

Begin forwarded message:

From: Joanna Doria <doriajoanna@gmail.com>

Subject: Re: further information the Board will want to consider at its 19 May meeting.

Date: May 13, 2021 at 7:24:58 AM EDT

To: "Carroll, John" <John.Carroll@vermont.gov>, "Sprague, Suzanne" <Suzanne.Sprague@vermont.gov>

Cc: Molly Witters <mollywitters@gmail.com>

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Dear Chair Carroll,

Thank you for your followup letter and for putting some of the State Board of Education's thoughts into perspective. We have considered both the near-term and longer-term concerns you have expressed.

Attached, you will find commitments in writing which demonstrate verified capacity at surrounding schools that can accommodate all Ripton students in grades K-12. Please also find a tabular overview of how all students in each grade K-12 can be accommodated at nearby schools for the 2022-23 school year.

I will also take this opportunity to introduce Molly Witters who will be speaking on Ripton's behalf at the Board's May 19th meeting. Molly is a member of the appointed Ripton School Executive Committee. She is also our Town Moderator.

Respectfully,
Joanna Doria for the Ripton School Executive Committee

On May 3, 2021, at 4:26 PM, Carroll, John <John.Carroll@vermont.gov> wrote:

Dear Ms. Cox, Ms. Phinney, Ms. Doria, and Ms. Hoyler:

My thanks to you again for your presentations to the State Board of Education at our 21 April meeting. As promised at the end of that meeting, I'm writing to you now to request further information that the Board will want to consider at its 19 May meeting.

First, I wish to put the Board's response to Ripton's proposal in perspective.

As you may have noted, the State Board readily approved withdrawal requests from Halifax and from Westminster — but appears to be hesitating about Ripton. The explanation is that Ripton's proposal is very different from those of Halifax and of Westminster.

In both Halifax and Westminster, the re-creation of new one-town districts will require no material change in where the students in all grades go to school. All students are already attending these schools, and no changes are foreseen. Tuitioning demands (and costs) for older students will not change. And each town school district will stay in the same SU as they are now — and have been for many years.

Ripton's proposed withdrawal from ACSD is very different. As a single small-town district, Ripton alone will bear all costs for a small K-6 elementary school, *and* the district will have to pay tuition for *all* its grade 7-12 students. Moreover, the new Ripton district will probably belong to an SU where few, if any, of Ripton's 7-12 students actually go to school. This will mean that Ripton will have virtually no control over the cost and quality of education for nearly half its students.

As other small Vermont towns have found, Ripton's proposed new governance structure — a single-town district which relies on tuitioning nearly half its students — can become very expensive to operate. In some small-towns with similar district structures, the costs of tuitioning grades 7-12 have forced the closure of their elementary school.

Accordingly, as you heard in the State Board's discussion on 21 April, there are among Board members these concerns:

- Near-term, given expected staff changes at the end of this school year, there's the *possibility* that Ripton Elementary School may lack adequate or appropriate staff needed to meet State requirements when it re-opens as a district school for the 2022-23 school year.
- Longer-term, tuitioning half or more of Ripton's K-12 students — where Ripton will have little control over costs — there's the *possibility*, as in other small-town independent districts, that tuitioning so many students will place unsustainable financial burdens on the new Ripton school district, possibly forcing the eventual closure of the Ripton Elementary School.

Statute requires the Board to ascertain "*that the students in [Ripton] will attend a school that is in compliance with the rules adopted by the State Board pertaining to educational programs.*"

Because of the vulnerabilities of a small single-town district, and because of the uncertainties and concerns described above, the State Board is unlikely to approve Ripton's request to withdraw from ACSD unless Ripton demonstrates that it can and will, if necessary, send all its students — not just grades 7-12 — to schools in other communities.

In other words, the Board asks Ripton to demonstrate that it is prepared for the *eventuality* that the town's elementary school may be unable to meet state standards at July 2022 and/or that financial pressures in coming years may force the closing of the town school.

Accordingly, the State Board asks that you present, at the Board's 19 May meeting, commitments in writing which demonstrate, for the five years beginning July 2022, that, should it become necessary, schools in nearby communities will collectively be able to accommodate all Ripton students in grades K-12.

In addition to the commitments of individual schools in nearby communities, please provide a tabular overview of how all students, in each grade K-12, can, if necessary, be accommodated at schools in nearby communities as of the 2022-23 school year — i.e numbers of all Ripton students, by all grades and by all schools in nearby communities, for school year 2022-23

As before, I will be grateful if you will send to Ms. Sprague (copied above) and to me the information requested above, six days before the Board meeting — i.e not later than mid-day 13 May.

kind regards,

JC

John Carroll

Chair, Vermont State Board of Education