Act 170 Group 7 Merger Study Committee Meeting Minutes

Date: Tuesday, October 13, 2026
Time: 6:00 p.m.–approximately 7:26 p.m.
Location: Universal Room, Bellows Falls Union High School, 406 High School Road, Westminster, VT 05158
Remote Participation: Zoom — https://wnesu.org/joinmeeting
Facilitator: Dana F. Brown
Committee Chair: Krista Gay
Minutes Prepared By: Dana F. Brown, based on the meeting transcript

1. Call to Order and Welcome

Facilitator Dana F. Brown called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

The facilitator reviewed the role of neutral facilitation and emphasized transparency, respectful participation, consideration of differing perspectives, and an evidence-informed process.

The committee proceeded with organizational matters and an initial discussion of its responsibilities and procedures.

2. Attendance

The following individuals were identified in the meeting record. Committee membership and representative status should be confirmed before approval of these minutes.

Committee Members and District Representatives Identified as Present In Person

- Krista Gay — Athens Grafton School District
- Karen Blanchard — Westminster School District
- Jerusa Contee — Rockingham School District
- Lisa Sanders — Green Mountain Unified School District
- Troy Palmer — Springfield School District
- Emily Ferenc — representing Ben Wallace of the Bellows Falls Union High School District
- Bob Flint — River Valley Technical Center, non-voting member per statute

Absent

Ben Wallace — Bellows Falls Union High School District; represented by Emily Ferenc.

3. Election of Chair and Meeting Procedures

The committee discussed its organizational structure and meeting procedures.

Election of Chair: Krista Gay was elected chair.

Parliamentary Procedure: A motion was made to adopt *Robert's Rules of Order for Small Boards* as the committee's meeting procedure. The motion's disposition should be confirmed against the transcript.

The committee also discussed the chair's responsibilities for leading meetings and developing agendas, in coordination with the facilitator as appropriate.

4. Committee Norms and Good-Faith Participation

The committee discussed expectations for respectful, informed, and productive participation throughout the merger study process.

Topics included:

- Treating committee members and members of the public respectfully.
- Reviewing relevant information and conducting research before meetings.
- Communicating with respective school boards and communities.
- Considering differing viewpoints and examining underlying assumptions.
- Sharing information between meetings to support informed discussion.
- Providing opportunities for public input and determining the appropriate placement of public comment on meeting agendas.

5. Public Comment

Cheryl Charles of Westminster, identified in the meeting record as chair of the Westminster Town School District Board and the Windham Northeast Supervisory Union Board, provided public comment.

Her comments emphasized the importance of using reliable information and evidence, examining assumptions, considering potential effects on students, communities, and taxpayers, and evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of alternative governance arrangements.

6. Overview of Act 170 and the Merger Study Process

The facilitator provided an overview of Act 170 and the committee's responsibilities in conducting the merger study.

The discussion addressed the importance of examining governance options in relation to educational quality, equity, and long-term sustainability. The committee's work is intended to inform a report and subsequent review.

The facilitator emphasized that a merger should not be presumed to be the predetermined outcome. The committee is responsible for examining relevant issues and alternatives through a structured, evidence-informed process.

The planned video presentation by Dave Younce on Act 170 was not shown during the meeting. The presentation link is provided below for reference:

Act 170 Overview Presentation:
Act 170 Overview Presentation

7. Committee Representation and Voting Procedures

The committee held an extended discussion regarding committee composition and voting procedures.

Two potential approaches were considered:

1. **Additional representatives based on district size:** Providing larger districts with additional representatives according to an agreed-upon measure of district size.
2. **One representative per district with weighted voting:** Providing each participating district with one representative while allocating voting power according to an agreed-upon formula.

Members discussed the distinction between equal opportunities to participate in committee deliberations and the allocation of voting power among districts.

Considerations included:

- The appropriate measure for calculating representation and voting weights, including equalized pupils as referenced in the statute.
- The relationship between district size and proportional voting power.
- The overall size and manageability of the committee.
- Meaningful participation by smaller districts.
- Building consensus while accounting for differences in district enrollment.
- The potential use of subcommittees to manage the committee's workload.

Members recognized the need to examine the alternatives and consult their respective school boards before determining a representation and voting formula.

Motion: Troy Palmer moved to defer a decision on committee representation and voting procedures until the November meeting to allow members additional time to review possible formulas and consult their respective school boards.

The motion's disposition should be confirmed against the meeting transcript. The committee's plan to revisit representation and voting procedures at its November meeting should also be confirmed before approval.

8. Meeting Schedule and Logistics

The facilitator discussed arrangements for future meetings.

The following items were identified:

- The facilitator will circulate a poll to gather members' availability and preferences regarding meeting dates and locations.
- The committee anticipates meeting monthly, subject to confirmation of the schedule.
- Members discussed planning for weather-related cancellations and considering remote participation when appropriate.
- Future meeting arrangements should support accessibility and effective participation.

Action Item: The facilitator will circulate a scheduling poll. Committee members will respond to assist in establishing future meeting dates and locations.

9. Public Transparency and Meeting Records

The committee discussed the importance of maintaining public access to information concerning its work.

Members were reminded of the need to ensure that meeting warnings, agendas, and approved minutes are posted on appropriate district or community websites in accordance with applicable requirements.

The committee also discussed sharing relevant information with members' respective school boards and the public.

10. District and School Information

The facilitator discussed preparing a spreadsheet of district and school information to support the committee's work.

The proposed spreadsheet will include:

- District and school names.
- School building names and locations.
- Street addresses.
- Grade configurations.
- Enrollment information and other relevant data.
- Supervisory union or school district affiliations, as applicable.

Action Item: The facilitator will prepare and circulate the spreadsheet for review. Committee members will be asked to identify missing information and correct inaccuracies.

11. Adjournment

Troy Palmer moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was approved unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at approximately 7:26 p.m.

Next meeting; TBD