



# August Newsletter

## Northshire Merger Study Committee

### Update on recent work from committee chair Jon Wilson

In our August meetings we took on some substantial issues that led to meaningful and open discussions. Our deliberation concerning board representation was especially intriguing. The law requires that a study committee must include in its final report a proposal for the size and composition of the new unified district's school board. At our August 3rd meeting we had an excellent discussion that ended in a proposed board structure that all committee members in attendance agreed was a fair compromise. Most committee members agreed that if this future board were larger than 13 members, then it could not effectively govern. Once we agreed that the board should consist of 13 members, we took on the complex task of how each town should be represented.

Some committee members from the less-populated towns were concerned that they would have little influence on a larger board while some committee members from the larger towns expressed that they would be concerned that they would be underrepresented if the makeup of the new board was not

proportionally based on population. As a history teacher, I found our debate interesting in that it echoed the Great Compromise of 1787 when the framers of the US Constitution devised our legislative structure and determined how each state would be represented in Congress. To see the agreement that the committee reached, please see the FAQ on the following page. Beyond tackling the issue of board representation, the committee made progress in some of the following areas:



- The committee reached an initial verbal agreement in regard to the requirements for closing a school in the new unified district. Our proposed plan states that no school will be closed the first four years after merging and  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the new board must approve a school closure thereafter. In the coming meetings, we will finalize the other requirements.
- The committee continues to weigh the pros and cons of merging into a Regional Education District (RED), which would be a part of Supervisory Union, or merging into a Supervisory District (SD) where we would not coexist with other districts in a Supervisory Union. At this time, many of the committee members are leaning towards an SD. In the next month or so, the BRSU office along with our consultant Dan French, will provide financial models that will estimate what the financial costs and benefits could be if we merged into a RED or an SD. These models, along with feedback from community members, will be essential in informing our final recommendation for a RED or an SD.
- We continued to develop plans as to how we will engage our communities in the fall. We agreed that by early September we will have a list of forum dates. In the meantime the committee will communicate its work digitally and through a variety of media outlets.
- The Agency of Education requires that the a study committee creates written goal statements that address Act 46's policy objectives. The committee has spent significant time polishing these statements.

Check out our website:

<https://sites.google.com/site/northshiremergerstudy>

Future Meeting Dates

Wed., Aug. 24 - 6-9pm at Dorset School

Would you like to receive emailed  
updates on the committee's work?  
If so, email [jon.wilson@brsu.org](mailto:jon.wilson@brsu.org)

- Principals from the BRSU joined us for our August 16 meeting and discussed what they perceive could be the educational benefits and downsides of merging. Some of the principals stressed how merger could further assist their efforts to share resources.

For a more complete picture of the work we have done, please review the meeting minutes on our [website](#) (see URL below).

## FAQ for August

### If the districts in this committee merged, what would the new school board look like?

Before answering this question, we on the Northshire Study Committee acknowledge that none of our proposals are set in stone. We have a proposal for the size and the composition of the new board, but we will be seeking out feedback from our communities in the coming weeks and months. There are nine towns that are participating in our study committee and our proposal calls for a 13-member board. Nine of these seats are designated for each of the nine towns. In other words, every town is guaranteed that it will have one seat on the board, but how this candidate is elected is unique. Let's say that Jane Doe from Landgrove wants to run for the Landgrove seat on the board. In order to get on the ballot, Jane must be nominated by Landgrove residents. But, once Jane is on the ballot, every voter in all of the towns in the new unified district will vote on the seat Jane is seeking. This non-proportional system of voting, where officials are elected by a single multi-town electorate, is called *at-large voting*. To summarize, every voter in the new unified district would have an opportunity to vote on every seat that is up for election.

So, nine of the seats are reserved for each of the nine towns, but what about the other four seats? The study committee proposed that these four seats should be up for grabs between the four largest towns. That means, in order to be eligible to run for one of these seats, the candidate has to be a resident of Danby, Dorset, Londonderry, or Manchester. The scenario could potentially arise that all four seats are won by candidates from one town. The committee members recognized that while this is possible, the at-large voting system provides a reasonable check to power since the voters would likely prevent any single town from dominating the board for a significant time period. The committee members also discussed how such a system would lead to more collaboration and communication among our towns and healthier competition in our school board elections, given the fact that candidates currently often run unchallenged or seats remain vacant for extended periods.

### Spotlight on a Committee Member - Vice Chair Richard Grip



I live in Dorset with my wife and two children. We moved to Dorset from Newfane, VT four years ago so our children could attend BBA. Our oldest just graduated from BBA in June. I am a school demographer, owning a consulting firm (Statistical Forecasting), that specializes in preparing feasibility studies for school districts (regionalizing, de-regionalizing, etc.) and projecting future enrollments. I was one of the authors of the Mountain Towns RED study. Before consulting, I was a high school physics teacher in NJ for nearly 10 years and taught courses on psychometric theory at Rutgers University. I have a doctorate in educational statistics and measurement from Rutgers University. In my spare time, I love to ski and am active in the Dorset Congregational Church.

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