

Act 170 Merger Study Committee Group 8 Meeting Minutes

Meeting Date: October 14, 2026

Time: 6:00 pm

Location: Windsor School, 19 Ascutney St, Room 210, Windsor, VT 05089

Facilitator: Dana F. Brown

Committee Chair: Bill Yates

Committee Vice Chair: Colin Butler

Minutes Prepared By: Dana Brown

Link to recording;  Merger Study Committee Meeting - 2026/10/14 17:38 EDT - Reco...

Call to Order and Introductions

The meeting was convened at 6:00 pm.. Committee members introduced themselves and shared their backgrounds and district affiliations.

Members identified in the meeting notes included

- Bill Yates, representing the Mount Ascutney School Board and Windsor/West Windsor;
- Colin Butler, representing the Hartford School District;
- Anthony Wilson, representing the Hartland School Board; and
- Gina McAllister, Vice Chair of the Mountain Views Supervisory Union, representing Keri Bristow.
- John Arrison, representing Weathersfield School District.

Absent; Peter DuBois, Pittsfield School District

2. Adoption of Parliamentary Procedures

John Arrison moved to adopt Robert's Rules of Order for small boards as the committee's parliamentary procedure. The motion was approved unanimously, with no dissent recorded.

3. Election of Committee Officers

The committee discussed the responsibilities of the chair, including assisting the facilitator with agenda development and conducting committee meetings.

John Arrison nominated Bill Yates to serve as chair. The nomination was approved unanimously.

Following discussion of leadership responsibilities in the chair's absence, Colin Butler was nominated to serve as vice chair. The nomination was approved unanimously.

4. Committee Norms and Good Faith Participation

Facilitator Dana Brown led a discussion regarding expectations for respectful and productive committee participation. Members discussed whether to adopt a written list of norms or rely on shared expectations of courtesy, respect, and appropriate language.

The committee agreed by consensus to maintain unwritten norms at this time, with the understanding that written norms could be considered if needed.

The facilitator also reviewed the good faith participation standard established under Act 170. Members discussed concerns about the interpretation and application of the statutory standard, including the absence of a clear definition of good faith in the law. Members expressed a commitment to responsible participation and constructive engagement throughout the study process.

5. Public Participation Procedures

The committee discussed procedures for public comment to ensure orderly participation and effective use of meeting time.

The proposed procedures provide that:

- Public comment will be offered at the beginning and end of each meeting.
- Speakers will state their full name and town of residence.
- Each speaker will have up to two minutes to comment.
- Public comment will not include back-and-forth debate with committee members.

Following discussion of privacy concerns, the committee agreed that speakers would be asked to identify their town of residence rather than provide a full street address.

Action: The committee agreed to implement the public participation procedures described above. The facilitator or designated meeting representative will provide the public participation instructions before each meeting.

6. Public Comment

Todd Heyman, representing Hartland, participated in the public comment period. He expressed appreciation for the website's overview of the four options under consideration and requested a clear, concise document summarizing the history of prior discussions and votes. He noted that such a document would help committee members and the public understand the background of the current study.

Follow-up: The request for a historical summary of prior discussions and votes will be considered as part of the committee's ongoing information and documentation needs.

7. Act 170 Study Timeline and Facilitator's Role

The facilitator reviewed the anticipated state timeline for the merger study process. The committee discussed the goal of completing a merger report by September 2027, with a potential public vote in March 2028.

The facilitator emphasized neutrality regarding the ultimate decision to merge or not merge districts. The facilitator's role is to guide the process, support informed discussion, and help the committee examine the available information and options.

Members acknowledged that legislative changes, elections, and additional state guidance could affect the process and its timelines.

8. Educational Quality, Equity, Sustainability, and Enrollment Trends

The committee discussed the educational and demographic factors underlying the regional study. Discussion included declining birth rates, aging populations, reductions in pre-kindergarten and K-12 enrollment, and the resulting effects on school funding, staffing, programming, and long-term sustainability.

Members discussed the need to evaluate potential regional arrangements in terms of educational quality, equitable opportunities for students, financial sustainability, and responsible use of public resources.

The committee emphasized that the study should consider how to provide a high-quality education at an affordable cost rather than focus exclusively on reducing expenditures.

9. Proportional Representation and Voting

The committee discussed possible methods for determining proportional representation and voting weights among participating districts.

Members considered the use of 2020 U.S. Census data, registered voter counts, and student enrollment as possible bases for determining proportional voting weight. Anthony Wilson expressed support for using census data, noting that public education serves the broader community rather than only registered voters or families with currently enrolled students.

Members also discussed the relationship between equal representation in committee deliberations and proportional voting for formal decisions. The statutory requirements governing proportional representation and voting were reviewed, including the importance of ensuring that the committee's approach complies with Act 170.

The committee also discussed the potential distinction between towns whose participation may be necessary to a proposed merger and towns that might participate in an advisory capacity. Members emphasized the importance of building broad agreement throughout the process and understanding the implications of different

participation and voting arrangements.

Recognizing that a member representing Pittsfield was absent and should have an opportunity to participate in the discussion, the committee agreed by consensus to defer a formal decision on proportional representation and voting weights until the next meeting.

No final determination on proportional representation was made at this meeting.

10. Regional Infrastructure and Geographic Considerations

Chair Yates discussed the region's transportation infrastructure, including the Interstate 91 and Interstate 89 corridors, and its potential relevance to regional educational planning.

Members acknowledged that transportation access and travel times will be important considerations when evaluating possible regional arrangements, student access, and the delivery of educational programs.

11. Asset Mapping: School Buildings, Programs, and Resources

The facilitator introduced an asset-mapping initiative to establish a baseline inventory of the participating districts' facilities and educational resources.

The committee discussed the need to examine both physical assets and programmatic offerings, including:

- School buildings, facilities, and classroom capacity.
- Existing educational programs and services.
- Advanced Placement and other advanced coursework.
- Early college opportunities.
- Career and technical education.
- Staffing and other educational resources.
- Building debt, operating costs, and potential future use of facilities.

Members noted that any evaluation of buildings should consider possible reuse, leasing, or sale, as well as the financial and educational implications of those options.

The committee agreed that asset mapping should support a broader examination of educational quality, equity, operational efficiency, and long-term sustainability.

Follow-up: Members will review information about facilities and programs in their respective districts. Relevant school and facility inventories will be distributed to committee members.

12. School Costs, Debt, and State Funding

The committee discussed financial pressures affecting Vermont school districts, including per-pupil costs, declining enrollment, building-related debt, state funding policies, and spending constraints.

Members considered the potential financial implications of school consolidation, building closures, regional supervisory arrangements, and other structural changes. The discussion included the need to account for existing debt obligations and other financial commitments when evaluating possible options.

The committee also discussed the relationship between cost containment and educational quality, including the potential effects of funding constraints on student support services, staffing, and course availability.

Members acknowledged that the financial implications of potential changes require further analysis and should be considered alongside educational outcomes and community needs.

13. State Geographic Information Systems and Mapping Resources

Member Colin Butler introduced state geographic information system (GIS) resources that may assist with regional planning. The tools identified in the meeting notes included:

- District Builder.
- School Explorer.
- Drive Time Mapper.
- Town School Network Visualizer

Members discussed how these tools could help evaluate school locations, student access, transportation considerations, and geographic relationships that may not align with municipal boundaries.

14. Community Communication and Public Information

The committee discussed how participating districts and communities should receive information about the study's work, meetings, and progress.

Members noted that districts may have different website practices and may be receiving different guidance regarding public communication. The committee discussed the importance of a consistent, accessible approach while recognizing that supervisory unions and districts may need to coordinate local communication with their respective superintendents and legal counsel.

Members were encouraged to consult their superintendents regarding appropriate methods for sharing meeting information and public updates.

The facilitator noted that local districts and supervisory unions would need to

coordinate communication efforts, given the limited capacity for a single centralized effort to serve all regions.

Follow-up: Members will consult their respective superintendents and report recommendations for communicating committee information at the next meeting.

15. Agenda Development and Open Meeting Compliance

The committee discussed preparation of the November meeting agenda. Members were asked to submit proposed agenda items to the chair and facilitator so that a draft agenda could be developed collaboratively.

The committee also discussed the importance of complying with applicable open meeting requirements. Members were cautioned against conducting unauthorized committee business through informal group discussions or other communications outside properly noticed meetings.

Action: Members will email proposed agenda items to the chair and facilitator for consideration in preparing the November agenda.

16. Meeting Schedule and Location

The committee discussed scheduling considerations for future meetings. Members identified some conflicts with Mondays and Wednesdays due to other district and supervisory union commitments. Thursday at 6:00 p.m. was discussed as a preferred option, subject to confirmation with members who were absent.

The committee agreed to use a scheduling poll to identify a mutually acceptable recurring meeting time. Potential alternatives discussed included Thursdays and the second and fourth Wednesdays.

The committee also discussed meeting locations. Members agreed to hold the November meeting at the current location. Rotating future meetings among participating districts was discussed as a way to increase public accessibility and provide opportunities to visit school facilities, including the region's high schools.

Remote participation through Zoom and arrangements for weather-related contingencies were also discussed.

Actions:

- A scheduling poll will be distributed to determine future meeting dates and times.
- Availability will be confirmed with absent members before the schedule is finalized.
- The November meeting will be held at the current location.

- The committee will consider rotating meeting locations in subsequent months.

Meeting adjourned at 7:37 pm

17. Summary of Actions and Follow-Up Items

The following items were identified for follow-up:

1. **Public participation:** The Chair will provide the public participation instructions before each meeting.
2. **School and facility inventories:** Distribute spreadsheets identifying the number and types of school facilities in each district.
3. **Asset mapping:** Compile and evaluate information about school buildings, programs, staffing, and other educational resources.
4. **Proportional representation:** Continue discussion and bring the question of voting weights and representation back to the committee for a decision.
5. **Meeting schedule:** Distribute a scheduling poll and confirm availability with absent members.
6. **November agenda:** Members will submit proposed agenda items to the chair and facilitator.
7. **Community communication:** Members will consult their superintendents regarding appropriate methods for sharing committee information and report back.
8. **Historical documentation:** Consider preparing a concise summary of prior discussions and votes in response to the public comment received.

18. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 7:37 pm.

Next Meeting: November 2026, date and time to be confirmed.

Location: Current meeting location, to be confirmed in the meeting notice.

Minutes prepared by: Dana Brown

Date prepared: 10/15/26