

## Report of the Chair Windham Northeast Unified Elementary School District

As of January 25, this year, the fate of the Athens, Grafton, and Westminster School Districts had yet to be determined by the Vermont State Supreme Court. Until the Court rules, the official position of the state is that our three districts went out of business as of December 31. This is the reason why there is no town school district report this year, and why we are not asking for your vote on your town school budget during March Town Meeting.

The state's position is that the only governing authority to run public elementary schools in our area is the Windham Northeast Unified Elementary School District, or WNUESD created by the State Board of Education.

In order to provide some basic continuity, and to ensure our schools can operate while the matter is decided, Act 46 allowed the three town boards to create a "Transitional Board" to create budgets and provide oversight of our local elementary schools, as well as a reduced ability to participate in governance of the Supervisory Union as a whole.

Last July we asked voters of our new district to meet together to confirm the board and those members while matters are settled. And— that is how we have been operating your schools.

In the next few weeks that Transitional Board expects to provide you with a new "unified" district budget for operating our schools for the next year. We anticipate distributing this proposed budget around town meeting time. **We ask you to come to Bellows Falls Union High School on April 9 to discuss and approve this budget, "Town Meeting" style.** We expect to have the budget information to be set up much like last year, to show you how it would operate if the districts remain consolidated or become separate once again.

We also anticipate asking you all to approve a master plan that would allow you to either resume town board operations (if we are allowed to do so by the Court), or to restructure our governing articles and governance model to be accountable to our communities should the Justices rule against us. **This is going to be a bit complicated**, so we hope you agree it makes more sense to meet on April 9, to have an open discussion on various items before a vote, rather than try to place a lot of complicated questions before you on an Australian ballot.

Among the changes to the state-imposed "Articles of Agreement" we would like you to consider would be an obligation of the district to consult with town-level level "Educational Advisory Commissions (or Committees) as part of their governance process. In order to comply with Act 46, these standing bodies would have to be operated as entities of town government. Our intent is to ensure that the citizens of each town will have a means to advocate for their community's interests when it comes to education. Most, if not all towns in our district should have an item to this effect on Town Meeting Agendas. We hope you will approve the creation of these bodies and that you will consider becoming Committee/Commission members. Your continued support of public education during these trying times is greatly appreciated.

Jack Bryar, Chair WNUESD (and Chair of the Grafton School Board)

**Jack Bryar**

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