

## WHY VOTE FOR A SCHOOL BOARD MERGER?

Merging into one unified board provides the best opportunity for both financial relief to our taxpayers and improved education for our students.

### FINANCIAL BENEFITS

- (1) **Tax Relief** – A merger approved by voters by July 1, 2016 through Act 46 qualifies for tax incentives. A “Yes” vote for a merger would take ten cents off the tax rate in the first year after the merger. This translates into approximately \$163 in savings on a \$300,000 property. These incentives would continue at a slowly declining rate over the next four years. In total, Duxbury and Waterbury taxpayers would save roughly \$1.5 million over the next 5 years through this incentive.
- (2) **Caps Property Tax Rates** – A vote to approve the merger stabilizes tax rates and ensures there will be no tax increase over 5% for the next 5 years.
- (3) **Savings and Efficiencies** – The merger would allow sharing of staff and resources as well as lower administrative costs. A unified district could also efficiently consolidate operations. For example, Harwood Middle School and Crossett Brook Middle School could be merged and operate at a lower per pupil cost, while strengthening our middle school curricula.
- (4) **Tax Rate Stability** – A unified district has greater ability to absorb expenses and significant shifts in student enrollment.
- (5) **Less Long Term Debt** – The WDSU currently has long-term debt in the amount of \$3.5 million associated with the renovation of Thatcher Brook Primary School. This debt would be spread across the new district, costing our taxpayers less money.
- (6) **Avoid Other Penalties** – A “Yes” vote exempts our district in the first year from other state imposed cost containment caps.

### IMPROVED EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

- (1) **Equality and Coordination of Pre-K-8 Educational Programs** – All WWSU students already attend the same high school (HUHS). A unified district would allow us to better coordinate their programs and experiences, pre-K-8. For example, all students could have access to the same foreign language and technology opportunities before entering high school. Efficiencies also make innovations to our classrooms and curricula a far more realistic financial option.
- (2) **Preservation and Protection of Existing Programs** – The savings of unified cost and resource sharing is our best chance to save our highly successful and celebrated programs such as music and art at HUHS, before and after school programs at the elementary schools and the environmental studies/sustainability program at the middle school level.
- (3) **Improving Our High School** – HUHS needs renovations to meet building code requirements and to maintain and provide space for modern academic offerings. Our high school should offer STEM (Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics\_ coding, more world language opportunities,

and more robust after-school programming in order to be a true 21<sup>st</sup> century educational institution. Other area schools already offer some of these opportunities and with declining enrollment and increasing costs, we have not been able to expand choices for students and parents. The merger gives us our best opportunity to build the state's best pre-K-12 school system.

- (4) **School Choice** – With a merger, families could choose to enroll their child(ren) at the elementary school that best meets their needs (Fayston, Warren, Waitsfield, Moretown, or TBPS) as long as space is available.

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

- (1) **Are we surrendering local control?** All of our Washington West Supervisory Union (WWSU) students already attend the same high school. In a way, this merger is the second half of a process that began decades ago when we created HUHS. We have already redefined local control to include the communities in our area. In order for us to maintain a high quality education in all schools, we need better coordination of administration and of academic opportunities for our students. With a merged board, we will have the opportunity to more efficiently innovate.
- (2) **How does debt from other districts impact us? What would it cost?** It is important to understand that our school district, like others, brings debt to the new district. Ours is currently about \$3.5 million, which would also be shared across the larger tax base of the unified district. To put it in context, necessary school improvements in Warren, of \$2.55 million this year reduces our savings by just a penny on the tax rate each year. We still save \$ \_\_\_ over \_\_\_ years.
- (3) **Will we lose the individuality of our schools if we are all one district?** School names, mascots, and community culture all remain. The merger allows us the opportunity to ensure our kids are receiving equal opportunities and access to the best education possible. It does not dictate the identity of the schools. Instead, the merger allows us financial flexibility to maintain programs that are important to our communities.
- (4) **Who owns the property that was once owned by our district?** Ownership of all WDSU property will be transferred to the new district, as will responsibility for the maintenance and upkeep of those properties.
- (5) **What about the maintenance reserve fund created for our schools?** The maintenance reserve fund will become part of the merged budget, but it will continue to be used to fund TBPS and CBMS maintenance needs.
- (6) **How will we be represented on the school board? Will we have greater representation based on our population?** Our representation on the school board will be based on our population. Waterbury-Duxbury will have a combined 6 seats on the merged board of 14. Waterbury will have 4 representatives; Duxbury and all other towns in the district will have 2 representatives each. The votes will be weighted based on population just as they are on the Harwood board.