



Mark Tucker  
Superintendent

P.O. Box 470 – Plainfield, VT 05667  
Phone 802-454-9924 Fax 802-454-9934

---

October 5, 2018

Vermont State Board of Education

Dear Chair Hulling:

The Twinfield Union School Board (TUS Board) is writing to update the State Board of Education (State Board) on our efforts to coordinate with other Supervisory Unions (SU) since the State Board's August 15<sup>th</sup> meeting on Act 46. As set forth below, based on discussion with Washington Central Supervisory Union (WCSU) and Barre Supervisory Union (BSU), the TUS Board requests that the State Board not take any action other than reassigning TUS to another Supervisory Union (SU). Additionally, we request that the TUS Board be kept intact, and that no other changes be put in place with respect to how TUS operates at this time.

Our understanding is that the State Board intends, at a minimum, to close Washington Northeast Supervisory Union (WNESU). However, the TUS Board would like to make it clear to the State Board that our preference would be to continue operations under our current structure, as a part of the WNESU, while we continue to meet with BSU and WCSU. If the State Board does intend to close WNESU, we believe that a decision to reassign TUS to another Supervisory Union is the only significant change the State Board should consider making at this time. The TUS Board believes that any material change to TUS will impede our ability to continue collaborative discussions and explore the best options for our communities and our students.

In its report, the Agency of Education (AOE) recommends that the Board:

*Merge the Twinfield Union School District with one or more other districts and/or move it to a larger SU when uncertainties in the region are resolved and the State Board has sufficient information to make a decision, taking into consideration that districts otherwise exempted from merger under the statewide plan are subject to SU boundary changes both under the statewide plan and, separately, pursuant to 16 V.S.A. § 261.*

The TUS Board would like the State Board to recognize that TUS is currently well served by the WNESU, and that the level and quality of operational service the WNESU provides is outstanding. Instead of making the foregone conclusion that TUS would be better served by a larger SU, the State Board needs to consider the alternative possibility that the WNESU could continue to serve TUS and possibly service additional area schools.

The AOE also indicates that it believes that the Board will have enough information to decide where to merge TUS by the time it must issue its final report. Specifically, AOE states, regarding TUS, "[B]y the time the State Board is required to issue its final statewide plan, the Board will have the information it needs to make its decisions." With all due respect, the TUS Board does not understand what additional information the State Board will have to make the decision regarding the fate of Twinfield Union School. The only additional information that has been provided is that we are continuing our efforts to forge relationships with the Barre Supervisory Union and the Washington Central Supervisory Union. At this time, we can only report some minor progress on these fronts.

TUS reached out to WCSU and BSU to continue discussions about Act 46 after the Board's August 15<sup>th</sup> meeting. BSU responded affirmatively in the second week of September, and Superintendent Mark Tucker and Board Chair Patrick Healy met jointly with BSU Board Chairs and Superintendent John Pandolfo on September 26<sup>th</sup>. The TUS Board anticipates that additional meetings will follow, however no firm dates have been scheduled.

WCSU has expressed an interest in discussing a potential merger with TUS, or a reassignment of TUS to the WCSU, and Superintendent Mark Tucker and Board Chair Patrick Healy held two informal discussions in early September

that allowed both parties to assess the interest level of the other. Representative teams met again on September 28<sup>th</sup> and exchanged financial census, and other relevant data. Additional meetings have been scheduled.

Despite this late date, TUS is pleased that these discussions with Barre and WCSU are underway. However, it is clear these discussions will take time to flesh out what would be involved in such a merger, whether the merger would be in the best interest of the WCSU or Barre SU and TUS students and whether the voters in our respective communities would support a merger. Given the late start to the talks, which has limited our ability to gather information and exchange ideas, the TUS Board takes no position at this time favoring one party over the other.

Importantly, the TUS School Board believes it would be inappropriate for the State Board to require that TUS join any newly-formed unified district in Barre or Washington Central without having information about the details of a merger that we could present to the voters of Marshfield and Plainfield. Detailed information about these potential mergers does not exist at this time, and additional time will be needed to inform our communities. While TUS is committed to talking with Barre and WCSU (and possibly other area schools) to enhance the educational opportunities for TUS students, at this time, a merger with any schools would be premature.

We ask the State Board to read this as reaffirmation of our openness to a reassignment to either the Barre or Washington Central SU as a standalone district, for now. The Board's primary focus continues to be reaching an outcome that is clearly in the best interest of our students, first and foremost. The TUS Board is not strictly opposed to the possibility of joining a new unified district, at some future date. This position is, as the Board represented to you in our Section 9 proposal and again on August 15<sup>th</sup>, a reflection of the inability of potential partners to engage with us, for reasons beyond the control of Twinfield Union School and the Twinfield Board, and because we have limited information about the impact of a forced merger on our students. Accordingly, we respectfully request the State Board's understanding and forbearance in this matter.

For the Twinfield Board of School Directors:

Patrick Healy, Chair

Lauren Cleary, Vice Chair/Clerk

Jade Walker

Jill Wilson

Jon Groveman



Mark Tucker, Superintendent, Washington Northeast Supervisory Union