February 28, 2019

Dear Education Committee,

I would like to offer some input on proposals for school consolidation being considered by the legislature:

1) Our state has a great variety of communities. Cornwall has the lowest population density of any Connecticut town, with a lot of our land being State forest.

2) Cornwall Consolidated School is very important to the town not just for sentimental reasons, but as a key reason young families move here. Attracting more young people is the top priority of our town.

3) Our school receives $6,000 annually from ECS payments. Teacher pension obligations are what is driving the State’s fiscal woes, not ECS payment to small schools like ours.

4) Our local school is part of Region School District #1 (the first in the state) and it shares a superintendent with six other schools (probably the most shared superintendent in Connecticut.)

5) Our community and school has and will continue to study sharing services and realigning with neighboring schools. After a lengthy review our local school board voted “to keep the current arrangement for the time being” due to lack of obvious budget savings and community sentiment listed in item #2.

6) Our students already spend a maximum amount of time on school busses daily. Proposed consolidation plans would require more transportation which costs would likely offset any cost savings in staff reductions.

I would urge you to reject any bills that call for consolidation into arbitrarily sized districts (why 2000 students?) Our towns and school board are vigilant in providing a solid education for our students in the constraints of our rural setting.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Gordon M. Ridgway, First Selectman

GMR/jh
Cc: Cornwall Board of Education
    Cornwall Board of Selectmen
    Cornwall Board of Finance