

Burlington and Winooski House Delegations Call on Committees of Jurisdiction to Correct Equalized Pupil Weights

April 13, 2022

To House Leadership, the Chair of the House Committee on Ways & Means, and the Chair of the House Committee on Education:

We, the House members of Burlington and Winooski, want to express our sincere concern over the direction currently being taken by the committees of jurisdiction in the House relating to S.287, an act relating to improving student equity by adjusting the school funding formula and providing education quality and funding oversight. The Senate proposal clearly identified that correcting the per pupil weights was the best path forward for our schools to address past and current harm done to underweighted districts, and provided a hybrid implementation and oversight of ELL service spending. Instead of thoughtfully considering this proposal and the Senate's reasons for choosing it, the House Ways and Means Committee is clearly favoring the "cost equity" or "cost adjustments" approach with little to no consideration of correcting the weights.

If the committees of jurisdiction continue down this predetermined path, we fear that we will be back at square one with the 2021 Taskforce recommendations and no actual policy to address known inequities in our education funding system. Our schools cannot wait any longer for equitable action from our state's leaders.

The 2019 University of Vermont and Rutgers University Study of Pupil Weights in Vermont's Education Funding Formula confirmed what the Vermont Legislature and many education leaders had long suspected: The equalized pupil weights used in Vermont's unique state education funding formula do not accurately reflect the cost disparities of educating students in those weighting categories. The UVM/Rutgers study gave us the first empirically derived weights for existing categories such as students living in poverty, English language learner (ELL) students, and high school students, while also recommending new weights for middle school students, school rurality, and local population density. In contrast, the "cost adjustments" model has not gone through the same level of evaluation and scrutiny for us to fully understand the true impacts for Vermont's learners and therefore could lead to similar disparities already reflected in our current education spending.

We call on the House Ways & Means and Education Committees, as well as House Leadership to seriously consider the Senate proposal of correcting the equalized pupil weights in S.287 and encourage the addition of thoughtful amendments that strengthen our work; not destroy it. What work can effectively be done in a Committee of Conference when the two proposals are so drastically different?

Respectfully,

Rep. Tiff Bluemle, Burlington (Chittenden 6-5)
Rep. Selene Colburn, Burlington (Chittenden 6-4)
Rep. Hal Colston, Winooski (Chittenden 6-7)
Rep. Bob Hooper, Burlington (Chittenden 6-1)

Rep. Curt McCormack, Burlington (Chittenden 6-3)
Rep. Emma Mulvaney-Stanak, Burlington (Chittenden 6-2)
Rep. Barbara Rachelson, Burlington (Chittenden 6-6)
Sen. Kesha Ram Hinsdale, Chittenden County
Rep. Taylor Small, Winooski (Chittenden 6-7)
Rep. Gabrielle Stebbins, Burlington (Chittenden 6-5)