

School Board Update: Act 46 Discussions

During the past two months Cabot School administrators and school board members have met several times with their counterparts from Twinfield School and Danville School. The purpose of these meetings has been to explore ways that our Cabot School students could potentially benefit were the Cabot School District to form a new, merged school district with one or the other of these neighboring districts.

School districts across Vermont are having these kinds of discussions as a result of Act 46, a law enacted by the Vermont Legislature last spring. Among the stated objectives of Act 46 is to improve the educational opportunities available to Vermont's students, and the law strongly supports the formation of new, consolidated school districts as a way to reach that goal. The law requires that all districts across Vermont submit to the Vermont State Board of Education a plan detailing how that district proposes to meet the objectives of Act 46. The meetings held thus far with Twinfield and Danville are a first step towards developing that plan for Cabot School. Our focus in these first discussions has centered on what benefits for our students may be provided by a larger district, as well as potential challenges. We have decided as a board to prioritize the welfare of Cabot's students in the early stages of discussion, rather than jump into the numerous details and logistics of a merger.

In our separate meetings with both Danville and Twinfield, we've started our discussions by identifying the challenges we face at our respective schools, and have then tried to look at how combining into one district might potentially allow us to better meet those challenges. We've also heard from our school administrators about the program strengths they see at their schools; this has led into discussions about how the different strengths of each school might complement each other and benefit all students in a combined district.

At this point in the process, we'd like to share with the Cabot community what we've found so far in these discussions about the potential benefits for Cabot students in a larger district with Twinfield or Danville. To that end, we have scheduled a community forum for Monday, March _____ (confirm date?) at 7:00 PM in the CSPAC building. At that time we'll review what we've gathered so far as well as answer questions and get input. We hope that all interested Cabot residents (students, parents, and community members in general) will be able to attend. We'll also post a summary of the same information we'll share at the forum on the Cabot School website for folks who're unable to make the meeting itself.

Looking ahead beyond March, if we find that there could be significant potential benefit for Cabot students by merging into a larger district, we'll begin as a board to look at the logistics and ramifications of a merger. If we decide at that point that the potential benefits are large enough, we will form a larger study committee to look more carefully at forming a consolidated district. If formed, that committee would include community members, school board members and school staff, and its purpose would be to draft a specific proposal for a merged school district.

According to the terms of Act 46, any proposal for a new, consolidated school district would have to gain the approval of the Vermont State Board of Education and would also have to be approved by the voters of Cabot and the other towns involved by July of 2017. Should both of those approvals be gained, the new consolidated district would begin operating during the 2019-20 school year.