



Orange Southwest School District

24 Central Street Randolph Vermont 05060

Telephone (802) 728-5052

Michael J. Clark, Superintendent

Robin Pembroke, Business Manager

Kayla Link, Director of Special Education

Mindybeth Pike,, Director of Curriculum and Student Achievement

Proudly Serving the Towns of Braintree, Brookfield, and Randolph

To: Orange Southwest School District Board & Community Members

From: Anne Kaplan, Orange Southwest Representative to the Act 170 Merger Study Committee

Date: October 18, 2026

Subject: Update & Summary of the First Act 170 Voluntary Merger Study Committee Meeting (October 13, 2026)

Dear Board Members and Community,

I am writing to provide an overview of our first Act 170 Voluntary Merger Study Committee meeting, which took place on Tuesday, October 13, at Randolph High School and via Google Meet. While the official minutes reflect a busy agenda and a lot of ground covered, I wanted to share a thoughtful, candid summary of how our work began and where things currently stand.

Key Topics & Deliberations

1. Governance & Meeting Operations

- **Modified Rules:** Regional Facilitator, Brad Morgan, introduced modified Robert's Rules of Order designed to encourage informal discussion and collaboration (e.g., removing the need for seconds on motions and allowing the chair to debate and vote). The committee adopted these modified rules.
- **Leadership & Open Meeting Law:** We deferred the election of a Committee Chair to our next meeting to ensure full representation across all participating boards. During this discussion, concerns were raised regarding Open Meeting Law compliance: specifically around who bears legal responsibility for properly warning meetings and posting agendas



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and minutes. Mr. Morgan is checking with the Vermont Learning Collaborative to clarify these duties. *(Please note: The Orange Southwest School District's Attorney has issued a legal opinion that posting minutes for an entity that is not part of the Orange Southwest School District such as the Group 9 Act 170 Voluntary Merger Study Committee may cause the OSSD to lose control of its website as a Limited Public Forum)*

- **Voting Structure & Proportional Representation:** Deciding how votes will be weighted proved to be one of our most complex discussions. Options ranged from weighted voting based on student counts to equal representation ("one person, one vote"). Questions arose regarding whether current statutory references to "equalized pupils" are outdated (proposing long-term weighted ADM instead) and whether individual members or entire local boards hold voting power. Because opinions differed and a chair has not yet been elected, formal adoption of a representation model was tabled until the next meeting. *(Please note: as the largest district in the study committee by far, I believe proportional representation is very important for our communities' representation.)*

2. Act 170 Overview & Regional Scope

- David Younce provided an overview of Act 170. The statute establishes regional framework mandates aimed at shared operational and special education services, targeting a combined Average Daily Membership (ADM) of 2,000 students while building in protections for districts under 750 students.
- *Committee Perspective:* A number of representatives expressed strong opposition to forming a unified K-12 supervisory district or pursuing a complete merger. Instead, there is strong interest in exploring targeted collaboration among neighboring districts and evaluating alternative structures; such as, expanding administrative units (Supervisory Unions), without losing local identity. Preserving local middle and high school choice remains an essential non-negotiable for many communities.



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3. Public Participation & Technical Logistics

- Draft public comment guidelines were reviewed (capping comments at two minutes per speaker prior to agenda items).
- During public comment, members of the public raised concerns regarding online sound quality, committee governance, and access to transcripts. Technical and audio setup issues were noted by board members as well, and improvements to the hybrid audio setup have been requested for future meetings.

4. Next Steps, Surveys, and Timelines

- **Data & Surveying:** The facilitator proposed distributing a draft qualitative student experience survey. Committee members noted the need to avoid survey fatigue and emphasized that any survey must include all community voters and tax-payers, not just current school families. Furthermore, concern was expressed regarding the timeliness and accuracy of state Agency of Education data, which may not be fully available until late December. (Please note: There was not talk about how to distribute any survey and the cost of distributing the survey was not clear.)
- **Timeline:** Given that final reports are anticipated ahead of key voting windows, the committee faces a tight schedule.
- **Pending Research Items:** Before we reconvene, the facilitator is researching rules around alternate board member attendance, virtual voting guidelines, warning posting legalities, representation thresholds, and labor/contractual considerations associated with regional study groups.
- The Recording can be found here
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ZqnU8zZtL7OscO_ZO0dvT2m3MCr4kA5Y/view?ts=6ad40feb



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Looking Ahead

Our next meeting location will rotate to the White River Valley High School media center. Specific dates and scheduling options are currently being coordinated via a group poll.

The agreed upon time is 4-6pm. As your representative, my goal is to ensure our district's values, local control, and educational priorities are fully represented throughout this process. I will continue to keep you updated as our discussions progress. Please feel free to reach out with any questions or priorities you would like brought to the committee table.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Anne Kaplan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Anne" and last name "Kaplan" clearly distinguishable.

Anne Kaplan

School Board Representative, Orange Southwest

Act 170 Voluntary Merger Study Committee