Designing Tomorrow's Schools:

Aligning School Facilities with District/School Mergers & Student Learning

John Alberghini & Sean McMannon
October 30, 2026

Purpose



Overview of relevant Act 170 info



Facilities & Merger



Questions: Note Cards

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WHY?

WHAT?

HOW?

H.955: Vermont Education Reform Implementation Timeline

Forward-looking roadmap, 2026–2031

● = Scheduled action
○ = Contingent action

ON PASSAGE

- Reset key Act 73 timelines and contingencies
- Launch AOE reserve-guidance rulemaking
- Develop statewide student profile form

2026

Build the machinery

- **July 1:** CESAs replace BOCES; 7 CESAs created
- CESA startup grants and executive director grants begin
- Merger committee process begins
- **By Sept. 1:** VTLC hires 8 merger facilitators
- **By Oct. 15:** merger committees hold first meetings
- PreK data and financing work begins
- **By Dec. 1:** BBF PreK report; School Construction Advisory Board identifies 3–5 regional high school opportunities
- **By Dec. 31:** AOE transportation and financing report
- AOE school construction division established

2027

Write the rules

- **Jan. 15:** Secretary of State report on election administration resources
- **Feb. 1:** AOE reports merger committee membership and status
- **Mar. 31:** AOE reserve fund standards due
- **Mar. 31:** SBE defines "small by necessity" and "sparse by necessity"
- **July 1:** CESAs expand services (PD, curriculum, transportation, facilities planning)
- **Sept. 1:** merger committees submit final meports
- **Dec. 1:** Secretary of Education forwards recommended mergers to SBE
- **Dec. 15:** SBE issues findings on proposed union districts

2028

Decisions and votes

VOTE

- **Jan. 1:** interim merger reports and preliminary SU/CESA boundary recommendations
- **Mar. 7:** voters decide on proposed union district mergers
- Districts not merged by July 1 may petition the General Assemlity with a voter-approved merger plan
- **Oct. 1:** property classification data submitted to JFO
- **Dec. 1:** final facilitator report and AOE boundary recommendations
- **Dec. 31:** AOE budgeting guidance under the foundation formula due

2029

Legislative decision gate

- Legislature must act before major Act 73 rollout
- Must address: CTE, special education funding, sparsity, secondary weighting, geographic cost differences, PreK funding, legacy bargaining agreements, and district debt
- **July 1:** tax rate multipliers must be set or property classification provisions repeal
- **Nov. 1:** SBE report on isolated districts
- **Dec. 15:** proposed regional assessment district boundaries

Contingent Gate
Major 2030 changes depend on these legislative decisions.

2030

Conditional rollout

- ○ **July 1** (if contingencies are met): property tax classifications take effect
- ○ Small and sparse school grant system begins
- ○ Legacy debt aid program may begin
- ○ School construction spending exempt from supplemental district spending cap
- ○ Foundation formula transition dates align with new schedule

2031

Assessment system begins

- **Jan. 1:** regional assessment districts take effect
- 6-year full reappraisal cycle begins
- Regional appeals boards hear valuation appeals

H.955 is a staged implementation bill: 2026–2028 builds governance and data systems; 2029 is the key legislative decision year; 2030–2031 begin conditional rollout.

Act 170: An act related to next steps in transforming Vermont's education system

Mandatory Merger Study Committees

Key Principle

Studies are mandatory, but the final decision to merge is voluntary.

These groups must examine:

- Governance
- Educational opportunity
- Efficiency
- Access to regional middle & high schools
- Career technical education

Timeline

- **September 1, 2026:** Facilitators hired.
- **September 15, 2026:** Districts appoint merger committee representatives (must be current school board members).
- **October 15, 2026:** Initial merger committee meetings.
- **2027–2028:** Merger analysis and public engagement.
- **September 1, 2027:** Final merger analysis presented to State Board and AOE.
- **March 2, 2028:** Vote to merge proposed districts.
- **July 1, 2028:** Boards of new districts form and plan for transition.
- **December 1, 2028:** Facilitator report to Legislature.
- **July 1, 2029:** New districts officially take full effect.

Act 170: An act relating to next steps in transforming Vermont's education system



Cooperative Educational Service Areas (CESAs)

- The law establishes **seven regional CESAs** across Vermont. All supervisory unions and school districts are required to participate. These service areas act as regional hubs designed to reduce duplication and overhead costs by sharing administrative and back-office programs.
- **Required shared services** include:
  - ✔ Special education
  - ✔ IT and business systems
  - ✔ Transportation
  - ✔ Curriculum development
  - ✔ Professional training

RESOURCES

- CESA Map
- Merger Committee Groupings

STATE AID FOR SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION

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Aid & Eligibility

75%

DEBT SERVICE COVERAGE

Eligible districts may receive aid equal to 75% of qualifying debt service costs for school construction debt incurred before December 31, 2024.

Districts identified as bad-faith participants in the merger process may be ineligible to access this aid.

Strategic Priorities

- Encourage greater scale and efficiency by prioritizing school construction projects that align with future governance structures.
- Remove disincentives to necessary school construction and renovation projects.
- Recognize the urgency of developing sustainable funding models for school facilities.

Funding Roadmap

SHORT TERM

Increase the State's bonding capacity to help catalyze construction projects.

LONG TERM

Establish a state aid program that provides support through debt service assistance.

State Aid for School Construction Advisory Board

SYSTEM REFORM OVERVIEW

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Education Funding

Foundation Model

Transitioning to a "foundation formula" model on **July 1, 2029**.

State Control

Instead of local voters driving the spending baseline, the state will distribute funding based tightly on student headcounts and the weighted demographic costs of teaching them.

Property Taxes

Categories

Divides property into three distinct tax categories: homestead, non-homestead residential, and non-homestead, non-residential.

Implementation

Following data collection in 2028, the legislature must lock in tax multipliers by July 2029, targeting full implementation by **2030**.

Reappraisals

Creates new regional assessment districts in 2031, forcing municipalities to run full real estate reappraisals every six years with partial state funding.

ADDITIONAL PROVISIONS

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Independent School Tuition & Fees

PROVISION STATUS

Has a direct impact on education funding structure.

DISCUSSION SCOPE

Not a primary focus area for today's presentation.

PreK Funding

PROVISION STATUS

Contributes to overall education system funding allocation.

DISCUSSION SCOPE

Excluded from current detailed agenda items.

FACILITIES STRATEGY

Telling a story and painting a picture…

1. Law & Governance

- Law: Act 170, Sec. 65 (pp. 118-143)
- Master Plan Development

2. Need & Assessment

- Facility Condition Index (FCIs)
- Local Facility Evaluations & Assessments

3. Roles & Responsibilities

Clarity for all involved:

- Community & Board
- Superintendent & Leadership
- Staff & Students

4. Communication Plan

Need a thoughtful & structured strategy

- Professional communication support
- Key talking points for consistent messaging
- Centralized location for documents & information

5. Stakeholder Engagement

Active involvement & outreach

- Targeted messaging at every opportunity
- Dedicated working committee
- Formal & informal facility visits

Data for Facilities & Mergers

Core domains to consider when evaluating educational infrastructure and merger feasibility

01

Enrollment History & Trends

Historical student counts and future projection trajectories.

02

Demographics

Community population shifts and student body composition.

03

Facilities Assessment

Building conditions, profiles, and physical infrastructure health.

04

Debt Service

Outstanding bonds, facility liabilities, and repayment obligations.

05

Financial Implications

Cost efficiencies, tax impact, and operational budget models.

06

Educational Impact

Academic programming, equitable access, and student outcomes.

RESOURCE & CAPACITY PLANNING

Staffing Considerations

Student Services & Needs

Special Educators, Nurses, educators and support staff required to support program delivery.

State & Federal Rules

Mandated operational requirements and statutory compliance standards.

Quality Standards

Adherence to Series 2000 – Education Quality Standards.

Unified Arts Offerings

Specialized instructional capacity for art, music, physical education and enrichment.

Administrative Services

Central Office, Principal leadership and administrative assistant roles.

Community Aspirations

Aligning staffing resources with local community expectations, aspirations and goals.

LEGISLATIVE COMPARISON

Some Notable Differences Compared to Act 46

1. Merger Studies

Merger study is required for all districts

2. Regional Sharing

Focus on regional services and sharing

3. Size Criteria

Minimum threshold of 2,000 students

4. CESA Creation

Creates seven Cooperative Educational Service Areas (CESAs)

5. Formula Shift

VT Shifting to a “Foundation Formula” by 2029

6. Facility Funding

Facility funding tied to governance and educational equity

7. Good Faith

Good Faith Participation Standard **Defined**

WHY?

WHAT?

HOW?

Notecards/Questions?