

AGENCY OF EDUCATION
Barre, Vermont

TEAM: AOE School Governance Team

ACTION ITEM: Will the State Board of Education vote to approve the Secretary's recommendation that Blue Mountain Union Supervisory District be placed under State Board consideration for supervisory union/district change.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: That the State Board of Education votes to approve the Secretary's recommendation that Blue Mountain Union Supervisory District be placed under State Board consideration for supervisory union/district change.

STATUTORY AUTHORITY: 16 V.S.A. § 261; State Board Rules, Rule 3000 et seq.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: The position of permanent superintendent of schools is currently vacant in the BMU Supervisory District. The District has an interim superintendent of schools, Emilie Knisley. Under the rules of the State Board, a vacancy in the position of superintendent of schools can serve as a basis for re-examining the current SU/SD structure of a local system. The present vacancy at BMU, along with its ADM (of about 400 equalized pupils), and the current governance conversations associated with Act 46 of 2015 has prompted a review of the status of BMU as a stand-alone supervisory district by the Secretary.

Historical Information

In February of 1976, the State Board of Education approved a request by the (then) Blue Mountain Unified Union School District to withdraw as a member district from the Caledonia Central Supervisory Union, to govern itself independently as the Blue Mountain Union Supervisory District. At that time, one of the compelling arguments in favor of this governance change was the fact that BMU was experiencing rapid population growth. In 1976, BMU's ADM had increased by nearly 80% in a six (6) year period from 1969-1975. BMU's ADM in 1969 was about 300. In 1975, the ADM was about 520.

Under statute, the State Board may designate any school district as a supervisory district if it will provide for the education of all resident students PK-12 and is large enough to support the planning and administrative functions of a supervisory union.

Current Situation

Presently, BMU has an ADM of just 409 equalized pupils. Over time, BMU has

experienced a significant and consistent decline in student population. This raises fundamental questions about whether BMU can remain a sustainable stand-alone SD, for the long term, pursuant to 16 V.S.A. § 261.

BMU's equalized tax rate increased 34% between FY11 and FY15, compared to a statewide increase of 20.4% in the same period. In the same period, BMU's spending per equalized pupil increased almost 28%, compared to just under 15% for the state as a whole.

Recommendation

For these reasons, the Secretary is recommending that BMU be evaluated for a possible change in SU/SD assignment. Concurrent with this State level evaluation, the Secretary notes that BMU is currently a member of a study committee under Ch. 11 of Title 16 and is already exploring a change in governance structure; the other member districts of this study committee are Bradford and Newbury (representing the interests of the two Town Elementary School Districts and the Oxbow Union High School District). The Secretary recommends that State level evaluation should defer, in the interim, to the local conversations already happening between BMU and its study committee partners. The Secretary proposes to report back to the State Board no later than the June 2016 SBE meeting with an update on this study committee's work. At that time the Secretary and the Board can revisit, as may be necessary, more exact details about the nature and timeline of any necessary report associated with an SU/SD reassignment.

STAFF AVAILABLE: Greg Glennon, General Counsel
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