

**A Proposal to Increase the Statewide Student to Staff Ratio
as requested by the Administration**

Rationale

The majority of education spending is in salaries and benefits. Increasing the student/staff ratio should reduce overall education spending. While Vermont's student population is declining, the staffing numbers do not seem to be declining in step. This proposal is to encourage districts to closely look at staffing levels and decrease them where necessary and possible.

AOE collects these staffing data in December of each year, so the most recent data available are for the current year, FY2018. If this proposal is accepted and moves forward, it should not be implemented until FY2020. Districts have already approved budgets for FY2019 and are currently finalizing contracts and personnel for FY2019. Therefore, they cannot respond to a new initiative to reduce overall staff in a timely manner. Additionally, districts should not be penalized for decisions made by others when they, the districts, had no knowledge or forewarning of a change that would penalize them for decisions already made.

This proposal should not be viewed workable for this coming year but could be workable for the following year, FY2020. Beginning the process now would allow time for districts to plan and strategize how to reduce staff and increase student/staff ratios in a thoughtful and meaningful manner so as not to adversely affect the education of the students.

Proposed Staff Exclusions

For these purposes, some staff should be excluded from the student/staff ratios. These staff are necessary for the background operations of the school – primarily maintenance, operation, food services, and transportation. The following is a list of proposed staff personnel to exclude – FY2018 FTEs are in parentheses:

1. Operations, maintenance, and security staff (1,069.14)
2. Student transportation staff (285.67)
3. Food Service staff (495.92)
4. Enterprise operation staff (68.23)
5. Community service operations staff (28.51)
6. Facilities acquisition and construction staff (1.00)

PreKindergarten teachers should also be excluded as prekindergarten is not offered in all schools, but the law requires preK students to be enrolled in their school of residence. That means the preK student count will also be excluded from the enrollment counts:

7. preK teachers (185.54)

Additionally, special education is federally mandated, so special education staff should also be excluded. That includes those paraprofessionals who are hired as the result of IEP requirements:

8. Special education ungraded teachers (1,364.35)
9. Special education directors (87.09)
10. Essential early education directors (25.91)
11. Special education paraprofessionals (2,999.28)

In FY2018, the above staffing categories proposed to be excluded total 6,610.64 FTEs, representing 36.1% of the 18,308.06 staff FTEs.

Potential Issues and Possible Resolutions

Supervisory union staff

Issue

A substantial portion of staff are at the SU level, approximately 23% in FY2018. Beginning with Act 153 of 2010, staffing for both special education and transportation moved to the SU level.

Potential resolution

SU staff will be allocated to the member districts that operate schools by district enrollment as a percent of SU enrollment. This will give each district that operates a school an effective staffing count – those the district hires directly and those that are its share of the SU staff.

This will exclude those districts that tuition all students. While those districts have no district staff, they are allocated SU costs covering their share of SU staff. However, students from non-operating districts are counted in the district in which they are enrolled which is where the staff are. Additionally, a district that receives a large number of tuitioning students will likely have a larger staff at the SU level.

Career technical education (CTE) Staff

Issue

Of the 15 public regional CTEs, 12 belong to a host high school with the other three being stand-alone regional technical center school districts. The students attending a CTE are not enrolled at the CTE they attend – they are enrolled at their home high school. If the CTE staff from the 12 CTEs affiliated with a host high school are included, ratios will be artificially low as the host district will have the staff count but not the student count.

Potential resolution

- a. Exclude CTE staff from the staff counts. Doing so, however, would not put pressure on a CTE to carefully review its staffing numbers versus staffing requirements.
- b. Alternatively, a head count of students from sending districts at each CTE could be used to allocate CTE personnel back to the sending and home school districts.

Approved independent schools

Issue

Independent schools are not required to report staffing levels to AOE although the four historical academies often do. Even if independent schools were required to report staffing, not all enrolled students are publicly funded, meaning student/staff ratios would be both difficult to calculate and compare.

Potential resolution

Restrict the ability of the voters of a school district to pay a tuition greater than the average announced tuition for elementary or secondary union schools. This could put pressure on the independent schools to reduce costs (i.e., staff) or put pressure on parents who pay tuition over and above the average announced tuition to reconsider their choice of schools.

The Proposal

1. Determine the staffing categories to use.
2. Allocate the SU staff to the operating district based on enrollment percentages for an effective district staff.
3. Calculate the FY2018 student/staff ratios for the State as a whole and the effective student/staff ratio for the operating districts.
4. Use the student/staff ratio for the State as a starting point for the target ratio.
5. If a district is under the target ratio by 1.00 (i.e., a whole student per staff FTE), then increase the district's education spending by 2.0% (or some other percentage).
 - a. This increase can be characterized as a fine, a tax, a penalty, or a surcharge on low student/staff ratios.
 - b. Prorate the percentage increase accordingly.
 - i. If the ratio difference is 0.75, then the percentage increase would be 1.75% ($0.75 \times 2.0\%$).
 - ii. If the ratio difference is 1.30, then the percentage increase would be 2.60% ($1.30 \times 2.0\%$).
6. Increasing education spending will be transparent to voters and taxpayers.
 - a. The increase would occur before the tax rate calculation.
 - b. The increase in education spending would then flow through to the district tax rate:
 - i. Increased education spending drives up the cost per pupil
 - ii. The increased cost per pupil will drive up the district tax rate.