



Caledonia Cooperative School District

Caledonia Cooperative School District (Barnet, Walden & Waterford Schools)

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Jason Miller, CCSD Board Chair

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Testimony of the Caledonia Cooperative School Board

Representing the towns of Waterford, Barnet, and Walden

Honorable members of the Senate Committee on Education,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I speak on behalf of the Caledonia Cooperative School District and the many parents, caregivers, educators, and residents of Waterford, Barnet, and Walden who are deeply concerned about the proposed redistricting map and its potential consequences.

Summary position:

- We strongly urge you to preserve Vermont's long-standing school choice model and to reject any redistricting plan that would remove or severely limit families' ability to choose accredited independent schools in our region.
- We ask for transparent decision-making, robust community engagement, and a pause on final approval until meaningful input has been solicited and incorporated.

Why school choice matters to our communities:

- Local access to high-quality schools: For decades, school choice has allowed families here to enroll their children in schools — both public and independent — that best meet their academic, social, and developmental needs. Our independent schools are accredited and provide education that has supported multiple generations in our towns.
- Family investment and community stability: Many families, including alumni of St. Johnsbury Academy and Lyndon Institute, deliberately returned to or purchased property in our towns so their children could attend these specific schools. Those investments—financial, emotional, and civic—depend on the continued availability of choice.
- Educational fit and student success: Choice enables students to find environments where they thrive. We see this every day: students who struggled in other districts now excel here. For example, one family moved here from Massachusetts after their son experienced significant trauma and struggled in his previous district. He arrived with tremendous barriers to success, but at St. Johnsbury Academy he found stability,

purpose, and a passion for the culinary program—an opportunity the proposed redistricting would likely eliminate.

- Forcing families to attend a single, distant public school would risk disrupting these individualized paths to success.

Broader economic and social impacts:

- Workforce and economic development: School choice is an important factor families consider when moving to or remaining in a region. Employers—large and small—look at educational options when recruiting staff. Limiting choice would weaken our towns' ability to attract and retain workers and businesses.
- Property values and local investment: Removing options that attracted families in the first place would likely depress demand for housing, undermining property values and the tax base that supports local services.
- Community cohesion and demographic stability: A loss of choice could accelerate outmigration of families seeking stable, desirable schooling options, reducing enrollment, straining remaining schools, and shrinking local civic participation.
- High transportation costs and a shortage of bus drivers would worsen these challenges—requiring more drivers to transport children longer distances would increase expenses and further limit reliable access to schools.

Concerns about process and transparency:

- Lack of meaningful community input: Redrawing district boundaries without clear, accessible explanations of criteria and data or without actively soliciting community alternatives erodes public trust. Families feel blindsided when long-standing expectations about educational access are suddenly threatened.
- Need for clearer rationale and alternatives: We request that the Committee:
 - Provide a detailed explanation of the decision-making criteria and the data used to justify boundary changes.
 - Share any modeling of student impact, transportation implications, and fiscal effects on towns and schools.
 - Consider and seriously evaluate alternatives proposed by parents, educators, and local leaders—especially options that preserve school choice while addressing any policy goals you intend to achieve.
- Request to delay final approval: Please delay final approval of any map until community feedback has been gathered, publicly summarized, and addressed in revisions. A rushed process risks long-term harm that cannot be easily undone.

Local collaborations at risk:

- Our district has active conversations and collaborative work underway with St. Johnsbury and Kingdom East School Districts on education reform. The current map, as proposed, would prohibit continuation of those cooperative efforts and undercut regional solutions that benefit students and taxpayers.

A plea on behalf of families:

- Respect parental choice and the investments families have made. Those choices were not incidental—they guided where families moved, how they invested in homes and communities, and where they built their lives. To change that model without genuine, meaningful consultation is to break a promise to the people who live here.

Conclusion and requests:

- Preserve Vermont's school choice model.
- Publish the full data, criteria, and analyses used to create proposed maps.
- Hold additional public hearings in communities and extend the comment period.
- Consider alternative maps that preserve access to independent schools and allow ongoing regional collaboration.
- Delay final approval until community concerns have been addressed.

We are ready to partner constructively with the Committee to find solutions that protect student opportunity, respect family investments, and preserve the social and economic vitality of Waterford, Barnet, Walden, and the surrounding region. Thank you for listening and for your careful consideration of the very real impacts these decisions will have on our children and our towns.

Respectively submitted,

Jason Miller



Caledonia Cooperative School Board School Board Chair

Towns of Waterford, Barnet and Walden

CC:CCSD School Board Members