



# LAMOILLE SOUTH SUPERVISORY UNION

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**November 20, 2024**

**To:** Meagan Roy, Chair of the Commission on the Future of Public Education in Vermont  
**From:** Ryan Heraty, Superintendent

**Memo:** Short-term Strategies

Dear Commission Members:

Thank you for your work on behalf of Vermont's children. These are challenging times and the problems are complex with no easy solutions. As you may know, our supervisory union has been significantly impacted by the current crisis; In the Elmore-Morristown District, two failed school budgets resulted in a substantial decrease in services provided to our students, including the loss of our middle school language program and intervention support for children. In Stowe, our taxpayers have navigated an increase of approximately 30% in local property taxes. Many have expressed the hardship this is placing on their families. According to the most recent Agency of Education [Data](#), our supervisory union is the second lowest-spending LEA in the state. It feels as though we are being penalized for years of fiscal responsibility.

We believe in the sharing of tax dollars and that all students should have access to a high-quality education, regardless of zip code. Our schools need extensive capital improvements and residents in all three towns are dedicating a much larger [percentage](#) of their income towards housing than others in the state. Our children have significant needs and the impact of the pandemic, mental health crisis, and opiate epidemic can be felt in each one of our buildings on a daily basis. Another round of budget failures will be devastating to our students and teacher morale. I worry deeply about the future of our towns, our schools, and our state.

Although many are committed to redesigning our system, this will take time. There are structural changes that can be made now to avoid a repeat of last year. Without any change, we will have another round of failed budgets, impacting some of the most vulnerable students.

We ask that you please initiate and support action around the following short-term strategies to minimize budget failures:

1. ***Establish a Reserve Fund Maximum (e.g., 10% of expenditures)***
  - a) Immediately reduces pressure on the education fund.
  - b) Encourages districts to use reserve funds for capital improvements now, reducing future liabilities.
  - c) Discourages districts from using Act 127 tax incentives to build a savings account to pay down future tax rates instead of lowering budgets.

2. ***Allow local options taxes to be used for capital improvement***
  - a) Reduces the pressure on the education fund as some districts will be able to fund critical repairs / renovations through local option tax revenue.
  - b) Acknowledges the state's decision to stop funding school construction and the burden this has placed on the education fund.
  - c) Addresses the immediate safety repairs needed in many schools and the impact of PCBs.
3. ***Redesign Tax Categories (i.e. resident, non-resident, business)***
  - a) Acknowledges the large purchase of properties that occurred during the pandemic by out-of-state investors, depleting our housing stock.
  - b) Ensures residents will pay an equal or lower tax rate than non-residents.
  - c) Reduces financial pressure on renters by disconnecting the landlord tax rate from non-resident tax rate.
4. ***Remove weights from tuitioning districts***
  - a) The state is currently subsidizing those sending their children to private schools by lowering property tax rates with pupil weighting. Some of these districts are even sending students to boarding schools in other states.
  - b) The weights are intended to increase resources provided to students, not to reduce tax rates for towns that do not operate public schools.
5. ***Identify and support districts that have a disproportionate staff to student ratio***
  - a) This one data point is critical for identifying inefficiencies in school budgets as salaries and benefits account for nearly 80% of all expenditures.
  - b) Reducing overstaffing will also address the high number of vacancies in hard-to-fill positions and an over-reliance on unlicensed educators. Vermont has had the largest [increase](#) in emergency / provisional licenses in recent history, putting inexperienced educators with children on a daily basis.
6. ***Increase transparency and publish student investments by category***
  - a) The politicization of the word "pupil" is having unintended consequences on equity across the state. For example, unpublished AOE data indicates there are 24 districts spending over \$30,000 / student. The weighted pupil amount however, conveys these districts are spending only \$14,000 / pupil on average. The \$14,000 figure is what will be written on the ballot, misleading taxpayers and preventing them from making informed decisions.
  - b) Act 127 was promoted as a bill to "increase transparency" yet misleads taxpayers. By not showing how money is truly spent, we will lose trust. Some argue showing real dollars will remove the "equity" built into the system. This is false; contrary to the narrative, Vermont's education finance system is one of the least [progressive](#) in the country and allows voters to choose between lowering tax rates or investing in schools. Hiding real financial data exacerbates funding inequities.

We appreciate you taking the time to review these suggestions and look forward to partnering with you during the upcoming legislative session.

Sincerely,



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