

## **AFT-NH Testimony opposing HB1804**

from Debrah Howes, President AFT-NH

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To Chairman Noble and members of the House Education Policy & Administration Committee

My name is Debrah Howes, President of the American Federation of Teachers–NH. I write on behalf of our 3,500 members who work in preK through grade 12 public education, in public services, and in private and public universities across the Granite State. We are taxpayers and citizens of New Hampshire, and many of us are parents or grandparents of public-school students.

On behalf of my members, the public-school students and the communities we serve, I respectfully urge you to vote “Inexpedient to Legislate” on **HB1804**.

**HB1804** would fundamentally restructure how New Hampshire’s public schools are governed by consolidating school administrative units at the county level and creating an elected “chief school administrator” (CSA) to replace the current superintendent model. It also redistributes duties among boards and principals in ways that create overlapping authority rather than clarity.

We need to look no further than our neighbors in Maine and Vermont who have tried this exact restructuring to see if it was effective in producing better academic achievement for students and lowering costs for taxpayers. The evidence shows that it did not. In fact, there is good reason to believe **HB1804** would harm students and families, fail to save money, and destabilize school operations for years.

### **HB1804 Will Not Save Money**

Supporters claim consolidation brings efficiencies, but real-world evidence says otherwise.

In Vermont, a 15-year analysis of school district mergers under the Vermont school district consolidation bill, Act 46, showed no reduction in overall per-pupil spending or tax rates. While merged districts reduced administrative and contracted services by about 6.5%, those savings were fully reinvested into staffing, student supports, transportation, and materials, leaving taxpayers no better off financially. [\[vermontpublic.org\]](http://vermontpublic.org)

In Maine, the 2007 consolidation law projected dramatic savings by reducing district offices. Instead, early statewide evaluations showed only approx. \$1.6 million in savings compared to a \$36.5 million target, revealing that expected efficiencies did not materialize. The analysis gave

the savings a **letter grade of D**. Maine's own universities documented that the process was hampered by unstable policy implementation and substantial local resistance.

[\[repealconsolidation.weebly.com\]](http://repealconsolidation.weebly.com) [\[umaine.edu\]](http://umaine.edu)

**HB1804** mirrors both states' consolidation structures but includes no detailed fiscal note or transition plan showing how savings would actually be accomplished, especially considering new costs for elections, administrative restructuring, records transfers, labor harmonization, and system migration. Evidence suggests such reorganizations typically increase short-term costs and do not create durable savings. [\[vermontpublic.org\]](http://vermontpublic.org), [\[repealconsolidation.weebly.com\]](http://repealconsolidation.weebly.com)

### **HB1804 Reduces Local Responsiveness**

Families deserve leadership that is close to their school communities. County-level governance moves decision-making further away from parents, teachers, and municipalities. The experience in New Hampshire over the past two decades has been towns breaking away from cooperative districts because they want more responsiveness from school leadership, not less.

In Maine, more than 40 towns have sought to withdraw from consolidated districts over fears of losing local influence and community schools: a clear sign that large, centralized structures feel less accessible and responsive. Studies of Maine's reorganization confirm decreased community support and concerns about threats to local values and school choice.

[\[themaineindicator.org\]](http://themaineindicator.org)

Vermont families voiced similar complaints: longer transportation times, program centralization, and a sense that decision-makers were further removed from daily school realities. [\[schoolstatefinance.org\]](http://schoolstatefinance.org)

**HB1804's** overlapping authorities among an elected CSA, school boards, and principals only compounds confusion about who is accountable for solving problems like transportation failures, special education issues, or school climate concerns.

### **Electing a Superintendent Undermines Professional Leadership**

Turning the chief school administrator into an elected county politician politicizes the most important professional education role in our system.

Research comparing elected and appointed superintendents in Florida found no consistent differences in student achievement, meaning elections do not improve results. A broader dissertation study reached similar conclusions: appointed superintendents performed slightly better academically, but governance method itself was not a meaningful driver of achievement: poverty levels were. [\[jstor.org\]](http://jstor.org)

Most of the nation relies on appointed superintendents because the job requires long-term planning, professional qualifications, and insulation from shifting political winds. **HB1804** replaces this stability with campaign cycles, fundraising, and politicized educational decision-making; none of which benefit students. [\[jstor.org\]](https://www.jstor.org)

### **HB1804 Creates Puts Labor Harmony and Consistent Workplace Operations at Risk**

Consolidation typically triggers changes in employer-of-record status, bargaining units, and contract alignment. *Maine had to adopt additional legislation (LD 1931) simply to stabilize bargaining rights during consolidation.* [\[maine.gov\]](https://www.maine.gov)

**HB1804** offers no such protections, raising the risk of contract conflicts, staffing instability, and costly administrative disputes that will divert attention from instruction.

Additionally, administrative transitions such as merging HR systems, updating compliance procedures, realigning evaluations, and shifting fiscal oversight are likely to consume years of leadership time that should be spent supporting students' learning experience in classrooms. Maine's "lessons learned" research warns precisely of this diversion. [\[umaine.edu\]](https://www.umaine.edu)

**HB1804** introduces complexity, cost, and instability while weakening local voice and professional educational leadership. Evidence from Maine and Vermont shows that consolidation does not save money and often leaves communities feeling less heard and less well-served. Our students deserve a system focused on teaching and learning, not a disruptive governance experiment.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to find **HB1804** Inexpedient to Legislate.

Sincerely,

Debrah Howes



President, AFT-New Hampshire