

Sec. 1. FINDINGS

Section 11 of No.173 of the 2018 Acts and Resolves directed the Agency of Education to undertake a study examining and evaluating the current formula used to weight economically-disadvantaged students, English language learners, secondary-level and preschool students in Vermont. At the same time, the study was to consider whether new cost factors and weights should be included in the equalized pupil calculation.

The December 2019 findings, produced by a UVM-led team of researchers including national experts on student weighting, were stark. “Neither the factors considered by the [current] formula nor the value of the weights reflect contemporary education circumstances and costs,” according to the research team; more unsettling still was their finding that the “values for the existing weights have weak ties, if any, with evidence describing the difference in the costs of educating students with disparate needs or operating schools in different contexts.” (“Study of Pupil Weights in Vermont’s Education Funding Formula,” Kolbe, et al.)

As a corrective to this situation, the major recommendations of the report are straightforward: that the Legislature increase certain of the existing weights and that it add population density (rurality) as a new weighting factor – given the report’s finding that rural districts pay more to educate a student, and have been historically underfunded in this regard.

Given the statewide nature of Vermont’s education funding system, however – and the reality that any change in the weighting formula will produce fluctuations in tax rates across the map – the Legislature has chosen to develop a phased approach to implementation of the findings.

Sec. 2 PUPIL WEIGHTING FACTORS; IMPLEMENTATION REPORT; PUBLIC OUTREACH

- (a) On or before December 15, 2020, the Agency of Education, in collaboration with the State Board of Education and stakeholders from the education community – including but not limited to the Vermont Superintendents Association, the Vermont School Boards Association, the Vermont Principals Association, and the Vermont-NEA – shall develop a Plan of Implementation for the Kolbe study’s recommended weighting changes, found in Table E.1 of the report’s Executive Summary, under the heading “New Weight Derived from Models with Controls for SWDs.” This Plan shall include:
 - (1) a timeline for phasing in the equalized pupil weighting changes over 3 years;
 - (2) a design for the implementation that is sensitive to the effect on property taxes and budgets in all of Vermont’s school districts;
 - (3) a consideration of the new formula’s interaction with other provisions of existing law, including the excess spending penalty threshold, the hold-harmless provision,

the effect on non-operating districts and the districts to which they pay tuition, small school grants, and incentives created under 2015 Acts and Resolves No. 46.

- (b) As part of its collaboration with the Agency of Education under subsection (a) of this section, on or before December 1, 2020, the State Board of Education shall hold not less than six public meetings in different regions of the State both to help educate the public about the financial realities of the weighting formula and any changes thereto, and to gather public input on the weighting report and its proposed implementation. This testimony the Board shall refer to the Agency of Education, which will use the input to inform its Plan of Implementation.
- (c) The Agency will deliver its completed Plan of Implementation to the House and Senate Committees on Education, and to the House Ways and Means and the Senate's Finance Committee, no later than December 15, 2020.

Sec. 3 REQUIREMENT FOR ADDITIONAL LEGISLATIVE ACTION

During the first year of the 2021-2022 biennium, the House and Senate Committees on Education will consider the Agency's Plan of Implementation, making such changes as they may deem necessary. A positive vote of both the House and Senate, and the signature of the Governor, will then be required to put the Plan of Implementation into effect.

Sec. 4 EFFECTIVE DATE

This act shall take effect on passage.

And that after passage the title of the bill be amended to read: "An Act Relating to the Implementation of the Pupil Weighting Factors Report"