

Testimony on H.949: Mountain Views Supervisory Union

Presented by **Sherry Sousa**, Superintendent — House Committee on
Ways and Means

Correct Misconceptions

Context behind MVSD's per-
pupil spending

Highlight Real Impacts

Programmatic cuts forced by
a threshold drop to 112%

Our Position

Support Capital Debt exclusion; urge a phased threshold reduction



MVSD: Recognized – for quality and costs



MVSD is recognized for **strong academic outcomes, diverse student opportunities, and engaged communities** – yet carries a reputation as a top-five highest-spending district in Vermont.

i The numbers alone do not tell the full story. Context is essential.

- Salaries and benefits are within the average, competitive range
- All classrooms meet Act 73 minimum class sizes
- Commended by AOE for special education cost containment
- Central Office is strictly limited to five administrators



Why Is MVSD So Expensive?

Several structural factors – largely outside the Board's control – drive per-pupil spending above the threshold.



Geographic Isolation

Functionally rural, centrally located between Hartford, Springfield, and Rutland. Limited Designated Agency support; schools fill healthcare and transportation gaps.



LTWADM Formula

The weighted membership calculation inflates MVSD's per-pupil cost above districts that actually spend *more* per student in attendance.



Articles of Agreement

Act 46 merger agreements mandate resource allocation, campus maintenance, and a strict school-closure process – all with associated costs.




Universal Pre-K & Facilities

High-quality early education improves outcomes but adds cost. Severely depleted middle/high school facilities compound financial strain.

The LTWADM Formula: A Misleading Comparison

A side-by-side comparison with a Southeast region district reveals how the formula distorts reality.

	MVSD	Comparison District
Students in residence	936	1,236
LTWADM	1,520	2,266
Adopted budget	\$30.77M	\$39.83M
Cost per student (attendance)	\$30,990	\$34,096
LTWADM Ed Spend	\$16,601	\$13,742
Above threshold?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

 MVSD spends **less per student in attendance** than this comparison district – yet the LTWADM formula places MVSD above the threshold and the other district below it.

This structural inequity means MVSD is penalized for factors inherent to rural education, not for overspending.

Why Closing Schools Isn't the Answer

Woodstock Elementary lacks physical capacity to absorb students

Pre-K space requirements reduced available classrooms

Closing RES saves only \$750,000

—still not enough to drop below the threshold

Articles of Agreement in neighboring districts prevent

meaningful consolidation partnerships

Reading Elementary School (RES)

The smallest MVSD school has been raised as a closure candidate. But the math doesn't work:

- Woodstock Elementary cannot physically absorb RES students
- Closing RES saves only **\$750,000** — still above the threshold
- Neighboring district Articles of Agreement block deeper consolidation

📄 School closure is not a viable path to compliance.

The Real Cost of Dropping to 112%

\$1.44M

Additional State Transfer

Extra funds sent to the Ed Fund if threshold drops to 112%

\$0.62

Per Dollar to State

Of every local tax dollar raised, \$0.62 would go to the statewide fund (up from \$0.61)

\$2.86M

Total Taxpayer Excess Cost

Moving from 118% to 112% in a single year adds \$2,862,504 to MVSD taxpayers

6.7%

Budget Increase

Even after freezing all positions and eliminating unfilled roles, costs still rose 6.7%

- ⊗ Our money is going to districts that are **underfunding** education – while MVSD taxpayers bear a disproportionate burden.

Programmatic Cuts: The Human Cost

If H.949 passes as written and the Board level-funds FY28 and FY29 budgets:

1

FY28 Cut

-\$1,305,177 — equivalent to **12 teachers**

2

FY29 Cut

Additional -\$1,298,711 — another **12 teachers**

3

Net Result

20% of teaching staff eliminated in two years

This would **significantly restrict or eliminate Pre-K**, force student relocations across campuses, and greatly reduce learning pathways for secondary students — all while leaving the state's fundamental funding inequities unaddressed.



The Bright Spot: Capital Debt Exclusion

The **strongest merit of H.949** for MVSD is the removal of Capital Debt from the per-pupil spend calculation.

Double-Taxation Penalty

Facility costs artificially inflate per-pupil spend, penalizing communities that have repeatedly voted to invest in safe buildings.

Community Commitment

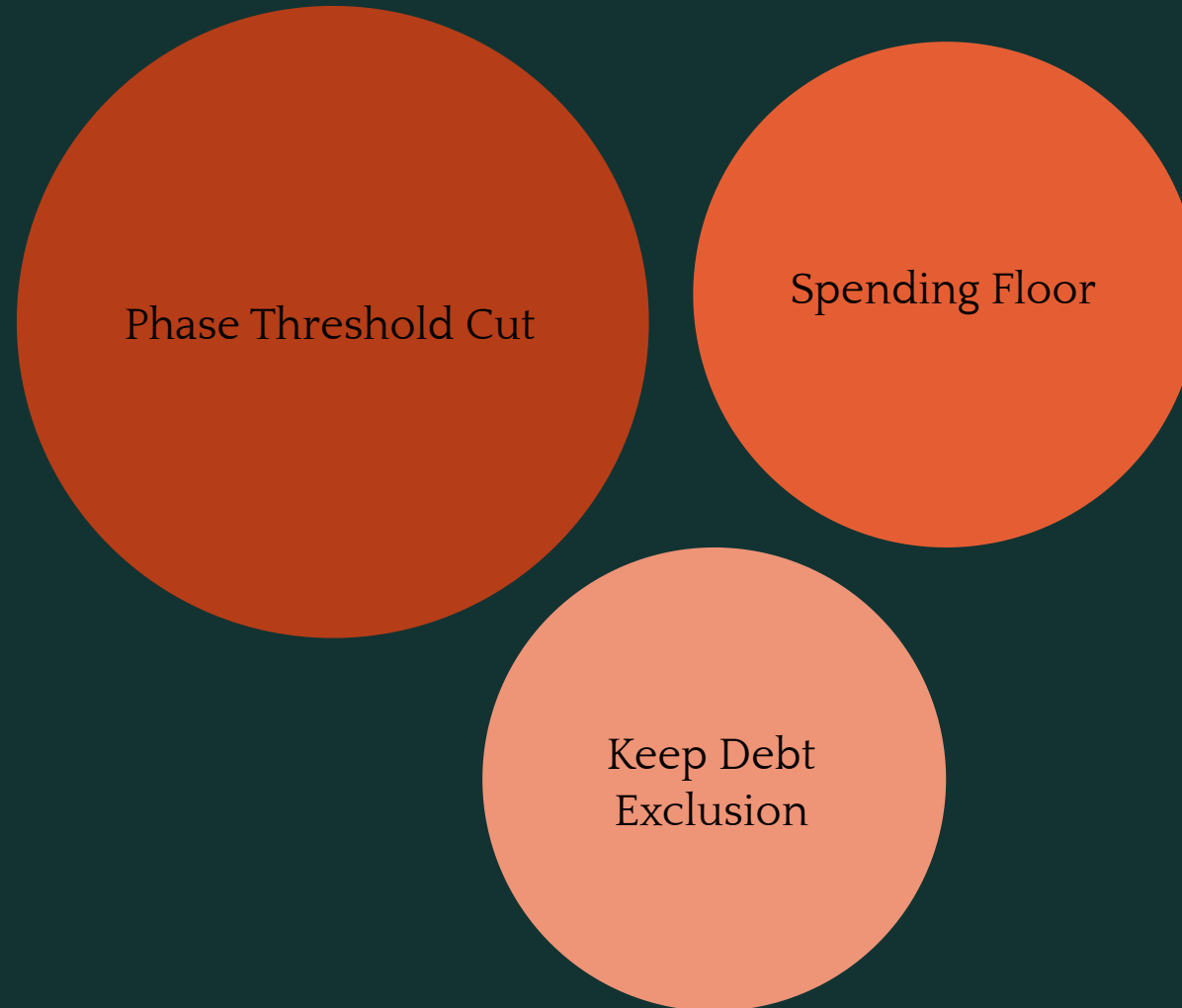
MVSD voters have supported multiple bonds to address a failing middle/high school – demonstrating clear commitment to safe learning environments.

A Path Forward

Decoupling capital expenses finally allows MVSD to address critical infrastructure needs without further budget penalty.



Our Recommendations to the Committee



A phased reduction gives School Boards and communities time to adapt responsibly. A spending minimum ensures Vermont meets its constitutional obligation to educate all children equitably – consistent with the stated aim of the foundation formula.

Our Children Cannot Wait

Our children only have access to this life-changing resource for a very short period of their lives. It is our collective responsibility to ensure those few years in our classrooms meet the expectations of our families, taxpayers, and communities.

Support Capital Debt Exclusion

A critical, commonsense fix that decouples facility investment from per-pupil spending.

Phase the Threshold Reduction

Allow districts time to adapt — a sudden drop to 112% causes irreversible harm.

Define a Spending Floor

Protect rural students from under-resourced schools and compound inequity.

