Rebecca Buck

From: Sent: To: Subject: Jody Normandeau <jodydvt@gmail.com> Monday, March 16, 2020 2:26 PM Rebecca Buck Weighting Study

Dear Ms Buck:

Would you please deliver my letter below to the members of the Senate Appropriations Committee.

Thank you and please stay well.

Sincerely,

Jody Normandeau Dummerston

250 Tucker Reed Road

Dummerston, VT 05301

March 16, 2020

Dear Members of the Senate Appropriations Committee:

I am writing today concerning the weighting study commissioned by and now being discussed by the legislature. I am asking you to be in favor of, and work to implement this study. It can not wait. It has waited far too long.

Twenty-Three years ago (February, 1997), a decision was handed down by the Vermont Supreme Court, called the Brigham Decision, that guaranteed the right to equal educational opportunities. The decision stated that children living in property poor districts should be afforded an equal opportunity of access to a similar education and state revenues as those children who lived in property rich districts.

Just four months later, in June, 1997, the legislature passed Act 60, a law that was supposed to make sure that every child had access to an equal education. This came with a horrendously complicated education formula that most people could never understand. It is now widely believed that Act 60 violates Brigham.

For twenty-three years, our area's students and so many others, have been shortchanged by Act 60 and the financial formula that has been used throughout these years. School districts have tried to take care of the huge increase in students living with poverty. But because the formula did not weight students properly,

districts have had to cut and cut many good programs that would have helped these students. Added costs for caring for the students in poverty and all their needs have only increased budgets over the thresh hold, thereby incurring penalties, and costing their taxpayers even more.

Over the last twenty-three years, rural areas with smaller schools have complained that they are not getting funding based on the types of student they have. Students, especially of lower income, have fallen behind students of more means. Students who need help learning the English language need more help. Small rural schools without good access to libraries and internet etc. have not been helped. And on top of all of this, the legislature has kept handing down more and more unfunded mandates that cost more money to the districts.

Then came Act 46, in 2015, that forced schools across the state to consolidate whether or not there was a need and whether or not their towns voted to merge or not. They were all merged, at the whim of the Agency of Education, by way of the State Board of Education and were supposed to bring equity and save money. Consolidation has not done either of these. Now, because of this forced consolidation, small rural schools are being over run and even closed by the larger towns in their district. Schools that had large debts have now pushed that debt on schools that had no debt. And there are so many other issues.

In 2018, Act 173 was passed requiring a study to evaluate the current weighting of students. UVM, Rutgers, and The American Institutes of Research were commissioned to look at how the State's educational money was being spent and whether it was being spent equitably across the state. The study came back to the legislature and has made it pretty clear that students of poverty, students who don't speak english, small rural schools miles away from larger centers of population, and students in Middle Schools, especially in smaller schools, have been penalized and short changed for 23 years, by not being weighted properly

It is now up to the legislature to make this right, especially for the students of poverty and the small rural schools They deserve to have equal access of education to bring them up to their peers. They deserve to have all the benefits of richer and larger towns. They have been short changed for twenty-three years. Act 60 and Act 46 are not working the way they were envisioned. Past legislators are even now saying Act 46, as enacted, is not what they voted for.

There are people in the state education hierarchy now who are asking you to go slowly. Act 60 was passed <u>four</u> months after the Supreme Court Brigham decision. Please do not wait to change the funding mechanism. Today's legislature could at least start to fix this problem. They have had plenty of time to think about it over the years, as there have been many pleas to change the funding system. We now know what the poorer schools have always known, and it is affecting towns all over the State. If this is not addressed, there will probably be many court challenges to Act 60 to come. Vermont needs to address this sooner, not later.

Please read the letters coming to you and listen to the testimony from the local people. (The boots on the ground.) The State Education Associations do not represent the people. They only represent their organizations. You are the people's voice and you need to represent us.

Thank you very much for listening.

Sincerely,

Jody Normandeau

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