

MEMORANDUM

TO: House Education Committee
FROM: Jeff Fannon, Vermont-NEA Executive Director
DATE: April 16, 2021
RE: S.13 Weighting Study

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to provide this written testimony on S.13, the student weighting legislative Task Force.

Vermont-NEA very much supports getting the student weights correctly established to offer, consistent with the *Brigham* decision, an equitable opportunity to a public education. I will make a few brief points in support of the bill.

Poverty is a key factor, and we must truly account for those children growing up in poverty and that includes providing appropriate financial supports for such students. Resources should be directed to account for poverty. The UVM study supports this. Likewise, the other recommendations from the UVM study should be implemented.

The study also recommends a new factor related to trauma. Vermont-NEA held a conference in May 2019 and more than 200 education stakeholders attended and all agreed students suffering from trauma need more resources and the need is growing. The post pandemic needs are also estimated to grow in this regard, and some mental health experts estimate upwards of 30% of students returning in the fall will have suffered some form of trauma during the pandemic.

S.13's mention of Act 173 is important. Connecting Act 173 and the Task Force is critical because when fully implemented, Act 173 will fundamentally change how special education and all education services are delivered by reimbursing schools based upon a block grant for each special needs student, which also affects the weighting discussion. Act 173 is far from full implementation, as the bill required educators to get trained in how to change their education practices to better serve all students, and that training has not yet happened. As we discuss weights and Act 173, we also should be cognizant of the Act 173 professional development void that must be addressed before schools convert to the block grant.

Finally, the weighting study implicates the Tax Structure Commission's recommendation to abolish the residential property tax to fund education. The Commission recommends funding education through the income tax for residents. As such, changing the funding via the weights should likely be done in concert with the change to an income tax with which to fund education. They go hand-in-hand. S.13, therefore, should be amended to add specific mention of the Tax Structure Commission's recommendation.