

Executive Summary

Overview

Section 5 of Act 60, 2013 Legislative session, required the Agency of Education to collect data necessary to set minimum student-to-classroom teacher ratios, student-to-staff ratios, student-to-school level administrator ratios, and student-to-central office administrator ratios in public elementary and secondary schools as well as supervisory unions.

The education governance structure in Vermont complicated the analysis, with schools having a wide variety of both grade configurations and sizes. In FY2013, there were 17 different grade configurations for grades kindergarten through 12, offered by 302 schools.

The Student Educator Course Transcript collection (SECT) provided FY2013 student and teacher data by course (school year 2012-2013). This is the second year of the SECT data collection. Investigation and use of the data revealed some weaknesses in the collection which AOE can address for future collections. Input accuracy should improve as schools recognize that these data are being used for a variety of purposes. AOE can improve the collection itself by adding more fields to allow more granular views of the data. Examples are adding a grade level so middle school courses can be separated from elementary and secondary courses, tagging courses as regular education versus special education where possible, and having a uniform method for differentiating differing sections of the same course offered multiple times by an individual teacher.

AOE can revise and improve the existing Teacher/Staff FTE and Salary Report to accurately reflect where personnel are employed and where they work. AOE can also add more specificity to the SECT data collection while providing stricter guidance to how courses are labeled and data are entered.

AOE recognizes the value of these data and is exploring options for developing capacity for improving data collections and increasing capacity for more analytical work of this nature. This type of work is of increasing interest and importance to the legislature and others and AOE feels it is critical to informed policy making.

Recommendations for Minimum Course Size in the Four Core Subjects

Recommendation 1:

For schools with grade configurations of K-6 or K-8 and enrollments of 150 or more, the minimum course size should be set at 10 students.

Recommendation 2:

For schools with grade configurations of K-6 or K-8 and enrollments of fewer than 150, the minimum course size should be set at 5 students.

Recommendation 3:

For schools with grade configurations of K-12, 5-8, 7-12, or 9-12 (or similar grades configurations), the minimum course size should be set at 10 students.

Recommendations for Student-to-Staff Ratios

Recommendation 4:

The minimum student/teacher ratio for direct instruction teachers should be eight students to one licensed teacher.

Recommendation 5:

The minimum student/staff ratio for district level personnel as defined above should be 5.5 students to one staff member.

Recommendation 6:

The minimum student/school level administrators ratio as defined above should be 75 students to one staff member. An exception could be made for those schools that have part-time principals.

Recommendation 7:

The minimum student/superintendent and assistant superintendent ratio as defined above should be 700:1 students to one superintendent/assistant superintendent. An exception could be made for those supervisory unions that have part-time superintendents.

Recommendations for Tax Incentives, Penalties, and Implementation

Recommendation 8:

Minimum ratios should go into effect in the 2015-2016 school year (FY2016) with subsequent data collection and ratio calculations in the following year (2016-2017 school year). Resulting tax incentives or penalties will be applied in the second year following (2017-2018).

Recommendation 9:

Tax incentives and penalties should be based on average student-per-course data for the district. For those districts operating more than one school, taking the average of all the student-per-course ratios should be the average for the district.

Recommendation 10:

A tax incentive/penalty should be determined by the relationship of a district's 5 ratios to the 5 minimum ratios, expressed as a percentage. 20% of each ratio will be used as the basis of the incentive/penalty, with ratios below the minimums being positive and those above the minimums being negative. The aggregate district percentage incentive/penalty will be applied against the district rate in the following year.