

Blue Mountain Union Supervisory District – Amendment to AGS Proposal

Presently, the Blue Mountain Union District (BMUD) is temporarily assigned to the Orange East Supervisory Union (OESU) as a Member District, by the Vermont State Board of Education.

As a result, BMUD no longer is allowed to continue operating under the “preferred” structure as a supervisory district. Consequently BMUD is newly operating as a Member District of a Supervisory Union (SU).

BMUD is submitting this amendment to our AGS Section 9 application to request BMUD operate within the structure the state board of education required of BMUD, the Orange East Supervisory Union, into the future.

While BMUD maintains that as a supervisory district, the originally submitted AGS proposal is the governing structure that would best meet the goals of Act 46, BMUD recognizes that the State Board is required by the Act “to look to the entire region when making determinations and not just at the possible consequence of merger on any one of the potentially merging districts”. Equipped with the knowledge that the State Board will adversely compromise one district in an attempt to reduce educational spending in a region, BMUD has determined that the governing structure that provides the “best means” of achieving the regional goals of Act 46 while concurrently limiting the negative impacts to BMUD and its’ member towns, is for BMUD to be a Member District of Orange East Supervisory Union,.

BMUD as a Member District will advance the goals of Act 46 in the following ways:

1. Increased and equitable access to a variety of quality opportunities will be achieved through collaborative programming, shared staffing resources, and the expansion of curriculum specifically designed to address regional poverty concentrations and the achievement gaps that have challenged the area. In recent years, BMUD has experienced improvement in this area and anticipates improvements will continue to trend positively with the full implementation of the Pre-K through 12th grade written curriculum in FY 2019. The Secretary has recognized that BMUD has a history of creative thinking and collaboration, which will prove valuable in pursuit of this and other goals.
2. BMUD has received high marks for its ability to meet the State’s Education Quality Standards. BMUD has been proactive about addressing areas in which improvements were recommended through the modification of its continued improvement plan. The experience and knowledge that has resulted in BMUD’s successful achievement of the State Education Quality Standards will prove to be of great value when addressing the standards regionally.
3. Operational efficiencies will be maximized through the re-organization of central office duties, the sharing of large and small purchasing processes, and the establishment of consistent operations throughout the SU. It is worth mentioning that the largest financial efficiencies will be gained in this system of governance and that due to the size of the BMUD and the member districts of OESU, it is unlikely that a forced merger will produce notable economies of scale beyond what BMUD as a Member District of a SU will generate.
4. Transparency and accountability will be promoted through published financial statements and audits in order to exhibit regional savings and disclose any/all findings respectively. Being the first “preferred” UUSD in Vermont, BMUD has extensive experience as a successfully functioning Supervisory District and is well poised to use that experience to help institute a system of regional accountability.
5. In the past five years, BMUD has limited budget increases to an average of 1.63% while at the same time increasing and enhancing programming. BMUD’s Average Daily Membership is stable signifying that students are staying in the district and indicating that BMUD is not only delivering education at a cost that

parents, voters and taxpayers can support but at a cost that is valued. BMUD's membership in a Supervisory District will serve to reduce spending regionally and provide parents, voters and taxpayers of other member districts education at a value that they too will support.

BMUD's transition from a Supervisory District to a Member District of a SU is not insignificant and should not be overlooked. The shift to SU membership is a momentous change for a district that has operated independently for over fifty years. Although not preferential, it is a transition that BMUD will make in an effort to improve educational opportunities for students in the region.

BMUD is certain that while its' amended AGS will prove successful in attainment of the goals of Act 46, a conflict-ridden merger fraught with obstacles will most emphatically not. This is an effective indicator that a merger is not only impracticable but inadvisable.

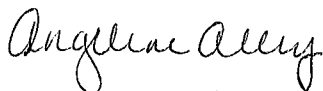
BMUD as a member district will provide opportunities for BMUD to:

1. Protect BMUD's investments in curriculum and instruction as they have begun to pay dividends in regards to narrowing the achievement gaps prevalent in the region.
2. Limit the negative tax impacts that would accompany merger due in part to the bonded debt of 1.7 million that the Bradford and Oxbow school districts would transfer to a newly merged entity.
3. Preserve current financial efficiencies at BMUD.
4. Produce mutually beneficial operating cost reductions.
5. Provide time to build the trust that will be required to construct sustainable and constructive relationships amongst the member districts.

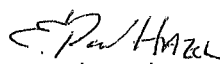
BMUD is concerned for its neighbors and is motivated to contribute to the expansion of financially sound and universally accessible education. BMUD has the staff, the students, and the community support to achieve such goals as a Member District. Merger, not un-like education, is not a one-size fits all process, and in the spirit of such an awareness, ACT 46 allows for Alternative Governing Structures. If the only consequence to merger for BMUD was loss of identity or an increase in student travel times, if it was only concern over infrastructure or rising taxes, if it was only a resistance to shared governances or community reluctance, then one might argue for merger. However, when combined, these concerns are overwhelming and will undoubtedly preclude achievement of the goals of ACT 46. In a nutshell, as similarly stated in the Secretary's review of a separate yet comparable AGS proposal, there is scant likelihood that a forced Merger of BMUD and several member districts of OESU will realize the potential opportunities of a larger, more flexible unified structure.

BMUD respectfully requests that the State Board consider the merits of BMU's amended AGS proposal and the ways in which the proposal offers a balance between the State Board's vision of "a public education system supported by educators, families and communities" and the goals of ACT 46.

Respectfully Submitted,



Angeline Alley, Chair



E. Paul Hazel



Judy Murray

Wade Parker



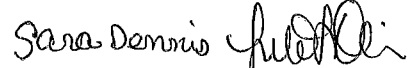
Kelsey Root-Winchester



Brent Abare



Bruce Stevens



Sara Dennis



Julie Oliver