

Madam Chair and Members of the Board:

Vermont is made up of many small rural towns. The center of these communities is their school. A lot of these schools are small. Most of them do an excellent job of educating their students. Does this cost money? Yes, especially in today's world where schools are more than reading and arithmetic. Schools are the sometimes the only place where children get fed and/or get their emotional needs cared for. Schools are taking on many of these social issues today. Students can not learn if they are hungry, have emotional problems, have issues at home or have families dealing with addictions. Vermont schools always rate very well nationally and internationally. Is this something we would like to continue or do we financially penalize our smallest schools and create further inequity? We do not need to compare ourselves with poorer education in some other States. Your board can help to decide which way we go. I hope you choose to support the students who attend Vermont's small schools. They are our future.

As to the metrics for Small School Grants on the agenda today.

I would like to know if compliance would be necessary for all or some of the guidelines in order to be eligible for a Small Schools Grant? Is it the Board of Education that makes the final decision?

Looking at the 5 metrics:

Geographic Isolation

- * Consider having different guidelines for elementary and secondary students.
- * Consider multiple metrics. Things such as number of stops, road conditions and weather should be considered. 30 minutes on a bus is too long for youngsters, Pre-K to 5th grade. Students should be in school, learning, not riding a bus for hours a day.
- * Please count the time to school in addition to the time to the next nearest school, as this is a true measure of the time it will take.

High Quality Education Opportunities

- * This should be one of the two most important things for your consideration. **It should be simple. If a small school is meeting or exceeding the State's Educational Quality Standards, and students have equal opportunity, they should qualify for a Small Schools Grant.**

Positive outcomes of students from economically deprived backgrounds

- * This should be the other of the two most important issues. Things to consider are:
 - * How is a school working to close the achievement gap and is it improving?
 - * A Small Schools Grant is very important to small rural schools in order to have success for children of poverty. If these Grants are withheld from these schools, the State will then be contributing to the potential failure of children from poverty, and therefore making it less likely to eliminate the achievement gap. As poverty rates rise, this would directly impact a large number of Vermont's students attending small schools.

Student to Staff ratios

At this time, it doesn't seem necessary for consideration by the State Board as it seems highly probable that the Legislature and the Governor will make this decision.

* But before this happens, a decision has to be made as to who would be included as “staff”

Is it adults in the building, including janitors and kitchen staff?

Definition of students? ADM, equalized or students actually in seats?

Are Supervisory Union staff, proportioned to all students, included?

How about Special Ed, bus drivers, crossing guards etc.

Right now it sounds like comparing apples to oranges as school boards don't have a clue as to who is included in the different ratios that are being bandied about.

The only real comparison between schools should be the comparison of the educators working directly with children.

Participating in a merger study and submission of report to Board of Education

I believe every district in Vermont has participated in some form of governance discussions over the last 2½ years. And I am assuming that, because an Alternative Governance Structure is allowable under the Act 46 law, that any AGS proposal would also qualify under this metric.

Therefore, as all schools would qualify, why have this as a consideration for a Grant?

Thank you for listening to my comments.

*Jody Normandeau
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