

ORLEANS CENTRAL SUPERVISORY UNION

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September 7, 2022

Mr. Oliver Olsen - Chair
Vermont State Board of Education
1 National Life Drive, Davis 5
Montpelier, Vermont 05602-2501

RE: Lincoln School District

Dear Chair Olsen and Members of the Board:

As Chairs of the Lake Region Union Elementary Middle School District, member of the Orleans Central Supervisory Union, and the Orleans Central Supervisory Union, we write to you today to provide Lake Region Union Elementary Middle School District's ('LRUEMSD') views regarding the potential for Lincoln to be placed, involuntarily, within the LRUEMSD. The Boards of the OCSU believe strongly that there are too many hurdles, whether structurally or financially, which would arise from the addition of the Lincoln School as a district of the OCSU. As such, we cannot support any decision which would place Lincoln within our district or Supervisory Union.

As you are aware, OCSU and its member towns, not unlike many towns and school districts in Vermont, were forced to merge their K-8 schools into one Elementary/Middle School District in July 1, 2019 to establish two side-by-side unified districts, the Lake Region Union High School District and the Lake Region Union Elementary Middle School District. In reference to structure, it is our understanding is that Lincoln is pre-K to 6th, which is different from all of our elementary/MS schools, which are Pre-K to 8th, who then attend the Lake Region Union High School District. It seems that the SU would need to devote significant resources to getting Lincoln students and the records to a middle school and then a high school in a way that does not occur anywhere else in the SU. This would include continuing as LEA for special education students.

OCSU's concerns about the possibility of the addition of Lincoln are focused on financial and organizational/support matters.

Our SU experienced a 30% loss in staff and administration in the 2021-22 school year entering into the FY23 school year. All of the Central Office administrators are new to their roles since February 2022. We are operating this year with a Supt in her second year and without a Director of Instruction.

Across our K-8 school we have 70% of our administration are new this year as well. Our turnover in leadership and staffing across our SU doesn't put OCSU in a place where we could support another school district. Currently we are still experiencing 8% shortage in staff as we open our schools this September.

OCSU has had a unified contract for all of its districts since before the merger. The addition of a new contract and employees on varying salary schedules has the potential for increasing costs for the taxpayers of OCSU as negotiations typically center on moving all employees to the higher salary rate after a merger. We were fortunate to align our teachers' salaries during the last negotiations session.

Finally, our special education case count is one of the highest in the state at 28%. We have struggled for two years to fill vacancies in the following categories to support our current caseload:

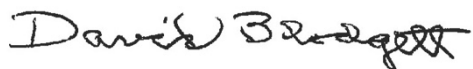
- Special educator
- Behavior interventionist
- SEL specialists
- Para educator and Personal Care

In addition, the grade configuration and enrollment of our LRUEMSD has been fairly constant and a recent 10-year study shows that our enrollments will either remain the same or increase slightly. Therefore, we do not see a decrease in students in our SU for several years and know the staffing shortage will continue for another year or two compounding our current situation.

It is our view that they should seek a new partnership with a district better positioned to support the addition of a new school.

On behalf of the OCSU and member districts, we appreciate the Board's consideration of our position.

If the SBE Board has additional questions, please feel free to contact either Superintendent Chamberlin or Neil Urie.



David Blodgett, Chair of the OCSU Board



Neil Urie, Chair of the Lake Region Union Elementary Middle School District