



Vermont Learning Collaborative Finalizes Act 170 Merger Committee Groupings and Releases Good Faith Participation Standard

September 25, 2026

The Vermont Learning Collaborative (VTLC) today announced the finalization of Act 170 merger committee groupings following its September 18 through 23 consultation period, and released the Act 170 Good Faith Participation Standard developed by the Facilitation Team.

Finalized Groupings

As a result of the consultation period, one school district requested and received a change in assignment moving from Group Seven (Southeast / VTLC Region) to Group Three (Southwest Region). All other merger committee placements shared on September 18 remain the same.

Scheduling Update

Regional Facilitators are now in direct communication with each committee's appointed representatives to schedule initial meetings. Act 170 requires each merger committee to hold its first meeting on or before October 15, 2026. Regional Facilitators are working with representatives to meet that deadline. In the small number of cases where scheduling challenges may prevent that, meetings will be held as quickly as possible and the overall Act 170 schedule will be maintained.

Good Faith Participation Standard

The Act 170 Facilitation Team's Good Faith Participation Standard, developed over several weeks and reviewed with multiple legislative and educational stakeholder groups across Vermont, is set out in full below. It will also be reviewed at each committee's first meeting.

This is a working standard. Act 170 requires good faith participation but does not define it. This document reflects the Facilitation Team's current framework and will be revised if the General Assembly establishes a statutory or regulatory definition, or otherwise provides additional clarity or guardrails.

Purpose

Act 170 directs merger committees to consider whether a new governance structure would provide “substantially equal educational opportunities for all children,” help students achieve or exceed the State's Education Quality Standards, and maintain access to career and technical education, alongside operational efficiency, transparency, and accountability. *Sec. 1(b)(4); Sec. 13(b)(4)(D)*

Good faith participation is measured against that purpose. A district participates in good faith when its conduct allows a committee to genuinely investigate those questions, whatever conclusion the committee ultimately reaches. Good faith is a standard about whether the inquiry can happen, not about what it finds.

The General Assembly has also been explicit that local voice and community input must retain an important role in this process. *Sec. 1(b)(2)* Good faith participation and vigorous local advocacy are not in tension. This standard is written to protect both.

Standard

Act 170 requires each school district to participate in good faith in the merger committee process. *Sec. 13(b)(3)* This standard provides a consistent framework for understanding and assessing that participation, applied in service of the purpose described above.

Participation is presumed to be in good faith.

A school district participates in good faith when it participates in the work of its merger committee and does not materially and substantially prevent the committee from carrying out the study required by Act 170. Good faith participation generally includes:

- appointing representation as required;
- maintaining active participation in committee meetings and activities;
- sharing updates with local district board members and community;
- engaging in the committee's consideration of information, questions, options, and proposals;
- providing available district information necessary for the committee's work; and
- participating in decisions and steps necessary for the committee to complete its statutory responsibilities.

Examples include attending meetings, adhering to open meeting law requirements, providing requested information, raising questions or concerns, proposing alternatives, and participating in committee decisions and votes.

Good faith does not require a district, school board, committee representative, or community to support merger or any particular governance outcome. Participants may question information and assumptions, challenge proposals, advocate for their communities, propose alternatives, criticize Act 170 or the merger process, express opposition to merger, and recommend or vote against a proposed configuration.

Civil engagement. Good faith requires civil engagement, not agreement. Participants are expected to direct disagreement, criticism, and advocacy at ideas, proposals, and information rather than at individuals; to refrain from personal attacks, threats, or conduct intended to intimidate other participants, committee members, facilitators, or members of the public; and to extend to others the same opportunity to be heard that they expect for themselves. Strong disagreement, sharp criticism, and firm advocacy are all consistent with civil engagement. Personal attacks and intimidation are not, regardless of the position they are advancing.

Disagreement, criticism, advocacy for a preferred outcome, opposition to merger, a missed meeting, or a procedural dispute does not, by itself, constitute bad faith.

Bad Faith Determination

A determination of bad faith participation, of the kind the Lead Facilitator reports to the Legislature, *Sec. 15* requires a documented pattern of conduct that materially and substantially prevents a district from participating in the process or prevents the merger committee from completing identifiable work required by Act 170 within applicable timeframes.

For purposes of this standard:

- Pattern: repeated or continuing conduct, rather than an isolated action or occurrence.
- Materially and substantially prevents: conduct that has a significant and demonstrable effect on the committee's ability to complete required work or meet required timelines.
- Statutory work: meetings, study, deliberations, decisions, reports, and other responsibilities required of the merger committee under Act 170.

Examples that may support a bad faith determination include repeated refusal to provide necessary and available information following specific requests; repeated failure to respond or participate when doing so prevents required work from being completed; or repeated conduct that significantly disrupts or prevents the committee from conducting its work. No single example, standing alone, establishes bad faith.

Notice and Opportunity to Address

Before a bad faith determination is made:

- The district will receive written notice from the Lead Facilitator identifying the specific concern and any action or information needed to address it.
- The district will be provided an opportunity to respond and address the concern within an identified timeframe.
- If the concern continues, written follow up from the Lead Facilitator will document the original request, the district's response or compliance status, applicable deadlines, and any continuing impact on the committee's required work.

A determination of bad faith will be considered only if the documented conduct continues to materially and substantially prevent the district or committee from completing the required process.

A determination of bad faith will not be based on a district's position regarding merger, its preferred governance outcome, criticism of Act 170 or the merger process, or the views expressed by its representatives or community members.

Any bad faith determination will be based on conduct documented by the Lead Facilitator that occurs within the merger committee process.

Standardized First Meeting Agenda

To ensure a consistent starting point across all eighteen merger committees, every first meeting will follow the same agenda. The following components are a part of the current draft agenda:

1. Facilitator Call to Order
2. Welcome and Introductions
3. Overview of Committee Roles
 - a. Regional Facilitator
 - b. Committee Chair
4. Merger Committee Organization
 - a. Adoption of Robert's Rules of Order
 - b. Election of Chair
 - c. Establishment of Committee Norms
 - d. Determination of future meeting locations(s), time, and meeting cadence
5. Public Input
6. Act 170 Overview Presentation
7. Good Faith Standard Review
8. Proportional Representation Determination
9. Areas of Committee Interest and Need for Next Meeting
10. Agenda Building
11. Adjourn

Finalized Merger Committee Groupings

Eighteen merger committees across seven regions, listed with FY25 average daily membership (ADM) for each member district. Note: Act 170 provides school boards with the ability to take action regarding committee assignment. This finalized set of committee groupings does not impact or eliminate that board authority.

Region	Committee	Member Districts	Total FY25 ADM
Champlain Valley North	Group Seventeen	Enosburg-Richford Unified Union School District: 854 Fairfax School District: 908 Fletcher School District: 195 Georgia School District: 829 Maple Run Unified School District: 2,368 Missisquoi Valley School District: 1,823 Northern Mountain Valley Unified Union School District: 1,139	8,116
Champlain Valley North	Group Nineteen	Alburgh School District: 283 Champlain Islands Unified Union School District: 392 Colchester School District: 2,331 Milton Town School District: 1,465 South Hero School District: 222	4,693
Champlain Valley South	Group One	Addison Central School District: 1,669 Addison Northwest School District: 889 Hannaford Regional Technical Center Mount Abraham Unified School District: 1,190	3,748
Champlain Valley South	Group Thirteen	Champlain Valley School District: 3,951 Harwood Unified Union School District: 1,750 Mount Mansfield Unified Union School District: 2,564	8,265
Chittenden Central	Group Fourteen	Essex Westford Educational Community Unified Union School District: 3,528	3,528
Chittenden Central	Group Eighteen	Burlington School District: 3,385 South Burlington School District: 2,512 Winooski ID: 785	6,682
Northeast	Group Ten	Blue Mountain Union School District: 384 Cabot School District: 163 Danville School District: 289 Oxbow Unified Union School District: 613 Peacham School District: 106 Thetford Town School District: 360 Waits River Valley Union School District #36: 397	2,312
Northeast	Group Eleven	Caledonia Cooperative School District: 542 Canaan School District: 138 Kingdom East Unified Union School District: 1,675 NEK Choice School District: 326 St. Johnsbury School District: 1,021 Stannard Town School District: 7	3,709

Northeast	Group Twelve	Brighton School District: 122 Charleston School District: 116 Coventry School District: 164 Derby School District: 365 Holland School District: 61 Jay School District: 44 Lake Region Union Elementary-Middle SD: 666 Lake Region Union High School District: 321 Lowell School District: 87 Morgan School District: 44 Newport City School District: 310 Newport Town School District: 147 North Country Union High School District: 678 North Country Union Junior High School Board: 213 Troy School District: 190 Westfield School District: 39	3,567
Southwest	Group Two	Barstow Unified School District: 265 Ira School District: 43 Mill River Unified Union School District: 698 Otter Valley Unified Union School District: 1,158 Quarry Valley Unified Union School District: 990 Rutland City School District: 1,716 Rutland Town School District: 540 Slate Valley Unified Union School District: 1,220	6,630
Southwest	Group Three	Ludlow-Mount Holly Unified Union School District: 319 Mettawee School District: 261 Readsboro School District: 65 River Valleys Unified School: 220 Searsburg School District: 23 Somerset School District: 1 Southwest Vermont Technical Center Stamford School District: 102 Stratton School District: 42 Taconic and Green Regional School District: 1,599 Wells Spring Unified Union School District: 255 Windham School District: 24 Winhall School District: 200	3,111
Southwest	Group Four	Arlington School District: 344 Mount Anthony Union High School District #14: 1,351 North Bennington Graded School District: 159 Sandgate School District: 68 Southwest Vermont Technical Center Southwest Vermont Union Elementary School District: 1,296	3,218
Southeast / VTLC	Group Five	Halifax School District: 94 Marlboro School District: 105 Twin Valley Unified School District: 372 Vernon Town School District: 297 West River Modified Union Education District: 442 Windham Southeast School District: 2,121	3,431

Southeast / VTLC	Group Seven	Athens Grafton School District: 47 Bellows Falls Union High School District: 310 Green Mountain Unified School District: 593 River Valley Technical Center Rockingham School District: 443 Springfield School District: 1,184 Westminster School District: 191	2,768
Southeast / VTLC	Group Eight	Hartford School District: 1,269 Hartland School District: 400 Mount Ascutney School District: 554 Mountain Views School District: 911 Pittsfield School District: 45 Weathersfield School District: 360	3,539
Winooski Valley	Group Nine	Echo Valley Community School District: 279 First Branch Unified School District: 339 Granville-Hancock Unified District: 95 Lincoln School District: 192 Orange Southwest Unified Union School District: 806 Rochester-Stockbridge Unified District: 176 Sharon School District: 272 Strafford School District: 167 White River Unified District: 571	2,897
Winooski Valley	Group Fifteen	Cambridge School District: 310 Craftsbury School District: 177 Elmore-Morristown Unified Union School District: 762 Hazen Union School District: 253 Lamoille North MUSD and Lamoille USD: 1,434 Mountain View Union Elementary School District: 305 Stowe School District: 726 Wolcott School District: 223	4,190
Winooski Valley	Group Twenty	Barre Unified Union School District: 2,127 Central Vermont Career Center Montpelier Roxbury School District: 1,187 Paine Mountain School District: 1,008 Twinfield Unified School District: 304 Washington Central Unified Union School District: 1,299	5,925

Key Future Milestones Under Act 170

September 25, 2026	Groupings finalized; Good Faith Participation Standard released
October 15, 2026	Target date for first merger study committee meetings to have occurred
September 1, 2027	Final merger study committee reports due
December 2027	Agency of Education and State Board of Education Review of Proposed Mergers
March 2028	Possible community votes on proposed merged districts