

Secretary Zoie Saunders, M.Ed.

Vermont Agency of Education
1 National Life Drive, Davis 5
Montpelier, VT 05620

July 17, 2026

RE: Request for Final Approval – Woodstock Union Middle/High School Construction Project

Dear Secretary Saunders:

On behalf of the Mountain Views School District (MVSD), the Board of Directors respectfully request that the Agency grant final approval of the Woodstock Union Middle/High School (WUMHS) project pursuant to Act 170 and 16 V.S.A. § 3445.

We appreciated meeting with you on May 27, 2026 to discuss our district's facility challenges and the extensive 10-year process we've pursued to fund the reconstruction. Over the past decade, our community has invested nearly **\$2 million** and contributed **hundreds of thousands of volunteer hours** to responsibly develop this project in accordance with state guidance. That effort included a comprehensive facilities condition assessment, extensive master planning, the evaluation of multiple building alternatives, **three rounds of value engineering to reduce costs while supporting future regional consolidation**, and extensive public engagement.

Throughout this process, we carefully followed the roadmap established by the Vermont Agency of Education, receiving **two Agency preliminary approvals** of our project—in **January 2024** and again in **September 2025**. Bob Donahue, Agency of Education School Facility Manager, described our efforts as a model process, which was a sentiment shared by both Democratic and Republican legislators repeatedly over the last two years of debate over education reform and school construction.

Our community then approved the \$112 million project by a **22% margin** in the March 2026 bond vote, local donors committed **more than \$5 million** in private pledges, and the **Legislature enacted legislation** ensuring that districts pursuing school construction would not be penalized under Vermont's education funding formula. Together, these milestones reflect a decade of diligent planning and partnership with the State to advance a project designed to meet the long-term educational needs of our region.

We were especially grateful for your willingness to hear our unique circumstances and your offer to meet again following the legislative session to discuss potential paths forward. We left encouraged that the Agency was willing to work collaboratively to find a solution under Vermont's new school construction framework.

That is why we were shocked by what happened next. Our June 10 follow-up meeting with you was rescheduled twice and ultimately canceled. Instead, we received a letter from your Deputy Secretary stating that, after reviewing the legislation, the Agency believed our decade-long planning effort and prior approval under the former program would not allow our project to proceed until the new State Aid for School Construction Program is fully implemented—potentially delaying the project by two to three years. We respectfully disagree with that interpretation.

Our team spent weeks carefully reviewing Acts 73 and 170 before and after passage. We believe that the Agency of Education can grant final approval that fully protects the Agency's legal responsibilities while advancing the Governor's and Legislature's shared goals of improving affordability, encouraging regionalization, protecting taxpayers, and ensuring safe learning environments. Rather than delaying one of Vermont's most thoroughly planned school construction projects, we believe there is a lawful approach that provides a true win for the State, the Agency, and our community.

We take strong issue with the Agency's July 13, 2026 memorandum outlining implementation of the State Aid for School Construction Program and the apparent assumption that Mountain Views is seeking an award of construction aid prior to the provisions of Act 170 being completed. We are not asking that construction aid be awarded before rulemaking is complete, the School Construction Division is operational, and the Legislature appropriates funding. Further, we are **not** requesting that the Agency award state aid, guarantee funding, or provide any special opportunity to influence rulemaking outside the public process.

Instead, we are asking that the Agency determine that the WUMHS project satisfies the statutory criteria for approval and issue a final approval with our understanding that:

- No state funding may be awarded until all statutory implementation requirements have been satisfied.
- The project remains subject to the Agency's final rules and statewide prioritization process.
- The timing of any future state assistance depends upon rulemaking and legislative appropriations.

Such actions would preserve every safeguard identified in the Agency's memorandum while allowing the District to continue planning, permitting, environmental review, procurement, and other pre-construction activities.

This approach is fully consistent with Act 170's objectives. The Agency's memorandum recognizes that Vermont's new school construction program is intended to support regional educational opportunity, voluntary governance consolidation, shared services, improved affordability, and long-term educational transformation. The WUMHS project directly advances each of those objectives. Mountain Views already serves students from **28 communities**, has established Vermont's first **Cooperative Educational Services Agency (CESA)**, and has designed a facility capable of accommodating future regional growth and expanded educational opportunities.

Time is of the essence. The existing school continues to experience significant deterioration despite millions of dollars invested in temporary repairs. Every year of delay increases costs to taxpayers, exposes students and staff to unnecessary health and safety risks, and postpones the regional consolidation and efficiency gains that Act 170 was specifically designed to encourage.

We continue to question the Agency's position regarding our prior preliminary approval under the former school construction program. We find no language anywhere in Act 73 and/or Act 170 that renders that approval or the laws that generated it "defunct." On the other hand, our decade-long planning process, the Agency's two preliminary approvals, overwhelming voter approval in March 2026, more than **\$5 million** in private commitments, and our continued compliance with statutory requirements demonstrate that this project is exceptionally well positioned to move forward once the State Aid for School Construction Program is fully implemented.

Final approval of our desperately needed project would not obligate the State financially, predetermine future rulemaking, or guarantee future funding. It would simply recognize that the project satisfies the statutory requirements, preserve the Legislature's authority over appropriations, and allow the District to continue advancing one of Vermont's most thoroughly planned regional school projects while the State completes implementation of the new program.

Doing so advances the affordability, regionalization, taxpayer value, and educational transformation goals that are at the heart of Acts 73 and 170.

We appreciate the Agency's continued partnership and urgently request your approval for the rebuilding of Woodstock Union High School and Middle School. Our students and the taxpayers across 28 Vermont communities deserve no less.

Sincerely,

Keri Bristow
Chair, Mountain Views Supervisory District