

Families for Region 14 Elementary
www.saveregion14elementary.com

On March 26, 1968 the town meetings of both Bethlehem and Woodbury voted unanimously to form a temporary regional school study committee to study the advisability of establishing a regional school district. The committee released its report in April of 1968; the document was circulated throughout the two communities and subsequently voted on in the 1968 referendum vote that formed the Regional School District 14.

On page one of the plan, the 1968 Temporary Regional School Study Committee Report outlined a series of recommendations. Above all, the committee recommended that the towns of Woodbury and Bethlehem form a regional school district to include grades kindergarten through twelve. But perhaps just as significantly, they made a series of recommendations as to how the region should be configured. Recommendations two and three read as follows:

That grades kindergarten through twelve be divided into elementary schools (grades K through 5), a middle school (grades 6 through 8), and a high school (grades 9 through 12).

- That grades K through 5 be housed in elementary school buildings in Bethlehem and Woodbury.

The Connecticut Supreme Court, in *Mary Atwood, et al v. Regional School District No. 15*, held that the terms of a regionalization plan consist of the recommendations found in the final report. In other words, the recommendations outlined above are part of the 1968 regionalization plan that formed Regional School District 14. The court has also held and state statute 10-47(c) provides that any fundamental amendment to such plan must be done via a referendum vote either brought by the regional school board itself or the “legislative body” of one of the two towns. *Atwood* appears to be the only Connecticut appellate law on point, and is particularly significant given the present circumstances in Region 14.

On October 16th, the Region 14 Board of Education voted to implement a reconfiguration plan for Woodbury and Bethlehem. This consolidation of our elementary schools mandates that grades K-2 from both towns will attend the Bethlehem ‘Primary’ School and grades 3-5 from both towns will attend Mitchell ‘Intermediate’ School in Woodbury. This would seem to be in direct violation of the recommendations presented in the 1968 plan, and as such raises the question as to whether or not reconfiguration is a fundamental change to the

1968 regionalization plan thus requiring the board to seek approval from the two communities via a referendum vote.

Given the legal questions that surround the Board's decision and the community outcry that has followed, roughly 400 residents of both Bethlehem and Woodbury have formally requested that the Region 14 Board take the proper steps and submit the reconfiguration issue to a referendum vote. This action would not only satisfy the requirements of the law, but would allow our two communities to form a consensus on this polarizing issue and move forward.

Unfortunately, the Board has opted not to submit this important issue to the public to decide. On April 3rd, we received notification from the Chairman of the Region 14 Board, John Howard, that the Board was declining our referendum request.

It seems that at the very center of this debate is a misunderstanding between the regional board and the community as to what the original 1968 agreement entails; fortunately, CGS 10-47 C provides us the opportunity to bridge that divide. The statute affords the citizens of either town the ability to present an amendment to the original plan for consideration of the region as a whole. In this case, we are opting to bring a referendum to amend the regional plan to affirm the original recommendations of the 1968 regional committee, in particular to make certain that those provisions relating to the local K-5 elementary schools are abided by and followed in the future.

If the referendum is passed, it will ensure that any future plans inconsistent with the agreement formed in 1968 be submitted to the two communities for consideration prior to implementation. In sum, the board will be forced to put the recently adopted reconfiguration plan on hold unless and until both towns by referenda choose to further amend the regionalization plan to include such a configuration of our lower grade schools.

From the onset of the reconfiguration debate, we have made every attempt to engage the democratic process. It is fortunate that Connecticut law provides us the opportunity to have a say in matters of fundamental importance in relation to our schools and by extension, our communities. We ask that residents of both Bethlehem and Woodbury take advantage of this opportunity by coming forward to sign our petition. Families for Region 14 will be circulating the petition at Hollow Park in Woodbury, Sunday, April 29th from 9 AM to 4 PM.