

Public Comment, June 8 State Board of Education meeting

I am going to speak on the point of whether or not you are going to change the Small School Grant qualifying time between school from 15 min to 30 min. I strongly encourage you to stick to the current 15 min metric. I live in Barnard, and Barnard Academy has a 15 min school-to-school distance with Woodstock Elementary, so it is highly relevant to us. 15 minutes may not seem like a lot of time on a bus, however, I believe there are very valid reasons that the limit was created during the Act 60 process.

Point 1: School to school distance does not reflect the real time students spend on a bus. Drive time in a car to our school from the outlying edges of town can be as long as 20 min for some families, and the one school bus that travels around town picking up kids, does it for 50 minutes now, and only reaches 60% of the kids. Kids are already spending a lot of time traveling on buses with the current metric.

Point 2: Some towns have more complicated geography than others. Barnard is almost 500 ft of elevation above Woodstock and travel on the road between Barnard and Woodstock can be treacherous a large percentage of the school year. Due to its elevation, Barnard, has almost daily "nuisance snow" in the winter, causing slower travel times and safety concerns. Last year the bus slid off the road and got stuck while traveling between Barnard Academy and WUHS with Middle Schoolers and High Schoolers on the bus and the students had to wait in cold temperatures for 45 minutes until a new bus arrived.

I encourage you to not change these time metrics. They were created with good thoughtfulness and concern for the welfare of our kids and the quality of their school experience. The standards for VT schools and school children needs to remain the same, not despite these challenging times, but because of it.

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