



# The Scoop

Produced by the School Board to help keep  
Starksboro residents informed of news  
relating to Robinson Elementary School

**October 2015**

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## Act 46 – Information and Implications for Robinson School

At the end of the 2015 session of the Vermont Legislature, Act 46, which was introduced by the House Education Committee chaired by representative Dave Sharpe, became law. Because this legislation could have profound implications for Robinson, we wanted to take this opportunity to provide Starksboro residents with some basic information about it, and to encourage you to participate in discussions about how our School Board and school community should respond.

(from the VT Agency of Education Fact Sheet: <http://education.vermont.gov/documents/edu-act46-fact-sheet.pdf>)

### Goals of Act 46 of 2015

Act 46 is designed to encourage and support local decisions and actions that:

- Provide substantial equity in the quality and variety of educational opportunities statewide;
- Lead students to achieve or exceed the State’s Education Quality Standards, adopted as rules by the State Board of Education at the direction of the General Assembly;
- Maximize operational efficiencies through increased flexibility to manage, share, and transfer resources, with a goal of increasing the district-level ratio of students to full-time equivalent staff;
- Promote transparency and accountability; and
- Are delivered at a cost that parents, voters, and taxpayers value.

The Legislature intends all school boards will attend to these goals, while acknowledging that the means to achieve these goals will vary, depending on the particular circumstances of different districts.

### Main components of Act 46 of 2015 (what this bill does):

- Provides tools boards can use to better align shared resources behind core goals.
- Provide some protection to small districts that currently are unable to control costs or shield themselves from fluctuations in ADM.
- Gives systems that need to make changes some tools to do so. If you are a small district, this is a great opportunity to partner with other small districts to achieve some scale.
- By moving some systems quickly, it gives Vermont a group of mergers we can study to determine what works, what doesn’t, where savings and program improvements can be found. We can then share this knowledge with other systems that are thinking about partnering.

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School Board Members	
Chair	
<b>Louis duPont</b>	453-5538
Vice Chair	
<b>Nancy Cornell</b>	453-2681
Clerk	
<b>Caleb Elder</b>	434-4805
*****	
Robinson Principal	
<b>Edorah Frazer</b>	453-2949
Superintendent	
<b>David Adams</b>	453-3657
Scoop Editor	
<b>Karen Wheeler</b>	453-6943

## FACILITY UPDATE

At our September meeting the board is anticipating hearing a plan from our Facilities Director for continuing the work started this summer to tighten up the outer shell of the building. As there are still a number of areas with rotten trim or siding, the board is looking forward to ensuring that this work is completed this fall. The concrete steps at the front of the building and the poor drainage along the building are ongoing concerns. Thanks to Andy Young for taking on the job of repairing the eroded steps and keeping them safe for now.

The Board will be consulting with Andy and Facilities Director Alden Harwood to develop a more long term fix for these stairs and the drainage at the corner near the old entrance. Also in this upcoming year, we will be deciding how best to proceed in replacing the roof over the Multi Purpose Room. This roof is near the end of its useful life.

## Act 46 (continued from front)

- This version leaves systems that are already working well alone.
- For districts that are unsure, they have more time to review their situation and review the better data we will make available through Education Quality Reviews before committing to a course of action.
- Gives the State Board of Education the tools to help very small districts that are not viable on their own and risk losing any local control, but can't find anyone with whom to partner.
- The bill puts pressure on systems to control their growth in per pupil spending, without forcing automatic cuts of the kind that can damage schools and hurt kids.

Schools are encouraged to measure quality and equity in the realms of academic achievement, personalization, safe school climate, high quality staffing, fiscal efficiency, and other components of the Education Quality Standards rules of the State Board of Education.

In the coming days and months, the Robinson Board and the Starksboro community, in collaboration with the Boards of Bristol, Lincoln, Monkton, New Haven, and Mt. Abraham, will engage in discussions about the implications of Act 46, and possible next steps.

### We'll be considering the following key questions, prompted by the details of this legislation

- Should Robinson "merge" with the other schools in the five towns of Addison Northeast, to form one school district, with one School Board and one unified budget? What might be the advantages, and disadvantages, of such a merger?
- Should Robinson consider merging with one or more other schools outside of Addison Northeast?
- What are the alternatives to merging with another school district, and what are the advantages and disadvantages of those alternatives?
- If we do decide to recommend any kind of merger with one or more school districts, what should be the criteria

by which we determine whether this move is successful, and how soon should we make this determination?

- If Starksboro decides to participate in a merger with other school districts (as determined by an affirmative vote of the town), what options would be available to us if the move proves unsuccessful?

We urge all Starksboro residents to get involved in these discussions in the coming days:

- The Robinson Board is planning an informational and input-gathering meeting about the details of Act 46. (Date and time to be determined.) Representative Dave Sharpe will be invited to provide information and answer questions about the legislation. At that meeting, we will also be soliciting your views. Please plan to attend.
- We're in the process of forming a supervisory union-wide study committee to consider next steps related to Act 46. The Robinson Board is seeking a community member to serve, with one of the members of our Board, on this committee. Please let us know as soon as possible if you are interested in serving on that committee, by emailing Robinson Board Chair, Louis Dupont ([ldupont@gmavt.net](mailto:ldupont@gmavt.net)).
- Once that study committee develops recommendations, we plan to hold a series of informational meetings throughout the five towns. We encourage you to keep an eye out for these. (We'll be posting details in the Scoop, and in Front Porch Forum, as they become available.)

In addition to the requirement that all school districts consider merging, Act 46 has established "allowable growth" spending caps on all school budgets. The Robinson Board will begin work on the school budget for 2016-2017 very soon. The Act 46 spending cap for FY '17 represents a serious challenge to the Board, as it seeks to develop a budget that ensures taxpayers an excellent return on their investment. Please be checking agendas for upcoming board meetings, and plan to attend to provide the board with information on what you see as the priorities in the Robinson School budgeting process.

### NEGOTIATING COMMITTEE UPDATE (by Louis duPont)

When Dennis Hysko bade farewell to the RSB back in August, among the duties he left for us to take over was the RSB position on the Negotiating Committee. So far I have attended three meetings. At our most recent meetings, on September 1st and 2nd, we met with the Addison Northeast Education Association (ANEDA) Teachers Bargaining Council and then the ESP or Educational Support Personnel Bargaining Council respectively. With Act 46 spending thresholds curbing anything more than a 2% budget increase in our SU, getting progress toward a compromise with the Teachers Bargaining group has been a challenge for all. At the 9/1 meeting we at least agreed to a "mutual impasse". This will hopefully put us on a path toward a mediated settlement. We hope to have a mediator at our next meeting in October. Over the summer the Boards' negotiating committee had proposed having teachers leave the Vermont Education Health Initiative (VEHI) plan that has been providing health insurance for teachers for many years, and join the Vermont Health Connect plan that most Vermonters are enrolled in. The Teachers bargaining group has for the time being rejected this proposal. The meeting with Support Staff on 9/2 was arduous but productive. There is a feeling that together we are making progress. Needless to say, the wide spectrum of details involved in these negotiations is potentially mind numbing.

It also seems to be apparent to this humble observer that the format of these negotiating meetings could certainly be improved. We need ultimately to progress from our current oppositional approach to one that emphasizes the obvious community of interest that staff, teachers, administration and board members all share in creating and sustaining the best learning environment for our kids we can sustainably afford.

### Robinson School Board Upcoming Meetings:

October 13, 2015 @ 5:30 pm ~ Robinson Elementary School