

**A REPORT ON THE VERMONT
SCHOOL GOVERNANCE PUBLIC
ENGAGEMENT PROCESS OF
2006-2007**

**PREPARED FOR THE VERMONT DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION
BY
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

During January – May 2007, a community engagement project was undertaken jointly between Robin Scheu of Career Wise, George Appenzeller of System Wide Solutions, Inc. and the Vermont Department of Education, which focused on the attitudes and perceptions of the public regarding the current education governance system in Vermont and a proposal by the Commissioner of Education, Richard Cate, in a White Paper published in May 2006. The paper, meant to stimulate a yearlong discussion, outlined a plan for changing the governance model of the education system in Vermont. As part of this discussion, the Department hosted 30 facilitated meetings across the state. The goal of these meetings was to engage a large and diverse group of Vermonters in a conversation about governance in the Vermont education system. There were three ways that Vermonters could participate in the process: attend one of 30 public meetings held around the state, randomly receive and respond to a survey that was sent to 4,000 Vermont households, or make and send comments via email, letter or fax.

At the public meetings, participants were asked what they saw as the advantages and disadvantages of their current education governance structure and the one proposed by the Commissioner, and what they saw as other ideas and suggestions for governance change.

The random survey was mailed to 4,000 Vermont households in order to determine the degree to which the general public agreed or disagreed with what was being said in the public meetings.

Finally, a special email address and web page hosted by the Department of Education were created so that individuals could make comments throughout the public engagement process. Those who participated in the meetings or the survey also had an opportunity to add further comments.

Methods and Sample Size

A total of 882 people attended the 30 public meetings that were held throughout the state. 55.3% of attendees were school board members, educators or administrators, 21.4% were community citizens, 14.2% were parents, and 9% were listed as “Other.” A total of 301 usable surveys were obtained from the mail survey. The confidence interval for the survey responses is 5.65 at a 95% confidence level. There are limitations to both methods due to several variables: The public meetings had overrepresentation of school board members, educators and administrators as compared to the total population, the self-selecting nature of the public meetings, and the fact that participants were given only one alternate choice to their current education governance system. A limitation of the survey was the amount of information given to survey respondents about the current system and about Commissioner Cate’s proposal, information with which the general public may not have been familiar.

In addition, over 100 Vermonters sent comments directly to the Department of Education and 159 included comments with their survey responses.

Conclusions

The following are the conclusions that were drawn as a result of the community engagement process described above. These conclusions are based on the detailed information provided in this report. It is important to read the themes from the public meetings as well as the findings of the survey in order to fully understand the conclusions.

Conclusions from the Public Meetings

(21.4% community members, 14.2% parents, 55.3% school board members/educators, 9% other)

1. The overriding theme in response to the advantages of the present education governance system was of local community involvement, connection and control.
2. The primary themes in response to the disadvantages of the present education system were of limited resources, inefficiencies and a lack of collaboration between schools.
3. The major themes in response to the advantages of the Commissioner's proposal were consistency of education vision and school operations, and clarity of roles of both the school board and superintendent.
4. The overriding theme in response to the disadvantages of the Commissioner's proposal was one of loss: loss of power, control, ideas, community connection, and fear of small school closings.
5. While many of responses to other thoughts and ideas on education governance were disparate and sometimes contradictory, many people did not see a connection between the proposed governance changes and education quality.

Conclusions from the Survey

(55.5% community members, 21.6% parents, 17.6% school board members/educators, 5.3% other)

1. Two-thirds (66.8%) of the respondents agree that the school governance system needs to be changed. Another 20.6% do not agree that the system needs to change and 12.6% had no opinion or did not respond.
2. About one-third (35.2%) of the respondents state that the supervisory unions serve the needs of students well. Another 53.5% state that the supervisory unions do not serve the needs of students well and 11.3% had no opinion or did not respond.
3. Almost half (48.2%) of the respondents state that the current governance structure serves the needs of students well. Another 42.9% state that the current governance structure does not serve the needs of students well and 8.9% had no opinion or did not respond.
4. Almost half (48.1%) of the respondents state that Commissioner Cate's governance proposal would serve the needs of students better than the current system of supervisory unions. Another 24.9% disagree with the statement and 23.3% had no opinion.
5. More than half (54.5%) of the respondents believe that Commissioner Cate's governance proposal would make more efficient use of financial resources than the current system of supervisory unions. Of the respondents, 20.6% disagree with the statement and 22.9% had no opinion.

6. More than half (56.8%) of the respondents believe that Commissioner Cate's governance proposal would result in more efficient use of school administrators. About 20% of respondents disagree with this statement and 23.2% had no opinion or did not respond.
7. Community members and parents generally favor changing school governance while school board members are generally opposed and educators generally have opinions that lie in between the other two groups.
8. At the same time, the general public and parents believe that a change in the governance structure could result in increased efficiency and serve the needs of students better.

Conclusions from Both the Public Meetings and Survey

1. The insights of both groups, community members/parents and school board members/educators, are valuable. Therefore the input of both needs to be taken into account.
2. Many Vermonters are concerned that the connection between community and school will be lost if the school board is no longer operating at the town level.
3. Any proposals that are made must clearly articulate the need for change as well as the expected results, including measurable outcomes in education quality.
4. To increase the likelihood of success in any proposed change in school governance, the special concerns identified in the last paragraph of the Discussion section (weighted voting, small schools being closed by fiat, developing consistency and best practices among schools) should be taken into account.

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INTRODUCTION

The Vermont Department of Education began the process of gathering information from the public on the governance of Vermont's public schools in May of 2006 with the publication of a White Paper, *Governance of Education in Vermont - 1777-2006*. In this paper, Education Commissioner Richard Cate gave a brief history of school governance in Vermont, the issues surrounding school governance today, and an idea that he suggests may ameliorate these issues. That idea, in brief, is to reduce the number of school districts in the state by aligning the district boundaries with the present supervisory union boundaries, while leaving supervisory districts as they are. In essence, supervisory unions would become supervisory districts. The present town school boards would no longer exist and there would be one board for each supervisory district.

Commissioner Cate believed that this idea should be the starting point for a conversation about school governance in the state. Since he and the Department of Education wanted this discussion to be as wide and as open as possible, a Request for Proposals was issued for an independent person or group to plan, organize and lead the conversation. A consortium of two firms, System Wide Solutions, Inc. of Sudbury and Career Wise of Middlebury, was chosen for the task.

The formal planning process to solicit public input on school governance took place between November 2006 and mid-January 2007. The process was designed to give Vermonters every practical opportunity to have input into the conceptualization of how Vermont's public schools should be governed.

The engagement process included 30 public meetings held throughout the state and attended by 882 people. These meetings were organized as conversations around people's perceptions and attitudes about the current school governance system and Commissioner Cate's idea. To make sure the public voice was fully heard, a survey on school governance was also sent to 4,000 randomly selected Vermonters. Finally, several methods were established for members of the public to communicate to the Department their ideas regarding school governance. These included a special email address associated with a web page on the Department website dedicated to the project, a fax number, and a physical address to which letters could be sent. The results of the public meetings were posted to the web page so that the public could read and comment on the results.

This report presents a summary of the information which resulted from the engagement process. In addition, the report analyzes that information qualitatively and, where possible, quantitatively. Finally, the report provides some conclusions that may be of help to the Department in developing recommendations for the State Board of Education, the Legislature and the Governor.

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The data upon which this report is based was gathered through three methods. First was a series of 30 community engagement meetings. Second were various forms of communications, including a web site with email capabilities, a mailing address and a fax number, through which the public could make comments. Third was a survey sent to randomly selected Vermont households.

The total quantity of data that was generated by these methods was beyond what the consultants and the Department expected. Over 100 Vermonters sent comments to the Department of Education and 159 included comments with their survey responses. A total of 882 individuals participated in the community engagement meetings.

Three questions were asked as part of the community meeting engagement process. These are:

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the current education governance system in your community?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the school district model suggested by Commissioner Cate in his White Paper?
3. What other thoughts and ideas do you have about education governance?

The survey questions paralleled the public meeting questions. They were designed to determine the degree to which the general public agreed or disagreed with several themes from the meetings. Respondents were also given an opportunity to make comments. The five questions to be answered by the survey were:

1. Does the present Vermont school governance system need to be changed?
2. Does the current Vermont school governance structure serve the needs of students well?
3. Does the current Vermont system of supervisory unions serve the needs of students well and is it efficient in certain respects?
4. Would the education governance system for Vermont proposed by Commissioner Cate serve the needs of students better and be more efficient in those same respects than the current system of supervisory unions?
5. What other ideas about school governance do you have?

Community Engagement Meetings

Planning for Meetings

The format and questions used in the community engagement meetings were arrived at over a three month period of discussion, planning and testing. The underlying method upon which the meetings were initially designed was *The World Café*, a technique for creating meaningful conversations around specific issues among people with diverse opinions. The specific agenda for the meetings and the specific questions that participants in the meetings would be asked to discuss went through several revisions between early November 2006 and late January 2007. A test meeting was conducted on January 9, 2007, followed by revisions, and the first public meeting was held on January 16, 2007. It was clear from the reaction to this public meeting that the questions and format had changed sufficiently that they no longer lent themselves to the World Café technique. A new approach was therefore utilized in the remaining 29 meetings based on Malcolm Knowles *Self-Directed Learning: A Guide for Learners and Teachers*. Throughout the 30 meetings, feedback from the participants was solicited and utilized to make further minor adjustments to the meetings.

The consultants and the DOE jointly determined where meetings would occur. The goal was to cover the state as fairly and completely as possible while remaining within the contract budget. A total of 30 sites were chosen. (Please see Appendix One, Site List and Schedule of Personnel.) Since major modifications were made after the first meeting, a second meeting was held at that site at the end of the meeting cycle. The DOE arranged for the meetings with the superintendents of the supervisory districts (SDs) or supervisory unions (SUs) in which the towns were located. The DOE also arranged for press coverage of the events.

General Outline of Public Engagement Meetings

The general outline of the engagement meetings was:

- Pre-Site Preparation
- On-Site Preparation
- Sign In
- Welcome and Introductions
- Commissioner's Message (DVD or Live)
- Background and Instructions
- Part 1: Questions and Conversations
 - Question 1 - What are the advantages and disadvantages of the present education governance system in your community?
 - Question 2 – What are the advantages and disadvantages of the idea being suggested by Commissioner Cate in his White Paper?
 - Question 3 - What other thoughts and ideas do you have about education governance?
- Part 2: Group Presentations
- Part 3: Whole Group Discussion
- Wrap Up and Adjourn

Implementation of Outline

Pre-Site Preparation

Two days before the meeting, the facilitator would contact the superintendent or designee for the SD or SU in which the meeting was occurring. The facilitator would go over what was going to happen at the meeting, what the needs were (such as table arrangements, a screen, and so on) and would invite the superintendent to say a few words about their SD or SU at the appropriate time.

On-Site Preparation

On the day of the meeting, the facilitator and the Department of Education (DOE) personnel would arrive at the site about 4:30 pm. They would unload and set up snacks, projectors, writing supplies for the tables, flipchart stands, and make any other arrangements necessary. The Department of Education personnel would take charge of registration. (Please see Appendix Two, Preparation Materials.)

Sign-In

As participants began to arrive before the 6:00 pm start time, they were asked to fill out a sign-in sheet that included their name and in what manner they were connected to the school system (i.e., teacher, parent, citizen, school board member, etc.) and given a name tag. They were also given handouts that described the governance of schools in their area and contained Commissioner Cate's White Paper. Participants were then asked to sit at a six to eight person table.

Welcome and Introductions

Prior to 6:00 pm, the facilitator would turn on the LCD projector and project a welcome message on the screen. At 6:00 pm (or a few minutes later if people were still coming in the door), the facilitator would give a brief welcome and explanation of the evening's process. (Please see Appendix Three, Presentation Materials.) The introductory information included the following points:

1. All of the information from all of these meetings will be given to Commissioner Cate shortly after each meeting.
2. In addition to these meetings, a random survey will be developed and sent out across the state to determine the degree of agreement of the general public with the themes of the discussion of the participants in these meetings.
3. The consultants will write a final report that discusses the findings from these meetings and the survey, including conclusions and recommendations.
4. Commissioner Cate will take all of this information and use it to help develop and deliver his own recommendations to the State Board of Education, the Legislature and the Governor.

Commissioner's Message

The Welcome and Introduction was followed by a presentation by Commissioner Cate, either on a DVD projected on the screen or in person. The SD or SU superintendent or another local representative would also be asked to speak briefly about the local governance structure.

Before giving the instructions for the first part of the discussion, the facilitator would present a set of ground rules to the participants. These were:

- Focus on the question at hand
- Contribute your own thinking
- Give everyone a chance to speak; no one dominates
- Listen in order to understand
- Link and connect ideas
- Be respectful of others
- It's ok to disagree

Part 1: Questions and Conversations

The first part of the input from the participants was prefaced by a set of instructions. These instructions were:

1. There will be three questions that you will discuss in small groups, one at a time.
2. After you are given the question, take a moment or two to write down some of your ideas on the paper provided.
3. Choose someone to be your scribe.
4. Have the conversation: discuss your ideas, listen to others, make connections and create new ideas.
5. When the facilitator signals the time, help the scribe write down the advantages and disadvantages on the sheet of flip-chart paper labeled for that question. If you need more sheets, just keep going to another sheet.
6. For each question, choose the three advantages and three disadvantages that are most important to your group based on your discussion of the question. (In reality, groups tended to write down most or all of the advantages and disadvantages.) Help the scribe summarize these on a flipchart sheet. Please put the question number on the top of the sheet.
7. By the end of the time available for the third question, choose a spokesperson for your group.

The participants were then given twenty minutes to discuss and document each of the three questions. As discussions and documentation were completed, the sheets of flipchart paper were taken up and taped to a space where they could later be presented by the spokesperson to the full group.

Part 2: Group Presentations

After all three questions had been discussed and documented on the flipchart paper, and the flipchart paper placed on the wall or another surface, each group's spokesperson gave a three to five minute summary of the discussion of the three questions.

Part 3: Whole Group Discussion

Following the presentation, the entire group was asked to discuss what had been placed on the wall, and the experience of the evening, using the following questions to trigger thoughts.

- What did you learn tonight?
- What had real meaning for you from what you have heard? What surprised you?
- So what does that mean? What are the areas of common ground? What are the important differences?
- What else do we need to know?
- Any last thoughts, questions, or comments?

A DOE staff member wrote down the comments.

Wrap Up and Adjourn

The participants were given a hand-out on which they could write other ideas they might have. These could be sent in the mail, faxed or emailed. They were thanked for coming and reminded that what they had written in their groups on flipchart paper would be available on the web site a few days after the meeting.

Other Forms of Communication

A web site (<http://education.vermont.gov/new/html/dept/governance.html>) was established to which information from the meetings would be posted and to which people could email comments. In addition, people were encouraged to use the mail and fax for comments. Over 100 comments from Vermonters were received by the Department of Education.

Survey

A random sample of 4,000 individuals, stratified by the five regions that are used for administrative purposes by the DOE, was obtained for the survey to represent the state's 240,634 households. The survey instrument was designed by the DOE. The surveys were mailed to the sample, along with a return envelope, but could also be completed online. A total of 301 usable surveys were obtained. The confidence interval for the survey responses is 5.65 at a 95% confidence level. The complete survey methodology may be found in Appendix Four, Survey Report.

FINDINGS OF MEETINGS

Demographics

A total of 882 individuals attended the meetings. There are individuals who attended more than one meeting. Therefore, double or triple counting of individuals may have occurred. The only demographic variables available are where the meetings were and which of four groups individuals believed themselves to be representing. The meeting sites and how individuals identified themselves is as follows.

Meeting Site	# Attendees	Community Citizen not Connected to the School System	Parent	School Board Member, Educator or Administrator	Other
Bradford (SU 27)	48	11	5	25	7
Enosburg Falls (SU 20)	16	3	1	12	0
Ludlow (SU 39)	30	7	7	15	1
Burlington (SD 15)	40	12	3	17	8
St. Johnsbury (SD 11)	28	4	4	17	3
Fair Haven (SU 04)	16	2	2	12	0
Grand Isle (SU 24)	57	13	16	28	1
Springfield (SD 56)	30	6	0	24	0
Hinesburg (SU 14)	31	7	8	10	6
Hardwick (SU 35)	21	3	3	14	1
Jamaica (SU 46)	31	9	2	16	4
Waterbury (SU 42)	31	8	4	16	3
Newport (SU 31)	29	3	3	19	5
Middlebury (SU 03)	51	20	5	23	3
Brighton (SU 31)	10	1	3	6	0
Rutland (SU 37/SD 40)	15	2	1	12	0
Bennington (SU 05)	51	6	10	30	5

Meeting Site	# Attendees	Community Citizen not Connected to the School System	Parent	School Board Member, Educator or Administrator	Other
Woodstock (SU 51)	29	2	3	20	2
Brattleboro (SU 48)	86	32	6	44	4
Hyde Park (SU 25)	46	8	8	29	1
Barre (SU 61)	18	2	1	11	4
Manchester (SU 06)	14	1	4	9	0
St Albans (SU 23)	21	4	1	16	0
Canaan (SU 19)	30	5	5	16	4
Wilmington (SU 49)	16	1	7	6	2
Vergennes (SU 02)	24	5	0	10	9
Warren (SU 42)	19	3	7	7	2
Lowell (SU 31)	0	0	0	0	0
Hartford (SD 54)	8	1	0	6	1
Randolph (SU 28)	23	4	6	11	2
Bradford (SU 27)	13	4	0	7	2
TOTALS	882	189	125	488	80
		21.4%	14.2%	55.3%	9%

A net total of 30 meetings were held. Bradford had two meetings – the first and the last – and the meeting in Lowell was cancelled due to lack of attendance.

The mean attendance (excluding Lowell) was 29.4 with a range of 8 attendees at Hartford to 86 attendees at Brattleboro.

Themes

The following themes were identified from the 30 public engagement community meetings.

Question 1: *What are the advantages and disadvantages of the present education governance system in your community?*

Question 1

ADVANTAGES

The overriding theme in response to the advantages of the current system was of local community involvement, connection and control.

Community involvement and connection

- Schools are the heart of the community
- Identity of towns are tied up in the school
- Townspeople define priorities that reflect local values and local knowledge. This allows for freedom, uniqueness, and autonomy.
- Many people are involved in the school, providing the opportunity to develop relationships at all levels and in all directions.

Local control

- Budget
- Programs, policies
- Hiring, evaluation
- Responsibility, oversight, accountability
- Ownership

Board representation

- Fair
- Accessible (everyone knows a board member)
- More diverse
- Breadth and depth
- Anyone can be a board member

Being local and ‘closer to the ground’ means

- Ability to respond more quickly to local needs and desires
- Closer connection to administration, board, teachers, parents
- Administration is more accountable

Other

- Broader range of ideas, more creativity, diversity of ideas
- Coordination of curriculum, special education, resource sharing already happens at SU level
- Test scores are already good so why change? If it’s not broken, don’t fix it.

Question 1

DISADVANTAGES

The primary themes in response to the disadvantages of the current system were of limited resources, inefficiencies and a lack of collaboration between schools.

Students/Education

- Smaller size schools have limited/fewer resources resulting in:
 - Limited course options
 - Less diversity of experience
 - Inequalities in education provided
 - Students unequally prepared for either high school or college
- Curriculum is inconsistent within the SU

Board

- Limited pool of people to draw from
- Hard to get people to run for board positions
- Individuals often have special interests
- Role confusion, blurred roles between boards and superintendents
- Micromanagement at the school board level makes it harder for administration to do its job

Superintendent

- Too many school boards so superintendent is spread too thin
 - Too many meetings
 - Burnout
 - High turnover
- Inability to use talents to do an effective job and focus on quality of education
- Hard to find good superintendents

Supervisory Union

- Lack of collaboration between schools
 - Inconsistency of curriculum, policies, schedules
 - Inconsistency of planning
 - Leads to inequities of resources and education of students
- Silo mentality
- Conflicts of interest
- Competing priorities and interests between schools
- Communication is difficult – too many paths, paths unclear
- Decision making and consensus is cumbersome and time-consuming

School Operations

- Higher costs due to
 - Inefficiencies (busing, e.g.)
 - Redundancies (rather than sharing resources)
- Contract complexities
 - Too many contracts
 - Different salary scales within the SU
 - Difficult to hire someone to work at multiple schools due to pay issues

Question 2: *What are the advantages and disadvantages of the school district model suggested by Commissioner Cate in his White Paper?*

Question 2

ADVANTAGES

The major themes in response to the advantages of the Commissioner's proposal were consistency of education vision and school operations, and clarity of roles of both the school board and superintendent.

Students/Education

- Board and superintendent are focused on K-12 curriculum as a whole
- Single educational vision
- Greater equity for all students
- More opportunities for students
- More diversity – of students, courses, etc.
- School choice is easier
- Helps smaller schools as they become part of larger whole
- Special education, EEE, etc. can be handled more effectively, efficiently and perhaps with cost savings
- Confidentiality of high cost students is less compromised because there are more students

School District Operations

- Consistency
 - Curriculum
 - Programs
 - Policies
 - Calendars
- Flexibility
 - Staff
 - Resources
 - Facilities/buildings
- Reduces redundancies and inefficiencies
- Greater purchasing power
- Ability to get more, better grants
- Single budget simplifies the budgeting process
- Consolidation of teacher contracts
- May reduce costs immediately and/or over time

Clarity

- Roles and responsibilities of board, superintendent, principal
- Chain of command
- Communication
- Authority, accountability
- Clearer for voters
- Single budget

Superintendent

- Ability to attract higher quality candidates
- Reduced turnover due to role clarity and fewer boards
- Improved leadership
- Focus on education, not administrative detail and boards
- Can utilize the skills for which they are hired

Board

- Increased competition for board positions
- Ability to attract better quality board members
- Focus is on a single, K-12 education vision and student achievement for the district rather than administrative details
- Eliminates or reduces 'silo' mentality
- Less micromanagement
- More accountability, more visibility

One group made the comment that DCF and homeless families would have fewer school transitions if the SU became an SD.

Question 2

DISADVANTAGES

The overriding theme in response to the disadvantages of the Commissioner's proposal was one of loss: loss of power, control, ideas, community connection, and fear of small school closings.

Loss of

- Local control
- Identity, individuality
- Voice
- Representation
- School choice
- Schools themselves (fear of school closings)
- Community connection
 - Moving government further away from local citizens
 - Limits participation
 - More bureaucratic
 - More top down/hierarchical
 - More likely to result in Australian ballot rather than floor votes because people will vote in their own towns instead of at one meeting
 - More difficult for citizens to come to board meetings

Homogenization

- Fewer ideas
- Less vision
- Less creativity
- Less diversity
- Less flexibility; more difficult to make changes

Weighted Voting

- Small towns feel powerless
- Larger towns have too much power
- Taxation without representation
- Fear of school being closed without input from individual towns

Board

- Will attract a different kind of board member
 - Weaker?
 - Politicized
 - More professional
 - Someone with more time to campaign
- More work for board members
- Getting enough people to run
- Fears that board members will not fully understand all the communities
- Too much power to one board

School District Operations

- Too much power to the superintendent
- Union contracts
 - Will cost more
 - Be more complicated
 - Be less flexible by town
- Costs may go up or at least no cost savings

Note: There were also a number of comments where people said it was difficult to answer Question 2 because there was not enough detail about the proposal.

Question 3 and Debrief: What other ideas and thoughts do you have?

Governance

- Lack of connection between proposed governance changes and education quality
 - People do not see the link between the two
 - What is the problem we're trying to solve?
 - The case has not been made
- Have local community councils/advisory boards replace the local school boards and deal with programmatic issues to maintain community connection.
- Look outside the state for other models: what has worked well elsewhere?
- This change is complex, don't rush it
- Consolidate further
- Don't change the current system
- Need to mandate change because local SUs won't do it on their own. Can do a phased approach.
- Do not mandate change: make it optional and provide incentives.
- Lots of questions about how things will work: budgets, funding, voting, facilities, school choice, etc.

Costs

- Governance isn't broken, funding is
- Real issue are the cost drivers: teacher salaries, benefits, health care, special education
- How will this proposal impact costs? How will the funding work?
- Need to fix the current inequities between sending and receiving schools and make resource distribution more equitable
- Concern with unfunded mandates and our apparent inability to do anything about it

Other Ideas

- Provide more 'best practices' information, addressing 21st century issues, not those of the Industrial Revolution
- How can we increase efficiencies instead – within an SU and between SUs?
- How can we collaborate more between schools and SUs?
- Consider magnet schools
- Have two boards: one for elementary schools and one for middle/high schools
- Need more board training on roles and responsibilities

FINDINGS OF SURVEY

The survey results as a whole may not be representative of the population of households in Vermont. This is a result of three intervening variables:

1. Interest bias introduced by an over-representation among respondents of school and supervisory union board members, educators, administrators, and other employees of the school system. Testing of the data indicates that these individuals have a vested interest in the current system.
2. Survey respondents were provided with information regarding the current system and the proposed changes. This resulted in a sample that is more knowledgeable than the general public.
3. Some inaccuracies in identification of town, current governance structure, and region of the state occurred due to the use of zip code as the single geographic identifier. In several instances, one zip code was utilized for more than one town. Analysis was conducted that, to the extent possible, overcame these limitations by separating populations from one another and conducting statistical tests separately. This was possible for the town and governance structure, although not for the region. The latter was of the least concern, however.

There are five research questions to be answered by the survey. The questions and their answers are:

1. Does the present Vermont school governance system need to be changed?

The majority of respondents (66.8%) agree that the school governance system needs to be changed. Another 20.6% do not agree that the system needs to change and 12.6% had no opinion or did not respond. The percentage of respondents who agree that the school governance system should be changed is highest in Region 1 (Northwest, including the Burlington area,) at 81.2% and lowest in Region 5 (Southeast, including the Brattleboro area) at 50.0%.

2. Does the current governance structure serve the needs of students well?

Almost half of the respondents (48.2%) state that the current governance structure serves the needs of students well. Another 42.9% state that the current governance structure does not serve the needs of students well and 8.9% had no opinion or did not respond. The percentage of respondents who state that the current governance structure serves the needs of students well is highest in Region 5 (Southeast, including the Brattleboro area) at 64.3% and lowest in Region 1 (Northwest, including the Burlington area) at 31.4%..

3. Does the current Vermont system of supervisory unions serve the needs of students well and is it efficient in certain respects?

Less than half of the respondents (35.2%) state that the supervisory unions serve the needs of students well. Another 53.5% state that the supervisory unions do not serve the needs of students well and 11.3% had no opinion or did not respond. The percentage of respondents who state that the supervisory unions serve the needs of students well is also highest in Region 5 (Southeast, including the Brattleboro area) at 42.8% and lowest in Region 1 (Northwest, including the Burlington area) at 20.9%.

Less than one fourth of the respondents (22.3%) state that the supervisory unions made efficient use of financial resources. This percentage does not vary greatly by region.

Slightly more than one fourth of the respondents (26.6%) state that the supervisory unions make efficient use of school administrators. This percentage does not vary greatly by region

4. Would the education governance system for Vermont proposed by Commissioner Cate serve the needs of students better and be more efficient in those same respects than the current system of supervisory unions?

Almost half of the respondents (48.1%) state that Commissioner Cate's governance proposal would serve the needs of students better than the current system of supervisory unions. Another 24.9% disagree with the statement and 23.3% had no opinion. The percentage of respondents who state that Commissioner Cate's governance proposal would serve the needs of students better than the current system of supervisory unions is highest in Region 4 (Southwest, including the Bennington area) at 57.5% and lowest in Region 2 (Northeast, the Northeast Kingdom) at 36.2%.

More than half of the respondents (54.5%) state that Commissioner Cate's governance proposal would make more efficient use of financial resources than the current system of supervisory unions. Of the respondents, 20.6% disagreed with the statement and 22.9% had no opinion. The percentage of respondents who state that Commissioner Cate's governance proposal would make more efficient use of financial resources than the current system of supervisory unions is highest in Region 4 (Southwest, including the Bennington area) at 61.1% and lowest in Region 2 (Northeast, the Northeast Kingdom) at 46.8%.

More than half of the respondents (56.8%) state that Commissioner Cate's governance proposal would result in more efficient use of school administrators. About 20% of respondents disagree with this statement and 23.2% had no opinion or did not respond. The percentage of respondents who state that Commissioner Cate's governance proposal would result in more efficient use of school administrators is highest in Region 4 (Southwest, including the Bennington area) at 64.8% and lowest in Region 5 (Southeast, including the Brattleboro area) at 49.9%.

5. What other ideas about school governance do you have? (open ended)

Of the 301 respondents, 159 made comments. These comments are often cogent and helpful to understanding how people think about the governance of public schools. A summary of the comments may be found on page 22 of the Survey Report.

There are five hypotheses which were developed by the evaluators based on the first fifteen of the thirty community engagement meetings. The results of analyses regarding these hypotheses are as follows:

1. The survey questions will fall into two factors: one pertaining to the current governance system and one pertaining to Commissioner Cate's governance proposal.

The survey responses fell into two factors, which were then used to create composites. These factors are: Supervisory Unions and Governance Proposal. It was found that as the respondents' agreement with the current system of supervisory unions (Supervisory Union

Composite) decreases, the respondents' agreement with Commissioner Cate's governance proposal (Governance Proposal Composite) increases.

2. There will be differences in the factors described above according to the group with which the respondents identify, particularly between the board members, educators and employees of the school system as compared to parents and community citizens

This hypothesis was proven to be partially true. Responses regarding changing the current system and the governance proposal were significantly different according to group identity. Board members are the most likely to disagree with changing the system and with the governance proposal. Community citizens and parents are the most likely to agree with changing the system and with the governance proposal. Educators/Administrators and employees of the school system have average scores on these items that are fairly neutral.

3. There will be differences in the factors described above according to the region of the state in which the respondents reside. In particular, respondents in Region 2 (Northeast Kingdom) will disagree with the governance proposal more than respondents in other regions.

This hypothesis was proven to be true. Respondents in the Northeast Kingdom (Region 2) disagree with the governance proposal more than residents of any other region. There were no other significant differences by region.

4. There will be a difference in responses to the factor pertaining to Commissioner Cate's governance proposal according to whether or not the respondent read the White Paper.

The hypothesis was disproved. Whether or not the respondent read the White Paper only impacted whether or not the respondent has an opinion; it did not relate to what the respondent's opinion actually is.

5. There will be a difference in responses to questions regarding the current governance structure according to the type of structure in the respondents' community. In particular, parents who reside in a community with a supervisory union will disagree more with supervisory unions' efficiency and their ability to serve the needs of students

This hypothesis was proven to be partially true. There were no differences in responses and composite scores by governance structure alone. However, closer examination showed significant differences based upon the group with which the respondents identify. In particular, parents in communities with a supervisory union feel more strongly that the supervisory unions are inefficient in terms of the use of administrators than those in a supervisory district. Furthermore, board members, educators, administrators, and other employees of the school system in communities with a supervisory district agree more with the governance proposal than those in communities with a supervisory union.

DISCUSSION

The survey findings indicate that board members generally do not favor changes in the current governance structure while the public generally does favor changes and employees of the school system are generally neutral. On the whole, the discussion in the community engagement meetings elicited more negative comments regarding changes to the governance system than can be found in the survey. Only 35.6% of the participants in the community engagement meetings were community citizens or parents, while 55.3% were school board members or employees of the schools. This predominance of persons associated with the schools, far beyond their representation in the community, appears to have biased the themes elicited in the meetings towards the opinions held by persons who are vested in the present system.

In essence, the persons who are presently governing and providing public education in Vermont have a very different opinion about how the system should be governed than those who pay for and depend upon the system. The persons governing and providing, with the exception of the Commissioner and a number of superintendents, believe things should be left largely as they are. The public and parents largely believe the system should be changed.

That is not to say that the community meetings did not address a very important issue. That issue, expressed in a variety of ways in the themes, is the sense of loss if local school boards were to disappear. The connection between community and school is very important to many Vermonters, in terms of community identity as well as informal resource availability and access. On the other hand, the survey results and the comments in the surveys identify the public's need for efficiencies in the school system and the best possible quality of education for the state's children. Any lasting change to the school governance system in the state will require reconciling these two needs, which are not necessarily in conflict with each other.

In both the response to the third question in the community meetings and the comments section of the survey, participants had a wide variety of ideas and thoughts about school governance and beyond. The most consistent message was that people felt there was a lack of connection between the proposed governance change and education quality. They asked questions like, "What is the problem we are trying to solve?" and said they did not see the link between the two. These responses create an opportunity for welcoming the many ideas that the public has regarding school governance. In addition, the public would welcome a clear articulation of the need for and results of changes in school governance.

Of particular importance among the ideas that were addressed in both the community meetings and the survey comments section were three concerns. The first of these was the weighted voting that would be necessary in the recommendations of the White Paper as it is currently written. The second is the fear that small schools would be closed by fiat by a newly constituted and "all powerful" SD board with little or no input from the affected town. The third is developing consistency and best practices among schools in areas such as teacher and administrative contracts, special education, curriculum development, calendars, healthcare benefits, resource sharing, and other similar issues.

CONCLUSIONS

The following are the conclusions that were drawn as a result of the community engagement process described above. These conclusions are based on the detailed information provided in this report. It is important to read the themes from the public meetings as well as the findings of the survey in order to fully understand the conclusions.

Conclusions from the Public Meetings

(21.4% community members, 14.2% parents, 55.3% school board members/educators, 9% other)

1. The overriding theme in response to the advantages of the present education governance system was of local community involvement, connection and control.
2. The primary themes in response to the disadvantages of the present education system were of limited resources, inefficiencies and a lack of collaboration between schools.
3. The major themes in response to the advantages of the Commissioner's proposal were consistency of education vision and school operations, and clarity of roles of both the school board and superintendent.
4. The overriding theme in response to the disadvantages of the Commissioner's proposal was one of loss: loss of power, control, ideas, community connection, and fear of small school closings.
5. While many of responses to other thoughts and ideas on education governance were disparate and sometimes contradictory, many people did not see a connection between the proposed governance changes and education quality.

Conclusions from the Survey

(55.5% community members, 21.6% parents, 17.6% school board members/educators, 5.3% other)

1. Two-thirds (66.8%) of the respondents agree that the school governance system needs to be changed. Another 20.6% do not agree that the system needs to change and 12.6% had no opinion or did not respond.
2. About one-third (35.2%) of the respondents state that the supervisory unions serve the needs of students well. Another 53.5% state that the supervisory unions do not serve the needs of students well and 11.3% had no opinion or did not respond.
3. Almost half (48.2%) of the respondents state that the current governance structure serves the needs of students well. Another 42.9% state that the current governance structure does not serve the needs of students well and 8.9% had no opinion or did not respond.
4. Almost half (48.1%) of the respondents state that Commissioner Cate's governance proposal would serve the needs of students better than the current system of supervisory unions. Another 24.9% disagree with the statement and 23.3% had no opinion.

5. More than half (54.5%) of the respondents believe that Commissioner Cate's governance proposal would make more efficient use of financial resources than the current system of supervisory unions. Of the respondents, 20.6% disagree with the statement and 22.9% had no opinion.
6. More than half (56.8%) of the respondents believe that Commissioner Cate's governance proposal would result in more efficient use of school administrators. About 20% of respondents disagree with this statement and 23.2% had no opinion or did not respond.
7. Community members and parents generally favor changing school governance while school board members are generally opposed and educators generally have opinions that lie in between the other two groups.
8. At the same time, the general public and parents believe that a change in the governance structure could result in increased efficiency and serve the needs of students better.

Conclusions from Both the Public Meetings and Survey

1. The insights of both groups, community members/parents and school board members/educators, are valuable. Therefore the input of both needs to be taken into account.
2. Many Vermonters are concerned that the connection between community and school will be lost if the school board is no longer operating at the town level.
3. Any proposals that are made must clearly articulate the need for change as well as the expected results, including measurable outcomes in education quality.
4. To increase the likelihood of success in any proposed change in school governance, the special concerns identified in the last paragraph of the Discussion section (weighted voting, small schools being closed by fiat, developing consistency and best practices among schools) should be taken into account.

**APPENDIX ONE
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MEETING SITES
AND
SCHEDULE OF PERSONNEL**

**DOE EDUCATION GOVERNANCE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT
SITE MEETINGS AS OF 3/5/07
*ALL MEETINGS BEGIN AT 6 P.M.***

DATE	SITE	FACILITY	HELPERS	CONSULTANTS
January 16	Bradford (SU 27)	Oxbow High School Cafeteria	Jill, John	Robin
January 24	Enosburg Falls (SU 20)	Enosburg Falls School Cafeteria	Susan	Robin
January 29	Ludlow (SU 39)	Ludlow Elementary School Multipurpose Room	Emanuel, Kate	Robin
January 30	Burlington (SD 15)	Burlington High School Cafeteria	Bev, Wendy, Jill	Robin
February 6	St. Johnsbury (SD 11)	St. Johnsbury School	Jill, John	George
February 7	Fair Haven (SU 04)	Fair Haven High School Library	Jill	George
February 7	Grand Isle (SU 24)	Grande Isle School Cafeteria	Wendy, Susan	Robin
February 12	Springfield (SD 56)	Springfield High School UVM Room	John, Tina	George
February 13	Hinesburg (SU 14)	Champlain Valley Union High School Cafeteria	Jim, Jill	Robin
March 7	Hardwick (SU 35)	Hazen Union Cafeteria	Bev, Jill	Robin
March 7	Jamaica (SU 46)	Jamaica Village School Cafeteria	Ken, Tina	George
March 8	Waterbury (SU 42)	Crossett Brook Elementary School Cafeteria, Duxbury	Kate, Jill	George
March 12	Newport (SU 31)	North Country Union High School Library	Jill, Susan, Richard	Robin
March 13	Middlebury (SU 03)	Middlebury Union High School Cafeteria	Ken, Jim	Robin
March 19	Brighton (SU 31)	Brighton Elementary Gymnasium	Jill, Tina	Robin
March 21	Rutland (SU 37 & SD 40)	Rutland High School Cafeteria	Bev, Wendy	Robin
March 27	Bennington (SU 05)	Mt. Anthony Union Middle School Cafeteria	John, Richard	Robin
March 28	Woodstock (SU 51)	Woodstock Union High School Cafeteria	Kate, Ken	George

3/13/2008 EGPEP Helper Schedule

April 2	Brattleboro (SU 48)	Brattleboro Union High School Multipurpose Room	Emanuel, Kate, Richard	George
April 3	Hyde Park (SU 25)	Lamoille Union High School Cafeteria	Cindy, John, Jim	JILL
April 3	Barre (SU 61)	Spaulding High School Library	Bev, Tina, Richard	George
April 4	Manchester (SU 06)	Manchester Middle and Elementary School Multipurpose Room	Kate, Susan	George
April 5	St. Albans (SU 23)	St. Albans Town Education Center Cafeteria	Jim, Susan, Richard	Robin
April 9	Canaan (SU 19)	Canaan Elementary Multipurpose Room	Jill, Tina, Richard	George
April 9	Wilmington (SU 49)	Twin Valley High School Cafeteria	Ken, Bev	Robin
April 11	Vergennes (SU 02)	Vergennes Union High School Library and Media Facility	Jim, Susan, Richard	Robin
April 25	Warren (SU 42)	Warren School Cafeteria	Wendy, Bev	Robin
April 30	Lowell (SU 31)	Lowell Elementary School Cafeteria	Kate, Susan	George
May 1	Hartford (SD 54)	Hartford High School Cafeteria	John, Kate	Robin
May 2	Randolph (SU 28)	Randolph Union High School Cafeteria	Emanuel, Jim	George
May 3	Bradford (SU 27)	Oxbow Union High School Cafeteria	Jill, John, Richard	Robin

APPENDIX TWO PREPARATION MATERIALS

- 2.1 Site checklist
- 2.2 Preparation checklist
- 2.3 Set-up procedures
- 2.4 Sign-in Sheets
- 2.5 Table Tents

2.1 Site Checklist

1. Call school contact a day or two prior to the meeting. This is usually the Superintendent.
2. Confirm location, get directions, and find out how to get close to the school to unload your car.
3. Make sure the following will be available:
 - a. Tables that can seat up to 8 people
 - b. Chairs
 - c. Screen for PowerPoint
 - d. Easy access to one or more outlets
 - e. Long table for facilitators (for laptop, projector, etc.)
 - f. Long table for registration
 - g. Long table for drinks and snacks
 - h. Wall space to hang easel paper
 - i. Cordless/portable microphone (preferred) or other microphone so people can hear facilitator
4. Ask contact if he/she has an idea of how many people to expect. You may also want to ask if there is anything you should know (potential land mines, etc.) that would be helpful to your running the meeting.
5. Ask if the school can put up signs in schools to direct people to the meeting location.
6. Ask for the name of the building principal. Confirm that the principal is aware of the meeting and ask if you also need to contact her/him.
7. Let contact know that you will be arriving at approximately 4:30 pm to unload and set up.

2.2 Preparation Checklist

SUPPLIES	EQUIPMENT	SNACKS	HANDOUTS	SET-UP
Easel paper • Post-it • Regular	Laptop computer	Bowls	White paper	Sign-in sheets
Markers	Projector and cords	Plates	Message from RC with SU/SD org chart and <i>school district/governance</i>	Table tents
Masking tape	Extension cords (2+)	Napkins	Regional Maps	Table cloths
Duct tape	Easel	Hot cups	Questionnaire	Pre-Charts • Agenda • Directions, Part 1 • Signs for Q1 and Q2 (where groups will hang their paper)
Post-it notes <i>Or white or lined paper for writing ideas?</i>	Remote for projector (extra battery)	Cold Cups		
Pens & pencils (sharpen)	Coffee urn	Juice		
Highlighters	Bells/chimes	Teas		
Name Tags	Mason jars	Hot chocolate		
Dots for map	State Map	Creamer		
Scissors	Facilitator's Guide and Checklists	Splenda		
Push pins	Process-recording sheet	Sugar		
Rubber bands	Vermont Gazetteer or other map for directions	Cookies Snack mix Nuts		
Zip-loc bags		Candy		

2.3 Set-Up Procedures

Tables	<p>Put table clothes on each table. Tape down if necessary.</p> <p>Arrange chairs so there are 4-8 per table or end of table.</p> <p>Put 3 pieces of regular flip chart paper on each table.</p> <p>Put Mason jar in center: fill with pens, pencils, markers for writing and doodling.</p> <p>Put 1 pack post-its and/or paper on each table.</p> <p>Put table tents on each table.</p> <p>Put snacks on each table: a bowl (or 2) for mix, nuts, pretzels and a plate for cookies and candy.</p>
Registration	<p>Set up a separate registration table that people will see as soon as they walk in.</p> <p>Put the following on the table:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sign-in sheets• Richard's letter re: governance• White paper• Name tags• Markers for name tags <p>Have ready for after the meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Questionnaire
Equipment / Facilitator's Table	<p>Set up a separate table for facilitator and equipment.</p> <p>Set up projector.</p> <p>Turn on computer.</p> <p>Have remote handy.</p> <p>Leave the "Welcome" slide up until you begin.</p> <p>Have your facilitator's guide on this table.</p> <p>Put chimes or bell on this table.</p>
Walls, Easels, and Map	<p>Set up 1-2 easels in the front of the room.</p> <p>Hang the pre-charts up where appropriate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Agenda• Directions, Part 1• Signs for where 2 Questions - answers will be put up <p>Put up state map. Add dots as needed for completed sites.</p>
Drinks Table	<p>Put water in coffee urn and heat.</p> <p>Lay out teas, hot chocolate, creamer, and sugar.</p> <p>Lay out hot and cold cups, stirrers, and napkins.</p>

2.4 Sign-In Sheet

Meeting Date: _____ Meeting Location: _____

Page Number: _____

Name	Community citizen not connected to the school system	Parent	School board member, educator or administrator	Other: Please specify

APPENDIX THREE PRESENTATION MATERIALS

- 3.1 PowerPoint Presentation
- 3.2 The Governance of Education in Vermont – 1777 – 2006
- 3.3 Education Governance Conversation Agenda and Supporting Documents
- 3.4 Governance Structure Charts
- 3.5 Follow-up Questionnaire

3.5 Education Governance Conversation Follow-up Questionnaire

Meeting Date: _____ Meeting Location: _____

We want to hear your thoughts! If you have further information, ideas, opinions or other comments you'd like us to know about, please complete this questionnaire and either give it to the facilitator at your meeting or send it to:

Mail:	System Wide Solutions, Inc. 466 Vail Rd. Whiting, VT 05778-4023
Fax:	Fax: 802-828-3140
Email:	<u>governance@list.education.state.vt.us</u> (Please indicate in your email the location of the meeting you attended.)

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the present education system in your community?

2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the school district model suggested by Commissioner Cate in his White Paper?

3. Do you have other suggestions for a governance model? If so, please tell us what that is and what you believe are the advantages and disadvantages of your suggestions.

3. What other information would you like us to know?

4. Please select the group with which you identify:

- Community citizen not connected to the school system
- Parent
- School board member, educator or administrator
- Other (please specify): _____

**APPENDIX FOUR
FULL SURVEY REPORT**