

3.27.26 Testimony – Senate Committee on Education

**Matthew Fedders, Superintendent
Central Vermont Supervisory Union**

Good afternoon Chair Bongartz and members of the Senate Committee on Education,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Matthew Fedders, and I serve as Superintendent of the Central Vermont Supervisory Union, which includes the Paine Mountain School District—serving Northfield and Williamstown—and the Echo Valley Community School District, serving Orange and Washington.

I want to begin by acknowledging the complexity of this work and the thoughtful effort that has gone into developing Version 6 of the map. I also appreciate the recognition that this is a starting point. As has been said publicly, it is “by definition, not right,” and I am offering these comments in that same spirit—to help improve it.

After reviewing both the map and the draft legislation, I want to frame my concern not simply as a local issue, but as one directly connected to the goals and requirements outlined in the bill.

The legislation makes clear that this effort is intended to improve governance efficiency, strengthen educational delivery, and remain responsive to local needs, while prioritizing voluntary alignment where possible. It also explicitly directs the State Board to consider and avoid creating geographically isolated districts.

My concern is that, as currently configured, the placement of the Paine Mountain School District—Northfield and Williamstown—within SU #8 risks doing exactly that.

Northfield and Williamstown sit on the western edge of the proposed SU #8, while the rest of the supervisory union extends significantly to the east and northeast.

At the same time, both communities are part of the central Vermont corridor, with strong geographic and community connections to Barre and Montpelier.

This creates a structure that does not reflect how these communities actually function.

- Northfield is closely aligned with the Montpelier–Roxbury region
Students from Roxbury travel through Northfield daily to attend school in Montpelier. Travel time is approximately 15–20 minutes.
- Williamstown is closely aligned with Barre
Commuting patterns, services, and regional identity all point in that direction.

By contrast, travel from Northfield and Williamstown to the eastern portion of the proposed SU can approach an hour or more, depending on the community.

These are not theoretical concerns. These are the daily realities that shape how districts collaborate, how students access opportunities, and how systems operate.

I also want to be clear that this is not about aligning with one specific district.

Northfield and Williamstown sit in a region that includes Montpelier–Roxbury, Barre, and Washington Central (U-32). These are all geographically proximate and interconnected communities.

My concern is not choosing one of those outcomes today—it is ensuring that the structure allows those conversations to happen in a meaningful way.

I would also note that this pattern is not limited to Northfield and Williamstown.

The towns of Orange and Washington also have strong ties westward toward Barre and the greater central Vermont region. Close to 90% of their high school students attend Williamstown Middle High School, U-32, or Spaulding High School in Barre.

That further underscores that this is a region with shared patterns of movement and connection that are not reflected in the current configuration of SU #8.

There are three critical ways this proposal conflicts with the framework established in the legislation.

First is geographical isolation. The bill explicitly requires consideration of whether a district becomes geographically isolated.

In this case, Northfield and Williamstown are placed in a supervisory union where they lack natural geographic and functional connection to the majority of the SU #8 communities.

This is not simply imperfect alignment—it is the type of configuration the bill cautions against.

Second, the bill's approach relies on voluntary mergers occurring within the proposed supervisory union boundaries.

That means the boundaries you establish now determine which partnerships are realistically available.

If Northfield and Williamstown are placed in SU #8, they are effectively prevented from aligning with nearby and naturally connected regions such as Montpelier–Roxbury, Barre, or Washington Central through the voluntary process this legislation is designed to support.

I want to be clear that our districts are prepared to engage fully in the process outlined in this legislation. This is not a request to be left unchanged.

Many of the districts that Northfield and Williamstown are most closely aligned with—such as Barre, Montpelier–Roxbury, and Washington Central—are not being placed into newly formed supervisory unions at this time, but will instead be studied and considered for future reconfiguration.

However, this proposal would place CVSU into a supervisory union that defines and limits the set of potential merger partners. That makes it especially important that our placement now reflects those connections, so that future collaboration is not unintentionally constrained.

Third, one of my primary concerns relates to how this legislation structures the path forward for districts.

While the bill does provide a pathway to adjust supervisory union boundaries, that pathway is separate from the core process. It requires local votes, multiple public hearings, State Board review, and ultimately legislative action.

In practice, it is limited, uncertain, and cumbersome.

So I would ask: if we already know that Northfield and Williamstown are more closely aligned with neighboring regions, why would we place them in a position where they would have to pursue that difficult process just to align with the communities they already connect to?

Finally, these supervisory union boundaries are being codified in statute, and the transition timeline begins immediately, with supervisory unions operational by July 1, 2027.

Study committees will begin work well before that.

So while it may feel like this can be adjusted later, in practice, this is the decision point. Once established, these boundaries will shape what is possible in the next phase of this work.

I understand the competing priorities the committee is balancing.

I understand that SU #8 is projected at approximately 3,700 students across multiple districts. The issue here is not whether the supervisory union meets a size target—it does. The issue is whether it is coherent, functional, and efficient.

Efficiency is a critical goal, and one I strongly support.

But efficiency is driven by proximity and alignment, not just scale.

When districts are geographically dispersed, transportation costs increase, collaboration becomes more difficult, and shared programming is harder to implement.

I agree that no map will be perfect.

But there is a difference between minor imperfections and structural misalignment.

In this case, the concern is structural. It affects whether the system can function as intended.

If we think longer term, this region currently operates multiple high schools within a relatively small geographic area.

Better alignment could create opportunities over time for deeper collaboration or even regional approaches that improve programming and efficiency.

But those kinds of conversations are only possible if CVSU is positioned within a structure that reflects their geographic reality.

I also want to emphasize that our districts are not seeking to preserve the current structure at all costs. The districts within the Central Vermont Supervisory Union have been open to reconfiguration, including the possibility of separating, if it results in stronger geographic alignment and better long-term outcomes for students.

My concern is that the current proposal assumes these districts should remain grouped, when in practice, they may be better aligned with neighboring regions.

If the goal of this legislation is to support meaningful, voluntary alignment, then the initial boundaries need to reflect those possibilities.

In closing, I want to be clear: This is not an argument for maintaining the current structure.

Our districts understand that change is necessary and have been open to restructuring where it leads to better outcomes.

But if the goal of this legislation is to improve educational opportunity, increase efficiency, and support sustainable systems, then alignment matters as much as scale.

Right now, the placement of Northfield and Williamstown in SU#8 works against that alignment and risks creating the kind of geographic isolation the bill specifically directs you to avoid.

I would respectfully ask the committee to reconsider this portion of the map.

A relatively small adjustment at this stage could significantly improve the long-term success of this effort

I would welcome the opportunity to continue working with the committee as you refine the proposal.

Thank you for your time and consideration.