



**Vermont
RURAL
EDUCATION
Collaborative**

Open Letter to: Governor Phil Scott, Lt. Governor David Zuckerman, Philip Baruth, Chair of the Senate Education Committee, Kate Webb, Chair of the House Education Committee, John Carroll, Chair of the State Board of Education

January 24, 2020

Dear Vermont Policy Makers:

The Vermont Rural Education Collaborative includes 44 schools from Canaan in the Northeast East Kingdom to Bradford in the Connecticut River Valley. Our school-communities have some of the highest poverty levels and include the most sparsely populated areas in Vermont. We implore the legislature to take the recommendations of the recent University of Vermont weighting study seriously and pick up deliberations this legislative session. The study provides long overdue research for the review and revision to our current school funding model.

Both the initial 2017 study and the most recent UVM study affirm the necessary adjustments to the current equalized pupil weighting formula necessary to implement Act 173. As educators in classrooms and schools every day, we know that concentrations of economic disadvantage require additional school wide support. Without increased funding for schools with demonstrated high percentages of students identified for special education, the census block grant model will result in a significant transfer of fiscal support from districts with high needs to districts with low needs. Section 11 of Act 173 calls for a "census grant supplemental adjustment" based on pupil weighting factors. We must align implementation of Act 173 with changes recommended by the weighting study.

The flexibility intended in Act 173 will not be achievable with diminished state support for those schools that potentially need it the most. Shifting the financial burden to local districts is inherently inequitable when meeting the variable needs of children within very different contexts across the state. Additionally, the current method for distribution of small school grants is flawed. A multi layer system based on merger decisions is inequitable; on average small schools in merged districts are higher spending and have lower poverty levels than the unmerged districts who on average spend less and have higher poverty levels.

The weighting study makes sensible recommendations which address scale, poverty, sparsity and geography which would provide a fair and equitable system to replace the current unfair distribution of funds. Please: reflect upon the results of the weighting study, review the overall approach to weighting and equalization of pupils, adopt the recommendations.

We, 44 schools and seven supervisory unions strong, stand ready to engage in the dialogue and action necessary. Thank you for your leadership in tackling these imperative issues.

VREC proposes to contract with the University of Vermont for foundational research that describes existing delivery human services delivery systems in a purposive sample of SUs, and the funding mechanisms and costs associated with implementing these systems of support.

Respectfully,

The Vermont Rural Education Collaborative Executive Committee

Jennifer Botzjornis, Superintendent Kingdom East
John Castle, Superintendent North Country Schools

Emilie Knisley, Superintendent Orange East
Karen Conroy, Superintendent Canaan/Essex N

VREC vtruraledu.org includes

Caledonia Central, Essex North, Kingdom East, North Country, Orange East, Orleans Central, St. Johnsbury