

To: Senate Finance Committee  
From: Martha Heath, Clerk Westford School Board

Dear Committee Members,

I am writing on behalf of the Westford School Board regarding the proposal to phase out the Hold Harmless provision in our current education funding system. Instead of phasing it out for all school districts we ask that you consider phasing it out only for those districts whose student to staff ratios are below the statewide average. Doing so would provide an incentive for districts to improve their ratios.

We feel strongly that districts like ours that have made a strong commitment to reducing staff as student population has declined should not be treated the same way as those who have failed to do so. The hold harmless provision was added specifically because it is not possible to reduce teaching and support staff in direct proportion to the decline in students.

Our enrollment has declined dramatically since the mid 1990s. By creating a class size guideline policy and by using the state quality standards we have reduced our staffing dramatically as well. The following is a chart of our present student to teacher/staff ratios.

<b>Student/staffing metrics</b>	<b>Vermont State average</b>	<b>Westford School FY'15 (actual)</b>	<b>Westford School FY'16 (proposed)</b>	<b>FY'15 Delta vs. state average</b>
<b>Average class size (K-8)</b>	13	19.9	18.4 (projected)	+53%
<b>Student to teacher ratio*</b>	9.9	12.1	12.2 (projected)	+22%
<b>Student to staff ratio**</b>	4.67	5.59	5.54 (projected)	+20%

We strongly believe that districts that have made this kind of effort should not be treated in the same manner as those who have not. It is akin to the teacher who punishes the whole class for the misbehavior of a few.

Phasing out the hold harmless for only some districts would certainly be more complex. At the same time it could provide an incentive for districts to reduce staffing which would benefit all districts. We respectfully ask that you seriously consider this proposal. Thank you. Martha