

Dear David:

As requested, this letter represents my belief that Staff:Student ratios would be an effective and equitable strategy for “right-sizing” Vermont schools while addressing the issues of sustainability and cost-effectiveness for public education investment overall. As with almost any measure to responsibly address costs, the details are what matter most. For example, how should “staff” and “student” be defined?

My recommendations are as follows:

1. Staff:Student Ratios should be used on a Supervisory Union/Supervisory District level (not an individual school level), thereby allowing maximum flexibility for SU’s/SD’s to determine how best to allocate their staffing resources, across all schools in a systematic manner, to best meet their unique needs. This approach would also facilitate greater cooperation among schools in a SU/SD. Of course, to address ratios at the supervisory union level would necessitate that the supervisory union be the employer of record, or headed toward unification as is envisioned under Act 46.
2. Student should be defined by actual student enrollment in a school (based on Oct 1. Count), not ADM (which is a taxing number that does not reflect the actual number of students being served in a SU/SD). For example, tuition, school choice, technical high schools, etc...are not reflected in the school’s ADM.
3. Defining Staff is the most difficult standard to set. Staff could be defined in more specific terms as teachers, support staff, non-union personnel directly and indirectly (outsourced) employed by the SU/SD. For example, SU/SDs would need to identify how many staff are employed through CFP Title Grants, and indirectly employed by outside agencies (OT/PT, Speech, etc...).

I would explicitly exclude the following:

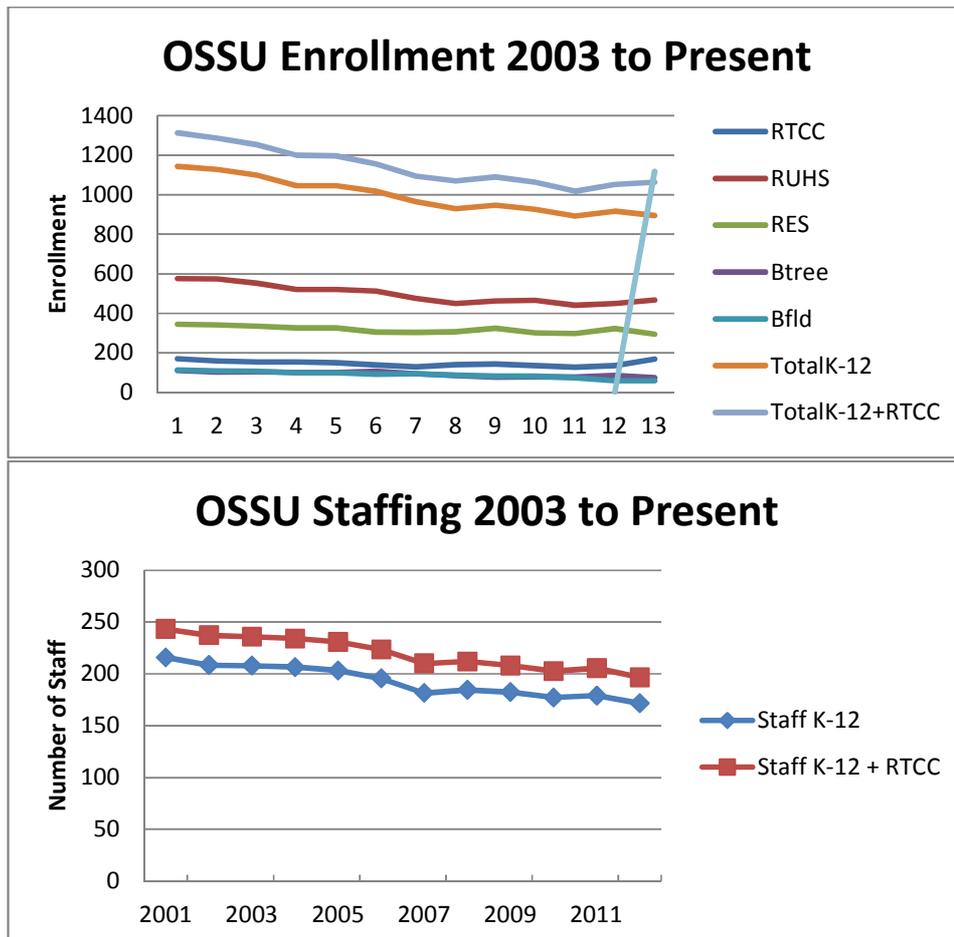
- a. Transportation: because not all school districts transport students.
- b. ELL Teachers: because this is a highly variable number and ELL need is not equitably reflected around Vermont.
- c. Pre-K: because it is mandated and comes with low Staff:Student ratios (not to exceed 10:1).
- d. Technical High Schools: only 15 in Vermont and staffing levels are very different than traditional schools, including administrative requirements.

You could always engage a discussion/information session (with CFOs, Sups, etc...) about other possible exclusions based on real inequity. I expect there would be some real attempts to get almost everything exempted...but in reality, the OSSU governs its “right-sizing” efforts by examining longitudinal total staff-student ratios as compared to enrollment. Any organization, no matter the sector, should do the same to properly manage fixed-cost ratios, etc... I can explain why taking such an approach is necessary as needed.

In fact, in light of the point above, I would recommend that the General Assembly delay implementation of the allowable growth provisions of Act 46 and turn its attention to working out a system affecting Staff:Student ratio that can be more equitably applied and will better address the rising cost of education, eighty percent of which is attributable to the cost of personnel.

I am aware the CFOs and Business Managers are currently completing their annual Teacher/Staff Data Certification surveys clearly outlining all staff employed by a SD/SU. I would recommend this survey be changed to require accurate and complete reporting on staffing levels by SU/SD (i.e. including all CFP Title Grant staff, outsourced staff, etc...).

Here is a sample OSSU longitudinal Staff:Student ratio data set. Note, total OSSU staff is inclusive of transportation, ELL, RTCC, etc...(all the recommended exclusions) and, therefore, is very conservative. More specifically, the graphs demonstrate greater than 5.2:1, Staff:Student ratio even with my recommended exclusions which demonstrates a 5.2:1, Staff:Student ratio is not difficult to realize.



OSSU Staff Student Ratio 2003 to Present

