



Using enrollment to define “small” schools in Vermont
Rural School Community Alliance (RSCA)
November 3, 2025

In our prior memorandum, submitted on Oct. 27, 2025, to the Small Schools and Sparse Schools Standards Committee of the State Board of Education (SBE), we focused on appropriate options for conditioning small school grants on geographic remoteness, using the sparsity of the school’s location (town/city). Here, we wish to highlight a more fundamental point about enrollment itself and **recommend modifying the threshold so that it (1) more accurately and fairly reflects the reality of Vermont schools, and (2) creates more funding stability and predictability for schools and districts.** Feedback from RSCA members in sparsely populated, geographically isolated areas— especially those that have small K-12 schools— has prompted this addendum, as schools in these regions are a necessary part of Vermont’s future education footprint.

Schools with two-year average enrollment below 250 students currently are considered “small” for the purpose of receiving per-pupil small school weights. Eligibility is conditioned on sparsity (population density): the school must be located in a district with fewer than 55 people per square mile. Schools with enrollment below 100 receive a higher per-pupil weight (0.21), and schools with enrollment greater than or equal to 100 receive a lower per-pupil weight (0.07.)

Act 73 replaces the current pupil weighting system (which generates district tax rates) to a system consisting of a base payment and additional weights that generate a per-student state education payment. The new funding system also establishes per-pupil grants for students attending small schools and for students attending schools in sparsely populated locations.

Relative to current practice, Act 73 restricts the definition of “small” to include only schools with two-year average enrollment below 100, and eligibility for state support may be further conditioned, presumably on measures of geographic remoteness (using yet-to-be defined standards under consideration by the SBE— the subject of RSCA’s prior memo.)

As noted above, here we are focused on the Act 73 enrollment threshold, and offer the following.

We strongly suggest retaining support for schools with enrollment at least 100 but below 250. This can be accomplished using graduated support that decreases to zero for schools with enrollment at or above 250. Retaining support in this way will provide districts with more stable and predictable budgeting, as well as avoid harmful funding “cliffs” that arise when using a single support/no support threshold. It would also continue crucial state support for remote, rural K-12 schools in Vermont with enrollment ≥ 100 that are objectively “small.”

Graduated small school support grants

For schools with enrollment between 100 and 250, a graduated system for support would provide the least disruption to students and districts. While there are different mathematical approaches, the overall concept is that schools with enrollment in this range would receive a per-pupil small school grant in an amount that gradually decreases to zero when enrollment reaches the two-year average of 250 students. The table

below provides a summary of one such option, including a similar approach to sparsity grants– that is, schools in locations with sparsity between 36 and 55.

Enrollment E	Small School Grant	Sparsity S	Sparsity Grant
$E < 100$	Full Act 73 amount (\$3,157 per pupil)	$S < 36$	Full Act 73 amount (\$1,954 per pupil)
		$36 \leq S < 55$	Graduated/decreasing per-pupil amount**: \$1,954 when $S = 36$, decreasing to \$0 for $S = 55$
$100 \leq E < 250$	Graduated/decreasing per-pupil amount*: \$3,157 when $E = 100$, decreasing to \$0 for $E = 250$	$S < 36$	Full Act 73 amount (\$1,954 per pupil)
		$36 \leq S < 55$	Graduated/decreasing per-pupil amount**: \$1,954 when $S = 36$, decreasing to \$0 for $S = 55$

* Per-pupil small school grant amount formula: $G_{sms} = 3,157 - \left(\frac{3,157}{150}\right) \times (E - 100)$

** Per-pupil sparsity grant amount formula: $G_{sp} = 1,954 - \left(\frac{1,954}{19}\right) \times (S - 36)$

Total per-pupil grant examples

- $E = 90, S = 30 \Rightarrow 3,157 + 1,954 = \$5,111.$
- $E = 90, S = 50 \Rightarrow 3,157 + [1,954 - \left(\frac{1,954}{19}\right) \times 14] = 3,157 + 514.21 = \$3671.21.$
- $E = 150, S = 20 \Rightarrow [3,157 - \left(\frac{3,157}{150}\right) \times 50] + 1,954 = 2,104.67 + 1,954 = \$4,058.67.$
- $E = 150, S = 50 \Rightarrow [3,157 - \left(\frac{3,157}{150}\right) \times 50] + [1,954 - \left(\frac{1,954}{19}\right) \times 14] = 2,104.67 + 514.21 = \$2,618.88.$

As discussed in RSCA's prior memo, using a school's geometric remoteness, as measured by the sparsity of its location, is an appropriate way to condition state support of small schools. Given that population density is objectively measurable, readily available for all Vermont school locations, calculated (and can be applied) the same way everywhere, and is also a recognized additional cost factor, sparsity may be the most appropriate and fair option.

The approach described here for continuing state support of schools with enrollment between 100 and 250 students also meets these important criteria and will provide crucial stability, predictability, and continuity to Vermont schools, students, and communities.