

BLUE MOUNTAIN SUPERVISORY UNION

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Emilie Knisley, Superintendent
Lori Blood, Business Manager

May 4, 2017

Dear Blue Mountain Community,

Over the past two years, Blue Mountain has been working to comply with the new school district consolidation law Act 46 (<http://education.vermont.gov/vermont-schools/school-governance>). We are writing to inform you of our work thus far, to discuss our next steps, and to ask for your participation in the process.

For the past 18 months Blue Mountain USD has been part of a 706b study with Oxbow, Newbury, and Bradford to pursue a school district merger. After careful study of the issues, it was determined that this merger would not meet the goals of Act 46-- and therefore the study was terminated on April 26th. The merger would not increase educational opportunities, would not save tax payers money, and it was very possible that our high school would be closed and our students would be required to attend Oxbow—which our communities did not support. Many parents and community members have spoken strongly about keeping our high school intact, and have stated that if we were ever forced to close the high school that school choice would be preferred over designation.

Prior to being part of this 706b, Blue Mountain held talks with Thetford, Rivendell, and SAU23/Woodsville at various times over the past two years. Rivendell is exempt from mergers due to their interstate school district status, Thetford decided to pursue other possible partnerships, and a partnership with SAU23 would have resulted in a large capital expense investment to revitalize buildings to create an interstate school district.

In April, Blue Mountain's School Board met with Danville's School Board and was encouraged by the possibilities that existed between the two districts. Although BMU reached out to meet with Danville in 2015 those meetings did not come to fruition until late 2016, as Danville was engaged in other talks and not able to meet. The Boards have requested that the school leaders of both entities sit down to look at what possibilities could be created for students as a result of working together, and report those findings back to the Board. Danville, Twinfield, and Cabot are engaged in a 706b committee and will have a merger vote in late June. Once we know the outcome of that vote we will know whether or not we can proceed with our talks.

In late April the Blue Mountain School Board met with a representative from the Peacham Act 46 committee to discuss their work around community engagement as well as their progress on alternative governance structures. Blue Mountain will look at creating an alternative governance structure application as one of its options.

The next step for our communities is to collect data on what the community wants for the future of BMU. In the fall of 2015, the Board conducted a community survey and in the coming weeks the Board will be asking for the voice of the community once again. The survey will center on governance structures and what grades the future district will operate (prek-8 with high school choice or prek-12 all in one building). Please know that this data collection is essential. We understand and respect the fact that the topic of what grades BMU operates is a sensitive subject, but it is essential that we have community input and data to support the process with the State of Vermont. We need to be able to clearly articulate our community's stance and the goals for our school district. We hope to complete this process by the end of June and will report the findings back out to the community this summer.

Sincerely,

The Blue Mountain Union School Board

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