



February 25, 2008

To: Richard Cate, Commissioner
Department of Education

From: Charlie Smith, President
Snelling Center for Government

Summary of Observations
School Governance Consolidation Survey

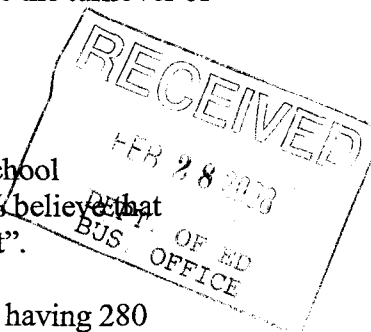
In February 2008, the Snelling Center engaged Macro International to conduct a public opinion survey of 400 randomly selected Vermont households, on attitudes about public school governance and consolidation to around 50 school districts. The survey consisted of seven core questions and five subordinate questions (see Attachment A).

Major Findings

- A majority of those polled, who expressed any opinion, believed that school governance in Vermont is complicated and should be simplified, and favored consolidation of school districts.
- The majority expressed that consolidation would improve education for students as well as cost control efforts and leadership turnover rates.
- Of those who opposed consolidation, a majority were open to the argument that consolidation would improve educational opportunities for children.
- Of those who opposed consolidation, a majority were not open to the arguments that consolidation would improve efforts to control costs or reduce the turnover of school leaders.

Detailed Summary

1. Out of 345 respondents expressing an opinion, 56% believe school governance is "complicated, fragmented and inefficient"; 44% believe that school governance is "systematic, well organized and efficient".
2. Out of 369 respondents expressing an opinion, 59% think that having 280 local school boards for 311 schools "seems like too many and should be simplified; 41% think it "seems about right and should not change".



3. Out of 358 respondents expressing an opinion, 56% “generally favor reducing the number of school districts”; 44% “generally oppose reducing the number of school districts”.
4. Out of 202 respondents who “generally favor reducing the number of school districts”, 58% said their opinions would not be different if they felt the reduction would lead to closing a school in their community; 36% said their opinions would change; 6% didn’t know.
5. Out of 156 respondents who “generally opposed reducing the number of school districts”, 58% said they were not primarily concerned about the closure of a local school;
6. Out of 156 respondents who “generally opposed reducing the number of school districts”:
 - 53% said their opinions would be different if they believed “consolidation would create more and better educational opportunities for children”;
 - 58% said their opinions would not be different if they believed “consolidation would reduce turnover of school leaders”;
 - 51% said their opinions would not be different if they believed “consolidation would significantly reduce costs”.
7. Out of 331 respondents rendering an opinion, 53% said fewer school districts will generally make education for students “better”; 40% said “worse”; 7% said “no change”.

Out of 369 respondents rendering an opinion, 69% said fewer districts will generally make efforts to control costs “better”; 27% said “worse”; 4% said “no change”.

Out of 347 respondents rendering an opinion, 55% said fewer school board meetings will generally make the turnover rate of school leaders “better”; 35% said “worse”; 10% said “no change”.

Attachment A: Survey Questions

Vermont has 311 public schools. These 311 schools are governed within 280 school districts, 46 supervisory union districts and 12 supervisory districts; each has its own school board, budget, teacher contract, bus system, etc.

1. Would you say that, in general, school governance in Vermont is:
 - a. Systematic, well-organized and efficient
 - b. Complicated, fragmented and inefficient
 - c. Neither
 - d. Don't know

2. Do you think that having 280 local school boards of 311 school in Vermont:
 - a. Seems about right and should not change
 - b. Seems like too many and should be simplified
 - c. Neither
 - d. Don't know

A proposal has been put forward to consolidate the management of Vermont's schools to about 50 districts that correspond to the current supervisory unions and supervisory districts.

3. Do you generally favor or oppose reducing the number of school districts?
 - a. Favor
 - b. Oppose
 - c. No opinion
 - d. Don't know

4. (To those who favor consolidation) Would your opinion be different if you thought it would lead to closing a school in your community?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Don't know

5. (To those who oppose consolidation) Are you primarily concerned about the closure of a local school?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Don't know

6. (To those who oppose consolidation) Would your opinion be different if you believed consolidation would:
- Create more and better educational opportunities for children?
 - Reduce turnover of school leaders?
 - Significantly reduce educational costs?
- a. Yes
b. No
c. Don't know
7. Would you say that:
- Fewer school districts will generally make education for students...
 - Fewer school districts will generally make efforts to control costs...
 - Fewer school board meetings will generally make the turnover rate of school leaders...
- a. Better
b. Worse
c. No change
d. Don't know