

# Essex-Westford Regional Education District Study

## Final Report

Prepared by:  
The Regional Education District (RED) Study Committee  
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## **Table of Contents**

Page 1	Committee Membership
Pages 2-6	Executive Summary
Pages 7-12	Articles of Agreement
Pages 13-17	Appendix A: Cost Benefit Analysis
Pages 18-21	Appendix B: School District Data

**Committee Members:**Essex Junction

Robert Bouthillier  
Amy Chess  
Marla Durham\*  
Linda Costello  
Brian Donahue  
Wes McClellan  
Keeley Schell  
Adam Sollace

Essex Town

Sam Gilliam  
Kim Gleason\*  
Rachel Preston\* (alternate)  
Tom James  
Kim Kedzierski  
Gary Kling  
Brendan Kinney  
Cathy Printon  
Mitchell Stern  
Jill Tarule  
Tom Thompson

Westford

Heidi Coppola  
Martha Heath\*

*\*Denotes school board representative from each district.*

**Committee Chair:**

Brendan Kinney

**Facilitator:**

Brian O'Regan

**Legal Counsel:**

Christopher Leopold

**Secretary:**

Ben Dickie

**School Leaders:**

Mark Andrews, Superintendent, Essex Town School District  
Judith DeNova, Superintendent, Chittenden Central Supervisory Union

## Executive Summary

In March 2015, a group of 20 residents representing the communities of Westford, Essex Town, and Essex Junction, Vermont, gathered to consider the question, “Should our communities create a unified school district?”

Over a period of four months, the Committee:

- Heard presentations by the district superintendents, business managers, curriculum directors, and special education coordinators.
- Met with representatives from the Chittenden East Supervisory Union who had recently completed a similar analysis.
- Read numerous articles about various aspects of district consolidation and kept abreast of discussions in Montpelier and various bills moving through the Legislature.
- Examined a detailed analysis of potential cost savings provided by an independent consultant. Considered additional financial analysis presented by business managers.
- Discussed legal questions and ramifications with counsel.
- Issued a survey to the community on the topic of school district consolidation and discussed various ways to engage the public.

On June 30, 2015, after drafting articles of agreement as required by the Vermont Agency of Education, the Committee voted unanimously in favor of a proposal to create a unified union school district to be presented to voters in November 2015.

## Educational Excellence

Thanks to the high caliber of teachers and support staff, school and district leaders, dedicated volunteers and parents, as well as residents who overwhelmingly support education, the students in our communities enjoy a top rate educational experience. Indeed, many families move to our region to take advantage of the opportunities provided by our schools.

At the conclusion of its study, the Committee believes the formation of a unified school district for pre-Kindergarten through grade 12 would only enhance the overall quality of education for students in our three communities. There would be both near- and long-term benefits for students, the details of which are outlined in Appendix A.

## Governance

During its deliberations, the Committee was struck by the current complexity of school governance in our communities for families and students as they travel through our systems pre-Kindergarten through high school graduation. This was especially obvious within the supervisory union. Collectively, superintendents and school leaders manage seven budgets and support and are accountable to five boards on behalf of approximately 4000 students, Pre-K-12, across Essex Town, Essex Junction and Westford.

In a unified Prek-12 school district, a 10-member board would represent the communities of Essex Town, Essex Junction and Westford, and would oversee the policy and direction of the newly-formed district. Election of these school board members would take place at the same

time as the vote to approve a unified union. If approved, the newly elected board would begin its work.

This new board would be charged with defining roles and responsibilities, hiring a superintendent, establishing policy, negotiating contracts for teachers and support staff, establishing a structure to support community and family engagement with our schools, and a work plan to ensure accountability to student outcomes in the newly formed district.

## **Financial Efficiencies & Incentives**

In a special report commissioned by the Committee, an analysis concluded that over a 5-year period, over \$1 million in savings could be realized, mostly by consolidating central office administrations from Essex Town School District (ETSD) and Chittenden Central Supervisory Union (CCSU). Through additional analysis by the business managers from the respective districts, opportunities for additional cost savings and efficiencies are expected.

The property tax incentives provided through Act 46 (or Act 153) are also a significant opportunity for residents of our three communities. For example, under Act 46, a five-year schedule of property tax reductions would be realized: 10 cents in the first year, 8 in the second, 6 in the third, 4 in the fourth, and 2 in the last year. These reductions present an important opportunity for the stabilization of property tax rates and a sense of predictability in the near future.

Ultimately, a newly elected school board of a unified union school district, working with school leaders, would be responsible for developing annual budgets for consideration by the voters in the three communities.

## **Transportation**

Transportation is an important consideration for any school district. In a survey to community members about the potential for a unified school district, transportation was the most frequently mentioned topic. Some respondents love the “walking district” feel of Essex Junction, while others worry about traffic congestion from the many parents who drive their children to school. Westford residents asked about busing for high school students.

Article 5 of the proposed Articles of Agreement (page 8) emphasizes that the transportation plan will be one of the new district’s top priorities, should voters approve a unified school district. The unified district would be required by law to consider issues like equal access to education and the state of local roads in making its determinations. The unified district would not be required to offer exactly the same services in all three towns if local needs differ. In any circumstance, no child would be required to ride a bus.

Transportation offerings may remain unaltered, expand or be adjusted to promote efficiency. The merger grants and incentives offered by the state are intended to help unified districts transition to provide better and more equitable opportunities to students, which may include transportation. According to estimates, expanding the current bus services in the Essex Town School District to all Westford and Essex Junction students could cost \$371,482 in each of the first two years of a new district and after state transportation aid kicks in, \$192,498 (adjusting for inflation) in subsequent years. This increase would be more than offset by savings and efficiencies gained in other areas.

## Governance of Essex Junction Recreation and Parks

The Essex Junction Recreation and Parks is currently governed by the Essex Junction (EJ) School District Prudential Committee. The Regional Education District (RED) Study Committee reviewed this situation and learned that the matter is one to be resolved by the Prudential Committee, and falls outside the authority of the RED Study Committee. The Prudential Committee received a letter from George Tyler, Village President and Pat Scheidel, Municipal Manager acknowledging the ongoing study of the possible formation of a Regional Education District (RED) which would result in the Prudential Committee being dissolved. The letter states, "This letter is to assure you that the Village stands ready to support this initiative with regard to governance of the Essex Junction Recreation and Parks (EJRP) Department. We share your desire to maintain EJRP as a premier recreation department with its wide range of programming options for the community. In the near term, we are certainly willing to work with you and the RED Board to ensure continued success of the department - whether it is governed by the RED Board or by the Village. In the long term, we are poised to discuss governance options ranging from oversight by the Village, the merger of Town and Village recreation departments, or even the formation of a recreation district." While this is a matter outside the authority of the RED Study Committee, these assurances from municipal partners are important in considering the future of a unified school district and the Village recreation department.

## Westford

During the course of the study, Study Committee members representing Westford raised specific concerns from their community about unification. The Study Committee took these concerns to heart, and attempted to address these concerns in the Articles of Agreement:

### *School Choice*

Westford students graduating from Grade 8 currently have school choice. So as not to disrupt that status and experience of those students, the Committee included a provision in the Articles of Agreement that would "grandfather" school choice for Westford students until 2020. After that, Westford students would matriculate to Essex High School. (See Attachment B for more information.)

### *School Closures*

The Committee also sought to assure Westford residents that their local school would not be subject to closure. Therefore, Attachment B provides this clarity that for at least four years no action would be taken to close any school buildings in a unified district.

### *Property*

Language was also included in Article 8 that, in the event of any future school closures or reconfiguration, the local community would have the ability to take ownership of property for continued recreational and educational use.

### *Second Vote*

If voters in Westford reject the proposal, they would have an additional eight-month period to reconsider (Article 19). See the next section for specific details about this scenario.

## Unified Union vs. Regional Education District

The Committee was organized under Act 153 to examine the potential of forming a Regional Education District. However, during the deliberations of the Committee, the Legislature passed Act 46, which provides a roadmap for the creation of a unified union. One of the key differences between the two pieces of legislation is that Act 46 provides a five year schedule of property tax incentives, while Act 153 has four years of incentives.

The Committee unanimously approved the formation of a unified union under Act 46. However, there are two possible outcomes depending on voter action in November:

- If voters in Essex Town, Essex Junction, and Westford vote unanimously in favor of the proposal, a unified union would be established under Act 46.
- If voters in Essex Town and Essex Junction vote in favor of the proposal, but Westford voters reject it, then a Regional Education District would be established under Act 153.

Because Essex Town and Essex Junction are both members of the union high school, a majority of voters in each of these communities must vote in favor of the proposal. If either of these two communities votes no, then no action will be taken to form either a Unified Union or a Regional Education District.

Because Westford has its own school district within the supervisory union, voters will also weigh in on the proposal. If Westford voters reject the proposal, the Articles of Agreement provide for a period of time up until June 30, 2016 for a second vote to be held on the question of joining a Unified Union. If Westford rejects the proposal outright, the State Board of Education would assign Westford to another district or supervisory union. In addition, the property tax incentives afforded through Act 46 would not be available to Westford residents.

## Conclusion

The central task of the Study Committee was to determine if school district unification would result in better outcomes and opportunities for students, at a cost that the three communities can afford today and into the future.

While Act 46 affords very attractive financial incentives, the Committee conducted the study with an appreciation that a decision to unify school districts must be based on whether or not it is the right *long-term* move for students and taxpayers, regardless of the incentives. After careful consideration and analysis, the Study Committee believes this is the right move and voted unanimously in favor of a proposal to create a unified union school district to be presented to voters of our three towns.

As the Committee worked these last several months, we were guided by the commitment to enhance learning opportunities and equity for all students and to find efficiencies within our educational system that respect the financial investments of our communities and taxpayers. Our review showed that the current school governance structure is onerous and disjointed. Students in our three communities can be better served by having a common and aligned curriculum from pre-K through their graduation from high school. Our analysis shows that there could be an initial cost savings by merging the operations of central office functions and longer-

term savings may be found through efficiencies and streamlined operations. A single board and administration can more effectively direct our resources to support learning for our students if we reduce redundancy. We can share our collective wisdom through expanded and more diverse professional learning communities for our leadership teams, our teachers and our support staff, resulting in continuous improvement in instruction for our students. We can deploy our resources to better support the journey of the student when we are able to plan for the entire journey, and allow the resources to be strategically aligned with our common mission and vision to prepare our students for the next stage of their lives in a rapidly changing world. A single board will be charged with holding the administration accountable to those outcomes for all of our students.

Our communities share strong educational values and we are very proud of the high quality education enjoyed by our students today. Bringing Essex Town, Essex Junction and Westford together around these shared values will expand upon this tradition of quality while also reducing costs through efficiencies of a shared system. We can optimize opportunities for our students and better serve our taxpayers. While our administrators have collaborated across districts over the past several years, there are legal limitations to what can be done while we are separate entities. Unification will allow our educational governance structure to reflect our shared values and direct our collective efforts and resources to the journey of all of our students pre-K through grade 12 and beyond.

We can be better together!

## Articles of Agreement

The Study Committee recommends that the following Articles of Agreement be adopted by each necessary and advisable school district for the creation of a pre-Kindergarten through Grade 12 unified union school district to be named Essex Westford Educational Community Unified Union School District, hereinafter referred to as the “Unified Union School District” or “Union School District”.

### Article 1

The School Districts of Essex Junction, Essex Town, and Essex Union High School District #46 are necessary for the establishment of the Essex Westford Educational Community Unified Union School District . The Westford School District is advisable to include in the formation of the Union School District. The above referenced school districts are hereinafter referred to as the “forming districts”. There are no additional school districts being recommended at this time.

If all of the forming districts vote to approve the merger, the Essex Westford Educational Community Unified Union School District will commence full educational operations and services on July 1, 2017 under the provisions of Act 46. In the event that Essex Junction and Essex Town school districts each vote YES to approve the merger, but Westford votes NO, pursuant to Act 153 of 2010, a Regional Education District is established and will commence full educational operations and services on July 1, 2017 (see Article 20).

### Article 2

The Union School District will provide pre-kindergarten through grade twelve education to all of the students in the Union School District. Westford students enrolled and attending a public or an approved independent high school (grades 9-12) during the 2016-2017 school year at the expense of the Westford School District as tuitioned high school students shall be “grandfathered.” Such tuitioned students shall be permitted the option to continue to attend as tuitioned students from the Union School District the same public or approved independent school. Except as specifically approved by the Union School District’s Board of School Directors, and consistent with state law, the tuitioning of grandfathered high school students shall cease on June 30, 2020.

### Article 3

The Union School District School Board will comply with 16 VSA Chapter 53, subchapter 3, regarding the recognition of the representatives of employees of the respective forming districts as the representatives of the employees of the Union School District and will commence negotiations pursuant to 16 VSA Chapter 57 for teachers and 21 VSA Chapter 22 for other employees. In the absence of new collective bargaining agreements on July 1, 2017, the School Board will comply with the pre-existing master agreements pursuant to 16 VSA Chapter 53, subchapter 3. The School Board shall honor all individual employment contracts that are in place for the forming school districts on June 30, 2017 until their respective termination dates.

## **Article 4**

No new school buildings are necessary to, or proposed for the formation of, the Union School District. The Union School District School Board will assume ownership and operate existing school facilities commencing July 1, 2017.

## **Article 5**

The Union School District School Board shall determine, in accordance with state and federal law, the transportation services to be provided to students in the Union School District.

## **Article 6**

The forming districts of the Union School District recognize the benefits to be gained from establishing district-wide curricula as well as their obligation to do so, and to otherwise standardize their operations on or before July 1, 2017.

## **Article 7**

Any and all operating deficits and/or surpluses of any of the combining/forming districts shall become the property, and/or the obligation of the Union School District, effective July 1, 2017. Those member districts with surpluses or remaining reserve funds as of the close of business on June 30, 2017, will transfer all such funds to the Union School District.

## **Article 8**

No later than June 30, 2017, the forming districts will convey to the Union School District all of their school-related real and personal property, for One Dollar, and the Union School District will assume all capital debt associated therewith. The Union School District recognizes the long term financial investments and community relationships that each town/village has with its school building(s). The Union School District will encourage appropriate use of the building by the students and community according to the policies and procedures of the Union School District as overseen by the building administrator.

In the event that, and at such subsequent time as, the Union School District Board of School Directors determines, in its discretion, that any of the real property, including land and buildings, conveyed to it by one or more of the forming districts is or are unnecessary to the continued operation of the Union School District and its educational programs, the Union School District shall convey such real property, for the sum of One Dollar, and subject to all encumbrances of record, the assumption or payment of all outstanding bonds and notes and the repayment of any school construction aid or grants as required by Vermont law, to the town/village in which it is located.

The conveyance of any of the above school properties shall be conditioned upon the town/village owning and utilizing the real property for community and public purposes for a minimum of five years. In the event a town/village elects to sell the real property prior to five years of ownership, the town shall compensate the Union School District for all capital improvements and renovations completed after the formation of the Union School District and prior to the sale to the town/village. In the event a town/village elects not to acquire ownership of such real property, the Union School District shall, pursuant to Vermont statutes, sell the

property upon such terms and conditions as established by the Union School District Board of School Directors.

In the event that, and at such subsequent time as, the Union School District determines that any real property, including land and buildings, conveyed to it by the Essex Union High School District is or are unnecessary to the continued operation of the Union School District and its educational programs, the Union School District shall, pursuant to Vermont statutes, sell the property upon such terms and conditions as established by the Union School District Board of School Directors.

## Article 9

A forming town district's representation on the Union School District Board of School Directors will be closely proportional to the fraction that its population bears to the aggregate population of all forming school districts in the Union School District. Initial Union School District School Board composition is based upon the 2010 Federal Census, and shall be recalculated promptly following the release of each subsequent decennial census. At such time the Union School District School Board shall also evaluate and consider the advisability of implementing a system of at-large voting for school directors.

The number of board members from each forming school district shall be determined by dividing the population of the town or village by one ninth of the total population of the aggregate population of the village and towns within the Union School District. Initially, Westford, a town corresponding to a pre-existing member school district, shall elect two members on the Essex Westford Educational Community Unified Union School District Board who will have a weighted vote of one.

At no time will a town/village corresponding to a pre-existing member school district have less than two board members with a weighted vote of one on the board of school directors. Subject to the previous sentence, each proportionality calculation shall be rounded to the nearest whole number.

The initial membership on the Union School District Board of School Directors will be as follows:

### Number of School Board Members by Town/Village

<b>Town/Village</b>	<b>Board Members</b>
Essex Junction	4
Essex Town	4
Westford	2*
*Each Board member will have .5 weighted vote (=1.0 Total vote)	

## Article 10

The Union School District Board of School Directors will be elected for three-year terms, except for those initially elected at the time of the formation of the Union School District. In the initial Union School District election, board member terms of office will be as follows:

Distribution of Initial One-Year, Two-Year and Three-Year Terms:

<b>Town/District</b>	<b>1 Year Term</b>	<b>2 Year Term</b>	<b>3 Year Term</b>
Essex Junction	2	1	1
Essex Town	1	1	2
Westford	1	1	

Pursuant to the provisions of 16 VSA §706j(b), elected school directors shall be sworn in and assume the duties of their office. The term of office for School Directors elected at the November 3, 2015 election shall be one, two, or three years respectively, plus the additional months between the date of the Organizational Meeting of the Union School District (16 VSA §706j), when the initial school directors will begin their term of office, and the date of the Union School District's annual meeting in the spring of 2017, as established under 16 VSA §706j. Thereafter, terms of office shall begin and expire on the date of the Union School District's annual meeting.

## Article 11

The proposal forming this Union School District will be presented to the voters of each forming school district on November 3, 2015. The candidates for the new Union School District Board of School Directors will be elected on the same date, as required by law. Nominations for the office of union school director representing any district/town shall be made by filing with the clerk of that school district/town proposed as a member of the union, a statement of nomination signed by at least 30 voters in that district or one percent of the legal voters in the district, whichever is less, and accepted in writing by the nominee. A statement shall be filed not less than 30 nor more than 40 days prior to the date of the vote.

## Article 12

Upon an affirmative vote of the electorates of the school districts, and upon compliance with 16 VSA §706g, the Union School District shall have and exercise all of the authority which is necessary in order for it to prepare for full educational operations beginning on July 1, 2017. The Union School District shall, between the date of its organizational meeting under 16 VSA §706j and June 30, 2017, develop school district policies, adopt curriculum, educational programs, assessment measures and reporting procedures in order to fulfill the Education Quality Standards (State Board Rule 2000), prepare for and negotiate contractual agreements, set the school calendar for Fiscal Year 2018, prepare and present the budget for Fiscal Year 2018, prepare for Union School District Annual Meeting(s) and transact any other lawful business that comes before the Board, provided, however, that the exercise of such authority by the Union School District shall not be construed to limit or alter the authority and/or responsibilities of the School Districts of Essex Junction, Essex Town, Essex Union High School #46, Westford Town and the Chittenden Central Supervisory Union.

The Union School District shall commence full educational operations on July 1, 2017.

### **Article 13**

The Union School District Board of School Directors shall propose annual budgets in accordance with 16 VSA Chapter 11.

The annual budget vote shall be conducted by Australian ballot pursuant to 17 VSA Chapter 55.

### **Article 14**

On July 1, 2017, when the Union School District becomes fully operational and begins to provide educational services to students, the Essex Junction, Essex Town, Essex Union High School #46 and Westford School districts shall cease all educational operations and shall remain in existence for the sole purpose of completing any outstanding business not given to the Union School District under these articles and state law. Such business shall be completed as soon as practicable, but in no event any later than December 31, 2017. The Chittenden Central Supervisory Union shall cease all operations within a reasonable timeframe of the completion of all outstanding business of its member school districts, but in no event any later than January 31, 2018.

### **Article 15**

Cost-Benefit Analysis (*See Appendix A*).

### **Article 16**

Information on school choice, school configurations and school enrollment plan (*See Appendix B*).

### **Article 17**

For at least the first year that the Union School District is fully operational and providing educational services, students will attend elementary school and middle school according to their town/district of residence; provided however, with parental consent, the Board of School Directors may adjust student enrollment based upon individual student circumstances and needs of the Union School District. After July 1, 2018, the Board of School Directors will have the authority to adjust school attendance boundary lines and school configurations within the Union School District.

### **Article 18**

The Union School District school board shall provide opportunity for local input on policy and budget development. Structures to support and encourage public participation within the Union School District will be established by the Union School District Board of School Directors on or before June 30, 2017.

### **Article 19**

In the event that the Westford School District votes not to join the Union School District, it will have until June 30, 2016 to reconsider and join the Union School District with admission

granted in advance by the Union School District. For the purpose of compliance with 16 VSA §721, the Union School District consents to Westford's admission. Thereafter, admission will be determined by Vermont statutes which require favorable votes by both Westford and the Union School District.

**Article 20**

In the event that Westford votes not to become a member of the Unified Union School District, the pre-Kindergarten through Grade 12 Regional Education District for Essex Town and Essex Junction will be formed and named the Essex Educational Community Unified Union School District.

## Appendix A: Cost-Benefit Analysis & Narrative

Efficiencies could be gained through the creation of a unified union school district (or a RED) in the following areas:

### Improved Student Learning Opportunities

The creation of a unified district will result in one mission statement, one vision and one strategic plan for continual improvement based on the attainment of outcomes the community believes are important for young people. Moreover, a unified district will provide a single School Board the opportunity to design a continuum of educational programs and experiences for all students through an integrated Pre-K-12 system, including the Center for Technology, Essex (CTE). There will be opportunities with increased scale to retain and possibly expand a variety of educational programs and learning pathways. Each community has unique resources and assets which may provide an opportunity for the creation of magnet schools or programs within a larger system. One Pre-K-12/tech unified district may allow students to transfer to another school within the unified district without having to pay tuition, and the opportunity to stay at their current school assignment if moving among the towns of Essex, Essex Junction, and Westford. Under the current structure students are not able to do this without paying tuition. Most importantly, a unified district will provide a more seamless transition to ninth grade within a single school district, which is especially helpful for students with special needs and their families.

Smaller groups of learners will also see increased opportunities in a unified district. On the early end of the educational continuum, pre-K student services and family relationships can be better coordinated within a single district. A single structure allows for systemic personalized learning plan (PLP) planning and increased personalized learning opportunities through the economy of scale. It also increases the ability to sustain specialty classes such as Advanced Placement classes, Internships, Science Technology Engineering Math (STEM) Academy and the Academy of Visual and Performing Arts (AVPA). There will be greater opportunities to share Special Education programs for students on the Autism Spectrum and Emotionally Challenging Students so their needs can be met within the public school setting. English Language Learner enrollment continues to rise and a single district provides an opportunity to share teachers for specialized instruction to meet the needs of this expanding population.

A unified district will enable every student greater access to a vast array of extracurricular choices (i.e. athletics, clubs, string orchestra, band, choral groups etc.) and other choices that may not currently exist in their schools.

Finally, by unifying the three districts, the professional learning community (PLC) of school leaders, teachers and support staff will become more diverse, allowing for a greater, richer exchange and sharing of resources, ideas and successes. The collaborative efforts of high performing PLCs produce high performing learners.

## **Teacher Staffing**

A unified district structure will allow the Superintendent flexibility to adjust staffing assignments based on student needs, changing demographic realities and staff expertise. Teachers could be reassigned where the greatest needs are across all schools within the unified district; currently, reassignments are limited to the district of hire, unless a shared service agreement is crafted. Such an arrangement takes more administrative time to create, implement and oversee.

There will be increased opportunity for part-time employees to find increased employment within the Union School District, which will improve recruitment and retention efforts. We are not expecting to close schools or to reduce instructional staff under the Union School District (the primary efficiency savings will be in central office administration), but unification will provide greater opportunity to equalize class sizes across the system for specific grade levels through staffing reallocation.

## **Non--teacher Staffing**

A unified district also allows for greater flexibility in the allocation of non--teaching positions. Personnel can be reassigned where the greatest needs are across all schools within the Union School District. Currently reassignments are limited to the District of hire (unless done through a shared service agreement, which takes additional administrative time to implement). Efficiencies will result in central office staffing reductions after the transition period, which will help to save money as the tax rate incentives go away. A single central office will improve consistent, seamless leadership for staff, students and families, and will eliminate redundancies in a variety of ways, including: researching and implementing new laws, staying current with new regulations and best practices, and other legal requirements. Additionally, parent and community volunteers and substitutes will no longer need to register at both Essex Town and CCSU, allowing for an increase in our substitute and volunteer pools.

## **Technology**

Within a unified union there will be one technology system to update and maintain across the system (e.g., payroll and accounting, human resources, student information and performance data). Communications will be improved with a single web page platform/structure across the system. There will be fewer vendors and increased buying power for internet service, software applications, and technology hardware. There will be only one E--rate application (to obtain affordable telecommunications and internet access) instead of two, and a single district will allow for greater flexibility regarding technician allocation. With fewer systems to purchase and manage, resources could be redirected to provide greater access to customized and personalized learning opportunities for students, for example, through personal devices. One system will allow for greater efficiencies and greater focus can be given to strategic planning and deployment of resources to enhance student learning.

## **Student Data Collection and Reporting**

A single Pre-K--12 student data system -would allow for richer empirical data, improvement in strategic planning, improved instruction, specialized interventions, and personalization. A single Pre-K--12 reporting system -would improve parental involvement and communication about student progress, promoting transparency and accountability. A single district will reduce redundancies with state reporting requirements.

In a single unified district, there will be the ability to track cohorts from Pre-K through graduation. A single Unified District would allow educators to monitor student growth and progress Pre-K-12 and provide early interventions when needed. The student achievement data tracking systems are fractured by the current governance structure, making it difficult to ensure that all students will achieve and exceed the State's Education Quality Standards. Our districts can currently track Pre-K--8 student achievement data in each district and then grades 9--12 as a whole, but data is FERPA protected in each district and cannot be shared. Disaggregating data allows for informed decision-making around programming, progress monitoring and professional development needs.

### **Financial Accounting and Budgeting**

In a unified district, budgets and tax rates will be easier to understand: one budget and tax rate, with no need to build separate Pre-K--8 and Grades 9--12 budgets and meld tax rates in Essex Junction and Essex Town. It reduces the number of State, Federal, and IRS reports and eliminates intergovernmental accounting transactions. This will result in a reduction in central office accounting staff. A single district reduces the number of independent audits, reducing labor and audit expenses. It also lowers the possibility of exceeding the excess spending tax penalty threshold (the Union #46 district is the only district that has been close to the threshold, which would impact Essex Junction and Essex Town). A unified district eliminates the need for equalized pupil hold harmless protection (and 'phantom' students); Westford would eventually lose protection and see a spike in tax rates without formation of a unified district. The formation of a single district would streamline accounting systems by creating a single budget, eliminating assessments to member school districts for costs currently incurred at the supervisory union level.

Currently, supervisory union budget expenses appear as assessments in local member districts' budgets and are not voted on by the electorate. This lack of transparency is confusing to taxpayers and requires additional financial accounting.

### **Improved Utilization of Buildings and Sport Facilities**

The facility use request process would be less complicated for community members and organizations: one application and one office to oversee the process, and more options (school facilities and grounds) to choose from.

## Centralized Contracting

Unified teacher and support staff agreements would result in a reduction of legal expenses and time necessary for negotiations after the initial transition. Dissolving the current supervisory union structure provides relief from Act 153/156, which requires special education services to be provided at the supervisory union level. Currently, a one-year waiver is in place for CCSU regarding these Act 153/516 requirements. However, should this unification fail to be approved by voters, an additional bargaining group including all special educators within the supervisory union would need to be formed, and an additional contract would need to be negotiated. Unified labor contracts, one for professionals and one for support staff, would provide consistency in wages and working conditions for the same positions across our communities.

The new Unified Union School District would be considered a large employer, providing the ability to maintain the same medical insurance options for all employees (rather than having a Supervisory Union with various sized employers, some required to join the State's exchange and others not). This will result in less administrative work than if we had several different plans and providers. It will also eliminate duplication of expenses for cafeteria plans. The ability to combine the self-insured dental plans of CCSU and ETSD would create a larger pool; typically, this results in lower per-plan participant costs.

A larger school district will allow for increased purchasing power and a stronger negotiating position through economies of scale. A unified district will be able to reduce from two Schoolspring (electronic advertising/ job application system) and Aesop (electronic substitute calling system) accounts to one, resulting in cost savings. A new Unified Union School Board will be empowered to collapse duplicate electronic systems (i.e. student achievement data, financial management and student information systems) which will result in cost savings, reduced complexity, and improved information and analysis opportunity.

## Transportation

The Unified Union School Board will have the authority to determine, in accordance with state and federal law, the transportation services to be provided to students in the Unified Union School District. A single district has a greater economy of scale, and more efficient routing of buses could be provided. In Essex Junction, most crossing guard positions could be eliminated if bus transportation were offered, with some guards being retained closer to the schools. Westford high school students could for the first time be provided transportation to Essex High School, eliminating the need for some young and inexperienced drivers to be managing challenging winter weather road conditions. Centralized transportation services may reduce absenteeism and be safer than walking for some younger students, especially during winter months.

## Food Service

A single Child Nutrition Service will have the scope and scale to negotiate more affordable labor and food costs, develop stronger and more efficient partnerships with the vast network of local growers, and be more efficient in meeting the demands of State and Federal guidelines. There will be greater efficiency and less overhead if we retain "in-house" food service, while the Unified Union School Board can assess whether there is a greater economy of scale if the service was contracted to an outside provider.

## Support Services

For purposes of special education and student support services, becoming a single school district increases the flexibility to allocate resources and design programs. Examples include the ability to develop autism and behavioral programming Pre-K--12, and for Extended Year Services (summer programming) to include larger groups of students together. (Currently, ETSD and Essex Junction schools run parallel programs.).

Students will also benefit from continuity of staff between schools, improving the transition from 8th to 9th grade and beyond. Continuity of intervention systems and programs across a Pre-K--12 system will be more readily realized without the barriers of district boundaries. Under one Local Educational Agency (LEA) there will be greater continuity of procedures, process, program, service providers, families, students and staff.

Common professional development will enhance the Pre-K--12 system by building increased expertise and specialization. Efficiencies will be gained through system-wide programming specializing in specific populations. This is particularly beneficial to Westford and low-incidence populations, since we do not have the scale to develop this kind of programming with small stand--alone populations.

Financially, there will be a decreased impact to the budget as a percentage of the whole as students with highly specialized needs (and the inherent costs associated with providing for those students) move in and out of the system.

## Appendix B: School District Data

### Data Sheets

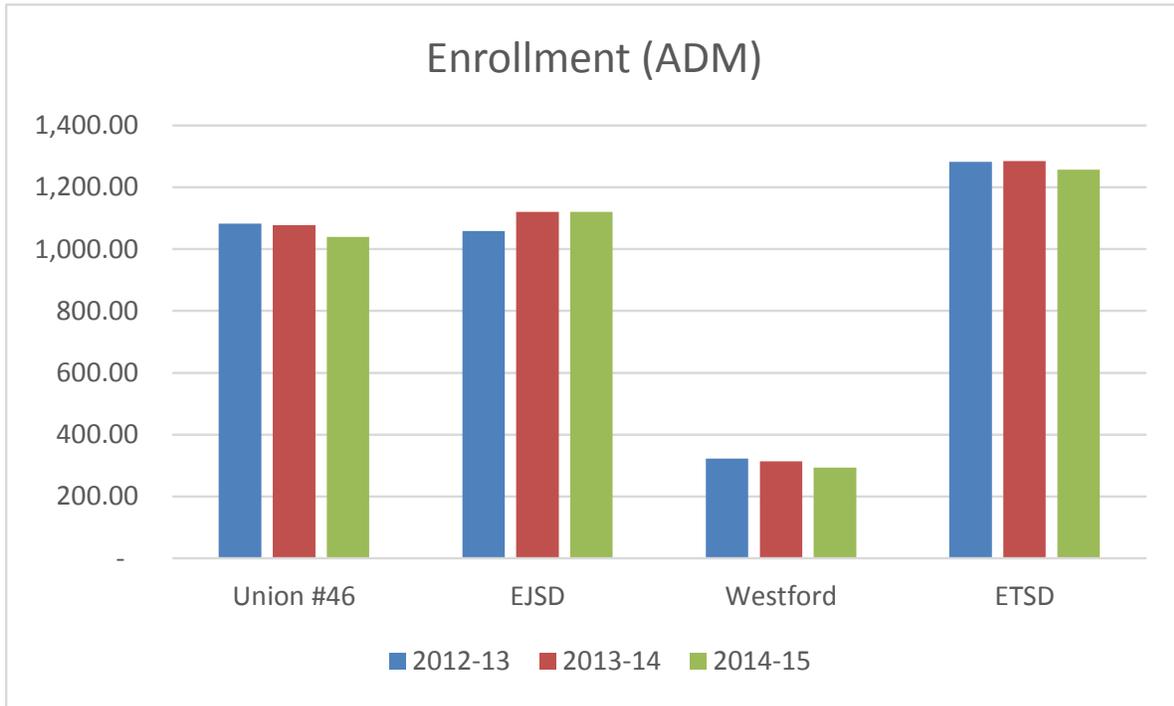
	Essex Community Educational Center Union #46	Essex Junction Incorporated School District	Westford Town School District	Essex Town School District
<b>Grades served:</b>	9-12	preK-8	* preK-8	preK-8
<b>FY' 15 ADM:</b>	1,039.09	1,120.23	293.08	1,257.36
<b>FY' 15 Education Spending per Equalized Pupil (ES/EP):</b>	\$15,364.63	\$14,043.64	\$14,342.06	\$13,930.00
<b>FY' 15 Student-to-Teacher ratio:</b>	12	12.3	12.1	10.4
<b>FY' 15 Student-to-Adult ratio:</b>	6.6	6.4	6.6	** 5.1
<b>FY' 15 Administrator-to-Teacher ratio:</b>	14.8	17.9	15.5	17.3
<b>FY' 15 Student-to Administrator ratio:</b>	177.7	220.6	187	179.6
<b>FY' 14 ADM:</b>	1,077.11	1,120.76	314.19	1,284.93
<b>FY' 14 Education Spending per Equalized Pupil (ES/EP):</b>	\$14,466.43	\$13,484.93	\$13,310.85	\$13,448.52
<b>FY' 14 Student-to-Teacher ratio:</b>	12.4	11.9	11.8	10.8
<b>FY' 14 Student-to-Adult ratio:</b>	6.8	6.3	6.3	** 5.5
<b>FY' 14 Administrator-to-Teacher ratio:</b>	14.9	17.9	15.2	16.9
<b>FY' 14 Student-to Administrator ratio:</b>	184.9	213.7	179	183.6
<b>FY' 13 ADM:</b>	1,082.43	1,058.74	322.58	1,282.33
<b>FY' 13 Education Spending per Equalized Pupil (ES/EP):</b>	\$13,527.75	\$12,938.90	\$12,239.17	\$13,081.18
<b>FY' 13 Student-to-Teacher ratio:</b>	11.2	11.6	11.6	10.9
<b>FY' 13 Student-to-Adult ratio:</b>	6.5	6	6.5	** 5.4
<b>FY' 13 Administrator-to-Teacher ratio:</b>	16.8	17.6	16	16.8
<b>FY' 13 Student-to Administrator ratio:</b>	188	204.3	186	183.2
<b>*** District Population (latest decennial census):</b>	19,587	19,587	2,029	19,587

\* School Choice for grades 9-12

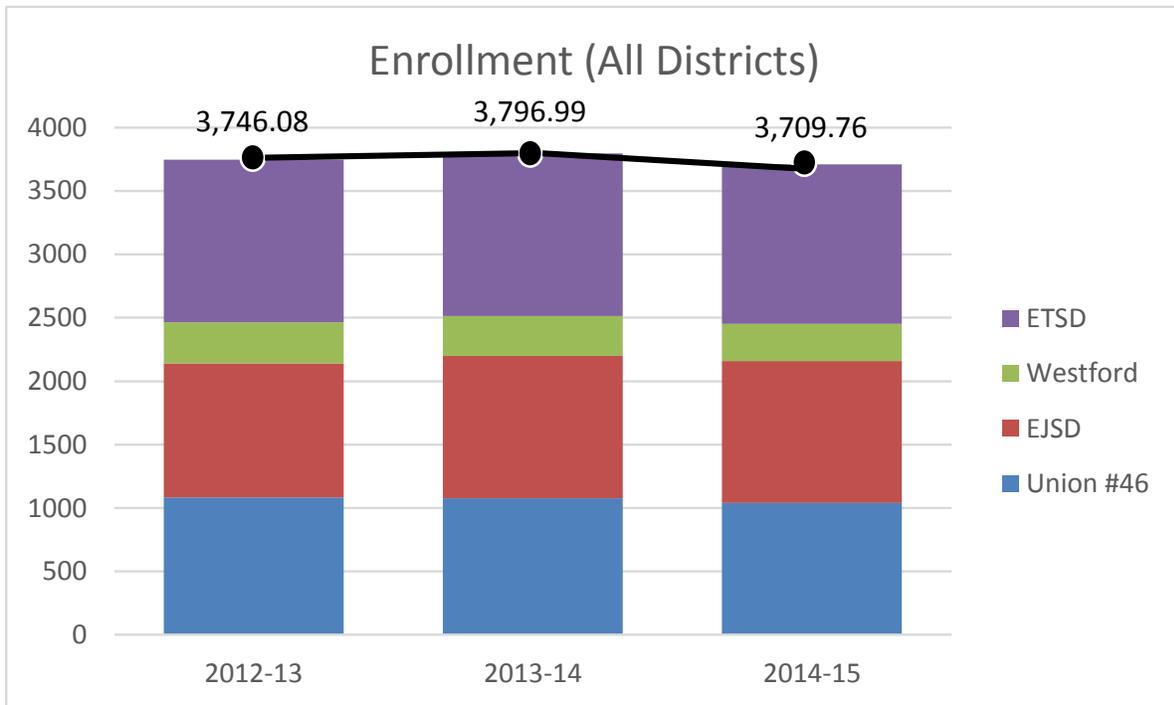
\*\* The Student-to-Adult ratio is artificially low for ETSD since it includes the Superintendent's office as a single district.

\*\*\* Number for U#46, EJSD, and ETSD is for Essex which appears to include the Village

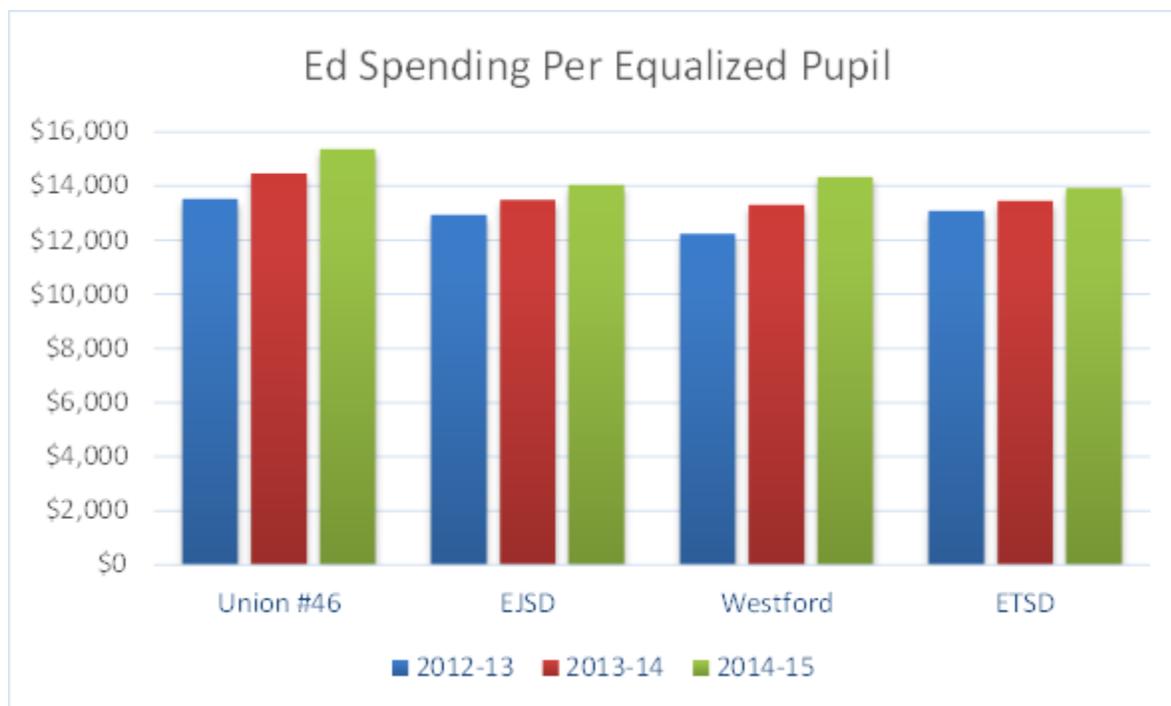
### School District Data Summary



Note: Union #46 ADM amounts do not include tech center six semester average.



Note: Union #46 ADM amounts do not include tech center six semester average.



## Current Grade Configuration

Essex Elementary School: Pre-Kindergarten-Grade 2 (ETSD)  
 Hiawatha School: Pre-Kindergarten-Grade 3 (EJ)  
 Summit Street School: Pre-Kindergarten-Grade 3 (EJ)  
 Founders Memorial School: Grades 3-5 (ETSD)  
 Thomas Fleming School: Grades 4-5 (EJ)  
 Westford Elementary School: Pre-Kindergarten-Grade 8  
 Albert D. Lawton: Grades 6-8 (EJ)  
 Essex Middle School: Grades 6-8 (ETSD)  
 Essex Community Educational Center: Essex High School and Center for Technology - Essex, Grades 9-12

## Grades Served and Configuration After Unification

The Union School District will serve grades pre-kindergarten – grade 12 by providing for students' education at public schools operated by the Union School District:

Essex Elementary School: Pre-Kindergarten-Grade 2  
 Hiawatha School: Pre-Kindergarten-Grade 3  
 Summit Street School: Pre-Kindergarten-Grade 3  
 Founders Memorial School: Grades 3-5  
 Thomas Fleming School: Grades 4-5  
 Westford Elementary School: Pre-Kindergarten-Grade 8  
 Albert D. Lawton: Grades 6-8  
 Essex Middle School: Grades 6-8

Essex Community Educational Center: Essex High School and Center for Technology - Essex, Grades 9-12

This Union School District will be a pre-kindergarten - grade 12 system with one high school, two middle schools and six elementary schools.

### **School Choice**

School choice is currently available to all high school students in Vermont (within capacity limits specified in statute and put in place by local public school boards). No changes are planned at this time. School choice options may be expanded for students in pre-kindergarten through grade 8. Discussions and decisions regarding school choice will be at the discretion of the Union School District Board of School Directors.

### **School Closures**

No school closures are planned in the immediate future. Pursuant to the provisions of Act 153 of 2010, the Union School District shall not close any school within its boundaries for a period of four years beginning July 1, 2017 unless the town in which the school is located consents to the closure.