

2020 Candidate Questionnaire - School Regionalization - 2 short questions!

As a 2020 candidate for Middletown or Newport Town Councils or School Committee - CITIZENS EXPLORING SCHOOL UNIFICATION is asking ALL candidates to REPLY to 2 questions below. The responses will be published on our website, social media, and with all local media outlets. CANDIDATES who DO NOT RESPOND to the survey - CESU will publish that you DECLINED to participate in the survey. DEADLINE to complete is August 31, 2020, *if you have questions about this survey - send an email to info@cesu.news We will reply within 24-hours.

Email address *

tflynn@middletownri.com

First and Last Name *

Terri Flynn

What position are you running for? *

- Town Council
 School Committee

Do you support an updated study of school regionalization between Newport and Middletown? *

Yes

No

Other:

Why OR Why Not? Please describe your position in detail (1,000-word limit)! *

I favor an "updated study," with certain considerations.

I requested the study referenced in the survey question, to review the content that would be updated. The 2011 New England School Development Council study reports that it was "...one of four studies (2009-2011) to explore the possibilities of a regional school district organization..."[p1] and "...is one of a series of preliminary reviews."[p38]

I am neither for nor against Unification. I am in favor of better education and more cost-effective education, with improvements that are data driven and best for Middletown students. As this is a topic of exponential interest in the community, I hope those who are engaged in this issue observe that I do not take it lightly:

It is relevant to note the study focuses on "Aquidneck, RI," which includes Portsmouth, so perhaps the study is not one to update, but to do a study that is totally different. I favor confirming, that any reported trends are indeed a direct result of Unification; the 20-year trends reported could be cultural ("...an increase of college enrollment..."[p5]) or reaction-based (an increase in math/reading scores[p5] could actually be curriculum addressing testing-exposed weaknesses). Worth updating are the charts in Section C/New England school districts' size in square miles, enrollment, and number of schools. At first glance, the "Aquidneck RI" district does not seem out of line with 3 high schools, given the potential impacts on students' transportation that consolidating into 1 campus would have, since it covers 44 square miles (the largest district represented)[p12]. Other statements to "update" include: "In our experience, we have found that the educational programs, extracurricular and sports opportunities vary more by size of district than by type of district (regional v. municipal or rural v. urban)"[p13] and "More than a dozen southern states organize their schools by counties, not local cities and towns, with few exceptions. This model has never caught on in the Northeast..."[p3].

I have been very consistent in my support for more information and my position on the 2 main barriers to Regionalization/Unification for Middletown, and in RI, generally:

1. Title 16 is the State law under which communities in RI regionalize. There are elements of Title 16 that would be unfavorable to Middletown. Once the threshold has been crossed, unintended consequences, compromise or counter-offer could result when the State is asked to accept terms less favorable to the State and more favorable to the communities involved.
 2. The RI State Constitution does not "make Education a Right" for its citizens. The State has burdened our School Department with a steady stream of unfunded State mandates over the years and the State must have financial accountability for them.
- A study, or an updated study, is one element of any educational decision, but simultaneously, or ahead of such study, these legislations should be aggressively addressed.

I do applaud the community action efforts of the citizenry on this issue. This topic was on the Council agenda 8 times in 2019; 6 times were either "Public Forum" items or "Communications" and Middletown citizenry getting engaged/communicating with Council. This extraordinary effort and passion set an example for voters addressing other community issues in the future.

In conclusion, State legislation must be addressed, and more must to be done to identify both the challenges and opportunities of Unification and the best way the community can move forward in confirming and addressing them. Proceeding in a way that is both economically responsible and ensures a quality education for the next generation will require the full engagement of all stakeholders, especially parents and teachers and staff working on the front lines.

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