



VERMONT PRINCIPALS' ASSOCIATION  
MEMO

From the Desk of Jay Nichols

*The Vermont Principals' Association supports school leaders to improve the equity and quality of educational opportunities for all students.*

**Testimony on Pupil Weighting Factors Report: Senate Education 2/19/20**

- Please consider this initial testimony on the report. I am certainly very interested in this topic and may want to weigh in further as appropriate.
- Be Quick, Don't Hurry. You want it bad you may get it bad!
- If you believe the validity of the points made in the study, especially around poverty weighting, there is a moral imperative to act. I personally think the study is extremely well done. The question however is how, and when, to act.
- Thoughts on Perspectives shared for study:
  - I agree the current weighting process is outdated; additionally, I know of no research data that supports the formulation of the current weights which I believe appeared in the education finance formula over 30 years ago.
  - I have been a critic of previous small schools grants and feel that the state, in many cases, has unnecessarily provided grants to schools that were not really geographically isolated and all of us have paid extra for inefficiencies that have also, in some cases, reduced student opportunities.
  - The VPA fully supports the concept of a categorical funding stream targeted for supporting student mental health needs in schools and providing instruction for staff to better support students in

trauma. Schools continue to serve as a branch of mental health. When schools provide the funding necessary to support the mental health needs of our students, this takes away resources for instructional needs and adds further burden to property taxpayers and school budgets.

- VPA believes that Early Childhood students should be counted in proportion to the amount of time they spend in the school. A full day ADM should be used when a school has a full-day early childhood program. This would serve as an incentive to increase Pre-K - something all research supports doing
- Like other interviewees in the weighting study, I too, worry that districts who may receive extra spending capacity without raising their tax rates may instead use this as a tax break and not provide funding to increase opportunities to students or to improve deterioration of facilities due to lack of preventive maintenance
- Recommended Cost Factors and Weights
  - I believe the five cost factors are the right five: student economic disadvantage, ELL students, Middle & Secondary students, Geographically Necessary Schools, Population Density
    - Student economic disadvantage
      - Ton of research connecting poverty to adverse learning, test scores, etc.
      - Many of us have believed for years that the weighting for poverty has not been tied to any realistic economic indicator of the extra financial support necessary to support students in poverty in our schools
      - This is a HUGE change and by itself will create a feeling of "winners" and "losers" we need to make sure we fully understand the impact
    - ELL students
      - Obviously, more resources are needed to support students for whom English is not their first language. In fact, a number of our ELL students arrive in Vermont with no understanding of English and/or might not be literate in their native language
    - Middle & Secondary

- This is largely due to increased licensing needs for content that is required in middle and secondary schools
  - Geographically Necessary Schools
    - We need to clearly define what geographically necessary means
    - We should examine this in the context of Act 46, declining enrollment, increasing expectations of schools, substandard facilities ...
  - Population Density
    - More dense populations tend to have better resources that schools and families can draw upon
    - Conversely, less densely populated places tend to have less resources and an increased extra burden of transportation to services
    - Hopefully, population density can allow us to have a more reliable metric and we can move away from the concept of small school grants
- Act 173/Students with Disabilities connection to Weighting Study
  - In keeping with Act 173, and the expectation of high quality implementation of this law, I believe that the weights in the report should be without students with disabilities counted should the weighting study be implemented. I believe this is more consistent with the Census Block Grant approach of 173.
- The legislature needs to understand the details of the weighting study and what implementation would look like and what the impact would be across the state
  - I believe there needs to be a study commission assigned that is given the resources necessary to study the report in detail and make recommendations to the legislature to include, but not be limited to, the following:
    - Recommended implementation date of all or part of the report
    - To provide specific recommendations regarding all aspects of the report by date certain set by legislature
      - This will need to be done thoughtfully, as budget considerations are of paramount importance here, thus timing matters

- The Legislature would then act on recommendations and put forth a law to address the issues in the report and from the recommendations at the beginning of the next biennium
- Finally, any legislative action as a result of the weighting report needs to consider the dynamic and complex education public policy initiative-laden whirlwind our schools currently exist within: Flexible Pathways, Early Childhood education, Act 173 (Census-Based Special Education funding and delivery model), Act 46, and so on. Let's make sure we take necessary action that is thoughtful and well planned out