

S.13

An act relating to the implementation of the Pupil Weighting Factors Report
It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

Sec. 1. FINDINGS

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

(b) The findings from the Pupil Weighting Factors Report dated December 24, 2019 (Report), produced by a University of Vermont-led team of researchers, including national experts on student weighting, were stark, stating that “[n]either the factors considered by the [current] formula nor the value of the weights reflect contemporary educational circumstances and costs.” The Report also found that the current “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.”

(c) As a corrective to this situation, the major recommendations of the Report are straightforward, specifically that the General Assembly 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. However, given the statewide nature of Vermont's education funding system and the reality that any change in the weighting formula is complex due to its relationship to other educational policies and will produce fluctuations in tax rates across the State, the General Assembly has chosen to develop a phased approach to revising the weighting formula.

Sec. 2. TASK FORCE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PUPIL
WEIGHTING FACTORS REPORT

(a) Creation. There is created the Task Force on the Implementation of the Pupil Weighting Factors Report. The Task Force shall recommend to the General Assembly an action plan and proposed legislation to ensure that all public school students have equitable access to educational opportunities, taking into account the Pupil Weighting Factors Report dated December 24, 2019 (Report), produced by a University of Vermont-led team of researchers.

(b) Membership. The Task Force shall be a legislative task force and shall be composed of the following six members:

- (1) the Chair of the Senate Committee on Finance or designee;
- (2) the Chair of the Senate Committee on Education or designee;
- (3) the Chair of the House Committee on Ways and Means or designee;
- (4) the Chair of the House Committee on Education or designee;

(5) the Secretary of Education or designee; and

(6) the Chair of the State Board of Education or designee.

(c) Powers and duties. The Task Force shall recommend to the General Assembly an action plan and proposed legislation to ensure that all public school students have equitable access to educational opportunities, taking into account the Report, and shall:

(1) recommend which weighting factors to modify or create and their associated weights and whether any weights should be eliminated in lieu of categorical aid;

(2) consider use of categorical aid, including whether categorical aid should be used instead of some or all of the weighting factors and, if weighting factors are used, whether small schools grants, transportation aid, and other State grant funding targeted for a specific purpose should be adjusted or terminated;

(3) recommend how to ensure that school districts are using funding to meet education quality standards and improve student outcomes and opportunities;

(4) consider education property tax rates and the taxing capacity of school districts and how the Task Force's recommendations relate to the recommendations of the Vermont Tax Structure Commission Report dated February 8, 2021;

(5) recommend how to transition to the new weights or categorical aid to promote equity and ease the financial impact on school districts during the transition, including the availability and use of federal funding;

(6) recommend how tuition rates for non-operating school districts and career technical centers should be adjusted to account for the cost of educating students as reflected in the recommended weights or categorical aid;

(7) consider school funding formulas in other states and alternative models for school funding;

(8) consider the relationship between the recommended weights or categorical aid and the changes to special education funding under 2018 Acts and Resolves No. 173; and

(9) consider the impact of the recommended weights or categorical aid on the goals and outcomes of 1997 Acts and Resolves No. 60 and 2015 Acts and Resolves No. 46, each as amended.

(d) Consultant. The Task Force shall retain a consultant to assist it with executing its powers and duties. The consultant shall have expertise and experience in providing advice on Vermont's education funding and tax system and shall be nationally recognized in the field of education funding and tax systems.

(e) Collaboration. In performing its duties under this section, the Task Force shall collaborate with the Vermont Superintendents Association, the

Vermont School Boards Association, the Vermont Council of Special Education Administrators, the Vermont Principals' Association, the Vermont Independent Schools Association, and the Vermont-National Education Association.

(f) Public meetings. The Task Force shall hold one or more meetings to share information and receive input from the public concerning its work, which may be part of or separate from its regular meetings.

(g) Report. On or before January 15, 2022, the Task Force shall submit a written report to the House and Senate Committees on Education, the House Committee on Ways and Means, and the Senate Committee on Finance with its action plan and proposed legislation.

(h) Meetings.

(1) The Secretary of Education shall call the first meeting of the Task Force to occur on or before August 1, 2021.

(2) The Task Force shall select a chair from among its members at the first meeting.

(3) A majority of the membership shall constitute a quorum.

(4) The Task Force shall meet not more than 12 times.

(i) Assistance. The Task Force shall have the:

(1) administrative assistance from the Agency of Education, which shall include organizing meetings and taking minutes;

(2) technical assistance of the Joint Fiscal Office, which shall include contracting with, and overseeing the work of, the consultant and data analysis and computation;

(3) assistance from the consultant, which shall include assistance with executing the Task Force's powers and duties and writing the report required under subsection (g) of this section; and

(4) legal assistance from Office of Legislative Counsel, which shall include legal advice and drafting proposed legislation.

(j) Compensation and reimbursement. For attendance at meetings during adjournment of the General Assembly, a legislative member of the Task Force shall be entitled to per diem compensation and reimbursement of expenses pursuant to 2 V.S.A. § 23 for not more than 12 meetings. These payments shall be made from monies appropriated to the General Assembly.

Sec. 3. REQUIREMENT FOR ADDITIONAL LEGISLATIVE ACTION

During the second year of the 2021–2022 biennium, the House and Senate Committees on Education, the House Committee on Ways and Means, and the Senate Committee on Finance shall consider the action plan and legislation proposed by the Task Force on the Implementation of the Pupil Weighting Factors Report created under Sec. 2 of this act. It is the intent of the General Assembly that it pass legislation during the second year of the biennium that implements changes to how education is funded to ensure that all public school

students have equitable access to educational opportunities. A positive vote of both the House and Senate, and approval by the Governor, would be required to implement these changes.

Sec. 4. APPROPRIATIONS

(a) The sum of \$10,800.00 is appropriated from the General Fund in fiscal year 2022 to the General Assembly for per diem and reimbursement of expenses for members of the Task Force on the Implementation of the Pupil Weighting Factors Report created under Sec. 2 of this act.

(b) The sum of \$150,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund in fiscal year 2022 to the Joint Fiscal Office for consultant expenses of the Task Force on the Implementation of the Pupil Weighting Factors Report created under Sec. 2 of this act.

Sec. 5. EFFECTIVE DATE

This act shall take effect on passage.