



TO: House Ways and Means Committee

FROM: Sue Ceglowski, Executive Director, Vermont School Boards Association

RE: S.287 As Passed By The Senate and Draft No. 1.5

DATE: April 12, 2022

Thank you for the opportunity to provide the Committee with VSBA's position on pupil weights (S.287 as passed by the Senate) versus cost adjustments (Draft No. 1.5 of S.287 under consideration in the House Ways and Means Committee) in education funding.

VSBA's position is based on a resolution passed by its members on November 4, 2021 and the VSBA Board's application of the resolution to the final report of the Task Force on the Implementation of the Pupil Weighting Factors Report and supporting documentation, including the [October 28, 2021 memorandum from Dr. Tammy Kolbe et al. to Representative Kornheiser and Senator Hardy](#) and the [January 11, 2022 memorandum from Dr. Tammy Kolbe et al. to Representative Kornheiser and Senator Hardy](#).

VSBA supports implementation of the weights set out as option #1 in the Task Force's final report with the addition of the ELL weight of 2.49 (from Table 1, Model 4 of the October 28 memo).

There are several reasons we support implementation of the weights:

- (1) The conditions are not right for introducing structural changes to the education funding system. This particular school year is more challenging and difficult for everyone involved in the education system than the previous two years.
- (2) School boards and school officials are familiar with the weights and the changes made by the Task Force make them easier to understand.

- (3) The recalibrated weights work well within our system of local control to fairly and efficiently adjust for cost differences.
- (4) Weights are designed with cost containment in mind. According to Dr. Kolbe's testimony to the Senate Finance Committee, if weights are calibrated correctly, they put a governor on the top end of spending.
- (5) Properly calibrated weights encourage spending by needier districts while disincentivizing overspending by less needy districts. This may help to narrow the gap between the top and bottom spenders in the state.

On the other hand, the cost adjustment approach has several drawbacks from our standpoint:

- (1) The cost adjustment amounts are equivalent to the *average* additional spending needed for each identified cost factor. Therefore, the cost adjustments will provide either too much or too little aid to most districts. Further, our understanding of the cost adjustment approach is that it is only valid when applied to a uniform base funding level (a uniform base funding level is not included in draft 1.5 of the bill).
- (2) The cost adjustment approach does not appear to support equity. The average grant amounts will mean that some districts will get more than they need. They will likely spend up to those dollars - which would in turn have the potential to widen the gap between top and bottom spenders in the state. This is the opposite of what we are trying to achieve in terms of equity.
- (3) The cost adjustment grants may introduce new administrative inefficiencies into the system.
- (4) There are more unknowns with the cost adjustment grants and more design considerations as outlined by Dr. Kolbe in her testimony to the Senate Finance Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with the Committee today on this important topic. I'll end by urging the Committee to act thoughtfully and expeditiously. There are inequities in Vermont's education funding system that have existed for a long time. It is VSBA's position that the General Assembly should act this legislative session to implement the recalibrated weights.