


MEMORANDUM

TO: State Board of Education

FROM: Daniel M. French, Ed.D., Secretary of Education 

SUBJECT: Assignment of Battenkill Valley Supervisory Union School Districts (Arlington and Sandgate) to the Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union

DATE: September 10, 2020

The Board ordered the assignment of all the school districts that are currently members of the Battenkill Valley Supervisory Union (BVSU), the Arlington Town School District and the Sandgate Town School District, to the Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union (SVSU) effective July 1, 2020. The Board subsequently extended this deadline to July 1, 2021 upon the request of the districts involved. From my perspective, the Board supported this request for an extension based on the rationale that SVSU was also dealing with the merger of its elementary school districts as required by the Board's order under Act 46.

I was contacted by the districts in February to discuss their interest in requesting a further delay in the assignment of these districts to the SVSU. The rationale presented at the time was based on my white paper, "Designing our Future" which concluded a single district would be the best structure to meet our education policy goals of quality and equity. The districts argued that if this was an eventuality, then assigning these districts to a new supervisory union now would create an unnecessary intermediate step towards that ultimate goal. I told them I did not believe this was a strong argument to support further delay. I also told them if they were going to make a request for further delay, that they should do so this summer, prior to the start of the fall school budget process which would need to address any structural changes in supervisory union composition.

Recently, the districts have articulated a new rationale to delay the assignment of these districts based on the COVID-19 emergency. They argue that the emergency has required them to focus their collective organizational capacities on the complex work of reopening their schools during the pandemic.

I am sympathetic to this argument, but when viewed in the larger context and pattern of delay, I do not support a further extension of this deadline. As we begin to address the challenging financial implications of the COVID-19 emergency on our education system, it will be important to seek efficiencies in education spending, particularly in areas of administrative costs which might not be directly related to the provision of student services. The assignment of these districts to SVSU and the subsequent dissolution of the BVSU it would cause have long been identified as a solution in this regard.