

1 TO THE HONORABLE SENATE:

2 The Committee on Education to which was referred Senate Bill No. 46
3 entitled “An act relating to ethnic and social equity studies standards for public
4 schools” respectfully reports that it has considered the same and recommends
5 that the bill be amended by striking out all after the enacting clause and
6 inserting in lieu thereof the following:

7 Sec. 1. FINDINGS

8 (a) 2018 Acts and Resolves No. 173, Sec. 11 directed the Agency of
9 Education to undertake a study examining and evaluating the current formula
10 used to weigh economically disadvantaged students, English language learners,
11 and secondary-level students in Vermont for purposes of calculating equalized
12 pupils. The study was also to consider whether new cost factors and weights
13 should be included in the equalized pupil calculation.

14 (b) The findings from the Pupil Weighting Factors Report dated December
15 23, 2019 (Report), produced by a University of Vermont-led team of
16 researchers including national experts on student weighting, were stark, stating
17 that “[n]either the factors considered by the [current] formula nor the value of
18 the weights reflect contemporary education circumstances and costs.” The
19 Report also found that the current “values for the existing weights have weak
20 ties, if any, with evidence describing the difference in the costs of educating
21 students with disparate needs or operating schools in different contexts.”

1 (c) As a corrective to this situation, the major recommendations of the
2 Report are straightforward, specifically that the General Assembly increase
3 certain of the existing weights and that it add population density (rurality) as a
4 new weighting factor, given the Report’s finding that rural districts pay more
5 to educate a student. However, given the statewide nature of Vermont’s
6 education funding system, and the reality that any change in the weighting
7 formula is complex due to its relationship to other educational policies and will
8 produce fluctuations in tax rates across the State, the General Assembly has
9 chosen to develop a phased approach to revising the weighting formula.

10 Sec. 2. PUPIL WEIGHTING FACTORS; IMPLEMENTATION REPORT;

11 PUBLIC OUTREACH

12 (a) On or before December 15, 2020, the Agency of Education, in
13 collaboration with the State Board of Education and stakeholders from the
14 education community, including the Vermont Superintendents Association, the
15 Vermont School Boards Association, the Vermont Principals Association, and
16 the Vermont-NEA, shall develop a plan of implementation (Implementation
17 Plan) for the Report’s recommended weighting changes, found in Table E.1 of
18 the Report’s Executive Summary, under the heading “New Weight Derived
19 from Models with Controls for SWDs,” provided that the Implementation Plan
20 shall not include the recommended enrollment weights. This Implementation
21 Plan shall include:

1 (1) a timeline for phasing in the equalized pupil weighting changes over
2 three years;

3 (2) a design for the implementation that is sensitive to the effect on
4 property taxes and budgets in all of Vermont’s school districts; and

5 (3) consideration of the new formula’s interaction with other provisions
6 of existing law, including the excess spending penalty threshold, the hold-
7 harmless provision, the effect on non-operating districts and the districts to
8 which they pay tuition, small school grants, and incentives created under 2015
9 Acts and Resolves No. 46.

10 (b) As part of its collaboration with the Agency of Education under
11 subsection (a) of this section, on or before December 1, 2020, the State Board
12 of Education shall hold not less than six public meetings in different regions of
13 the State, both to help educate the public about the financial realities of the
14 weighting formula and any changes to it and to gather public input on the
15 Report and its proposed implementation. The Board shall refer this testimony
16 to the Agency of Education, which shall use the input to inform its
17 Implementation Plan.

18 (c) The Agency will deliver its completed Implementation Plan to the
19 House and Senate Committees on Education, and to the House Ways and
20 Means and to the Senate Finance Committees, no later than December 15,
21 2020.

