

**From:** Ken Fredette <[kfredettevt@gmail.com](mailto:kfredettevt@gmail.com)>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, October 23, 2024 7:06 PM  
**To:** Roy, Meagan She/Her/Hers <[Meagan.Roy@partner.vermont.gov](mailto:Meagan.Roy@partner.vermont.gov)>  
**Subject:** Re: Olsen memo

I would be glad to have you forward my comments to commissioners - I would have copied Oliver if I had his e-mail address.

I guess I'd like it to be part of public comments as well, since his memo is, if that makes sense.

Thanks,

Ken

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**From:** Ken Fredette <[kfredettevt@gmail.com](mailto:kfredettevt@gmail.com)>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, October 23, 2024 6:04 PM  
**To:** Roy, Meagan She/Her/Hers <[Meagan.Roy@partner.vermont.gov](mailto:Meagan.Roy@partner.vermont.gov)>  
**Subject:** Olsen memo

Dear Chair Roy,

Thank you, once again, for facilitating the important work of the Commission on the Future of Public Education in Vermont.

I was just reading the memo regarding Short-Term Cost Containment Suggestions from Commissioner Olsen, dated 10-21-24. This, near the bottom of page three, caught my eye:

If this concern is being framed in relation to a concern about spending in these school districts, there needs to be an examination of per pupil spending to determine whether independent school tuition is actually translating into higher education spending in those districts. A good place to start is the most recent AOE data on FY25 per pupil spending, published on October 14, 2024.

As you may recall, I feel quite strongly that private\* schools need to show us their books - that would also be "a good place to start". Not only is it astounding to me that *any* entity being supported by public dollars can skirt around that, but it redefines ludicrous that Mr. Olsen would suggest an "examination" without all pertinent information being available. He quotes an AoE report published last week on FY '25 data when we are not quite 1/3 of the way through that fiscal year, and in the following pages of his memo, he shares numbers that he wants us to see. At the bottom of page three, he touts:

This data shows that for FY25, these eight districts collectively have average Per Pupil (LTWADM) Education Spending that is lower than the FY25 state average (\$13,226):

And after sharing a chart, he writes:

The VSBA/VSA/VASBO recommendation to limit tuition to AAT would have a profoundly negative impact on students and their families. By limiting a school district's ability to pay the full tuition, educational opportunity and equity would be seriously compromised for students in some of the state's most rural communities.

Pivoting from Ed Spending numbers to Average Announced Tuition rates as if they were one and the same. At the top of page 5, he writes:

The fiscal fallacy in the VSBA/VSA/VASBO recommendation is that it suggests that AAT reflects the actual cost of educating a student. It does not

Arguing with himself, I reckon.

He then writes:

In fact, school districts can arbitrarily set any number as their "Announced Tuition" rates, which are then used to calculate AAT.

Um, no, not really.

Finally, still on page five, he writes a highly accusatory:

Because there is a billback provision under current law (16 VSA § 836), which requires any shortfall between the two tuition rates to be reconciled, school districts can strategically publish a low "announced tuition" number, knowing that there is a mechanism to recapture the difference once the true cost becomes known.

School districts do not arbitrarily pick a number without any guiding parameters. The State of Vermont provides a template for school districts to plug budget numbers into to determine as closely as possible tuition rates; there is a 3% swing in either direction from rates announced in January to the actual rates at the end of the fiscal year where no reconciliations are required (or allowed); there is a cap of 10% on any reconciliations, so any "windfall" would be limited to a net of 7%, as would any shortfall; public school districts communicate with each other regularly during budget season to avoid surprises - private schools do not have to show us their books. To blatantly state that public schools are somehow gaming the system is a classic example of deflection and projection.

\* I find Mr. Olsen's protestation of the use of the word "private" in the footnote on the bottom of page three childish, at best:

1 "Private School" is an antiquated term now used as a pejorative, which educators, students, and families in Vermont's independent school community view as offensive. Vermont's independent schools are called "independent schools", which is also how they are defined and described in Vermont State Statutes and Regulations.

Personally, I find the use of "independent" as somewhat offensive, as it is a not-too-subtle attempt to add a certain loftiness to private schools over public. If one were playing a Password type game, and the clue was "If it's not public it's...", I seriously doubt a contestant would blurt out "Independent!"

Perhaps we should start referring to public schools as "Constitutionally mandated" schools.

One thing that remains crystal clear beyond all the smoke and mirrors is that whatever the numbers are, if students currently attending private schools were to be enrolled in public schools educational opportunities would increase and property tax rates would decrease; there is no escaping those facts no matter how good one is at spinning tales to support their personal agendas.

I defer to your judgement, Dr. Roy, as to whether to include this in public comments for the Commission at this point, or not, because my ongoing hope is that the truth will prevail eventually.

Respectfully submitted,

Ken Fredette,

Wallingford