Franklin West Supervisory Union

# Community Update

**September 30, 2026**

Greetings,

It's hard to believe that September is coming to a close. We have had a fantastic start in all of our schools. Our learners have transitioned into new routines and expectations and are engaged in meaningful learning in their classrooms. You can see examples of a variety of learning opportunities on our school websites and Facebook pages. I want to share a few updates with you and appreciate your time to read this letter.

**Act 170**

There is a lot of conversation and news coverage regarding education transformation under Act 170 (and Act 73). Two aspects of these laws require our attention and participation. First, our Cooperative Education Service Agency (CESA) for the Champlain Valley North region has met several times as required by the statute. We have begun the adoption of bylaws and discussed possibilities for cooperative services that might be beneficial to all of our districts. There is initial funding available from the state to fund this work, but the board is working slowly and deliberately before we commit to any plan that might entail a cost for our communities without an immediate financial benefit. The agendas (and minutes) for our monthly meetings are available on the FWSU website under the School Board tab.

The second aspect of Act 170 is the Merger Study Committee. Franklin West has been grouped with Maple Run Unified School District, Franklin Northeast Supervisory Union, and Missisquoi Valley School District to explore a possible Franklin County-wide school district. Each of our town school districts will have one member representing their board at the initial meeting scheduled for September 29th. This committee will meet over the next eleven months and make a recommendation to the Agency of Education regarding a possible merger or restructuring. If the AOE supports the recommendation, there would be a potential vote on the proposal on Town Meeting Day in March 2028. There is a fair amount of uncertainty about the direction that the committee will pursue and what the outcome will be. The meetings are open to the public and will be facilitated by John Everitt, a former superintendent. Again, agendas and minutes are posted on the FWSU website. This topic will also be on the agenda of all of our board meetings over the next year, so you can provide your input to your local boards as well.

**Technology**

The other topics that are receiving much attention in the media are screen time and artificial intelligence. I want to provide some initial information and context related to these topics in our Franklin West schools. As we have been evaluating our one-to-one device program, we have been gathering data about the use of devices at all grade levels. I can assure you that none of our students (particularly our youngest learners) are on their devices "all day long". At the youngest grades, device access is intentional and limited to under 30 minutes per week. As students progress toward middle and high school, their device use increases depending on the subject area and topic being studied. A high school student engaged in a research project for a global citizenship course might access their device every day in that class, but not at all in others. Our goal is for the students to use their devices for academic tasks that are active and engaging, not for content instruction, gaming, or scrolling. Our learners are also accessing technology devices during academic screeners three times a year and mandatory State VTCAP testing in the spring. Those might be the days when your learner feels like they were on devices "all day"! We will be presenting complete data to the FWSU Board at their October meeting.

Regarding Artificial Intelligence, our tech integrationists and IT staff have been working to manage and monitor our AI use over the last several years. Our teachers' use of A.I. tools is limited to platforms that are pre-vetted, protect our student data, and don't feed our work into the "large language models". We never include student data or images into any AI platform. Our learners do not have access to AI tools until upper middle school or high school. It is essential that our oldest learners receive instruction regarding AI in order to be prepared for the opportunities of their future. Instruction includes proper and ethical use of AI in addition to ways to increase efficiency, particularly regarding routine and repetitive tasks. Artificial Intelligence cannot replace learning or critical thinking; rather, it might be used when it can to enhance the experience of learning. We continue to monitor changes in AI platforms and tools and will adjust our use and expectations as this ever-changing technology evolves.

**Substitutes**

We have had a great response from community members as we have transitioned to recruiting our substitutes in-house. This has made providing coverage for staff who need to be out far easier than in the past few years. Of course, we can always use more folks to be available throughout the year. If you have availability and would like access to a flexible work schedule, please reach out to your building's office staff to begin the onboarding and training process.

As always, I thank you for your continued support of our schools and for giving us the opportunity to work with your learners every day. We are fortunate to have such amazing students and communities. Please let me know if you have questions or concerns.

**Sincerely,**

*John T. Tague*

**Superintendent**