

**Public Comment to the Commission on the Future of Public Education in Vermont**  
**December 16, 2024**

Thank you Commissioner Roy for the opportunity to make comments today, and thanks to you and all of the members of the Commission for your efforts. My name is Cheryl Charles and I am the chair of the Westminster Town School District Board and chair of the Windham Northeast Supervisory Union Board (WNESU).

My comments are directed to the important task you have before you **today** to decide what to send to the legislature.

As part of your process, you discussed a chart that had been developed by the Finance Committee chaired by Emilie Kornheiser. The basis for the chart was a brainstorming session. Brainstorming, by definition, is a process where all ideas are posted and none are evaluated for their merit, accuracy or impact. The version you looked at and discussed at your last meeting was an edited version in which language about “high fiscal impact” was included, without underlying analysis and evidence. Some of you expressed strong concerns that if the chart were included in that form, the brainstormed ideas would look like recommendations—and all of you have agreed that you are NOT supporting the list as a slate of recommendations. So, if you do include the chart, do not include the edited version. Make sure you are showing the raw document, labeled as a brainstormed list, and link to it, so that you don’t implicitly give credibility to ideas that have no merit, and no demonstrated cost savings.

Throughout your deliberations, you have emphasized the importance of being “data driven” and standing on the evidence. Please continue to do so. Continue to question assumptions, for example, like closing small schools and merging districts will save money. It is damaging and would actually be irresponsible, given your stature, to make such statements without accurate data and other supporting evidence. Make sure you have the evidence to support whatever recommendations you ultimately develop. And show us, the public, the evidence you are using. You are making progress in that area with the help of the Agency of Education, and also members of the public, like Dr. Jeanne Albert who provided data at your last meeting to demonstrate that merged districts are not saving significant monies, and are actually spending more per equalized or weighted pupil, on average, than supervisory unions and unmerged districts.

Looking ahead, there are rumors that you will be exploring a foundation formula where a certain amount of money is provided to schools and districts throughout the state, and then locals, depending on their means, can add to it. That approach would appear to be in violation of the Vermont constitution and would raise significant equity issues.

I respectfully urge you to exercise caution and care to ensure that you are standing on accurate data, Vermont-specific research, and other rigorously obtained evidence with any statements or potential recommendations you make.

Thank you,  
Cheryl Charles, Ph.D., Westminster, Vermont, Cheryl.charles@wnesu.com