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We Need Your Help February 17, 2010

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Contact Info:
[Representatives and
Senators](#)

Contact Info: Senate
[Committee on Education](#)

Contact Info: House
[Education Committee](#)

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Dear Parents,

We Need Your Help.

School Choice and School Consolidation are two issues currently facing Vermont's legislature. We believe that school choice, or more accurately parent choice, allows families and students to enroll in a school that best suits the student's interests and abilities. Simply put, one school does not meet the needs of all students, just as one college does not meet the needs and abilities of every college-age student. Though the outcome is not yet determined, there are a number of conversations occurring that do not consider independent schools and school choice carefully as district consolidation is discussed. We are therefore encouraging TSA parents who are concerned about preserving **SCHOOL CHOICE** to write to their representatives and senators and to attend the Public Hearing at the Vermont State House on February 24th, from 5 - 8 pm. (See post script for details.) We have included several tools (see links at left) to help you in this endeavor.

The most effective way to alert representative of their constituents' opinions, according to the advice we have received from state representatives, federal representatives and lobbyists, is to write letters. (Emails are less reliable as mailboxes become overwhelmed and emails are often not opened for days.) Please address letters to your representative/senator at the Vermont State House (Please click [here](#) for contact information for representatives and senators, click [here](#) for contact information for the House Education Committee, and [here](#) for the Senate Committee on Education). Please keep you letter to 1 page, and be as clear and concise as you can. We have been advised that using a large, bold (strong) font makes your letter easier to read, and therefore more effective. Some examples of effective fonts are: Arial, Berlin Sans bold MT, Calibri, Cambria, Franklin Gothic Demi Cond, Rockwell, Tahoma and Veranda.

In an attempt to help you with the process of writing letters, we have drafted a letter template (click [here](#) to link to the template) which can be modified with various options. The first paragraph of the letter quickly establishes support for school choice. The next four paragraphs are options for you to choose from and customize. The options emphasize the advantages resulting from school choice and are often comments that have been shared with TSA by parents. Please feel free to choose one of these four options, and customize it so that the information is pertinent to you and your family. Alternatively, please feel free to write your own paragraph. You may find the list of talking points (please click [here](#) to view the Talking Points) useful in constructing your own argument for school

choice. Some of the talking points are already captured in one of the four options, while others may replace points of emphasis. Whether you choose to modify an existing option, or to write one of your own, we encourage you to reflect on the qualities that make TSA a better fit for your child than other schools. Please also bear in mind that representatives may stop reading a letter if they feel it is a carbon-copy of letters they have already received - customizing your message is essential in getting a representative's attention.

The names of representatives and senators can be found below, organized by county. Correspondence should be sent to the State House (contact information is below). Please, also feel free to write to the: Commissioner on Education, Senate Committee on Education, and the House Education Committee. The contact information for these groups can also be found below.

Phone Calls - we have been advised that phone calls are not the most effective way of influencing your representatives unless you know the representative or senator personally. However, if this is the case, please feel free to make a call.

- a. Call the number below to leave a message for a representative to call you back.
 - i. Please leave your name and number and a brief message about the issue.
- b. Committee going to vote - Sergeant at Arms
 - i. We may suggest a phone campaign if we learn that a motion is on the House Floor that does not support School Choice.
 - ii. At that time, call the Sergeant at Arms, identify yourself (name, district) and ask that a message be delivered to your representative stating your position. This would be delivered by a senate or house page.

Should you have questions, please e-mail us at school. Though it is vacation week, we will be checking email regularly.

Thank you for you assistance.

Peter Ross, Amber Wylie
Advancement Office

Michael Livingston
Head of School

PS: PUBLIC HEARING: CONSOLIDATION AND SCHOOL CHOICE

WE NEED YOUR HELP ON WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 24TH!

Please attend the public hearing on the consolidation of school districts and supervisory unions with The House and Senate Committees, Wednesday, February 24, 2010 at 5:00 PM, Room 11 of the Vermont State House.

There will be an opportunity for you to sign up and speak for up to two minutes to the joint committees. We need many families to come and support TSA and independent schools even if you choose not to speak. It is also fine for students to speak. We only ask that you consider your words carefully and speak specifically as to why school choice is so important for independent school families. Our legislators are faced with a huge budget shortfall and speaking to the fact that we deliver better outcomes for fewer dollars is crucial.

S. 252 - An act relating to creating regional school districts

Template Letter

Please copy the text from this letter into Word to edit and customize.

Dear Representative -----

I am writing you directly to communicate my strong feeling that School Choice should not be compromised in any legislative action taken by the House of Representatives now or in the future. School choice, or more accurately parent choice, allows families and students to enroll in a school that best suits the student's interests and abilities. Simply put, one school does not meet the needs of all students, just as one college does not meet the needs and abilities of every college-aged student. My position does not stand in opposition to the ongoing discussion regarding school district consolidation, although the financial data and projections used to support consolidation are inconclusive based upon information provided to date.

As a supporter of school choice I have carefully selected The Sharon Academy, an independent school in Sharon, VT as the best option for my child. As cited by the by the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice and Vermonters for Better Education, February 2009, 89% of Vermonters surveyed favor school choice.

Option 1:

In selecting The Sharon Academy (TSA), I deliberately chose a school community where the benefits of strong instructional practices and a culture of academic achievement are evidenced by the percentage of students placing in Levels 3 and 4 on the NECAP. At South Royalton, Rochester and Hartford High Schools all students placed at about 70% for Reading, between 22% and 50% for Math, and between 33% and 51% for Writing, with a cohort graduation rate of between 83% and 88%. At TSA there is a cohort graduation rate of 98%, and NECAP scores of 95% for Reading, 55 % for Math, and 69% for Writing. The faculty and administration at TSA have created a school culture that promotes academic achievement and the importance of graduation and post-secondary education; exactly what current federal legislation is mandating. At TSA, my daughter/son goes to school each day knowing that her/his instructors believe in her/his personal and academic ability with a personal commitment to her/his own education and growth. Her/his growth curve has exponentially taken off.

Option 2:

As a parent who did not attend college, it is essential that my child attends a High School that helps him/her aspire to a post-secondary education. A college diploma is today what a high school diploma was 30 years ago. A college diploma increases the opportunity for job placement, and future financial opportunity. By attending The Sharon Academy (TSA), I am increasing the chances of my child going to college, as TSA's college enrollment is 94%. At TSA, students see post-secondary education as part of their future; they learn how to learn, to think critically and to believe in their capability to achieve. The college guidance counselor knows each student and works with them to find the right post-secondary placement. I believe that if my son/daughter did not have the choice of attending TSA as part of school/parent choice, he/she may not have seriously considered college as an option.

Option 3:

As a parent whose student had struggled academically, I value the ability to choose a middle and high school that is helping my son/daughter succeed. During my research into area schools, I found many where teachers truly wished to positively impact students, but where the policies, systems, and culture allowed students like mine to "fall through the cracks". I placed my child at The Sharon Academy (TSA) because there his/her learning style was identified, and he/she was given the support he/she needed to learn that he/she was intelligent and capable. He/She was not relegated to the back row or to the resource room, but found instead that his/her voice counted in his/her classes and in the school community. Because of TSA's small size, my son/daughter found he/she had access to his/her advisor, the guidance counselor, and the academic services coordinator to learn more about his/her specific learning style or to address specific academic concerns. At The Sharon Academy he/she has taken off! He/She now takes responsibility for his/her own learning, and is excited about school. I truly believe that if he/she had been limited in his/her choice of schools, he/she would not have had the opportunity to grow to his/her potential. He/She is now focused on college and his/her future.

Option 4:

I feel so strongly about the importance of School Choice in the education of my children, that I moved from a town with a designated high school to a school choice town. Although the high school in my town is deemed fine by some, the options available to me at The Sharon Academy (TSA) allowed for a much more rigorous and well rounded educational experience. The Sharon Academy allows my child to thrive. His/Her relationships with his/her instructors and peers have allowed him/her to learn that he/she is valued, and his/her voice is heard. He/She plays on the interscholastic teams and participates in the school-wide musical. At a large school, he/she would have slipped through the cracks and would not have considered trying out for any extra-curricular activities. At TSA, he/she matters! Without school choice, he/she might easily have become lost in the system.

Concluding Paragraph

I recognize that The Sharon Academy may not be the right choice for everyone. Many of my daughter's/son's friends are doing well at other schools, all of which illustrates the importance of choice. As a parent, I want my child to have the skills necessary for the 21st Century. School Choice allows for this preparation. Our children are the future. It is our collective responsibility to provide each of them the best opportunity to create and build a successful educational experience. It is my belief that School Choice must be preserved for all Vermonters and all students. Please continue supporting parent school choice in every current school choice town and consider expanding the opportunity for all towns. School choice is a distinguishing characteristic of a Vermont Education.

Sincerely,

Name
Address

Talking Points

"The mission of The Sharon Academy is to nurture intelligent, independent, and creative thinking in a small school community, awakening students to their immense potential and the difference they can make in the world."

SCHOOL CHOICE IS SUPPORTED BY VERMONTERS

- 89% of parents surveyed in Vermont prefer [School Choice](#).
According to: Vermont's Opinion on K-12 Education and School Choice
The Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice
Poll released jointly by the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice and Vermonters for Better Education, February 2009
- One School does not meet the needs of all students.
- Families choose TSA because of what TSA offers, even though it may not be as convenient as other public schools.
- TSA is creating a new educational paradigm, a paradigm that is committed to the success and growth of each student, where the student is the center of the educational community.

STUDENTS ARE SAFE

- TSA provides a Small School Environment which is committed to creating a community that is safe physically and emotionally and is academically rigorous and challenging. We provide a supportive school climate that makes students, as well as adults, feel valued and safe.

TSA CULTIVATES A CULTURE OF SUCCESS AND RESPONSIBILITY

- We believe that all students can succeed.
- Classes are designed to be engaging and to teach students how to learn, think critically, and research effectively so that they may succeed in any post-secondary environment.
- Teachers take responsibility for helping students to succeed. TSA believes that the school staff is ultimately responsible for students' success.
- Students' learning styles are identified to help them maximize their learning potential. Students take responsibility for their learning and do not use a learning difference or disability as an excuse to fail or a reason to avoid working.
- Students are celebrated, not stigmatized, by their peers for wanting to excel academically.
- Multiple Assessments allow students to recognize and work from their

strengths while addressing their weaknesses.

STUDENTS ARE SUPPORTED

- We have a comprehensive and highly functioning support system for students who struggle academically, emotionally, or socially. TSA has built in multiple "touch points" with its students: an advisor who acts as a mentor/advocate for the student throughout their high school career, a full-time guidance counselor who supports our student's emotional/social needs, a learning specialist who coordinates additional academic assistance, and a college counselor who takes students step-by-step through the college application process. Students do not fall through the cracks.
- TSA's small class/school size allows for relationships with the faculty to be personal; students are known as individuals and cared for by adults.

LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY ARE INTEGRAL TO THE CURRICULUM

- Leadership opportunities abound where students acquire their own voice.
- Students become self-advocates aware of their learning styles and do not see differences as disabilities.
- Presentation and communication skills are emphasized in each grade.
- Teamwork and collaborative learning is valued and practiced.
- TSA provides the 21st Century Skills needed to be 21st Century Citizens.

COMMUNITY IS THE FRAMEWORK WHICH SUPPORTS ACHIEVEMENT

- TSA consciously fosters a community built upon values of trust, respect and commitment to personal growth through its practices and approach.
- Students are treated as a part of the solution, not part of the problem.
- We are committed to building constructive relationships with families and involving them in their children's learning.

AFFORDABLE

- A TSA is an affordable education based upon the state average tuition.
- TSA does more with less money. TSA students and faculty exceed Vermont Educational Outcomes using less money than the majority of middle and/or high schools in Vermont.

Vermont Department of Education released a white paper: "**Roots of Success: Effective Practices in Vermont Schools.**" The research team identified eight characteristics of effective schools. All of these characteristics reflect the practices of TSA but the 1st three are the most important:

1. The belief that all students can succeed. *This is a core component of the TSA culture.*
2. The belief that the school staff is ultimately responsible for students' success and must therefore continually improve their practice. *An exciting part of TSA is that each year is different from the year before. There is nothing static or rigid about TSA. Each year, TSA gets better.*
3. Effective school leadership that helps translate these beliefs into practice. *TSA's administrative teams are very strong and committed.*

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Contact Information for Representatives and Senators

Commissioner on Education:

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 Vermont Department of Education
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 Montpelier, VT 05620-2501
 Tel: 828-3135
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Representatives and Senators

Name
 The Vermont State House
 115 State St
 Montpelier, VT 05633
 (802)-828-2228

Vermont House of Representatives

District	Representative	Party	Residence
Addison-1	Steven Maier	Dem	Middlebury
	Betty Nuovo	Dem	Middlebury
Addison-2	Willem Jewett	Dem	Ripton
Addison-3	Gregory Clark (also House Education Committee)	Rep	Vergennes
	Diane Lanpher	Dem	Vergennes
Addison-4	Michael Fisher	Dem	Lincoln
	David Sharpe	Dem	Bristol
Addison-5	Christopher Bray	Dem	New Haven
Addison-Rutland-1	Will Stevens	Ind	Shoreham

Orange-1	Susan Davis	Prog	West Topsham
	Philip Winters	Rep	Williamstown
Orange-2	Sarah Copeland-Hanzas	Dem	Bradford
Orange-Addison-1	Patsy French	Dem	Randolph
	Lawrence Townsend	Dem	Randolph
Orange-Caledonia-1	Chip Conquest	Dem	Wells River
Rutland-1-1	Andrew Donaghy	Rep	Poultney
Rutland-1-2	Joseph Baker	Rep	West Rutland
	Dave Potter	Dem	Clarendon
Rutland-2	William Canfield	Rep	Fair Haven
	Robert Helm	Rep	Fair Haven
Rutland-3	Eldred French	Dem	Cuttingsville
Rutland-4	James McNeil	Rep	Rutland Town
Rutland-5-1	Peter Fagan	Rep	Rutland
Rutland-5-2	Margaret Andrews	Dem	Rutland
Rutland-5-3	Steven Howard	Dem	Rutland
Rutland-5-4	Gale Courcelle	Dem	Rutland
Rutland-6	Butch Shaw	Rep	Pittsford
Rutland-7	Joe Acinapura	Rep	Brandon
Rutland-8	John Malcolm	Dem	Pawlet
Rutland-Windsor-1	Megan Smith	Dem	Mendon
Windsor-1-1	Kathy Pellett	Dem	Chester
Windsor-1-2	Alice Emmons	Dem	Springfield
	Cynthia Martin	Dem	Springfield
Windsor-2	Ernest Shand	Dem	Windsor
Windsor-3	Donna Sweaney	Dem	Windsor
Windsor-4	Steven Adams	Rep	Hartland
Windsor-5	Alison Clarkson	Dem	Woodstock
Windsor-6-1	Mark Mitchell	Dem	Barnard
Windsor-6-2	John Clerkin	Rep	White River Junction
	Charles Bohi	Dem	White River Junction
Windsor-Orange-1	David Ainsworth	Rep	South Royalton
Windsor-Orange-2	Margaret Cheney	Dem	Norwich
	Jim Masland	Dem	Thetford Center
Windsor-Rutland-1	Dennis Devereux	Rep	Belmont

Windsor-Rutland-2	Sandy Haas	Prog	Rochester
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Senate

District	Representative	Party	Residence
Addison	Claire Ayer	Democratic	Weybridge
	Harold Giard	Democratic	Bridport
Orange	Mark MacDonald	Democratic	Williamstown
Rutland	Bill Carris	Democratic	Rutland
	Margaret Flory (Also on Senate Committee on Education)	Republican	Pittsford
	Kevin Mullin	Republican	Rutland
Windsor	John F. Campbell	Democratic	Quechee
	Richard McCormack	Democratic	Bethel
	Alice Nitka (Also on Senate Committee on Education)	Democratic	Ludlow

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Senate Committee on Education

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Senator William Doyle, Vice Chair

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