

TO: **Mount Abraham Union School District School Board members** (Robert Backlund, Kristin Blanchette, Andrea Denny, Dawn Griswold, Kevin Hanson, Brad Johnson, Sarah LaPerle, Sandra Lee, Sarah McClain, Andrew Morton, Steve Rooney, Liz Sayre, Dave Sharpe, Krista Siringo)

CC: **MAUSD Superintendent Patrick Reen, Rep. Caleb Elder, Rep. Mari Cordes, Rep. Harvey Smith, Sen. Ruth Hardy, and Sen. Chris Bray**

FROM: **Starksboro Selectboard**

DATE: **September 13, 2021**

RE: **Proposed changes to MAUSD structures and community schools**

Dear MAUSD School Board members,

We present this letter to the Mount Abraham Unified School District School Board on behalf of the residents of Starksboro. Our intention is to create the opportunity for a thoughtful and deliberate response on our part to the outcomes of the current undertakings of the Board, which include the Merger Study Committee and the review of the community proposals. We are concerned 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 have 3 requests of the Board:

1. Adjust the timeline to allow for towns to respond thoughtfully to outcomes.
2. Affirm, actively support, and ensure that no town will lose the ability to hold a vote to withdraw from the district should the recommendation be a merger.
3. 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) regardless of the recommendations of the Merger Study Committee.

We ask the School Board to hold an affirmative vote on a resolution not to close, merge, repurpose or otherwise fundamentally alter schools without giving the affected town(s) a right to vote on the matter.

We are also concerned about the work plan recently presented to the Merger 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 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.

Respectfully submitted,

Starksboro Selectboard
Koran Cousino, Chair
JP Painter, Co-Chair
Nancy Boss
Eric Cota
Carin McCarthy