

From: Carolyn Schwalbe [mailto:VTschwalbes@comcast.net]
Sent: Wednesday, September 02, 2009 9:38 AM
To: Vilaseca, Armando; Rep. Donovan
Cc: Lee, Cindy
Subject: Project STAR

9-2-09

Dear Representative Donovan and Commissioner Vilaseca:

Here are a few links to the Project STAR (Student Teacher Achievement Ratio) study I referenced at yesterday's meeting. Opinions of the validity and usefulness of the study vary, but please note that "Small Class Size" is defined as 13-17 students, Regular as 22-26, and Regular with one teacher and an aide as 22-26 pupils. The project studied primary/elementary school students. There are many other links to this study.

<http://www.aypf.org/publications/rmaa/pdfs/ClassSizeSTAR.pdf>

<http://skeptidad.wordpress.com/2008/05/08/the-politics-of-reduced-class-size/>

https://www.aera.net/uploadedFiles/Journals_and_Publications/Research_Points/RP_Fall03.pdf

<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=95763060>

Using the STAR class sizes as a guide, Vermont is in the position of being able to **increase** our current number of students per teacher in Vermont to 15:1 or even 17:1 and still be in the "small" class range. It could produce great savings without impacting achievement and effectiveness at all. Of course, flexibility and common sense would be needed if this is implemented.

Commissioner Vilaseca: could someone in your office or the auditor's office run a pro forma to reflect the savings Vermont schools might see if class sizes were modified upwards?

Having served on a school board, I know that school administrators and School Directors do not want more mandates from Montpelier; however, if the cost savings of increasing class size slightly is real and could be presented to the legislature and school directors in a data-based fashion, schools could be encouraged to adopt larger class sizes on their own with great confidence that educational outcomes would not be compromised.

Oftentimes we hear that Vermont's high achievement is linked to our small class size; I would argue that this assertion is a fallacy because, as far as I know, we have no "large class" data in Vermont to which we compare current class ratios when making that claim. It is possible our test scores are high because we have very good teachers not because we have a low student teacher ratio. High test scores in Vermont could be completely attributable to good teachers, attentive parents, and other demographic realities. We simply cannot claim it is due to small class size unless we look at statistical comparisons with larger class sizes within the same population.

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