

We reached out to John Castle, Superintendent of North Country Supervisory Union, which has already met with the 3-person panel reviewing AGS proposals. Here are some of his thoughts:

- The NCSU Proposal was massive, 4 8 inch three ring binders. Not to say that it was all needed, but his suggestion is to have too much info rather than too little.
- The meeting with Secretary Holcombe, Brad James and Donna Russo Savage went well. These three are conducting all of the AGS meetings. John was accompanied by two others, an administrative assistant and a board member.
- They were given a chance to describe their proposal, instead John suggested that the panel ask them questions. Here is a bit of John's transcript: " (the Secretary) asked about student to staff ratios and what we would do if had the ability to shift staff in a centralized model. I talked about the nuance of making staffing decisions in the context of schools and over years. We recognize we have some places that are hard to justify. I did mention that we share staff between schools and hold the contract at the SU level and then assess out the cost." There ensued some discussion about this- the legal panel at the recent AVSBM conference is clear in its interpretation of Vermont law that it IS legal to hire staff at the SU level and assess the costs to individual districts.
- John was asked about sustainability in his current system and his response was that it would not be all that different than in a centralized system. It comes down to programming, needs, staffing, student numbers, etc. The panel did not ask about "governance," so John explained why local governance was not only desired, but the best way to continue to have support for schools. The panel asked about the lack of transparency of not voting on SU budgets, John replied that he felt it was more transparent. Folks can understand current budgets (mostly) and local boards understand their assessments. He feels it is less transparent to have a 50 million dollar budget for the community to vote on, and how he feels that a merged district would get less participation in an annual meeting when we have people 30 miles away.
- The discussion continued on the topics of "equity", "opportunity", teacher quality and pay, poverty weighting at the State level, etc.

Our thanks to John for making this information available.