no school districts being recommended as advisable at this time. The above referenced school districts are hereinafter referred to as the “forming districts”. There are no additional school districts being recommended at this time.

If both of the forming districts vote to approve the merger, the Unified Union District will commence full educational operations and services on July 1, 2018 under 16 VSA, chapter 11. If Halifax, Readsboro, and Stamford vote to approve a merger (Southern Valley Unified Union School District) this would enable the two Unified Union School Districts to form a side by side structure within the same supervisory union. The formation of the Southern Valley Unified Union School district is not a required condition for the forming of the Twin Valley Unified Union School District.

Article 2

The Unified Union District will provide pre-kindergarten through grade twelve education by operating PreK-12 schools for all students in the Unified Union District.

Article 3

The Unified Union District will comply with 16 VSA Chapter 53, subchapter 3, regarding the recognition of the representatives of employees of the respective forming districts as the representatives of the employees of the Unified Union District and will commence negotiations pursuant to 16 VSA Chapter 57 for teachers and 21 VSA Chapter 22 for other employees. In the absence of new collective bargaining agreements on July 1, 2018, the School District will comply with the pre-existing master agreements pursuant to 16 VSA Chapter 53, subchapter 3. The School District shall honor all individual employment contracts that are in place for the forming school districts on June 30, 2018 until their respective termination dates.

Article 4

No new school buildings are necessary to, or proposed for, the formation of the Unified Union District. The Unified Union District will assume ownership and operate existing school facilities commencing July 1, 2018. No school closings are anticipated or proposed on July 1, 2018. (See Article 8C)

Article 5

The Unified Union District shall determine, in accordance with state and federal law, the transportation services to be provided to students in the Unified Union District. The new Unified Union Board will evaluate transportation systems during the first year of district operation. (See 16 V.S.A. §§1221, 1222, 1224 (Student transportation) 16 V.S.A. §1551 (Technical center transport)

Article 6

The forming districts of the Unified Union District recognize the benefits to be gained from establishing district-wide curricula as well as their obligation to do so, and to otherwise unify their curriculum operations on or before July 1, 2018.

Article 7

A. Capital Debt

The Unified Union District shall assume all capital debt as may exist on June 30, 2018, including both principal and interest, of the forming school districts that join the Unified Union District.

B. Operating Fund Surpluses, Deficits and Reserve Funds

The Unified Union District shall assume any and all operating deficits, surpluses, and fund balances of any of the forming districts that may exist at the close of business on June 30, 2018. In addition, reserve funds will be transferred to the Unified Union District on June 30, 2018, and will be applied for such established purposes unless otherwise determined through appropriate legal procedures.

C. Restricted Funds

The forming districts will transfer to the Unified Union District any pre-existing specific endowments or other restricted accounts, including student activity and related accounts that may exist on June 30, 2018. Any scholarship funds, trusts, endowments, or similar accounts held by, dedicated to, or benefitting individual school district's, students, employees, residents or buildings of such districts prior to June 30, 2018, shall be used thereafter for the schools, personnel, or students previously in those individual communities and districts in accordance with their provisions.

Article 8

A. Transfer of Property to Unified Union District

No later than June 30, 2018, the forming districts will convey to the Unified Union District all of their school-related real and personal property, for One U.S. Dollar, and the Unified Union District will assume all capital debt associated therewith. The Unified Union District recognizes the long term financial investments and community relationships that each town has with its school building(s). The Unified Union District will encourage appropriate use of the building by the students and community according to the policies and procedures of the Unified Union District as overseen by the building administrator.

B. Subsequent Sale of Real Property to Towns

In the event that, and at such subsequent time as the Unified Union District School Board determines, at its discretion, and subject to compliance with the school closure provisions of Article 8C, that any of the real property, including land and buildings, conveyed to it by one or more of the forming districts is or are unnecessary to the continued operation of the Unified Union District and its educational programs, the Unified Union District shall offer such real property, for the sum of One U.S. Dollar, and subject to all encumbrances of record, the assumption or payment of all outstanding bonds and notes and the repayment of any school construction aid or grants as required by Vermont law, to the town in which it is located.

The conveyance of any of the above school properties shall be conditioned upon the town owning and utilizing the real property for community and public purposes for a minimum of five years. In the event a town elects to sell the real property prior to five years of ownership, the town shall compensate the Unified Union District for all capital improvements and renovations completed after the formation of the Unified Union District and prior to the sale to the town. In the event a town elects not to acquire ownership of such real property, the Unified Union District shall, pursuant to Vermont statutes, sell the property upon such terms and conditions as established by the Unified Union District School Board.

C. Closure of Schools

The Unified Union District shall not close any school within its boundaries during the first four years after the effective date of merger unless the electorate of the town in which the school is located consents to closure. Closing a school facility after July 1, 2022, takes a vote of the electorate in the town in which the school is located, and a super majority vote (greater than 70%) of the Unified Union District School Board.

Article 9

A forming town district's representation on the Unified Union District School Board will be closely proportional to the fraction that its population bears to the aggregate population of all forming school districts in the Unified Union District. Initial Unified Union District School Board composition is based upon the 2010 Federal Census, and shall be recalculated promptly following the release of each subsequent decennial census. At such time the Unified Union District School Board shall also evaluate and consider the advisability of implementing a system of at-large voting for school directors.

The number of board members from each forming school district shall be determined by dividing the population of the town or village by one seventh of the total population of the aggregate population of the village and towns within the Unified Union District.

The initial membership on the Unified Union District Board of School Directors will be as follows:

Number of School Board Members by Town:

Town	Population	Board Members
Whitingham	1344	3
Wilmington	1876	4

Article 10

The Unified Union District School Board will be elected for three-year terms, except for those initially elected at the time of the formation of the Unified Union District. In the initial Unified Union District election, board member terms of office will be distributed as follows:

Town/District	1 Year Term 2017 - 2018	2 Year Term 2017 - 2019	3 Year Term 2017 - 2020
Whitingham	1	1	1
Wilmington	1	1	2

Pursuant to the provisions of 16 VSA §706j (b), elected school board members shall be sworn in and assume the duties of their office. The term of office for school board members elected at the May 23, 2017 election shall be one, two, or three years respectively (16 VSA §706j). One year terms begin when board members are sworn in at the initial board meeting and end on the date of the Unified Union District's annual meeting in the spring of 2018, as established under 16 VSA §706j. Thereafter, terms of office shall begin and expire on the date of the Unified Union District's annual meeting.

Article 11

The proposal forming this Unified Union District will be presented to the voters of each forming school district on May 23, 2017. The candidates for the new Unified Union District School Board will be elected on the same date, as required by law. Nominations for the office of Unified Union District director representing any district/town shall be made by filing with the clerk of that school district/town proposed as a member of the union, a statement of nomination signed by at least 30 voters in that district or one percent of the legal voters in the district, whichever is less, and accepted in writing by the nominee. A statement shall be filed not less than thirty (30) nor more than forty (40) days prior to the date of the vote.

Article 12

Upon an affirmative vote of the electorates of the school districts, and upon compliance with 16 VSA §706g, the Unified Union District shall have and exercise all of the authority which is necessary in order for it to prepare for full educational operations beginning on July 1, 2018. The Unified Union District shall, between the date of its organizational meeting under 16 VSA §706j and June 30, 2018, develop school district policies, adopt curriculum, educational programs, assessment measures and reporting procedures in order to fulfill the Education Quality Standards (State Board Rule 2000), prepare for and negotiate contractual agreements, set the school calendar for fiscal year 2019, prepare and present the budget for fiscal year 2019, prepare for Unified Union District Annual Meeting(s) and transact any other lawful business that comes before the Board, provided, however, that the exercise of such authority by the Unified Union District shall not be construed to limit or alter the authority and/or responsibilities of the School Districts of Whitingham and Wilmington. The Unified Union District shall commence full educational operations on July 1, 2018.

Article 13

The Unified Union District School Board shall propose annual budgets in accordance with 16 VSA Chapter 11. The annual budget and Board Member votes shall be conducted by Australian ballot pursuant to 17 VSA Chapter 55.

Article 14

On July 1, 2018, when the Unified Union District becomes fully operational and begins to provide educational services to students, the school districts of Whitingham and Wilmington shall cease all educational operations and shall remain in existence for the sole purpose of completing any outstanding business not given to the Unified Union District under these articles and state law. Such business shall be completed as soon as practicable, but in no event any later than December 31, 2018.

Article 15

The Unified Union District School Board shall provide opportunity for local input on policy and budget development. Structures to support and encourage public participation within the Unified Union District will be established by the Unified Union District School Board on or before June 30, 2019.

Note: Cost budget analysis and information on school configurations, student enrollment, and school choice are found in the appendices.

Twin Valley Unified Union School District Act 46 Study Committee Members

Seth Boyd, Chair

Sharon Berry

John Doty

Janna Ewart

Kathy Larsen

Therese Lounsbury

Appendices

Appendix A: Cost Benefit Analysis and Narrative

The transition from contracting to operate their schools jointly to a Unified Union School District will support and expand on the existing work that Twin Valley has completed. The new District will continue a focus on one mission, one vision and one strategic plan for continuous improvement toward the attainment of outcomes the two communities believe are important for all students. The Union District will provide a single School Board focused on the continuum of educational programs and experiences for all students through an integrated PreK - 12 school system.

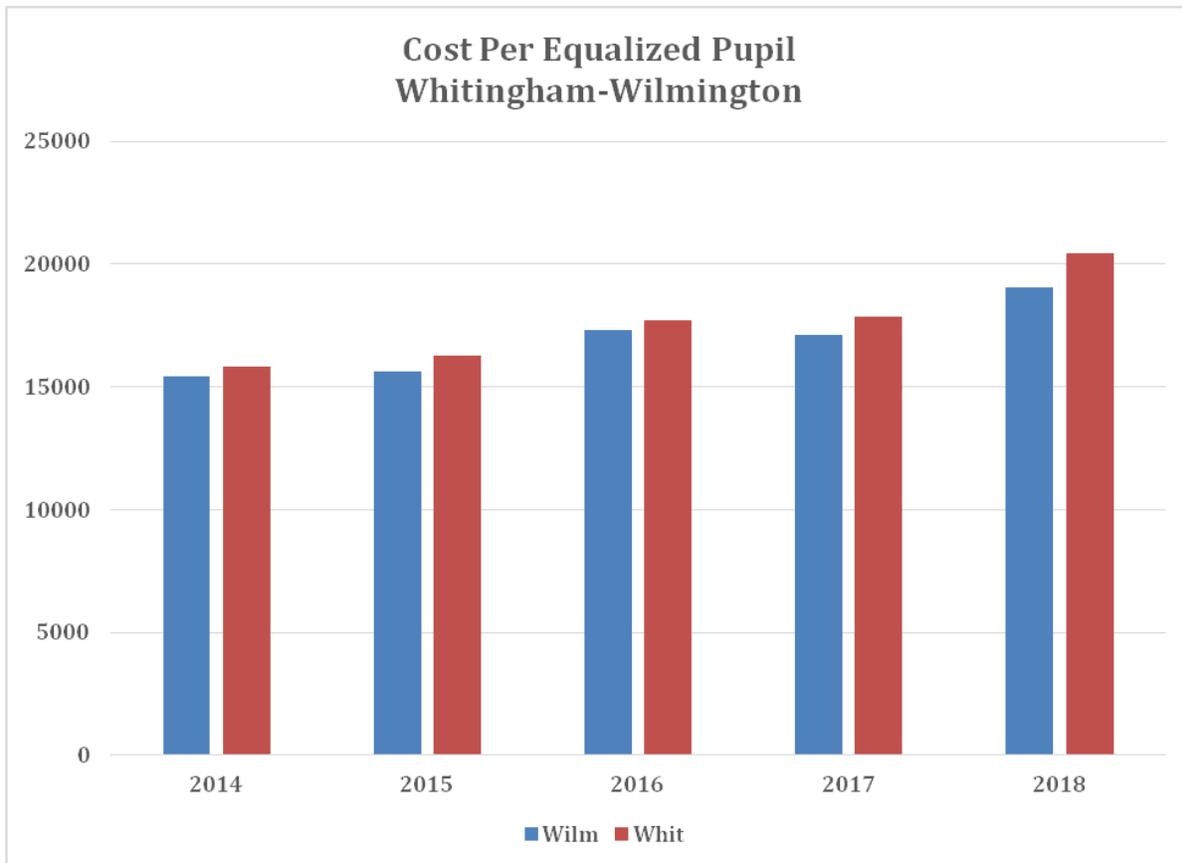
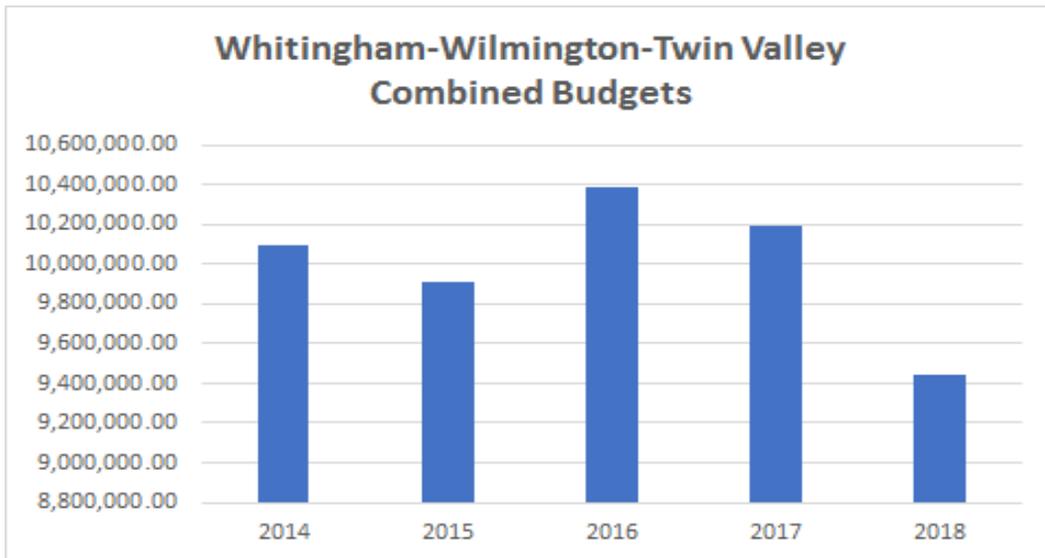
The new Unified Union Board will work to retain existing programs in a tight fiscal environment and possibly expand a variety of educational programs and learning pathways. An example of this would be the expansion of dual enrollment and the opportunity for early college for high school students. The goal for all of our students is to experience increased opportunities in a Unified Union.

Because we are moving from a contract to operate our schools jointly to a Unified Union we have not been able to target specific financial efficiencies to be gained from this transition. As we move through the process we may find efficiencies such as savings in auditing expenses or workload in the Central Office that may be reduced by moving from six school districts to three school districts. This will be a continued focus of a new supervisory union board.

Areas such as contracting, transportation, food service and special education have already been centralized, but a new Unified Union Board, in conjunction with the Supervisory Union Board, will continue to work to realize efficiencies.

Please find a 5-year budget and cost per pupil history for the Twin Valley Joint Contract District below. You will see a pattern of fiscal responsibility as the student population of the district decreases.

By forming a new Unified Union you will see that tax rates between the two towns will be merged and the per-pupil rate will stabilize in both towns. Currently, Whitingham has a high number of special needs students influencing their tax rate. This will be equalized across towns through unification. In the future this trend might be reversed and Wilmington would benefit from the unification.



The following chart shows the distribution of students across grade levels, the number of students who tuition in to the school, and the number of students who leave because of state school choice or special education. Also, it shows the number of students attending the technical school in Brattleboro.

Students Attending Twin Valley Schools

Grade	# of Students	Whit	Wilm	Searsburg	Dover	Halifax	Readsboro	Marlboro	Wardsboro	Prof Courtesy
PK	29	13	14	1						1
K	24	7	19	1						
1	23	10	12							1
2	30	10	20							
3	33	13	17	2						1
4	29	14	14	1						
5	33	14	19							
6	27	10	17							
7	27	13	14							
8	29	13	13	1	1					1
9	37	11	20	2	1	1	2			
10	24	9	11	2		2				
11	43	16	18	1	2	2		3	1	
12	35	16	12	1	2	4				
Total	423	169	220	12	6	9	2	3	1	4

**Whitingham-Wilmington Students
Attending Other Schools**

Grade	# School Choice Lottery	School Attending	# Special Ed Placements	# Attending WRCC
PK				
K				
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6			1	
7				
8				
9	6	BUHS	1	
10	4	BUHS		
11	4	BUHS		9
12	1	BUHS		2
Total	15		2	11

Tax rates for Wilmington and Whitingham will affect both towns differently. Using a static 5-year budget model (no increase in budgets or changes to student population and a static number for the state yield) you will see the tax implications for both communities.

	FY 18	FY 19	FY 20	FY 21	FY 22	FY 23
Whitingham - Yes Merger Vote	2.1352	2.0284	1.9270	1.8376	1.8576	1.8776
Whitingham - No Merger Vote		2.1352	2.1352	2.1352	2.1352	2.1352
Wilmington - Yes Merger Vote	1.9532	1.8555	1.8784	1.8984	1.9184	1.9384
Wilmington - No Merger Vote		1.9532	1.9532	1.9532	1.9532	1.9532

As you can see from the model, at the present time both Whitingham and Wilmington will benefit from unification. With changes in populations and students this trend could reverse, but unification will in the long term, benefit both communities with greater stability to tax rates.

**School Configurations, Enrollments and Choice
Twin Valley Summary Data**

	Elementary	Mid/High School
Grades Served	PreK-5	6-12
FY16 ADM	202.90	203.60
FY16 Education Spending for Equalized Pupils	Wilm \$17,324 Whit \$17,728	Wilm \$17,324 Whit \$17,728
FY16 Student/Teacher Ratio	9.18 : 1	6.76 : 1
FY16 Student/Administrator Ratio	202.9 : 1	203.6 : 2
FY15 ADM	209.95	223.00
FY15 Education Spending for Equalized Pupils	Wilm \$15,615 Whit \$16,249	Wilm \$15,615 Whit \$16,249
FY15 Student/Teacher Ratio	9.5 : 1	7.61 : 1
FY15 Student/Administrator Ratio	209.95 : 1	223 : 2
FY14 ADM	229.45	224.70
FY14 Education Spending for Equalized Pupils	Wilm \$15,402 Whit \$15,803	Wilm \$15,402 Whit \$15,803
FY14 Student/Teacher Ratio	10.34 : 1	7.67 : 1
FY14 Student/Administrator Ratio	229.45 : 1	224.7 : 2
Small Schools Grant	N/A	N/A

School Choice

Public high school choice is currently available to all high school students currently living in districts that operate a high school in Vermont (within capacity limits specified in statute and put in place by local public school boards). No changes are planned at this time. Discussions and decisions regarding school choice will be at the discretion of the Union School District Board of School Directors.

School Configurations

	Elementary Enrollment	Mid/High School Enrollment
Twin Valley Elementary School	197	
Twin Valley Middle/High School		231

At the present time 15 students from Wilmington and Whitingham take advantage of public high school choice and 10 students enter Twin Valley High School through this program. Also, Twin Valley Middle High School currently has 18 tuition students from non-operating districts.

School Closures

At the present time there are no school closures recommended. Please see Article 4 and Article 8c.

Appendix C: Educational Benefits to Students

Please see the charts below for student performance levels on the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) summative state tests in English Language Arts (ELA) for 2016 (End of School Year 2015-2016) and 2015 (End of School Year 2014-2015).

Twin Valley ELA Summative 2016				WSSU ELA 2016		VT State ELA 2016	
Grade	# of Students Tested	% Level 3 or Above	Average Scale Score	% Level 3 or Above	Average Scale Score	% Level 3 or Above	Average Scale Score
3	31	39%	2417±15	50%	2433±12	54%	2438±1
4	33	48%	2471±12	56%	2481±10	54%	2477±1
5	29	76%	2548±13	66%	2536±10	58%	2515±1
6	20	40%	2527±16	50%	2537±12	56%	2539±1
7	36	50%	2540±12	53%	2548±10	58%	2562±1
8	36	61%	2577±15	58%	2574±13	59%	2580±1
11	35	51%	2593±21	51%	2593±21	57%	2598±2

Twin Valley ELA Summative 2015				WSSU ELA 2015		VT State ELA 2015	
Grade	# of Students Tested	% Level 3 or Above	Average Scale Score	% Level 3 or Above	Average Scale Score	% Level 3 or Above	Average Scale Score
3	34	56%	2431±14	59%	2435±10	52%	2431±1
4	30	60%	2469±16	63%	2478±11	51%	2470±1
5	22	55%	2506±18	50%	2501±12	57%	2510±1
6	34	41%	2512±13	43%	2520±10	53%	2532±1
7	36	44%	2536±14	50%	2539±12	55%	2558±1
8	30	40%	2547±16	50%	2565±13	54%	2569±1
11	27	33%	2540±20	33%	2540±20	58%	2597±1

Please see the charts below for student performance levels on the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) summative state tests in Math for 2016 (End of School Year 2015-2016) and 2015 (End of School Year 2014-2015).

Twin Valley Math Summative 2016				WSSU Math 2016		VT State Math 2016	
Grade	# of Students Tested	% Level 3 or Above	Average Scale Score	% Level 3 or Above	Average Scale Score	% Level 3 or Above	Average Scale Score
3	31	48%	2408±12	33%	2547±12	44%	2564±2
4	33	33%	2465±10	44%	2483±8	50%	2482±1
5	29	45%	2527±13	34%	2513±9	43%	2509±1
6	20	15%	2476±19	34%	2517±13	41%	2522±1
7	30	36%	2532±14	39%	2537±11	46%	2548±1
8	38	34%	2545±14	33%	2547±12	44%	2564±2
11	35	37%	2553±23	37%	2553±23	38%	2581±2

Twin Valley Math Summative 2015				WSSU Math 2015		VT State Math 2015	
Grade	# of Students Tested	% Level 3 or Above	Average Scale Score	% Level 3 or Above	Average Scale Score	% Level 3 or Above	Average Scale Score
3	34	53%	2431±10	55%	2439±8	51%	2435±1
4	30	27%	2455±14	37%	2468±9	45%	2472±1
5	22	23%	2469±15	29%	2480±10	42%	2503±1
6	34	26%	2493±13	26%	2501±10	37%	2516±1
7	36	11%	2485±14	15%	2501±12	43%	2542±1
8	30	37%	2550±17	39%	2559±14	40%	2553±1
11	27	19%	2471±23	19%	2471±23	37%	2581±2

Looking at student results there is no way to break out scores from the two communities because they contract to operate schools jointly and reported as one district. The Unified Union would continue to work on curriculum implementations and local assessments to improve student performance.

The Educational Benefits

When the towns of Whitingham and Wilmington developed a contract to operate jointly it meant significant sacrifice and compromise. Each town lost part of its identity and schools. Wilmington no longer had a high school and Whitingham lost its elementary school. But there was an immediate benefit of our consolidation: we could continue to provide schools as close as possible to where our students lived. The sense of local pride and critical involvement of families in the schools has been re-established and the study committee believes that unification would further enhance these relationships in both communities. Although some students have to travel a bit longer to access schools, they don't have to cross mountains on their daily trips. The schools remain very accessible to parents and the community. This is critically important to student success. We have already combined two student bodies and faculties and because of this have stronger academic programs. A Unified Union would give us the opportunity for this relationship to continue to grow and lead to stronger outcomes for our students.

We have realized benefits in many areas:

Our Middle High School

Bringing together the middle and high school into one building produced many opportunities to improve the quality of education. It typically takes at least five years for most changes to be implemented and begin to have positive impacts. We are now in the third year of operation for the middle high school and look forward to continuing to improve as a Unified Union District.

Our school opened in 2014 with a newly renovated building and a new administration. Teachers had been in two different buildings. As a group, they had not worked together or had consistent professional development. Through the Agency of Education, they immediately began training to pilot proficiency based learning and they began to grow as a collaborative group. This year proficiency based learning is being implemented. Students are more easily able to move at individual pace; for example, Algebra One is open to eighth graders. For those who are not able to maintain the pace, extended learning time has been created. We have extra remedial blocks during the school day as well as Saturday school and vacation school.

Instead of operating a separate middle and high school, we are now one school. Aligning grade 6-12 curriculum has produced significant advantages. As we are moving to proficiency based learning and assessment, there is a common language and there are common expectations throughout the school. The "fundamental five" instructional strategies are used schoolwide and we are in our second year of the schoolwide Collins Writing Program. It is easier for staff to have content area conversations and understand student needs in different areas.

It typically takes at least five years to see program implementation begin to have an impact but having the ability to be more responsive to student needs is beginning to make a difference. In addition to regular programming, we have more flexibility with special education and Title One staff and are better able to allocate them as they are needed at different grade levels.

Our Elementary School

We were fortunate to have had a strong, visionary elementary principal in place prior to consolidating the two elementary schools into one. This allowed for extensive planning for the merger. It included overseeing a renovation and expansion of the old elementary school building in Wilmington in preparation for nearly doubling the student population there when we brought in the elementary students of Whitingham. It also meant preparing to bring together two separate and diverse faculties and the melding of two student populations and parent communities. Many operational efficiencies were realized immediately, but there were also significant advantages for both students and teachers.

Teachers now have collaboration ability that was not available to them previously. There are at least two teachers at each grade level. A teaming and coaching model along with a long term professional development plan means there will be consistent programming PreK through 5th grade. This improved the instruction and assessment continuum which has in turn improved learning opportunities. Younger students in particular are feeling the impact of more consistent academic expectations. As relationships have formed between teachers and students, it has allowed for more individual needs of students to be met. The school is now poised to pilot some Personalized Learning Plans in the fourth and fifth grade.

The school has a stable, veteran staff of teachers and paras who have all been participating in professional development together. When there is turnover, there are opportunities for advancement and broadening of responsibilities among teachers while offering consistency for students.

Over the years, the needs of the school community have changed. We are constantly adapting to meet those needs both during and outside of the school day. We have extended our afterschool programming hours to better meet the needs of working parents. Students have the option for an extra meal in the afternoon. Part of our vision is to facilitate even more changes to align the programming to make it an extended learning opportunity that better meets student academic, emotional and social needs.

After four years of operation, the school is beginning to be seen as one community. Parents are less likely to see children from two different towns. Instead there are more students with which to interact and they are all members of a safe and caring learning community. The climate is welcoming and there is an emphasis on the importance of relationships.

As with the middle high school, the groundwork has been laid for the elementary school to make even more progress once we are in a Unified Union District.

The PreK- 12 system and beyond

It is equally important to look at the ways the two schools are now working together and have become part of the community. There are several benefits:

- a single and consistent vision with commonly held beliefs and values.
- a more aligned K-12 curriculum.
- shared technology equipment and services including the use of one-to-one Chrome books beginning in grade three and continuing through grade twelve.
- a strong guidance program that includes school-based clinicians and the ability to follow students as they advance through the grades.
- increased ability to focus on state initiatives such as the Education Quality Standards and Act 77 implementation.
- fewer and easier transitions among grades and between schools.
- increased ability to retain paras and certain teachers because they can be moved between the schools depending on needs.
- an improved teaching environment means less turnover and subsequently a better investment in professional development.
- programs such as the local prevention partnership and the youth sports program have had an increased and positive impact within both schools and throughout the valley.
- our coordinated school health committee has developed a wellness policy that is held up as a state model.
- the cooperation of and coordination by our administrations allows for flexibility.
- Our music program is innovative with teachers shared K-12 and a 6-12 band
- historically intense sports rivals now play together. There are more opportunities for all to participate. They show improved level of play. They have made it to some state championships and are frequently honored for their sportsmanship.
- increased sense of belonging and increased pride in the system as a whole. Secondary students are welcomed at the elementary school for spirit days and celebrations. Younger students are exposed to and excited about extracurricular events such as high school athletics and the Iron Chef competition. They look up to the older kids as role models and are impressed when they arrive each spring in their graduation gowns. Secondary students perform regular community service both within and outside of the schools. They help organize and take part in events for seniors and others in the community.

Increased Efficiencies

By closing one school we were immediately able to realize efficiencies. Funds for maintenance of the old high school were reallocated toward facility upgrades at the two schools which would remain open.

The total number of faculty and staff were reduced. Not only were fewer classroom teachers needed at the elementary level because of increased class size, our number of administrators was also cut from a total of five to three. Secretarial staff was cut from six to three and custodial staff were cut from seven to five.

We combined our transportation system so we now have fewer buses and fewer routes. The number of full time drivers has gone from nine to five.

More students are now participating in the free and reduced lunch program. We hired a food services manager. We have expanded our food service offering with breakfast and extended day meals during the school year and also now offer free breakfast and lunch programs throughout the summer. Despite this we have fewer staff overall.

Other benefits include the ability to share specialized furniture and technology rather than purchasing new. Our business office management has seen less redundancy with streamlined purchasing and data collection. There is only one budget to develop and manage. There are still three audits now but as a Unified Union District, there would only be one.

In the last 15 years our budget has only increased 11%. We would have to go back to 2006 to have a budget as low as we have now. As a Unified Union District, we recognize that our numbers will continue to decline and we will need to look for further efficiencies and ways to operate our educational programs that still provide our students with a quality education.

Our School Board

When our two school districts voted to consolidate, we combined the two town school boards so we all meet at the same time. Some members of each town board are also members of the Twin Valley School Board. We continued with our legal and financial obligations but as a group we also wanted a better understanding of the education provided to our students. One way this was done was the creation of an Academic Committee. It continues to be an ongoing sub-committee that meets once a month to discuss curriculum and assessment. The committee consists of the two building principals, two board members, and the WSSU curriculum and integration specialist. At each meeting we review progress at each school on implementation of initiatives such as the Education Quality Standards and Proficiency Based Learning. The committee is the liaison between the boards and academic programs. We schedule regular teacher presentations at board meetings so board members and the community can acquire more information about school programs. The Academic Committee allows the school board to stay focused on student learning but also be more visionary. This would continue and hopefully be strengthened by a new Unified Union Board.

Looking into the future

The Twin Valley Unified Union District will be tasked with identifying potential for future growth. The new board will be charged with developing a vision that will continue the positive work we have started while determining how to remain sustainable.

Economic development will not come to our communities without strong schools. We need to work with the economic development people in our neighboring towns in Windham , Bennington and Franklin (MA) counties. Our success is tied to one another. Our struggle is tied to the real world. If we don't have a strong school at Twin Valley then the potential for economic development is diminished.

As we look at economic development, we not only will determine our real population concerns but also start to understand how to develop more relevant programs and curriculum. We are already working with a workforce and education development specialist at the Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation on a program in our schools to better prepare students in grades 10-12 for life after high school. We actively participate in the work of the Windham Regional Career Center and their Pathways to Success program. This allows us to see how curriculum is changing and what we need to do to better prepare our students. It is clear, however, that there is much more to be done.

We see a need to expand the internship program for juniors and seniors as well as their dual enrollment opportunities. We would like an increased emphasis on industrial technology classes. As part of the high school renovations, we have allocated space in the building for more industrial technology offerings.

Our valley has a large, supportive artistic community and we see potential for the involvement of our artisans in the school programs. They could possibly offer some internships in addition to more experiential opportunities. This could have a subsequent connection to economic development.

We would like to consider engaging our guidance staff with our graduates in their post graduation years to further inform our future work. Another possibility might be to structure personal learning plans so they include post graduate aspirations. Having educational programming that is more relevant to our students' future needs is an important goal.

Consolidating has been extremely beneficial. It has given us many opportunities for growth and the study committee process is causing us to look further for that growth. It has been a valuable opportunity. It caused us to reflect on how far we have come since our merger. Equally important, we have an improved understanding of how critical it now is to start looking ahead. We look forward to the additional advantages and potential growth we will realize by becoming the Twin Valley Unified Union District.

Section 3:

**Southern Valley Unified Union School District
Vermont State Worksheet**

Study Committee Worksheet for All Phases of Voluntary Merger

Please submit this to the Agency with the Study Committee Report

Current Supervisory Union or Unions (list each)	Potentially Merging Districts Pursuant to 16 V.S.A. § 706b(b)(1)-(2) (list each)	Is the District:	
		Necessary	Advisable
Windham Southwest Supervisory Union	Halifax		yes
	Readsboro		yes
	Stamford		yes

Type of Merger	
<i>Please refer to the related eligibility worksheets to determine baseline eligibility for each merger type.</i>	(column reserved for agency use)
<input type="checkbox"/> Accelerated Merger (Act 46, Section 6)	
<p>A Regional Education District (RED) or one of its variations (Act 153 (2010) and Act 156 (2012))</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> RED (Act 153, Secs. 2-3, as amended by Act 156 , Sec. 1 and Act 46, Sec. 16)</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Side by Side Merger (Act 156 , Sec. 15) Districts involved in the related merger:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Layered Merger (Union Elementary School District) (Act 156, Sec. 16)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Modified Unified Union School District (M.U.U.S.D.) (Act 156, Sec. 17, as amended by Act 56 (2013), Sec. 3)</p>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Conventional Merger – merger into a preferred structure after deadline for an Accelerated Merger (Act 46, Section 7)	

Dates, ADM, and Name	
Date on which the proposal will be submitted to the voters of each district (16 V.S.A. § 706b(b)(11)): May 23, 2017	
Date on which the new district, if approved, will begin operating (16 V.S.A. § 706b(b)(12)): July 1, 2018	
Combined ADM of all “necessary” districts in the current fiscal year: 0	
Proposed name of new district: Southern Valley Unified Union District	

Please complete the following tables with **brief, specific** statements of how the proposed union school district will comply with the each of the listed items. ***Bulleted statements are acceptable.***

The Proposed School District is in the Best Interest of the State, Students, and School Districts – as required by 16 V.S.A. § 706c		
<p><u>Goal #1:</u> The proposed union school district will provide substantial equity in the quality and variety of educational opportunities.</p> <p><i>Act 46, Sec. 2(1)</i></p>	<p>Potential Benefits for PreK-8</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Vertical and horizontal curriculum alignment for the K-8 district ● One Action Plan for the K-8 district ● Increase the academic offerings among the schools through technology and instructor collaboration (due to geographic location) ● Narrowed focus on age- appropriate learning opportunities ● Common local assessment in the Unified Union that are aligned to SU assessments. ● Sharing of resources for instruction, including enrichment opportunities 	
<p><u>Goal #2:</u> The proposed union school district will 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.</p> <p><i>Act 46, Sec. 2(2)</i></p>	<p>The districts face immediate pressures to address and comply with the significant requirements of the Education Quality Standards, especially at the K-8 level for the smaller schools of Halifax, Stamford and Readsboro. Increasing and developing the items listed below would increase student achievement and opportunities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● SU wide development of PBL, MTSS, PBIS, PLP ● Technology integration to offer more learning opportunities. ● Increase opportunities through Virtual/Blended Learning in grades K-8 	

<p><u>Goal #3:</u> The proposed union school district will 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.</p> <p><i>Act 46, Sec. 2(3)</i></p>	<p>The PreK – 8 Unified district would benefit in the following ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sharing of Special Education under the SU ● Sharing of Para-Educators ● Transportation when feasible ● Sharing of Special teachers (art, music, nurse, OT, PT school psychologist) ● Sharing of after school activities ● Alignment of Central Office systems that are common across the Supervisory Union ● One unified teacher contract for the SU ● Opportunities to consolidate Food Services ● Consolidate purchasing of instructional materials and equipment ● Reducing bureaucratic redundancy is made possible with fewer districts ● Teachers are often underserved in their current professional development activities. The size of existing districts is often too small for teachers to share professional development. With districts unifying, more shared resources related to curriculum or operational expertise, technology, training, assessment planning, instructional coaching and other professional development activities are available 	
<p><u>Goal #4:</u> The proposed union school district will promote transparency and accountability.</p> <p><i>Act 46, Sec. 2(4)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use of technology to involve and inform the public actively ● Stronger, more robust teacher and administrative evaluation system that raises the bar of accountability ● Consistent use of common board policies and protocols ● Development of SU wide communication plan with all stakeholders in the schools and communities ● Proficiency based learning reports SU wide ● One Unified Student Information System ● Shared Telecommunication Infrastructure 	
<p><u>Goal #5:</u> The proposed union school district will deliver education at a cost that parents, voters, and taxpayers value.</p> <p><i>Act 46, Sec. 2(5)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reduce audit costs from 3 districts to 1 ● Decrease redundancy in all areas ● Due to larger ADM, reduction in tax variation from year to year 	

<p><u>Regional Effects:</u></p> <p>What would be the regional effects of the proposed union school district, including: would the proposed union school district leave one or more other districts geographically isolated?</p> <p><i>Act 46, Section 8(a)(2)</i></p>	<p>All school districts in WSSU would be part of two side by side model or an alternative model. Wilmington, Whitingham, Readsboro, Halifax and Stamford would be part of the side by side and Searsburg would be an alternative model. Although Somerset is also part of the SU, they do not operate a school, have no students, and don't have a school board. Somerset is considered a non-established town by the state. No districts are left isolated.</p>	
<p>(3) The grades to be operated by the proposed union school district</p> <p>The grades, if any, for which the proposed union school district shall pay tuition</p>	<p>Pre-K – 8</p> <p>Pay tuition for grades 9-12</p>	
<p>(4) The cost and general location of any proposed new schools to be constructed</p> <p>The cost and general description of any proposed renovations</p>	<p>No new construction is being proposed</p> <p>N/A</p>	
<p>(5) A plan for the first year of the proposed union school district's operation for:</p> <p>(A) the transportation of students</p> <p>(B) the</p>	<p>(a) The board shall determine, in accordance with the state and federal law, the transportation services that will be provided to students in the Southern Valley Unified Union.</p> <p>(b) The Board shall honor all individual employment contracts that are in place for the Southern Valley school districts on July 1, 2018 until their respective termination dates. New contracts will be negotiated.</p>	

<p>assignment of staff (C) curriculum The plan must be consistent with existing contracts, collective bargaining agreements, and other provisions of law, including 16 V.S.A. chapter 53, subchapter 3 (transition of employees)</p>	<p>(c) The forming districts of the two Union Districts recognize the benefits to be gained from establishing a district-wide curriculum as well as their obligations to do so, and to otherwise standardize their operations on or before July 1, 2018.</p>															
<p>(6) The indebtedness of the proposed merging districts that the proposed union school district shall assume.</p>	<p>Any and all operating deficits and surpluses of the Halifax, Stamford and Readsboro school districts shall become property and/ or obligations of Southern Valley Union District, effective July 1, 2018. No later than July 1, 2018, the forming districts will convey to the Unified District all of their school-related property for \$1 and the unified district will assume all capital debt associated therewith.</p>															
<p>(7) The specific pieces of real property owned by the proposed merging districts that the proposed union school district shall acquire, including: * their valuation * how the proposed union school district shall pay for them</p>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Assets</th> <th>Debts</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Readsboro</td> <td>121,537</td> </tr> <tr> <td>0</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Halifax</td> <td>717,395</td> </tr> <tr> <td>0</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Stamford</td> <td>243.300</td> </tr> <tr> <td>0</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Assets	Debts	Readsboro	121,537	0		Halifax	717,395	0		Stamford	243.300	0		
Assets	Debts															
Readsboro	121,537															
0																
Halifax	717,395															
0																
Stamford	243.300															
0																
<p>(8) <i>[repealed 2004 Acts and Resolves No. 130, Sec. 15]</i></p>																

<p>(9) Consistent with the proportional representation requirements of the Equal Protection Clause, the method of apportioning the representation that each proposed member town shall have on the proposed union school board</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * no more than 18 members total * each member town is entitled to at least one representative * see also 16 <p>V.S.A. § 706k(c): one or more at-large directors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * see also 16 <p>V.S.A. § 707(c): weighted voting</p>	<p>Proportional Representation</p> <p>Halifax 3</p> <p>Readsboro 3</p> <p>Stamford 3</p>	
<p>(10) The term of office of directors initially elected, to be arranged so that one-third expire on the day of each annual meeting of the proposed union school district, beginning on the second annual meeting, or as near to that proportion as possible</p>	<p>Each District in the Unified Union starts with 1 one year term, a 2 year term, and a 3 year term.</p>	

<p>(13) Any other matters that the study committee considers pertinent, including whether votes on the union school district budget or public questions shall be by Australian ballot <i>(please list each matter separately)</i></p>	<p>Both budgets and school board members will be voted by Australian ballot</p>	
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Executive Summary for the Southern Valley Unified Union School District

The plan of the Southern Valley Act 46 Study Committee includes the formation of the Southern Valley Unified Union School District. This merges the School Districts of Halifax, Readsboro and Stamford into one PreK-12 district offering PreK – 8 educational services at three elementary schools and paying tuition for all students in grades 9–12. There will be approximately 166 students in the new Unified Union.

All three school districts are advisable for the establishment of the Unified Union School District.

The Unified Union School Board will comply with statutory requirements, recognizing existing collective bargaining agreements and commencing negotiations upon formation of the new district.

The Unified Union District shall assume ownership and operate existing school facilities and property through conveyance. Subsequent sale shall first be offered to the towns including the assumption or payment of outstanding bonds and notes and the repayment of any school construction aid or grants as required by law, to the town in which it is located.

No schools shall close during the first four years after the effective date of merger unless the electorate of the town in which the school is located consents to closure. Thereafter, closing will require a unanimous vote of the School Board and a majority vote of the town in which the school is located.

The School Board representation is proportional to the population in each town, totaling nine members: 3 from Halifax, 3 from Readsboro and 3 from Stamford.

The School Board shall determine transportation, attendance, boundaries, and school choice.

The proposal will be presented to the voters of each forming school district on May 23, 2017 along with candidates for the Unified Union School Board.

This contemplated merger allows the schools to offer greater educational opportunity, improved services and supports, as well as expanded efficiencies through shared governance.

The Southern Valley Unified Union School District will benefit from the efficient and cost-effective centralization of services including administration, bargaining, transportation, food service, enrichment, technology (infrastructure and integration), school safety and crisis prevention and intervention.

The study committee unanimously recommends approval of the proposed merger, as it will provide efficiencies and enhanced opportunities for all students in partnership with families and community members. The Southern Valley Unified Union School District shall serve all students in the three member towns collectively and equitably.

Articles of Agreement
Southern Valley Unified Union School District
Serving the schools of the communities of
Halifax, Readsboro and Stamford

The Study Committee recommends that the following Articles of Agreement be adopted by each necessary/ advisable school district for the creation of a pre-Kindergarten through Grade 12 Unified Union School District to be named **Southern Valley Unified Union School District**, hereinafter referred to as the “Unified Union District“.

Article 1

The Town School Districts of Halifax, Readsboro, and Stamford are **advisable** for the establishment of the Southern Valley Unified Union School District. No school districts are recommended as being necessary. The above referenced school districts are hereinafter referred to as the “forming districts”. There are no additional school districts being recommended at this time.

If the forming districts vote to approve the merger, the Southern Valley Unified Union School District will commence full educational operations and services on July 1, 2018 under the provisions of 16 VSA chapter 11; provided, however that the votes approving creation of the Unified Union District shall not become effective unless and until the voters of the Whitingham and Wilmington School Districts vote to approve formation of the Twin Valley Unified Union District, enabling the two Unified Union School Districts to form a side by side structure within the same supervisory union.

Article 2

The new Unified Union District will provide for the education of all PreK-12 students, by operating grades PreK-8 and paying tuition for students in grades 9-12.

Article 3

The Unified Union District will comply with 16 VSA Chapter 53, subchapter 3, regarding the recognition of the representatives of employees of the respective forming districts as the representatives of the employees of the Union School District and will commence negotiations pursuant to 16 VSA Chapter 57 for teachers and 21 VSA Chapter 22 for other employees. In the absence of new collective bargaining agreements on July 1, 2018, the Unified Union District will comply with the pre-existing master agreements pursuant to 16 VSA Chapter 53, subchapter 3. The Unified Union District shall honor all individual employment contracts that are in place for the forming school districts on June 30, 2018 until their respective termination dates.

Article 4

No new school buildings are necessary to, or proposed for, the formation of the Unified Union District. The Unified Union District will assume ownership and operate existing school facilities commencing July 1, 2018. No school closings are anticipated or proposed on July 1, 2018. (See Article 8C)

Article 5

The Unified Union District shall determine, in accordance with state and federal law, the transportation services to be provided to students in the Unified Union District. The new Unified Union Board will evaluate transportation systems during the first year of district operation. (See 16 V.S.A. §§1221, 1222, 1224 (Student transportation) 16 V.S.A. §1551 (Technical center transport))

Article 6

The forming districts of the Unified Union District recognize the benefits to be gained from establishing a supervisory union-wide curricula as well as their obligation to do so, and to otherwise standardize their operations on or before July 1, 2018.

Article 7

A. Capital Debt

The Unified Union District shall assume all capital debt as may exist on June 30, 2018, including both principal and interest, of the forming school districts that join the Unified Union District.

B. Operating Fund Surpluses, Deficits and Reserve Funds

The Unified Union District shall assume any and all operating deficits, surpluses, and fund balances of any of the forming districts that may exist at the close of business on June 30, 2018. In addition, reserve funds will be transferred to the Unified Union District on June 30, 2018 and will be applied for such established purposes unless otherwise determined through appropriate legal procedures.

C. Restricted Funds

The forming districts will transfer to the Unified Union District any pre-existing specific endowments or other restricted accounts, including student activity and related accounts that may exist on June 30, 2018. Any scholarship funds, trusts, endowments, or similar accounts held by, dedicated to, or benefitting individual school district's, students, employees, residents or buildings of such districts prior to June 30, 2018 shall be used thereafter for the schools, personnel or students previously in those individual communities and districts in accordance with their provisions.

Article 8

A. Transfer of Property to Unified Union District

No later than June 30, 2018, the forming districts will convey to the Unified Union District all of their school-related real and personal property, for One U.S. Dollar, and the Unified Union District will assume all capital debt associated therewith. The Unified Union District recognizes the long term financial investments and community relationships that each town has with its school building(s). The Unified Union District will encourage appropriate use of the building by the students and community according to the policies and procedures of the Unified Union District as overseen by the building administrator.

B. Subsequent Sale of Real Property to Towns

In the event that, and at such subsequent time as the Unified Union District School Board determines, at its discretion, and subject to compliance with the school closure provisions of Article 8C, that any of the real property, including land and buildings, conveyed to it by one or more of the forming districts is or are unnecessary to the continued operation of the Unified Union District and its educational programs, the Unified Union District shall offer such real property, for the sum of One U.S. Dollar, and subject to all encumbrances of record, the assumption or payment of all outstanding bonds and notes and the repayment of any school construction aid or grants as required by Vermont law, to the town in which it is located.

The conveyance of any of the above school properties shall be conditioned upon the town owning and utilizing the real property for community and public purposes for a minimum of five years. In the event a town elects to sell the real property prior to five years of ownership, the town shall compensate the Unified Union District for all capital improvements and renovations completed after the formation of the Unified Union District and prior to the sale to the town. In the event a town elects not to acquire ownership of such real property, the Unified Union District shall, pursuant to Vermont statutes, sell the property upon such terms and conditions as established by the Unified Union District School Board.

C. Closure of Schools

The Unified Union District shall not close any school within its boundaries during the first four years after the effective date of merger unless the electorate of the town in which the school is located consents to closure. Closing a school facility after July 1, 2022 takes a vote of the electorate in the town in which the school is located, and a unanimous vote of the Unified Union District School Board.

Article 9

A forming town district's representation on the Unified Union District School Board will be closely proportional to the fraction that its population bears to the aggregate population of all forming school districts in the Unified Union District. Initial Unified Union District School Board composition is based upon the 2010 Federal Census, and shall be recalculated promptly following the release of each subsequent decennial census. At such time the Unified Union District School Board shall also evaluate and consider the advisability of implementing a system of at-large voting for school directors.

The number of board members from each forming school district shall be determined by dividing the population of the town or village by one ninth of the total population of the aggregate population of the village and towns within the Unified Union District.

The initial membership on the Unified Union District Board of School Directors will be as follows:

Number of School Board Members by Town

Town	Population	Board Members
Halifax	723	3
Readsboro	742	3
Stamford	818	3

The Unified Union District School Board will be elected for three-year terms, except for those initially elected at the time of the formation of the Unified Union District. In the initial Unified Union District election, board member terms of office will be distributed as follows:

Town	1 Year Term 2017 - 2018	2 Year Term 2017 - 2019	3 Year Term 2017 - 2020
Halifax	1	1	1
Readsboro	1	1	1
Stamford	1	1	1

Pursuant to the provisions of 16 VSA §706j (b), elected school board members shall be sworn in and assume the duties of their office. The term of office for school board members elected at the May 23, 2017 election shall be one, two, or three years respectively (16 VSA §706j). One year terms begin when board members are sworn in at the initial board meeting and end on the date of the Unified Union District's annual meeting in the spring of 2018, as established under 16 VSA §706j. Thereafter, terms of office shall begin and expire on the date of the Unified Union District's annual meeting.

Article 11

The proposal forming this Unified Union District will be presented to the voters of each forming school district on May 23, 2017. The candidates for the new Unified Union District School Board will be elected on the same date, as required by law. Nominations for the office of Unified Union District School Board Member representing any district/town shall be made by filing with the clerk of that school district/town proposed as a member of the union, a statement of nomination signed by at least 30 voters in that district or one percent of the legal voters in the district, whichever is less, and accepted in writing by the nominee. A statement shall be filed not less than thirty (30) nor more than forty (40) days prior to the date of the vote.

Article 12

Upon an affirmative vote of the electorates of the forming school districts, and the affirmative votes of the Twin Valley Unified Union School district, and upon compliance with 16 VSA §706g, the Unified Union District shall have and exercise all of the authority which is necessary in order for it to prepare for full educational operations beginning on July 1, 2018. The Unified Union District shall, between the date of its organizational meeting under 16 VSA §706j and June 30, 2018, develop school district policies, adopt curriculum, educational programs, assessment measures and reporting procedures in order to fulfill the Education Quality Standards (State Board Rule 2000), prepare for and negotiate contractual agreements, set the school calendar for fiscal year 2019, prepare and present the budget for fiscal year 2019, prepare for Unified Union District Annual Meeting(s) and transact any other lawful business that comes before the Board, provided, however, that the exercise of such authority by the Unified Union District shall not be construed to limit or alter the authority and/or responsibilities of the School Districts of Halifax, Readsboro and Stamford. The Unified Union District shall commence full educational operations on July 1, 2018.

Article 13

The Unified Union District School Board shall propose annual budgets in accordance with 16 VSA Chapter 11. The annual budget and Board Member votes shall be conducted by Australian ballot pursuant to 17 VSA Chapter 55.

Article 14

On July 1, 2018, when the Union School District becomes fully operational and begins to provide educational services to the students, the forming districts shall cease all educational operations and shall remain in existence for the sole purpose of completing any outstanding business not given to the Union School District under these articles and state law. Such business shall be completed as soon as practicable, but in no event any later than December 31, 2018.

Article 15

During the first year of operation all students will remain in the schools they currently attend unless a parent requests a school change and the board agrees to it. After July 1, 2019, parents can continue to request a school change with the board's approval and the school board will have the authority to adjust school attendance boundary lines and school configurations within the Union School District.

Article 16

The Union School District School Board shall provide opportunity for local input on policy and budget development. Structures to support and encourage public participation within the Union School District will be established by the Union School District School Board on or before June 30, 2018.

Note:

Cost budget analysis and information on school configurations, student enrollment, and school choice are found in the appendices.

Southern Valley Unified Union School District Act 46 Study Committee Members

Homer Sumner, Chair

Mary King

Cynthia Lamore

Susan Bailey

Paul Blais

Erika Bailey

Barbara Malinowski

Appendix A: Cost Benefit Analysis and Narrative

The creation of a Southern Valley Unified Union District will result in one mission, one vision and one strategic plan for continual improvement based on the attainment of the State Educational Quality Standards and the expected outcomes based on standards and values. Moreover, a Unified Union District will provide a single School Board the opportunity to design a continuum of educational programs and experiences by operating schools for all students in an integrated PreK-8 program and tuitioning students in grades 9-12. The Board will be collectively responsible for all students' education in grades PreK-12.

Opportunities with increased scale enable the new district to retain and possibly expand a variety of educational programs and learning pathways. Each school and community has unique resources and assets, which may provide an opportunity for added programs within a larger system. More students allow for them to have opportunities to work with others at the same grade level and to have flexibility in class structure.

One PreK-12 Unified Union District may allow students to transfer from one elementary school to another school within the regional district without having to pay tuition, and may allow the opportunity to stay at their current school assignment if families move between the towns of Halifax, Readsboro, and Stamford. Under the current structure, students are not able to do so without paying tuition.

We will be able to expand shared Special Education programs for elementary students and have more flexibility within a larger school district. For example, currently the addition or decrease of one or two students may throw off the ability to balance the needed services, but under a larger Unified Union District, having the flexibility of special educators and service providers will allow better flow between programs/buildings and will provide greater opportunities and possibilities.

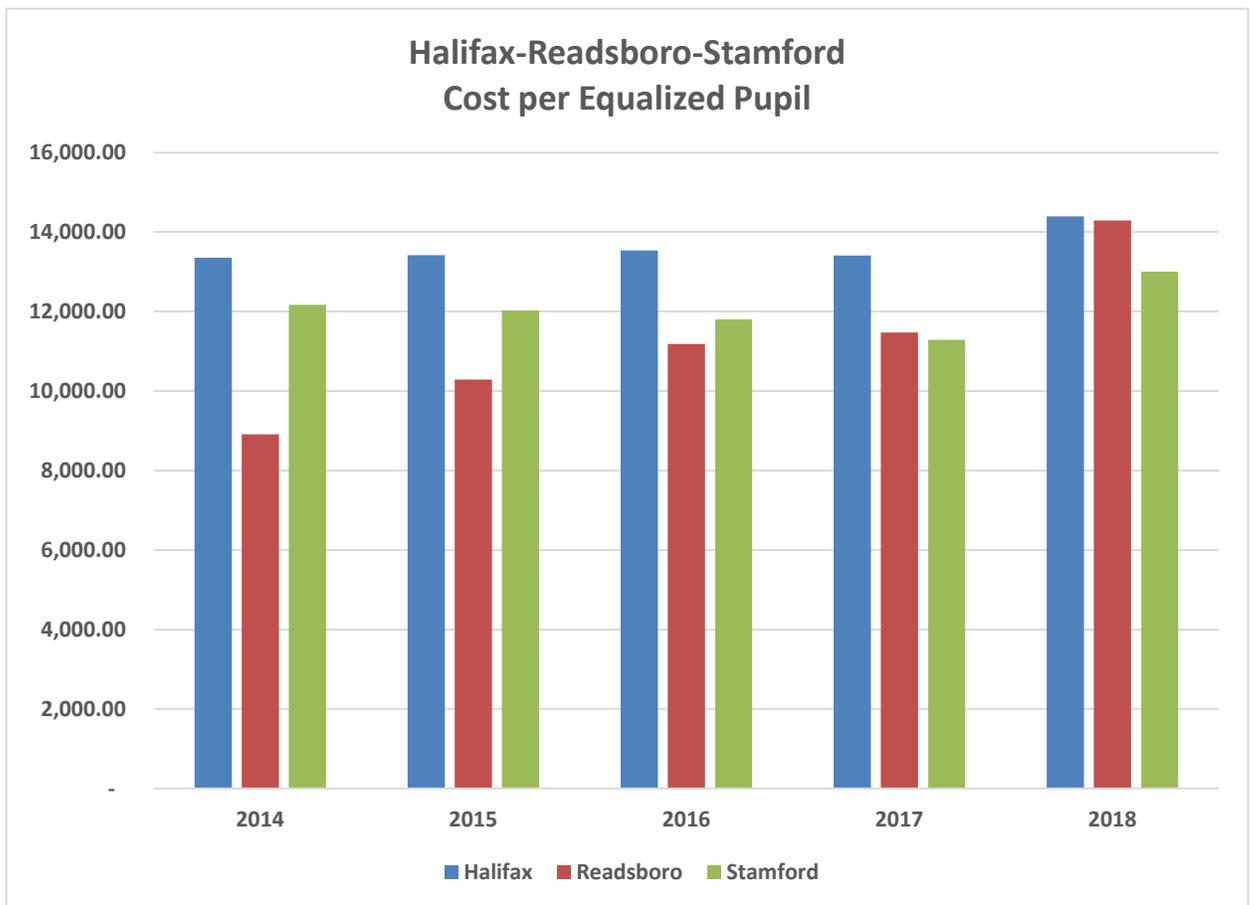
Southern Valley teachers are highly qualified. Our teachers are involved in pursuing professional development activities and taking graduate courses. They are leaders and mentors to new teachers. Many of these educators have Master's degrees or higher post-secondary education. Combining resources from the three districts into one Unified Union District will create professional development opportunities for teachers that allow for a greater, richer exchange and sharing of resources, ideas and success. The ability to co-plan and share lessons may spark interest and foster greater expertise in content and instructional strategies and practices.

Curriculum, instruction, and assessment for students in the elementary grades will be aligned in the Unified Union District through cooperative work between and among the professionals, which is already underway at the WSSU Central Office. All students will have access to a rich array of high-quality learning opportunities in the Unified Union District. Elementary school students will benefit from increased stability, shared resources and faculty, combined programs like field trips and athletic teams, and potential program expansion. Tuitioning grade 9-12 students continues to provide parents the ability to choose the appropriate secondary program to meet the needs of their children. Currently, many high school students in the district opt to attend high school in bordering Massachusetts schools. This school choice option will continue as long as it remains permissible by state statute.

All towns will have a voice in the education of all students, PreK-12, in Halifax, Readsboro, and Stamford. The Southern Valley Unified Union District structure provides for representation from each community, ensuring that a broad spectrum of perspectives is represented in the governance of education systems.

The formation of the Unified Union District will streamline accounting systems and increase transparency and accountability of programs and services within the single budget. The same financial accounting system will be used to track both revenue and expenditure reporting for all three towns' schools. Budgets and tax rates will be combined, and there will be one budget and tax rate, reflecting increased fiscal efficiencies. The number of State, Federal, and IRS reports and intergovernmental accounting transactions, as well as the number of independent audits, will be reduced, and this will reduce labor and audit expenses. Having a Unified Union District also lowers the possibility of exceeding the excess spending tax penalty threshold.

Please find a 5-year budget and cost per pupil history for the three communities in the Southern Valley Unified Union District below. You will see a pattern of fiscal responsibility as the student population of the districts decrease. Also, please note the tax increases caused by the change in the "phantom student" guidelines.



Tax rates for Halifax, Readsboro, and Stamford will affect all three towns differently. Using a static 5-year budget model (no increase in budgets or changes to student population and a static number for the state yield) you will see the tax implications for all three communities.

TOWN	FY 17	FY 18	FY 19	FY 20	FY 21	FY 22	FY 23
Halifax - Yes Merger Vote	1.3355	1.3203	1.2544	1.206	1.226	1.246	1.266
Halifax - No Merger Vote			1.3993	1.3993	1.3993	1.3993	1.3993
Readsboro - Yes Merger Vote	0.9715	1.0945	1.0398	.9973	1.0173	1.0373	1.0573
Readsboro - No Merger Vote			1.1677	1.1677	1.1677	1.1677	1.1677
Stamford - Yes Merger Vote	1.0668	1.1821	1.1747	1.1947	1.2147	1.2347	1.2547
Stamford - No Merger Vote			1.2695	1.2695	1.2695	1.2695	1.2695

**Appendix B:
School Configurations, Enrollments, and School Choice
Southern Valley Unified Union School District Summary Data**

	Halifax	Readsboro	Stamford
Grades Served	K-8	Pk-8	K-8
FY 16 Equalized Pupils	83.15*	93.6*	113.11
FY 16 Education Spending for Equalized Pupils	13,534.91	11,188.24	11,801.43
FY 16 Student/Teacher Ratio	6.06	7.7	6.3
FY 16 Student/Administrator Ratio	47 : 0.5	51 : 1	73 : 1
FY 15 Equalized Pupils	85.65	96.99*	106.81
FY 15 Education Spending for Equalized Pupils	13,418.09	10,291.24	12,029.38
FY 15 Student/Teacher Ratio	7.06	7.7	8.3
FY 15 Student/Administrator Ratio	50 : 0.5	61 : 1	73 : 1
FY 14 Equalized Pupils	87.10	100.51*	106.15
FY 14 Education Spending for Equalized Pupils	13,357.93	8,915.38	12,166.82
FY 14 Student/Teacher Ratio	7.06	7.7	8.4
FY 14 Student/Administrator Ratio	51 : 0.5	62 : 1	65 : 1
Small Schools Grant Avg.	80,681.67	91,408.33	97,080.00
* Includes Phantom Students			

School Configurations

	Elementary/MS Enrollment	High School Tuition Students
Halifax Elementary School	54	29
Readsboro Elementary School	50	26
Stamford Elementary School	72	31

School Choice

Tuition is paid for all high school students in the Southern Valley Unified Union School District. There are no plans to change that. The chart below shows current enrollment in area high schools by town for each grade.

Southern Valley Students Attending Other Schools							
School Attending	Home District	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12	Total
TVMHS (VT)	Halifax		1	2	2	3	8
	Readsboro		2				2
	Stamford						0
Brattleboro UHS (VT)	Halifax		2	3	1	3	9
	Readsboro						0
	Stamford						0
Mohawk Regional HS (MA)	Halifax		1				1
	Readsboro						0
	Stamford						0
Franklin Technical (MA)	Halifax		2			2	4
	Readsboro						0
	Stamford						0
McCann Technical (MA)	Halifax						0
	Readsboro		2	5	3	3	13
	Stamford		5	4	2	5	16
Drury HS (MA)	Halifax						0
	Readsboro		1	1	3	2	7
	Stamford		2	1	2	2	7
Mt Greylock (MA)	Halifax						0
	Readsboro						0
	Stamford		2	1	1	2	6
Private Out of State	Halifax		1	3		1	5
	Readsboro		1	1	1	1	4
	Stamford				1		1
Private In State	Halifax					1	1
	Readsboro						0
	Stamford						0
Special Ed Placement	Halifax	1					1
	Readsboro					1	1
	Stamford			1	1		2
Total		1	22	22	17	26	88

School Closures

At the present time there are no school closures recommended. Please see Article 4 and Article 8c.

**Appendix C:
Educational Benefits to Students**

Please see the chart below that represents student performance levels on the state tests. Because each of the schools is too small to report identifiable data, we have not been able to make comparisons among schools. Overall, student results are consistent with state averages. This data represents student performance levels on the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) summative state tests in English Language Arts (ELA) for 2016 (End of School Year 2015-2016) and 2015 (End of School Year 2014-2015).

SBAC ELA	SVSD ELA SUMMATIVE 2016			WSSU ELA 2016		VT State ELA 2016	
	Grade	# of Students Tested	% Level 3 or Above	Average Scale Score	% Level 3 or Above	Average Scale Score	% Level 3 or Above
3	17	72%	2462±12	50%	2433±12	54%	2438±1
4	21	67%	2498±13	56%	2481±10	54%	2477±1
5	23	52%	2523±13	66%	2536±10	58%	2515±1
6	18	61%	2548±13	50%	2537±12	56%	2539±1
7	19	58%	2565±13	53%	2548±10	58%	2562±1
8	14	50%	2568±13	58%	2574±13	59%	2580±1

SBAC ELA	SVSD ELA SUMMATIVE 2015			WSSU ELA 2015		VT State ELA 2015	
	Grade	# of Students Tested	% Level 3 or Above	Average Scale Score	% Level 3 or Above	Average Scale Score	% Level 3 or Above
3	22	64%	2440±11	59%	2435±10	52%	2431±1
4	22	68%	2491±12	63%	2478±11	51%	2470±1
5	20	45%	2494±13	50%	2501±12	57%	2510±1
6	19	47%	2535±13	43%	2520±10	53%	2532±1
7	16	63%	2548±13	50%	2539±12	55%	2558±1
8	16	69%	2598±14	50%	2565±13	54%	2569±1

Please see the charts below for student performance levels on the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) summative state tests in Math for 2016 (End of School Year 2015-2016) and 2015 (End of School Year 2014-2015).

SBAC	SVSD Math Summative 2016			WSSU Math Summative 2016		VT State Math Summative 2016	
	Grade	# of Students Tested	% Level 3 or Above	Average Scale Score	% Level 3 or Above	Average Scale Score	% Level 3 or Above
3	17	72%	2468±9	33%	2547±12	44%	2564±2
4	21	62%	2512±9	44%	2483±8	50%	2482±1
5	23	21%	2496±10	34%	2513±9	43%	2509±1
6	18	56%	2562±11	34%	2517±13	41%	2522±1
7	18	44%	2549±12	39%	2537±11	46%	2548±1
8	13	31%	2553±15	33%	2547±12	44%	2564±2

SBAC	SVSD Math Summative 2015			WSSU Math Summative 2015		VT State Math Summative 2015	
	Grade	# of Students Tested	% Level 3 or Above	Average Scale Score	% Level 3 or Above	Average Scale Score	% Level 3 or Above
3	22	59%	2452±9	55%	2439±8	51%	2435±1
4	22	50%	2486±9	37%	2468±9	45%	2472±1
5	20	30%	2492±11	29%	2480±10	42%	2503±1
6	19	26%	2514±12	26%	2501±10	37%	2516±1
7	16	25%	2539±13	15%	2501±12	43%	2542±1
8	16	44%	2576±14	39%	2559±14	40%	2553±1

The Educational Benefits

In reading Appendix A you have seen the many educational benefits to be achieved by creating a Unified Union District. Educational opportunities could be increased and student equity improved through consolidation of the three school districts. Below we have listed other potential opportunities the study committee has identified.

Student Learning Opportunities

The creation of the Southern Valley Unified Union District will result in one mission, one vision and one strategic plan for continual improvement based on the attainment of the Educational Quality Standards and the expected outcomes based on standards and values. The Unified Union District will provide a single School Board the opportunity to design a continuum of educational programs and experiences by operating schools for all students in an integrated PreK-8 program, then providing a broad base of educational opportunities meeting individual student needs by tuitioning students attending grades 9 -12. The Board will be collectively responsible for all students' education in grades PreK-12. Opportunities with increased scale will enable the new Unified Union District to retain and possibly expand a variety of educational programs and learning pathways, incorporating the unique resources and assets of each school and community. More students in each grade across the district will give them opportunities to work with others at the same grade level and to have flexibility in class structure. The goal is for our learners to experience increased opportunities in a unified district. With a single structure, there will be more teachers at each grade level and the opportunity to share teachers and resources, including the possibility of joint field trips, learning projects and other special programs.

The Unified Union District will give PreK-8 students greater access to a vast array of extracurricular choices that may not currently exist in their individual schools, such as instrumental lessons, a larger band and chorus, athletic programs, outdoor activities, and other after school activities.

Finally, by forming the Unified Union District, the professional learning community (PLC) of school leaders and teachers will become more diverse, allowing for a greater, richer exchange and sharing of resources, ideas, and success. The ability to co-plan and share lessons may spark interest and foster greater expertise in content and instructional strategies and practices. The collaborative efforts of high performing PLCs produce high performing learners. All students will have access to a rich array of high-quality learning opportunities in the Unified Union District. PreK-8 students will benefit from increased stability, shared resources and faculty, combined programs like field trips and athletic teams, and potential program expansion. Tuitioning 9-12 students continues to provide parents the ability to choose the appropriate secondary program to meet the needs of their child(ren).

The Unified Union District structure provides for representation from each community, ensuring that a broad spectrum of perspectives is represented in the governance of education systems. In Readsboro, Stamford and Halifax, cooperative work between and among the professionals is already underway. It is facilitated through grade level and department level meetings, joint faculty meetings, professional development, and in-service training.

Potential Benefits for Teachers & Staff

In a Unified Union District structure, all teachers will be employed by the Southern Valley Unified Union District, allowing the superintendent flexibility to adjust staffing assignments based on student needs, changing demographic realities, and staff expertise. Teachers could be reassigned to where the needs are across the schools within the Unified Union District. Currently, reassignments are limited to the district of hire, unless the teacher is hired by the WSSU or on a shared FTE basis. Having a shared teacher for two or three separate districts currently takes more administrative time to create, implement, coordinate and oversee. Part-time employees could find increased employment opportunities within the Unified Union District, improving recruitment and retention efforts. We are not expecting to close schools or to reduce instructional staff under the Unified Union District (the primary efficiency savings will be in WSSU Central Office administration and further service consolidation), but having a Unified Union District will provide greater opportunity to equalize class sizes across the system for specific grade levels as needed.

The Unified Union District will allow for greater flexibility in the allocation of nonteaching positions. Personnel can be reassigned where the greatest needs are across all schools within the district. Currently reassignments are limited to the district of hire unless done through a shared service agreement.

Increased Access to Academic Programs through Technology, and Expanded Opportunities for Technology Integration Experiences

Within the Southern Valley Unified Union District there will be one IT Department to update, maintain, and standardize resources across the system. The WSSU Curriculum Director will also serve as technology integration specialist for the Unified Union District, so that teachers will receive the same training and information, while the students will continue to use technology as a tool for learning.

There will be increased buying power to obtain affordable telecommunications, internet services, software applications and technology hardware. Likewise, similar hardware will lead to repair efficiencies, because parts can be stocked and knowledge in repairs can be streamlined. A single Unified Union District will manage resources to provide greater access to customized and personalized learning opportunities for students - for example, through the use of personal mobile devices. Information Technology staff specialties (e.g. Supervision, Network Administration, Technicians, Technology Integration, and Application Specialists) can be applied to every building, where previously these resources were scarce or unavailable. One system will allow for greater efficiencies and greater focus can be given to 21st Century personalized learning environments. The Unified Union District would also be able to expand and increase academic programs and opportunities for technology integration experiences in the areas of foreign language, enrichment, and on-line learning through teacher sharing.

Student Data Collection and Reporting

The student achievement data tracking systems will be enhanced to ensure that all students will achieve at high levels as defined in the State's Education Quality Standards. Currently class sizes are small, resulting in the inability to share grade level data. Combining data from classes in all three schools would increase the ability to share data and to discuss improvement strategies. A single PreK-8 student data system would allow for richer empirical data, improvement in strategic planning, improved instruction, specialized interventions, and personalization. It would improve discussions at the Board level, enhance parental involvement and communication about student progress, and promote transparency and accountability. Collecting student data in a single Unified Union District will reduce redundancies with State reporting requirements.

Potential Benefits for Taxpayers and Residents

- Moderate the effects of year to year population changes
- Availability of tax incentives
- Lower the overhead cost by sharing educational resources across all districts
 - Custodial services – facilities system management
 - Energy management practices
 - Purchasing on a larger scale helps lower costs – technology, textbooks, supplies
 - Common food services
- Coordinated financial services through a Unified Union District
 - One audit instead of three
 - Less redundancy in business office management and operations
 - AOE VT State and Federal data collection is streamlined

**Section 4:
Searsburg Self-Study**

**Searsburg School District
Alternative Governance Structure
Self Study**

**An Alternative Self Study for the Searsburg School District to be included with
the Windham Southwest Supervisory Union Act 46 Study Committee's Final
Report.**

This study is presented to the Vermont State Board of Education to demonstrate that the Searsburg School District is in compliance with the requirements of ACT 46 and the goals of a sustainable governance model that provides its students with increased educational opportunities while remaining economically efficient.

1. Introduction

a. Searsburg is a town in southwestern Vermont encompassing 21.58 square miles. Searsburg sits between Wilmington to the East and Woodford to the West, Readsboro to the south. Most of the northerly border lies within the Green Mountain National Forest with the unincorporated town of Somerset along part of the border. The town is geographically separated in the center by a steep mountain range. The main route over the mountain is Route 9. Route 9 is a notorious stretch of road known for being a dangerous route in the winter. Law requires trucks to chain up from either side of the mountain and rarely a snow squall occurs that the road is not shut down for some period of time. At the top of the mountain Route 9 intersects with Route 8, which runs the top of the mountain ridgeline south into Readsboro. Route 8 is also known to be a dangerous route during winter weather.

b. The population of Searsburg remains stable with a current population of 109 people. Very few people move into or out of town. In the three years prior to this report there were only three residential sales in the town. Only one of which is occupied as a primary residence.

c. Searsburg offers full school choice for grades Pre-K to 12. For the 2016-2017 school year Searsburg has 21 total students, 11 students in grades Pre-K through 6 and 10 students in grades 7 through 12. Searsburg students attend 9 different schools in 8 different districts and 2 states. 17 of which attend public schools, 3 attend private schools with 1 student attending a vocational high school. Searsburg has no phantom students.

Many different factors contribute to the wide range of educational choices made by Searsburg families. Some factors include but are not limited to: Geography and travel distance, winter travel difficulties, the location of parents' jobs, academic opportunities, extracurricular and afterschool programs offered, sports programs, music and arts programs and internships with job placement opportunities. Searsburg pays the announced tuition rate for all public schools and the Vermont State average to all private schools, or the entire private school tuition, whichever is less. Parents and families are able to make the choice taking into account each individual student's strengths, needs and interests with the full support of an actively involved school board. Thus allowing students to meet and exceed the Educational Quality Standard in whichever environment is best suited for the individual.

Elementary Schools (Pre-K - 6)				
School Name	School Type	Number of Students	FY 17 Announced Tuition	Total FY17 Tuition Cost
Twin Valley ES (WSSU)	Public	4	\$13,500	\$52,515
Woodford (SWVT)	Public	2	\$10,500	\$21,000
Bennington Head Start	Public	1	\$3,092	\$3,092
Dover (WCSU)	Public	2	\$13,500	\$27,000
Hilltop Montessori	Private	2	\$12,938	\$25,876
Average Per Pupil & Total Cost		11	\$10,706.00	\$129,483
Secondary Schools (7-12)				
School Name	School Type	Number of Students	FY 17 Announced Tuition	Total FY17 Tuition Cost
Twin Valley MHS (WSSU)	Public	7	\$14,750	\$103,250
Readsboro (WSSU)	Public	1	\$8,500	\$8,500
Burr & Burton	Private	1	\$14,773	\$14,772
McCann Tech	Voc.	1	\$16,464	\$16,464
Average Per Pupil & Total Cost		10	\$13,621.75	\$142,986

2. Searsburg and Windham Southwest Supervisory Relationship

a. The relationship between the WSSU and the Searsburg School Board is strong. Communication between the board and the WSSU is frequent and productive. Searsburg board members often look to multiple members of the Supervisory Office including the business manager, administrative personnel and the Superintendent with questions or concerns with satisfactory and timely outcomes. Searsburg holds 12 regular monthly meetings and it is routine for a representative of the Supervisory Office to attend. Generally either the Superintendent or the business manager depending on the items on the agenda and which of them could provide the best support.

b. The Windham Southwest Supervisory Union includes the districts (in its current structure) of Twin Valley, Whitingham, Wilmington, Readsboro, Stamford, Halifax and Searsburg. Searsburg has only 1 vote on both the Supervisory Board and the Executive Board. However small Searsburg voice is on these boards Searsburg feels it is heard loud and clear and received fairly with equal attention. Searsburg participates in nearly all Super Board and Executive Board meetings and WSSU wide committees in turn.

3. Act 46 Research and Cooperation with other districts

a. From the first time Searsburg heard mention of Act 156 the board gave it full attention. Early in the process after a few months of seeking information and answers to questions regarding our possible options to move forward we held an informational meeting for our town. On October 29, 2015, 20 voters attended out of 109 registered voters in the town. The board presented 3 possible options to the town. 1. Merge with the three similarly operating districts within the WSSU that had elementary schools but high school choice. 2. Merge with Twin Valley who operates schools for Pre-K through 12. 3. Seek out other non-operating district outside of the WSSU. All audience members supported, by show of hands support to seek out another “like” districts in the interest of keeping the current Pre-K through 12 choice. Approximately half of the meetings attendees supporting choice did not have a current student enrolled or would not have a current student enrolled by 2017. Further discussion included

b. Searsburg first approached Stratton, another non-operating school district of similar size within the Windham Central Supervisory Union at a regular Stratton Board meeting on October 1, 2015. The Searsburg Board Chair Jacki Murano with support from Searsburg State Representative Laura Sibilgia both spoke to the Stratton Board suggesting that Searsburg and Stratton start a discussion about the possibility of merger. Stratton was in the very early stages of processing the ACT 46 information and had been approached by the Winhall School Board as well. At that time Stratton had no further interest.

c. Searsburg subsequently joined a Study Committee of non-operators from the school districts of Granville, Hancock and Pittsfield in November of 2015. While the logistics became an instantly daunting feat because of distance between Searsburg and the three other boards, Searsburg continued with the study. In the end the Searsburg School Board concluded that there was no benefit to our town or students and in fact the distance would make a merger difficult. The board also concluded that having a Supervisory office in close proximity for support and accountability was a priority not met by the proposed merger. With the intent to be fully informed Searsburg continued to monitor and attend the Southern Valley Study committee meetings during this time. Searsburg also considered the possibility of merging with Somerset, which shares a border. The Searsburg School board was informed that a merger with Somerset was not possible as Somerset was an “unincorporated town” and not eligible.

d. In April of 2016, Searsburg was contacted by the Marty Nadler, Chair of the Winhall School Board. He proposed that Searsburg enter into a formal study committee with Searsburg, Stratton, Winhall and Sandgate to form a RED within the Bennington Rutland Supervisory Union. The Searsburg School district discussed this possible merger at great length with the WSSU Superintendent, The Stratton School District, The BRSU Superintendent and both the Searsburg State Representative Laura Sibilgia and the Stratton/Winhall State Representative Oliver Olsen. With some reluctance and concern that the voters of Searsburg would not approve such a merger Searsburg agreed to participate in the hopes that there would be unforeseen benefits to such a merger. By August of 2016 The Searsburg board was concerned that a meeting had not been set up for the first RED meeting within the BRSU. Searsburg began to seek out information from the BRSU to have a preliminary idea of what a merger would mean for Searsburg. Searsburg requests for information were denied under the pretense that the information would be shared once the committee began their study. This response only amplified Searsburg concerns over joining with a much larger SU that we had no previous relationship with.

e. Stratton and Searsburg voted to join a formal study committee in September of 2016 to investigate the possibility of a merger as a side by side within the WSSU. The committee met by weekly in the WSSU office which is a central location between the two towns and was provided great support by the WSSU Superintendent, Chris Pratt and Business Manager Karen Atwood. Both towns are very similar in size and student population, both is non-operating districts for grade Pre-K through 12, both had a long history of supporting school choice. The two towns are 20 miles apart. The joint committee was optimistic that we had found our solution.

f. On November 3rd 2016 Searsburg and Stratton attended a WSSU Superboard meeting and question and answer session with Donna Russo Savage and Brad James. During that meeting Searsburg and Stratton learned two pieces of information that were pivotal in our merger discussion.

1. That no 5% tax penalty would be applied for School Boards that chose not to merge.
2. That the state was not requiring boards to merge and that they could in fact remain standalone under an alternative structure, thus removing the only two benefits seen by the committee to merge boards at that time. Stratton withdrew from the formal study committee.

g. On November 21 the Searsburg School Board sent a letter to all property owners on the Grand List with notification of an ACT 46 Community Information Session being held on December 1st, 2016. During the information session the board provided the new information and the consensus was overwhelmingly from both the board and the town to move forward as a standalone district within the WSSU.

4. Current Act 46 Status

The Searsburg School District has concluded through multiple study committees, active involvement with many surrounding districts, participation and or guidance from both our State Representative and Superintendents of our current SU, the BRSU and Windham Central Supervisory Union and by review of the information provided by the Agency of Education, specifically Donna Russo Savage that there is no benefit to our students or our taxpayers through any possible merger at this time. Searsburg and Stratton continue to support each other informally by sharing information throughout the process but see no benefit in a merger of the two districts.

5. Proposal for Alternative Structure

Searsburg School District feels very strongly that we are well informed and have exhausted all avenues available to us throughout this process and into the Self Study. We are confident that our current model is the most beneficial for our students and our taxpayers. Students are afforded every opportunity to excel and exceed the ACT 46 goals under our current structure and we are still able to be cost effective with an average per pupil spending of \$10,706 in Pre K through 6 and \$13,621 for 7 through 12. Searsburg wishes to continue as a standalone Pre-K through 12 non-operating district within the Windham Southwest Supervisory Union.

Conclusion

The comprehensive study and report of the Twin Valley Act 46 Study Committee and the Southern Valley Act 46 Study Committee including Halifax, Readsboro, Stamford, Wilmington, Whitingham, and Searsburg has demonstrated a practical and reasonable plan that will best meet the needs of all students in the six participating districts.

The plan you have reviewed is inclusive and does not leave any districts in the WSSU isolated. There were many discussions with districts outside the supervisory union during this process but none seemed to meet the needs of participating communities or the students in those communities.

The Twin Valley Act 46 Plan has proposed the unification of Wilmington and Whitingham, which currently contract to operate schools jointly. This appears to be a next logical step in bringing these two communities together and sharing fiscal responsibility for all children in the two communities. They would be the first side of a side by side model.

The second side of this side-by-side model would be the unification of Halifax, Readsboro, and Stamford into the Southern Valley Unified Union School District. These three isolated districts offer PreK–8 education in their local elementary schools and pay tuition for high school students.

To complete the study we are recommending that the Vermont State Board of Education accept the self-study for Searsburg, a non-operating district in the supervisory union, and when approved, Searsburg would be assigned to the WSSU.

This report has provided evidence and data to support the creation of a side by side model and the inclusion of Searsburg as an alternative model. Thank you for accepting our report and we look forward to our presentation to the board in April. As stated earlier, both Act 46 Study Committees understand that unification may not solve the fiscal challenges caused by decreasing enrollments in the districts, but will give them a greater capacity to help address the problems created by these issues.