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Notes from editor (not for publication):

Note spelling — Sue McCormack

I moved the items about Marlboro and the survey to the end rather than bisect the material about Townshend.

HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 State's task force fields questions about school
2 redistricting

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

3 Many say they're unhappy with the process and express
4 concern about prospects of educating their children far from
5 home without clear benefit

####END SUBHED####

6 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

7 The Vermont School Redistricting Task Force broke the
8 folks assembled at Leland & Gray Union Middle and High School
9 into small groups to take testimony regarding their thoughts on

10 redistricting on Oct. 16, forcing about 80 people online to have
11 their own chat.

12 And not everyone was pleased with the setup, although
13 state officials offered reassurance that comments can still be
14 accepted at ADM.Redistricting@vermont.gov.

15 Following a presentation of about 15 minutes, those
16 present were split into individual feedback stations in an adjacent
17 room to the gymnasium, where the main meeting was held.

18 For remote participants, during the ensuing about 45
19 minutes, sound was muted for a short time, and then the visual
20 was suspended.

21 "The meeting is muted while participants are engaging in
22 an interactive activity," wrote Chrissy Gilhuly, state Senate
23 operations manager, who was monitoring the online portion of
24 the meeting. "We are gathering the same feedback that you can
25 offer using the survey link."

26 "Why would you mute the public from any and all
27 sidebar conversations?" asked one online participant. "This seems
28 like a perfect snapshot of what will happen if we all live too far
29 from our local schools to attend a school board meeting [or other
30 meetings] in person on a weeknight."

31 Ultimately, the themes that emerged from the small
32 station discussions were summarized back to the full group.

33 Parents in attendance both in person and online
34 expressed concern regarding school choice, student travel time to
35 and from school, busing costs, health-care costs, the education
36 quality where students are versus what might come in bigger
37 districts, and loss of local control.

38 "Without Leland & Gray, there's no more heart to this
39 valley anymore," said Leland & Gray teacher Terry Davidson
40 Berger of Townshend.

41 Just one representative from the Windham Central,
42 Northeast, and Southeast supervisory unions attended the
43 meeting, although a group of them met the next day for an
44 exploratory discussion regarding redistricting.

The person who attended told the local group that the link to access the meeting had been changed at the last moment, so many people couldn't get in online.

One woman who was much closer to Townshend than Brattleboro and had been online posted in the live chat that she was so upset with the process, she got in her car and drove to Leland & Gray Union Middle and High School, where the gym was just about half full.

Parents question benefits of redrawing districts

Moderator Sue McCormack, a consultant who facilitates the task force, opened the meeting by explaining its scope of work.

"While school closures are not in the charge or intent of this Task Force, in Act 73 one of the areas of consideration for our work requires that we seek 'opportunities to support local elementary schools, central middle schools, and regional high schools, with the least disruption to students.' And we will do that," McCormick said.

The mandate of the 11-member Task Force, which includes state Sen. Wendy Harrison among its six lawmakers, is to consider and recommend new district boundaries/configurations by December, as part of Act 73. School closure considerations fall under the Commission on the Future of Public Education and other entities (Agency of Education, State Board of Education, etc.).

Key considerations for the task force are boundaries, transportation barriers, demographic trends (declining enrollment statewide with regional variation), aging infrastructure, increased student needs, inequitable opportunities across districts, and rising costs/property taxes.

76 Task Force members noted multiple avenues to offer
77 input, including comments submitted online and on paper. All
78 feedback methods carry equal weight, they assured.

79 The Task Force is gathering input to inform new district
80 boundaries that will be drawn. These maps will be provided to
81 the Legislature, along with a comprehensive summary of public
82 feedback, intended to inform legislative deliberations during the
83 session.

84 While members said no hard mapping decisions have
85 been made, some maps posted to the [Committee Materials](#)
86 [section of the School District Redistricting Task Force site](#) are
87 being discussed.

88 Discussion included statewide challenges that include
89 declining student enrollment overall, significant regional
90 disparities, aging school buildings, increasing student needs,
91 uneven educational opportunities, rising costs, and property tax
92 pressures.

93 Task Force members said they'll consider uncertainty at
94 the federal level, low trust between citizens and the government,
95 and the need to proceed with transparency and respect as a
96 guiding context to inform map development and make
97 recommendations.

98 "Redistricting will also change the flow of people in the
99 area which will have impacts to lots of other things, including
100 businesses and club sports among others," said one attendee. "I
101 hope the study goes beyond the boundaries of education and
102 considers these impacts as well."

103 "My questions are, who does this benefit financially?"
104 asked online participant Erin Stack. "Who does it benefit at all? If
105 the schools didn't ask for it, the parents didn't ask for it, it's not in
106 the best interest of our kids, it's not in the best interest of our
107 schools. No one I've talked to has any positive to share. I'm
108 having trouble discerning who or what this action helps or serves,
109 if it's not our communities?"

110 This was the only Task Force meeting scheduled for
111 southern Vermont. The two next meetings are Oct. 22 at Rutland
112 High School and Oct. 28 at Winooski High School.

113 Other news about education

114 reform/redistricting

115 • **Marlboro seeks townspeople's views:** Marlboro's
116 school board is now conducting a town-wide survey regarding its
117 school and plans to pass whatever input is received along to the
118 Task Force.

119 The Marlboro board has said it's considering merging to
120 form a larger district, likely with Brattleboro's Windham Southeast
121 School District (WSESD) or River Valley, which serves Dover and
122 Wardsboro.

123 That scenario would see the Marlboro School Board
124 disband and get one seat or more on a larger district board in
125 proportion to the student population from Marlboro.

126 A second option under consideration would keep
127 Marlboro as a district but merge it into a larger supervisory union
128 with, most likely, the Windham Southeast Supervisory Union or a
129 "mega-supervisory union."

130 If you're in the Marlboro district now and would like to
131 provide input, you can mail board Chair Dan MacArthur
132 (dmacarthur@windhamcentralboard.org), Vice Chair Rachel
133 Boyden (rboyden@windhamcentralboard.org), or Clerk Andrea
134 Burke (aburke@windhamcentralboard.org).

135 • **State commission invites participation in survey:** The
136 Commission on the Future of Public Education in Vermont is
137 reaching out for feedback on Act 73, a law said to be enacted "in
138 response to residents' concerns about high and rising property
139 taxes and a desire to increase quality educational opportunities
140 for students."

141 "The intent of the law is to strengthen the public
142 education system, mitigate costs, and improve educational

143 opportunities for students,” the Commission says in a press
144 release.

145 And the purpose of the survey, found at
146 bit.ly/VTEdSurvey, is “to gather your perspectives on how the
147 state can achieve its goals and improve educational opportunities
148 for all students.”

149 The Vermont Legislature will be considering how best to
150 achieve this transformation over the next several months, and it
151 will ultimately be up to it, with the assistance of the Commission
152 on the Future of Public Education and the School District
153 Redistricting Task Force, to make these decisions.

154 Surveys are requested by the end of October.

155 A link to the public comment section also appears on the
156 Task Force [website](#).

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

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157

####END BIO/COATTAIL####

LAST ISSUE IN WHICH THIS FILE CAN BE RUN:

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LINKS:

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VIDEO:

####BEGIN VIDEO####

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LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

###BEGIN LOGLINE###

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