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Working together to
be stronger together.

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22 September 2022

Oliver Olsen
Chair of Vermont Board of Education
1 National Life Drive
Montpelier, VT 05602

Dear Chair Olsen:

In anticipation of the upcoming State Board of Education meeting, I want to clarify the position of Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union with respect to Lincoln School District's request to become part of our Supervisory Union. On September 1, 2022, our Supervisory Union Board Chair was contacted by a member of the Lincoln Board with this request. After consulting with me, the chair brought the request to the full Supervisory Union Board at their September meeting. At that meeting it was clear that there was no interest in absorbing the Lincoln School into OSSU. I am the new superintendent, but I clearly gave the SU Board my professional opinion to the negative and they agreed. I have been a superintendent in Vermont for 21 years and prior to that a building principal and curriculum director.

The Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union is located more than 100 miles and two counties away from Lincoln. It is a GPS travel of one hour and 40 minutes and usually Google Maps underestimates the time. There is also some difficult terrain between the two locations. But more importantly, any assumption of the Lincoln District would completely disrupt the PK-12 initiatives that are well underway in our SU. Orleans Southwest faced a forced merger of the towns of Greensboro, Hardwick, and Woodbury. Those towns, under very difficult COVID conditions, have done heroic work in identifying as a single district - sometimes a great public peril. It continues to be hard. To add another outlier district that would not have to comply with the conditions of that merger would be a hardship for those towns. They complied and never sought withdrawal. It would seem like a proverbial "slap in the face" to bring in a district that has fought a merger and walked away.

OSSU operates four K-6 schools; a 7-12 high school where all the students in the merged districts go, and a PK-12 school. We have approximately 1,100 students and the SU has been focused on compliance with all state efforts to coordinate services at the supervisory union level. We coordinate and centralize transportation, special education services, food service, facilities management, curriculum, instruction, and assessment. There is a good faith effort as evidenced by the recent appointment of a centralized Food Service Director, Facilities Director and a centralized Director of Finance and Operations. These services can all be implemented smoothly because of a fundamental commitment to that model and, more importantly, proximity. To assume a district that is over an hour and forty minutes away would completely disrupt this model and undermine all the work of this SU.

Aside from these geographical limitations, OSSU has spent considerable time, energy, and resources developing a shared curriculum and associated professional development in those curricula areas. This year we have embarked on a

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strategic and robust Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) that requires shared staff to go to each building to ensure implementation with fidelity. This work was done collaboratively among the school districts. It has been rolled out and would be completely disrupted by a school district that, again, is over an hour and a half from us.

As other superintendents have said, our SU is right-sized to meet the needs of the students in our region. Some of this right sizing came at great sacrifice. It could be easy to anticipate that adding an additional, very small district, located in another county more than an hour and forty minutes away, would significantly disrupt that process.

On a final note, our labor unions have worked hard to develop one Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA). This was not easy but could be severely disrupted by an outlier. We have a common workday, common salaries, common benefits and unified working conditions. That work should be honored and not disrupted.

For all of the above reasons, the Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union Board had no interest in absorbing the Lincoln School District and we hope the State Board agrees.

David W. Baker

Dr. David Baker
Superintendent of Schools
Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union