



Supporting Learners & Leaders

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To: House Committee On Education

Date: April 21, 2021

Subject: Testimony S.13 as passed by Senate

Good morning, for the record, Jay Nichols, Executive Director of the Vermont Principals' Association. I have testified previously in general on Pupil Weighting and the UVM Study. I will keep my comments today focused on the provisions of S.13 "An act relating to the implementation of the Pupil Weighting Factors Report."

Sec. 1 Findings:

- I agree with the findings and support new cost factors and weights as outlined in the report to be included in the calculation of equalized pupils.
- I also agree that the current weightings have no real basis in any statistically valid manner and that there is no evidence supporting them.
- I do not have a problem with a phased approach to revising the weighting formula.

Sec. 2 Task Force:

- I fully support this being a Legislative Task Force. That is the most appropriate group that should be doing this work. This Task Force is on the Implementation of the Pupil Weighting Factors Report. It should not be a rehash of the Report or the validity of the report in my opinion.
- I support the Task Force recommending to the GA an action plan and proposed legislation. In terms of the listed responsibilities:
 1. I don't think the Task Force should touch the weights themselves
 2. Categorical Aid – I think you implement the weights themselves before you look at any other aid
 3. This is very important. Extra spending capacity should be used on supporting students and school districts that have been historically underfunded – not additional tax rate breaks for local citizens.
 4. I don't really think the taxing capacity and education property tax rates and recommendations of the Vermont Tax Structure Commission Report changes anything as it relates to implementation of the Pupil Weighting Factors Report.

5. I fully support the goal of promoting equity and easing the financial impact during the transition from our current weighting system to the more statistically valid system outlined in the UVM Study.
6. I agree with the look into adjustments for non-operating school districts and CTEs.
7. I see no reason to consider school funding formulas in other states and alternative models for school funding. That has already been done as part of the UVM Study.
8. Regardless of what happens with Act 173 the recommended weight changes should take place. However, what does need to be considered are provisions around Maintenance of Effort. There are federal requirements related to the amount of money we spend in the state and in school districts. Essentially, with a few exceptions, we need to spend the same amount of money at least on special education as we did the previous year or risk losing some federal funds. This will be an important area where legal financial expertise will be needed
9. Whatever is implemented needs to be consistent with Act 60 and 68 and meet the constitutional requirements of the Brigham decision.

D. Consultant

- Makes sense as long as the focus is on implementation and not essentially trying to do another study or change recommendations in the weighting study

E. Collaboration

- VPA will cooperate and collaborate with the Task Force

Section 3 Requirement for Additional Legislative Action

- I agree that legislation needs to be passed that implements changes to make sure all students have equitable access to educational opportunities.

Section 4 Appropriations

- I'm no expert in this area but would think an implementation plan could be developed at much less than \$150,000. If the goal is to actually implement the Pupil Weighting Factors Report, I don't think you will need nearly that much funding. If the goal is to try and essentially redo everything that has already been reported and completely overhaul all aspects of the education funding system in Vermont, I would respectfully suggest that the \$150,000 might not be enough.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jay Nichols