

22. The Cabot School District

23. The Danville School District

24. The Twinfield Union School District (Towns of Marshfield & Plainfield)

The three PreK-12 operating districts of Cabot, Danville, and Twinfield developed and presented a merger proposal to their respective voters in 2017. The Cabot and Danville voters did not approve the proposed merger and the boards of each of the three districts subsequently prepared independent proposals that they submitted in compliance with Act 46, Sec. 9. Although each proposal is discussed separately below and the Secretary's proposal for each district is not necessarily entwined, it is simplest and least confusing to discuss them together.

The Cabot School District, one of two districts in the Washington Northeast SU, is a single-town school district that provides for the education of its resident PreK-12 students by operating a school through grade 12. Cabot's K-12 ADM in FY 2018 is 150.42. AOE data reveal that the district's ADM declined by nearly 8% (13 fewer students) between FY 2014 and FY 2018, or an average of approximately 2% annually.

The Twinfield Union School District is the other member district of the Washington Northeast SU. It was created by the towns of Marshfield and Plainfield and provides for the education of its resident PreK-12 students by operating a school through grade 12. Twinfield's K-12 ADM in FY 2018 is 306.75. The district's ADM declined by 19% (73 fewer students) between FY 2014 and FY 2018.

The Danville School District is a single-town, PreK-12 district in the Caledonia Central SU that operates a school through grade 12. Danville's K-12 ADM in FY 2018 is 287. The district's ADM has fluctuated during each of the last five fiscal years, reaching a high of 301 in FY 2016 before dropping by 6.6% to a low of 281 in FY 2017. It currently has five fewer students than in FY 2014, a decrease of 1.7%.

The other districts in the Caledonia Central SU, the newly created Caledonia Cooperative School District (PreK-8 operating / 9-12 tuitioning)⁶⁷ and the Peacham School District (PreK-6 operating / 7-12 tuitioning) have FY 2018 ADMs for K-12 of 570 and 91 respectively.

The combined ADM for the two Washington Northeast SU districts is just over 457, K-12. The combined ADM for the three Caledonia Central districts is 948, K-12.

The Cabot, Danville, and Twinfield districts created a § 706 study committee after passage of Act 46. The three districts' boards presented the committee's report and proposed articles of agreement to the voters on June 20, 2017, naming each district as "necessary." The voters did not approve the proposal in each of the necessary districts:

Cabot – 163 Yes; 356 No; 1 Blank/Spoiled

Danville – 112 Yes; 239 No

Twinfield – 160 Yes; 103 No

⁶⁷ Encompassing the towns of Barnet, Walden, and Waterford; operational on July 1, 2018.

Districts' Sec. 9 Analyses and Proposals

The Cabot, Danville, and Twinfield Districts' proposals are outlined separately below.

For more details, see each district's Snapshot at Appendix F; common data points at Appendix G; a link to each school board's Section 9 Proposal at [School Governance / Sec. 9 Proposals webpage](#); and the C-D-T Study Committee's Merger Report and proposed Articles of Agreement as approved by the State Board, which can be accessed through the [School Governance / Merger Activity webpage](#).

The Cabot School District

The Board of the Cabot School District proposes that the district remain a single-town district that operates all grades, K-12. It proposes a number of steps to meet the goals of Act 46 in a sustainable manner, such as:

- Making "targeted enhancements" to the high school curriculum such as: "reintroducing design/technology curricular opportunities and hiring a faculty member to support such a position;" "develop[ing] assessment measures and building strategic relationships with employers and partners to develop a career ready workforce;" and "returning the social studies and language arts positions to full time equivalent or adding adjunct educators to offer specialized classes" in FY 2019 – FY 2020. Targeted enhancements would also include "hiring or identifying a current faculty member to oversee the expansion administration of experiential learning opportunities," which the Section 9 Proposal stated that the proposed FY 2019 budget would support, potentially turning a part-time position into a full-time one. In FY 2023 and after, "as enrollment allows," the district will look to "expanding the high school foreign language program to include an additional language" and adding "foreign languages to elementary grades."
- Working with "Advantage Cabot," a private non-profit entity that "has developed an independent boarding program targeting out-of-state high school students who will attend Cabot School and be housed with local host families. Advantage Cabot is collaborating with the Board and administration to develop and deliver enrichment programs, academic and extracurricular, available to all high school students attending Cabot School." The nonprofit group has a goal of recruiting two students to enroll in the Cabot school in FY 2019, adding four more per year until reach 20 students in FY 2025, and reaching a maximum of 32 additional students by FY 2029. Advantage Cabot estimates that tuition from the program will add \$350,000 to the district's budget in FY 2023.
- Emphasizing CTE and early college.
- Continuing to offer "a predictable number of [public high] school choice slots."

The Cabot School District, "in cooperation with the Town ... and other community based entities," intends to explore "multiple paths to improve our infrastructure for the long term" including, *e.g.*, the possibility "of budgeting in a single year, up to \$150,000 for critical repairs, most notably to the gymnasium and its facilities;" a review of funding opportunities from non-profit entities; and an exploration of joint funding/bonding initiatives with the Town.

The Cabot School Board hopes to enter into partnerships with other districts to share programs and resources, for example “part-time equivalent instructional interventionists.” It also intends to “focus[] upon professional development ... to encourage innovative programmatic and curricular offerings.”

Cabot voters did not approve the 2017 proposal to create a unified union school district with the Danville and Twinfield Districts, which would have ceased operating high school grades at the Cabot School. Cabot’s rejection of the merger proposal was based on concerns that:

- Cabot’s “diluted power” on a unified school board “would not ensure the adequate resourcing or prioritization of the Cabot School’s remaining PreK-8 program”
- The articles of agreement “could be rewritten to hasten restructuring or the eventual closure of the Cabot School”
- Closure of the Cabot high school would provide limited, intradistrict school choice and not all the opportunities of a tuitioning district
- Closure of the Cabot High School would lead to a “potential loss of property value”

The Section 9 Proposal states that “Danville has been a natural and logical partner to explore options. Geography and a similar educational culture have been repeatedly recognized as strong starting points for scenarios encompassing merger or collaboration.” The Board affirms that in “the absence of legal and financial challenges associated with cross-supervisory union collaboration, we believe Danville would be a logical partner to form a close and cooperative relationship.”

The Board speculates that in a two-district merger of Cabot and Danville, Cabot “would retain approximately 40% of voting power on a consolidated board – likely enough representation to mitigate concerns of involuntary restructuring of grades, although based upon the 706b process we believe closure of Cabot high school would be predicate to a proposed merger.” It identifies barriers to include: the two districts would not be large enough to be considered a “preferred structure;” there is a “disparity between Cabot’s present per pupil expenditures and debt load [and] Danville’s current financial situation and absence of debt;” and the “anticipated costs of renovating the Cabot school campus.”

The Cabot School Board supports becoming a member of a larger SU “to enable the effective sharing of administrative costs among a greater number of communities.” It identifies Washington Central SU as a possible option. Both the WCSU and the Cabot School District are in the same CTE region and contract with same mental health services. In addition, U32 and three of the WCSU’s elementary schools are within 20 miles from the Cabot School. The Board stated that membership in the WCSU would give more exposure to project-based learning opportunities in Cabot and might result in more WCSU students taking advantage of the public high school choice program to enroll in the Cabot High School.

The Cabot Board is less interested in moving the district into the Barre SU because the schools are less proximate (30-35 min drive) and “the supervisory union has not previously been responsible for education of students outside of the Barre City-Barre Town community.” Nevertheless, the Board considers both SUs as possibilities .because they “anchored by comparatively large high schools versus Hazen Union, Danville, or Twinfield.” The Cabot

Board is “not convinced that ‘bigger is better,’ however, [it recognizes] that a larger program necessarily entails more areas to focus cooperative or collaborative efforts.”

The Danville School District

The Danville School District proposes to remain a single-town district that operates all grades, PreK-12, and to retain its membership within the Caledonia Central SU. It cites the proposed closure of the Cabot High School and Cabot’s “education spending per equalized pupil and the cost of renovating their core facilities – [as] clear obstacle[s] to any merger for the citizens and taxpayers of Danville.”

The Section 9 Proposal states that:

efforts over the past three years to communicate the quality of its educational programs to local families [has increased numbers of tuitioning students,] stabilizing and improving Danville’s financial picture, ensuring the breadth of Danville’s academic and co-curricular offerings, and enriching the diversity of student life at the high school.

In addition, the Proposal reports that the districts within the Caledonia Central SU have a history of cooperation, citing as examples SU-level instructional coordinators, maintenance services, and food service employees. The Proposal intends for the districts to begin “a more robust process of ongoing strategic, board-level discussions across our SU” and take actions such as a joint school climate survey and coordinated professional development opportunities.

By rejecting the C-D-T merger proposal, the Danville community “sent three key messages” regarding the importance of:

1. Maintaining and strengthening the quality of our school programs – in particular the vibrancy of our high school.
2. Ensuring the long-term financial stability and sustainability of our school’s core operations.
3. Pursuing educational partnerships with our neighbors, where possible and practicable, that lead to greater educational opportunity for our students.

In pursuit of these goals, the Danville Board proposes “continuing to access the unique cultural and entrepreneurial resources available in Caledonia county – schools, businesses, non-profits – in direct support of our educational programs” and “expanding our existing school/community partnerships – as in our newly established cooperative agreement with St. Johnsbury Academy” that will begin in the 2018-2019 school year. The Danville Board will “look to partner with other organizations wherever practicable as evidenced by our exploratory conversations with [the Blue Mountain Union School District] over establishing a regional alternative program” for students with special needs. The Board notes that Blue Mountain’s “overall enrollment [is] comparable ... and [it has a] similar educational philosophy” and the districts recognize “potential areas for establishing some regional cooperative agreements.” Although the Danville District welcomes exploring regional agreements “to enhance its core programs, particularly for

students in need of alternative placements, [it] contemplates no additional merger discussions at this time.”

The Section 9 Proposal points to the importance of maintaining a strong public high school in the region:

Danville High School is the last reasonably accessible public high school left in Caledonia/Essex Counties! Therefore, should cost pressures lead Danville to close its high school, serious questions would arise as to where regional high school students could actually attend school without inordinately long bus rides and increased transportation costs. ... Succeeding in [increasing the number of tuitioned students] will benefit not only the students of Danville, but students across the region who need and deserve a quality educational program to attend. We believe that our AGS proposal is key to the success of this effort.”

The Twinfield Union School District

The Twinfield USD “is *not* proposing that [it] should simply be ‘left alone’ to operate as it is now.” Although it is opposed to closure of its high school, the Section 9 Proposal asserts that merger with one or more other districts and/or reassignment to a larger SU would be in the best interests of the Twinfield District. The Proposal considers several possibilities including reassignment to the Washington Central SU as a stand-alone district with the possibility of eventual merger with those districts and merger with or reassignment to the Barre SU. Although Twinfield contemplates the potential for entering into regional partnerships, and perhaps eventual merger, with the Cabot or Danville School Districts, the Section 9 Proposal requests that the State Board refrain from merging the Twinfield District with either or both at this time because the financial impacts would be different than they were when the districts originally proposed merger.

The Section 9 Proposal notes that the “current enrollment in the high school of 112 students ... presents a challenge in terms of offering the fullest possible range of high school programming opportunities.” Nevertheless, it notes that Twinfield “currently provides a rich educational opportunity” including the high school’s personalized “Renaissance” program; an “80-acre environmentally diverse campus;” PLPs starting in the 7th grade; early college; integrated curriculum opportunities such as the 8th Grade Survival Unit and the grade 9-10 Synapse program; and a high percentage of enrollment in the Central Vermont Career Center. An intervention program in the elementary grades examines current performance data and provides intervention blocks four times weekly both for students who struggle academically and for those who can benefit from enrichment activities. The Section 9 Proposal states that the Twinfield District is “a pioneer in understanding, defining, and implementing Proficiency-based Graduation Requirements,” noting that in FY 2018, its 12th graders will graduate with proficiency based diploma and transcripts. Looking to the future, the Twinfield and Barre boards are discussing creation of a satellite campus at Twinfield for “eco-studies,” either as an “extension to or replacement of” an existing program at the regional career-technical education center.

The Section 9 Proposal observes that as one member of a two-district SU, it assumes responsibility for approximately two-thirds of the SU’s operational costs. This proportional

share – and perhaps the total financial responsibility – would decrease if it were a member of a larger SU.

In summary, the Section 9 Proposal states that the district is:

open to appropriate partnerships with other schools that improve educational opportunities ... while maintaining and continuing to build upon the school's hard work ... to bring the school up to Agency-directed 21st century learning standards – PBGR, Act 77, Trauma-Informed school environment, etc. – overlooked or ignored by potential partners.

The Board asks that the Agency and State Board “be mindful of how much this small school has accomplished on its own as they think about placement and partnership opportunities.”

Secretary’s Discussion and Proposal – the Cabot, Danville, and Twinfield Districts

Under Act 46, a UUSD that is large enough to be its own SD is the “preferred structure” for education governance in Vermont. That is, the Legislature has deemed a unified district to be the structure most likely to meet or exceed the educational and fiscal goals of Act 46 in a sustainable manner.

Act 46 acknowledges that there are regions of the State where it may be necessary for the statewide plan to “include alternative governance structures ..., such as a supervisory union with member districts or a unified union school district with a smaller average daily membership.” Nevertheless, the Legislature limits the State Board’s authority to include SUs with multiple member districts in the statewide plan by declaring that the “State Board **shall approve** the creation, expansion, or **continuation** of a supervisory union **only if** the Board concludes that this alternative structure:

“(1) **is the best** means of meeting the [five Act 46 Goals of opportunity, equity, and efficiency] in a particular **region**; and

“(2) ensures transparency and accountability for the member districts and the public at large ...”

Therefore, Vermont law requires the State Board to look to the entire region when making its determinations, and not just at the possible consequences of merger on any one of the potentially merging districts.

The voters of both the Cabot and Danville Districts rejected the study committee’s merger vote by greater than 2-to-1 margins. Merger is not “impossible” or “impracticable” because of community opposition, however. The Legislature determined that a UUSD that is its own SD is the governing structure most likely to meet the educational and fiscal goals of Act 46 in a sustainable manner. The Legislature requires the State Board to merge districts into this structure where necessary to create a sustainable entity. The law does not contemplate a departure from this goal based on community sentiment. Community opposition does not make merger “impossible” or “impracticable,” although it is important in any merged district for both the unified board and the townspeople to take the time to build trust, develop new habits for working together, and embrace and develop a shared and coherent vision.

It is also worth noting that a school board is charged with making decisions that are best for its students and its taxpayers. It is understandable if a school board endeavors to implement the will of the community. In contrast, Act 46 and longstanding statutory law require the State Board to decide what is best for the district, the region, and the State – and, given the statutory purpose underlying the State Board’s existence, that means the State Board must focus on what is best for the education of the State’s children.

On a related topic, both the Danville and Cabot Boards cited the closure of the Cabot High School grades as a reason that their voters disapproved the study committee’s proposed merger plan, including concern that closure of those grades would result in a “potential loss of property value.” It is important to remember that even if the State Board requires two or three of the districts to merge their governance structures, they will not be unifying under the terms of the original study committee proposal and nothing in the statewide plan will require termination or reconfiguration of grades offered or closure of school buildings.

The Section 9 Proposals of both Cabot and Danville state that retaining their single-town district structures is the best way for them to be sustainable entities capable of meeting the goals of Act 46. In addition, the Cabot Board cites its citizens’ “diluted power” on a unified school board as a reason that its voters rejected creation of the proposed Cabot-Danville-Twinfield UUSD. Underlying these statements is, at least in part, the premise that maintaining decision-making at the local board level and approving district budgets at Town Meeting are the best ways to ensure responsiveness, transparency, accountability, and fiscal responsibility and that a centralized board, unified budget, and Australian balloting are not. It is understandable that community members would mourn transition from a school-centric budget, which often is amended and voted on “from the floor,” to a multi-school budget developed by a unified board and decided by Australian ballot. Given the Legislature’s presumption that the “preferred structure” with centralized decision-making is the best way to achieve all the goals of Act 46, including transparency and accountability, the shift to a unified board and Australian ballots is not a reason to preclude the State Board from requiring merger.

Some variation of the transition from local to more centralized decision-making has occurred in each of the new UUSDs created under the voluntary merger programs enacted by the Legislature. In most of those unified districts, the articles of agreement require formation of community-based entities that advise and otherwise serve as a bridge between the local community and the unified board. In addition, it is important to note that, other than the initial vote voluntarily to form a UUSD and the election of the board members, statute does not require Australian balloting. In fact, some of the UUSDs formed since Act 46 have eschewed a switch to Australian ballots and will instead continue to debate and vote on their unified budgets and other public questions “from the floor.”

When referring to Cabot’s “diluted power” in the proposed unified C-D-T school district (that would have closed Cabot’s high school grades), the Cabot Board indicated that its community members were concerned that a unified board “would not ensure the adequate resourcing or prioritization of the Cabot School’s remaining PreK-8 program” and that the articles of agreement “could be rewritten to hasten restructuring or the eventual closure of the remaining grades offered to be in the Cabot School.

Throughout all phases of the Act 46 process, small districts have repeated variations of the concern that their voice would not be heard on a unified board leading to: reduced programmatic offerings in favor of lowering tax rates or at urging of communities perceived as less willing to support budgetary increases at the polls; increased taxes by voters in other towns that can more easily support tax increases; failure to perform needed or desired structural improvements to school buildings in smaller towns; and the ultimate closure of smaller, more rural elementary schools. Even assuming that the members of a unified board are incapable of learning to view all of the district's students as "our" students rather than as students of "either my town or some other town," this concern has little merit if the merging districts allocate members of an equal or more similar number to each town under the Hybrid Model of board representation.

The Cabot School Board hopes to enter into partnerships with other districts to share programs and resources, for example "part-time equivalent instructional interventionists." For many years, small districts throughout the State have endeavored to increase programmatic offerings and create a more stable workforce of full-time staff by sharing teachers and other professionals. This is sometimes accomplished by two or more districts hiring the same individual for a fractional position, all of which would total 1.0 FTE. Although it is at times a successful strategy, more often districts report either that highly valued employees leave for a single full-time position with full benefits in a larger, often unified, district or that the candidates interested in cobbling together employment through a series of part-time contracts are less well qualified. While this approach may be all that is available in some regions of the state – especially where districts cannot merge unless the voters agree to change the current operating/tuitioning structures – it is an inherently unstable one.

At times, staff sharing is accomplished through the SU office, which hires the shared professional as a full-time employee. In such an arrangement, the respective cost of each SU-level employee would be allocated to the districts in which the employee works. The local school board would thus have a diminished personnel-related role in relation to the SU's employee and the voters would have no ability to control or reject the costs the SU allocates to the local budget to cover the employee's salary and benefits – which could negatively affect the local district's ability to fully fund the programs in its own school(s).

Danville cites Cabot's "education spending per equalized pupil and the cost of renovating their core facilities" as reasons that Danville voters rejected merger. Cabot similarly acknowledges the disparity between "Cabot's present per pupil expenditures and debt load [and] Danville's current financial situation and absence of debt;" and the "anticipated costs of renovating the Cabot school campus." The contention that unification will raise tax rates for one or more groups of taxpayers cannot be relied upon to prevent merger, particularly where there is no evidence that the calculation resulting in the projected increase accounted for the potential savings that can be realized by the creative and efficient use of the unified district's resources and flexibility. In addition, even assuming that merger would increase the cost per pupil and tax rates in Danville without also expanding equity, increasing opportunities, and improving outcomes, the Legislature requires the State Board to have a regional focus as it merges districts where necessary to create sustainable structures.

Cabot's ADM is trending downward. Danville's ADM has fluctuated over the last few years and although its FY 2018 numbers are higher than those in FY 2017, they are still 1.7% lower

than in FY 2014. In addition, although Danville is hopeful that its marketing campaign will continue to increase enrollment by tuitioning students, the Board was unable to indicate whether any such trending increases was accompanied by an increase in the numbers of students who are more expensive to educate. In any event, the Cabot and Danville Districts are both extremely small, particularly for districts that operate a high school, with an average FY 2018 ADM of 11.5 and 22 students respectively per grade level.

Danville's Section 9 Proposal passionately asserted the importance of maintaining strong public high school education in the region. Experience throughout the State demonstrates that decreasing student population in a small district is not sustainable and ultimately leads to a downward spiral of increasing tax rates, reduced programming, and frequent staff turnover due to, *e.g.*, part-time positions and low salaries, especially where there are other full-time and/or better compensated options in the region. Larger governance structures have been shown to provide the flexibility needed to mitigate annual budget and tax increases, moderate tax rate fluctuations, and allow small or struggling schools to stay open and programs to remain intact or be expanded.

Finally, although assumption of a portion of one district's capital debt or sharing responsibility for a district's building that is in need of repair may result in tax increases, the increases may be mitigated by savings that could result from approaching the possibilities of merger in a creative manner. In addition, today's district without debt or an immediate need for renovation will tomorrow become the district that needs a new roof. In other words, long-term decision making should not be based on point-in-time circumstances. Finally, capital debt does not last forever, it is eventually paid off. Districts need to take the long view when determining what will best serve their students and all students in the region, particularly in small districts with fluctuating or declining populations, increasing budgets, or unstable tax rates.

Each of the three districts approached the Act 46-required self-analysis in an earnest manner, and identified weaknesses and steps to alleviate them. Many of the more specific action items listed, specifically in Cabot's Section 9 Proposal, however, are approaches that have been employed for many years in other districts, are elements of unified union school districts, or more significantly, are standard elements of sound district operation and represent the very baseline of educational opportunities, especially at the high school level. In addition, the Cabot voters' failure to approve a budget is an indication that the district will not even be able to take these modest steps forward towards better opportunities for its students. While these approaches may eventually lead to improvement, they do not result in creation of a sustainable structure capable of meeting or exceeding the Act 46 goals.

The Cabot Board's plan to work with "Advantage Cabot" shows creative, out-of-the box problem solving and is an interesting option to explore. Even if the nonprofit group pursues and implements its plans to the highest level, however, it remains an entity that is distinct from the school district itself and provides no assurance of sustainability for student numbers or funding sources. Ultimately, whether a district pursues contractual arrangements with other entities does not affect decisions related to *governance*.

Danville's Section 9 Proposal convincingly asserts the crucial need to maintain a strong public high school in the region, stating that the "Danville High School is the last reasonably accessible public high school left in Caledonia/Essex Counties!" It goes on to argue that if "cost pressures

lead Danville to close its high school, serious questions would arise as to where regional high school students could actually attend school without inordinately long bus rides and increased transportation costs.” Neither the Cabot nor the Danville Section 9 Proposal, however, demonstrates that remaining as two independent, single-town districts is the “best” means of creating a sustainable structure capable of meeting the Act 46 goals. Rather, given both district’s small size, the inherent flexibility of a unified district – if embraced – is the most likely way to enable the communities to be viable, particularly at the high school level.

Cabot notes that due to geography and a similar educational culture, Danville has been a natural and logical partner with which to explore options. In addition, the Cabot Board speculates that in a two-district merger of Cabot and Danville, Cabot “would retain approximately 40% of voting power on a consolidated board – likely enough representation to mitigate concerns of involuntary restructuring of grades.” One of the primary barriers that the Cabot Board raises to a two-district merger – that it would not be large enough to be a “preferred structure” – is significant only when considering whether to merge voluntarily in a way that would make the new unified district eligible for tax rate reductions. It is not a barrier to merger under the statewide plan because the Legislature acknowledged that there would be the need in some regions for alternative governance structures, “such as a supervisory union with member districts or a unified union school district with a smaller average daily membership.”

A unified union school district formed by the Cabot and Danville School Districts would have a K-12 ADM, in FY 2018 numbers, of 437. The unified district would still be relatively small, but the additional scale and flexibility would enhance the district’s sustainability. If the new unified union school district were to be a member of the Caledonia Central SU, then the SU’s ADM would rise from its current 948 to 1,098. If Twinfield were also included, the unified district would have an ADM of nearly 745, an increase of approximately 70%, and the SU’s ADM would grow to 1,404.

Twinfield’s Board believes that merger with one or more districts and/or reassignment to a larger SU will be in the best long-term interests of the district. It requests, however, that the State Board refrain from merging it with Cabot, Danville, or both districts, claiming that the financial impacts will differ from those under the study committee’s merger proposal. Without exploring the accuracy of this assertion or considering whether it would be a valid reason on which to base a decision, the Secretary believes that other issues – of geography, affinity, creativity, and shared vision – as well as the needs of other districts in the Central Vermont region, weigh against the State Board requiring Twinfield to merge with the Cabot and Danville Districts. Given the uncertainty surrounding other districts and SUs with which Twinfield might be associated, however, the Secretary does not have sufficient information to make a proposal at this time. By the time the State Board is required to issue its final statewide plan, the Board will have the information it needs to make its decisions.

Merger of the Cabot and Danville Districts is both “possible” and “practicable.”

The Cabot and Danville Districts’ arguments that retaining their current structures are the “best” means of creating a sustainable structures capable of meeting the Act 46 Goals are not strong enough, individually or jointly, to overturn the Legislature’s presumption that a larger, unified structure is the “preferred” means of doing so – even in regions where it is necessary to

include an alternative governance structure, “such as” a multi-district SU or a UUSD with a less than optimal ADM.

A decision either to merge the Twinfield District with one or more other districts and/or to move it into a larger SU would result in the net loss of one SU (Washington Northeast) as well as increased scale for both the Caledonia Central SU and also the SU or SD of which Twinfield becomes a member.

Absent compelling evidence to the contrary in this particular instance, the Secretary defers to the Legislature’s determination that unified districts are the structures most likely to meet or exceed the educational and fiscal goals of Act 46 in a sustainable manner.

The Secretary trusts that the communities’ concern for the well-being of all their children will impel them eventually to embrace the opportunities of a unified structure and work together to improve educational opportunities and equity for all students in the region.

Accordingly, the Secretary believes that the best means of meeting the Act 46 Goals – for each district individually and for the region – is for the State Board of Education to:

- *Merge the governance structures of the Cabot School District and the Danville School District into a single unified union school district that provides for the education of its PreK-12 students by operating multiple school, and redraw SU boundaries so that the new UUSD becomes a member district of the Caledonia Central SU.*
- *Merge the Twinfield Union School District with one or more other districts and/or move it to a larger SU when uncertainties in the region are resolved and the State Board has sufficient information to make a decision, taking into consideration that districts otherwise exempted from merger under the statewide plan are subject to SU boundary changes both under the statewide plan and, separately, pursuant to 16 V.S.A. § 261.*

See also the discussion of the Spaulding Union High School District and its member elementary districts and the Union 32 High School District and its member elementary districts at #4 and #5 respectively of Part VI(A)(a) above.