Subject: Education Reform - Act 73/ keeping high school choice

Thu 3/12/2026 8:52 AM

Dear Vermont Senators and Legislators,

My name is Jennifer Allen, and I am a resident of Lunenburg in Vermont's Northeast Kingdom. I grew up in Lunenburg and chose to raise my own children here because I believe deeply in our rural communities and the opportunities they can provide families. I am writing to express my strong support for maintaining school choice for Vermont students, particularly in rural districts like ours.

I currently have a ninth grader enrolled at St. Johnsbury Academy and a middle school student attending Concord Middle School in the Kingdom East School District. My children were in preschool and elementary school when Act 46 was implemented, and our family has experienced firsthand the changes and challenges that came with the consolidation of our local schools.

One of the most difficult transitions occurred when our town's middle school serving grades 5–8 closed. That change forced students to move to a new school environment during already challenging developmental years. For my daughter, the transition was especially difficult. She experienced significant bullying during sixth grade and the beginning of seventh grade, which ultimately led us to withdraw her from the public school system to protect her well-being.

The ability to choose her high school made an enormous difference for her. School choice gave her the opportunity to attend a school where she could start fresh without the fear of being placed in the same environment with students who had bullied her. That option restored her confidence and allowed her to focus on learning and building positive relationships. When students have little choice during difficult middle school transitions, the ability to choose their high school can provide an important sense of control and stability.

Living in a border town also presents unique challenges that policymakers should consider. Many Northeast Kingdom families live closer to schools, employment, shopping, sports programs, and community resources in neighboring New Hampshire than they do to other parts of Vermont. When school assignments move farther away from where families live or work, it can create real hardships.

Even when transportation is provided, there are still significant challenges. If a child becomes sick during the school day, many parents may be 30 minutes to an hour away. Just this morning, for example, families in Lunenburg received a call at 6:15 a.m. informing us that the bus transporting students from Lunenburg to Concord was unavailable for the day with no alternative transportation offered. Many families

could not get their children to school because it required traveling in the opposite direction of work or other responsibilities.

I urge lawmakers to recognize that these policies affect real families in some of Vermont's most economically challenged communities. These decisions are not simply about numbers, maps, or consolidation models—they affect how children access education every single day. When transportation barriers increase and local options disappear, students in underserved communities are at greater risk of falling through the cracks.

As a real estate agent, I also see how school policy directly influences whether families consider moving to rural Vermont. Many potential buyers hesitate to move into small towns that no longer have nearby school options. With many of our communities facing aging populations, we must think carefully about what will attract young families to live and work here.

One of the factors that makes these towns appealing is access to high school choice that allows families to find the best educational fit for their children. Removing that option could further discourage families from settling in rural Vermont communities.

For families like mine and many others across the Northeast Kingdom, school choice is not about politics—it is about giving our children safe environments, reasonable access to education, and opportunities to succeed.

Thank you for your time and for considering the perspectives of rural families as you evaluate education policy in Vermont.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Allen

Lunenburg, Vermont