

December 31, 2021

TO: Mount Abraham Unified School District School Board members (Robert Backlund, KristinBlanchette, Dawn Griswold, Kevin Hanson, Erin Jipner, Brad Johnson, Sarah LaPerle, Sandra Lee, Andrew Morton, Steve Rooney, Liz Sayre, Dave Sharpe, Krista Siringo)

MAUSD/ANWSD Merger Study Committee members (Dustin Corrigan, Dawn Griswold, Kevin Hanson, Brad Johnson, Mari-Kate Kelley, Sarah LaPerle, Ed McGuire, Troy Paradee, Stephanie Rossier, Dave Sharpe, Erica Andrus, Rebecca Coffey, Martha DeGraaf, Carole McBride, Keith Morrill, Mary Neffinger, John Stroup)

CC: MAUSD Superintendent Patrick Reen, ANWSD Superintendent Sheila Soule, Representative Caleb Elder, Representative Mari Cordes, Senator Ruth Hardy, Senator Chris Bray

Dear MAUSD School Board and MAUSD/ANWSD Merger Study Committee:

We present this letter to the ANWSD/MAUSD Study Committee on behalf of the residents of Starksboro. Our intention is to reaffirm our concerns with the work plan and potential actions of the study committee, which were initially stated in a letter to the MAUSD School Board in September of 2021. We continue to be troubled with what appears to be an unnecessarily compressed process that feels prematurely resigned to a merger with the deadline conveniently in time for a potential vote on Town Meeting Day in March 2022.

We are concerned about the focus of the work being conducted by the Study Committee. Upon review, we believe the authors of the work plan see a merger as a foregone conclusion, as it appears that the focus of the work is to draft new articles of agreement for the newly merged district instead of an exploration of cost saving measures that may or may not be realized through a merger of the two districts. We respectfully request that the work plan be reconsidered to include the following ideas:

1. Taking affirmative steps to reverse the demographic trends that underlay much of our current scenario. People are moving into the area, and giving reasons for more people to do so is an avenue that should be explored, such as providing universal childcare in the school buildings.
2. A thorough exploration of the pros and cons of a merger so the committee is best equipped to come forward with a thoughtful, well-informed recommendation.

We have 2 requests of the Committee:

1. Refocus your efforts to study cost-saving measures outside of a merger between the Addison Northwest and the Mount Abraham Unified School Districts.
2. Affirm, actively support, and ensure that no town will lose the ability to hold a vote to determine whether or not to close their school (which includes repurposing).

We have already seen the town of Lincoln vote to leave the district without fully knowing the financial impact on their town and well before knowing the outcomes of the Board's current undertakings. While there are, no doubt, several different reasons for this decisive action, we can all be certain that the lack of clarity around each town's self-determination was a major driver in this vote. As a member of the MAUSD, we, like Lincoln, feel backed into a corner with the lack of clarity and potential loss of self-determination. We believe a commitment on your part to the requests listed above will ensure a more thoughtful and deliberate process that will bring Starksboro in as a partner. Without a commitment to these requests, we believe it is likely that Starksboro will follow suit and host a vote to withdraw from the district.

Starksboro Selectboard

Koran Cousino, Chair

JP Painter, Co-Chair

Nancy Boss

Eric Cota

Carin McCarthy