

AOE Testimony: Pupil Weighting Factors Report

Testimony To: House Committee on Ways and Means
Respectfully Submitted by: Daniel M. French, Ed.D., Secretary of Education
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Policy Recommendation

The cost factors recommended by the [Pupil Weighting Factors Report](#) (Poverty, % ELL, Enrollment, Population Density, Middle Grades, and Secondary Grades) were based on regional and national comparisons and confirmed by an empirical modelling of Vermont data. These factors should be adopted to replace the current factors, the origins of which could not be confirmed by the Report.

The Report found the current pupil weights to be outdated. They do not represent current educational circumstances or costs. In particular, the variation between the current poverty weight (0.25) as compared to the poverty weight determined through the analysis from the Report (3.14) suggests **immediate action by the General Assembly is necessary** to address a significant equity concern in the current education funding system.

The Report identified broad dissatisfaction with the current Smalls Schools Grant. Its parameters are rather subjective and not consistent with the goals of other policies such as Act 46. The new cost factors identified in the Report of school size and population density should be implemented in lieu of the Small Schools Grant.

Pupil Weights

The Report proposes two alternative sets of pupil weights:

1. *weights without Students With Disabilities (SWDs),*

and

2. *weights with SWDs.*

I believe the **first alternative** is the better approach. It would better support a more discrete mechanism for the categorical grant funding of special education costs consistent with the findings of Act 173.

Per Capita (Census-based) Grant

In terms of the per capita or census-based block grant, the Report provides two options:

1. *increase the per capita grant amount for those districts that serve larger numbers of SWDs,*

or

2. *increase the number of students multiplied against the per capita grant amount using the pupil weights recommended in the Report.*

Since the block grant amount was derived from empirical analysis in the earlier UVM Report that supported the creation of Act 173, I believe the better approach would be the **second option**, to adjust the total special education categorical grant amount by increasing the pupil count not the grant amount itself. This approach would give the new pupil weights and the shift from a reimbursement model to the block grant model time to be implemented before any adjustments are made. As identified in the early UVM Report, it appears Vermont already spends twice the national average on a per IEP basis so it is unlikely the block grant amount when adjusted for appropriate student weights will be inadequate.

Ensuring Equal Educational Opportunity

Addressing the mechanics of the educational funding system consistent with the Report are necessary to ensure equal tax effort and to establish the necessary financial preconditions for equal educational opportunity. In order to enact equal opportunity, a **more rigorous regulatory framework should be considered** through the establishment of School District Quality Standards to provide districts with baseline input quality measures to ensure districts are using their taxing capacity to make adequate investments in their operations including school district facilities and instructional systems.