

March 7, 2020

Re: Pupil Weighting Study

Dear Members of the Senate Education Committee,

When we heard that the tax rate in Marlboro was going to go up by 18% due to the school budget, we were incensed that the school board could do that to the people in this town. When we educated ourselves and found that the driver for this increase was not lavish spending by the school board, but rather a number of things beyond their control, our indignation found a new target, the VT Legislature.

By far the most galling part of the outrageous increase in taxes that all Marlboro taxpayers will have to endure, if they can, is the fact that it is largely due to a faulty Pupil Weighting System that the legislature has not been monitoring and adjusting to ensure equity. The 2019 Pupil Weighting Study shows that the formula used to establish state-wide Education Taxes has been irrationally calculated for well over a decade. If you are unclear what we mean by that, we point you to page 4 of the Executive Summary of the Pupil Weighting Study which includes this statement:

*The cost factors incorporated in the calculation do not reflect current educational circumstance. ... Neither the factors considered by the formula nor the value of the weights reflect contemporary educational circumstances and costs.*

And if that isn't galling enough, the bullet point below that one is even more exasperating:

*The values for the existing weights have weak ties, if any, with evidence describing differences in the costs for educating students with disparate needs or operating schools in different contexts.*

Weak ties, if any, to evidence... Wow.

As a result of this baseless assessment, Marlboro School District taxpayers are being assessed a penalty of more than \$200,000 for the coming property tax year. Our part in this will be in excess of \$1,000 and turns our tax bill from a painful inevitability to an excruciating burden. We shudder to think what it will do to the folks in town who, like many Vermonters who are in districts suffering under the existing system, are land rich and cash poor.

A side effect of this inequity has been the insult to injury of our not being able to fund badly needed repairs to our school. The roof leaks in one of the upper classrooms and the school board was ready to propose a significant improvement project to address the problem but had to hold off due to this ridiculous inequity. Now kids in the 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> room next year will again have to deploy buckets when it rains.

It is imperative that the Legislature implement the recommendations of the 2019 Pupil Weighting Study Report in 2020 to start to make amends for the burdens it has placed upon taxpayers of our town — along with many others throughout the State — for decades. Only then will you begin to atone for the legislative oversight failure that is imperiling our students' rights to a safe, secure, equitable education and relieve our taxpayers from the undue burden they have been carrying for many years. In addition, the \$200,000 penalty assessed as a result of applying a Pupil Weighting system that is outdated and without basis in fact must be waived. Not to do so in light of the findings of the Pupil Weighting Study would be unconscionable.

Many Vermont towns are in the same boat as Marlboro. As elected leaders in the legislature, it is your duty to pursue fairness in education funding and as citizens of VT, we are sure it is something you wholeheartedly support. There are no doubt people on the committee who live in towns in which a change would bring about an increase in taxes. Although this puts you in a difficult spot, it also provides you with a chance to show true courage and leadership by righting a wrong that has been in place for far too long. Please do not miss this opportunity. Vote to implement the Study recommendations and eliminate unjust Education Tax penalties before the end of this session.

Thank you for your time and service,  
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