

Statement to the Commission on the Future of Public Education

by Mill Moore — January 6, 2025

Good afternoon Madam Chair and members of the Commission.

I am Mill Moore, a Vermont native and a 45-year resident of Hartland Vermont. Many of you know me from my past work with the Vermont Independent Schools Association.

I want to stress that I am no longer an independent schools advocate. I retired from that work in August of 2023. Now I am a taxpayer advocate, and a citizen of a school district that experienced a 29 percent tax increase this year.

As you begin the second phase of your legislative mandate, I want to highlight an important idea in the Commission's brainstorm document which is to address **staff to student ratios**. That idea appears on lines 30 and 31 in the list.

I hope everyone on the Commission already knows Vermont's student-teacher ratio is the lowest in the nation. That's an enormous red flag, because **roughly three-fourths of all school spending is on staff salaries and benefits**.

If three-fourths of all Ed spending is supporting a worst-in-the-USA student teacher ratio, **that alone is a compelling reason for further attention**.

So, my recommendation is to **make controlling staffing costs a high priority**.

Though rising health insurance costs were a trigger to last year's crisis, the underlying reason is that staffing costs have increased to extraordinary levels at many Vermont schools.

Vermont's student-teacher ratio currently is around 10.5-to-one. Half of Vermont schools have higher ratios, including many with ratios above 12 to one or even 14 to one. But within the other half many other schools have ratios beneath nine to one and a few are beneath seven to one.

This is an important point to understand, because as far as student-teacher ratios are concerned, consolidating small schools will not solve the low ratio problem.

So, the question I suggest this Commission should be asking is this: ***Why are dozens of Vermont schools able to operate with student-teacher ratios at or in excess of 12 to one?*** What are they doing that lower-performing schools can emulate?

Working on reducing staffing costs can be done by identifying successful staff management techniques in schools with high student to staff ratios and by devising fiscal incentives to correct the problem. Many Vermont school districts can help to show you the way.

I want to add, I also am concerned that **paralysis by analysis is a real danger for this Commission**. Please avoid the temptation to ask for more and more data. You do not need more data nor do you need ever deeper dives into the data pool to see the big picture problems, including the low student-to-staff ratio problem.

To deliver a compelling final report try to **keep your focus on the big picture problems**.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.