

Hi, Sean Dobbin again, CHSVT teacher in St. Johnsbury.

I'm getting pretty tired of the governor (and others in power) harping on the "41 graduates" argument and I'd like to expand on my previously-submitted testimony regarding it. The argument is a classic red herring, and I feel that we all deserve better than that.

This deceptive use of a single data point is not fair to our teachers and students, all of whom are at risk of losing their beloved school over important arguments made by people in power. If the governor or commissioner or anyone else intends to decimate a first-rate institution like CHSVT, as a Vermonter I expect it to be done with openness, honesty, and integrity, and I expect the use of appropriately-framed, sound data. I hope that you expect that, too.

A quote from the governor from the 2/18 Vermont Digger:

"We're not saying let's not educate young people in prisons. What we're saying is we've got 49 teachers that graduated 41 students this year. I don't think there's a Vermonter who would say, 'Wow, that's an efficient way to deliver education — 49 teachers, 41 graduates,'" Shumlin said. "All we're saying is let's find the areas where government isn't being efficient and not always turn to taxpayers."

The issue here is that this is a misleading and nearly meaningless statistic that has nothing to do with how we "deliver education," as the governor puts it. It not only ignores the many other industry-recognized credentials issued by CHSVT (over 330 in FY14) and a multitude of other variables, but also some very basic statistical truths. **CHSVT did employ 49 teachers in FY14, but in no way does that mean that we had 49 teachers working exclusively with high school seniors on their way to graduation, much in the same way that *every* school employs teachers working with students at different grade levels.**

The statistic doesn't mean that 49 teachers hung around with 41 prison inmates and that's all that happened in FY14. What really happened, as we all should know by now, is that our 49 CHSVT teachers managed an average daily population of 593 students¹. 593 students a day! And we're not talking about teacher's pets, here. These are some of the most difficult students in Vermont. They are criminal offenders, damaged in unfathomable ways – socially, emotionally, intellectually, academically – and who, like it or not, will eventually go back to being our neighbors. We will see them in town. Their kids will go to school with our kids.

We cannot ignore this obvious truth. Many of our students don't even function at the kindergarten level. We have students coming to us at all levels, from below basic literacy all the way through (not often, but occasionally) 12th grade and beyond. In some ways, though it is an accredited high school, CHSVT operates as a k-12 program, serving students at the grade level at which they function. We do not turn away a student because he is reading at a 6th-grade level, nor do we tell him that he's now a member of CHSVT's 6th-grade class. Unlike nearly every other school in Vermont, we turn away **no one**. We teach our students until they are proficient and functioning at a high level. Then we can talk about

graduation. That’s the reality of our school. And by the way, we do it without the help of teacher aides and other instructional supports.

To put this into perspective, please take a look at the teacher-to-graduate ratios of the following K-12 schools from FY14. I know it’s not a perfect comparison – nothing comparing CHSVT to any other school is – but I hope you can see where I’m coming from.

School	Full-Time Instructional Staff (incl. Aides, which applies to some, but not all, of these schools) ⁱⁱ	Graduating Seniors ⁱⁱⁱ
Danville	50	34
Twinfield	58	27
Cabot	27	16
Concord	37	10
Chelsea	20	8
CHSVT	49	41

Again, I know this isn’t a perfect comparison, but I think it takes us in a better direction. It would be absurd to argue that these schools should have their funding cut in half because of their full-staff-to-graduate ratio (which is an absurd and deceptive ratio to ever talk about to begin with), because of course many/most of these teachers and aides are working with students who aren’t at the graduating level. It is even more absurd to make that argument with a specialized school like CHSVT, where the same situation is true. And if you look at the full-staff-to-unique-students-served ratio, there is no comparison. CHSVT blows everyone in the state out of the water.

If you ever hear the governor, the commissioner, or anyone else use the 41-graduates argument again, I hope you call them out on it. Make no mistake: regardless of what the governor or commissioner says, this proposed “consolidation” will kill the Community High School of Vermont. The governor and the DOC will be able to sort of “check a box” saying that education is being delivered to our corrections population, but it will inevitably be the worst publicly-funded education in Vermont, hardly different than any other half-baked “alternative” program. Then we’ll really see a waste of taxpayer money.

Thanks for reading.

ⁱ <http://chsvt.org/reports/annual-report-2013-2014.pdf>

ⁱⁱ http://education.vermont.gov/documents/EDU-TSReport14_No_PAs.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://edw.vermont.gov/REPORTSERVER/Pages/ReportViewer.aspx?%2fPublic%2fSchool+Report>. (This number refers to *potentially* graduating seniors in FY14 as reported by the schools. Not all may have graduated, and the numbers may actually be even lower.)