

Senate Education Committee
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Testimony on S.13 - An Act Relating to the implementation of the Pupil Weighting Factors Report.

Good afternoon. I am pleased to join you this afternoon to provide testimony on S.13 - An Act Relating to the implementation of the Pupil Weighting Factors Report.

The membership of the Vermont Superintendents Association comprises all of Vermont's superintendents. The Association supports superintendents in their work both collectively as a group and as individuals in the communities they serve.

An important aspect of the Association's work involves contributing to education policy development in support of an efficient, effective and equitable education system.

In 2016 the Vermont Agency of Education published a document titled [Roles and Responsibilities in Vermont School Systems](#). The document outlines respective duties for school boards, superintendents, principals and teachers.

For superintendents, one relevant responsibility is *ensuring quality of education and equity of opportunities within the system*. A second is *managing services, programs and resources, for the quality of learning and for the implementation of the school board's annual district education plan and budget*.

The superintendent's interests and those of the communities that they serve center both on equity and on best utilization of resources.

I think it is fair to suggest that the highest priority for Vermont's public education system is equity. It is the basis for the current funding system, and in fact, under the Brigham Decision is the essence of that system.

The concept of educational equity supports the importance of the evaluation of the student weights within the education funding formula and reinforces the importance of adjusting the weights to make the funding system more equitable.

The Weighting Study, which is the impetus for this work by the General Assembly, provides modeling, which was [updated in February of 2020](#), as the General Assembly prepared for the review that you are engaged in today.

The model shows that if the proposed weighting changes are adopted, there will be tax rate adjustments in most communities. In some communities tax rates would go down, in other communities they would rise - in some cases quite dramatically. The act of changing the weights will bring relief to some communities (where equalized pupils increase) and undoubtedly create challenges in others (where equalized pupils decrease).

Changing the weights will lead to dynamics where communities that have experienced higher levels of investment at a lower tax rates would find the changes challenging and communities where the change in weights would result in an ability to invest more in the education at the same or lower tax rates would feel relief.

Because VSA's membership comprises superintendents serving all communities of the state, and because superintendents respond to both equity priorities and taxpayer interests, for the Vermont Superintendents Association, it is prudent to consider the findings of the Weighting Study not from the vantage point of individual superintendents or districts, they can speak for themselves, but rather from our position as a statewide association.

Principles that are generally guiding the work of the Vermont Superintendents Association relative to legislative consideration around the Weighting Study are:

- Achieving greater equity should be a primary goal behind making adjustments to the funding system
- The Weighting Study establishes that the existing weights need to be adjusted
- Legislative considerations for how to adjust the weights should take into account the findings of the study and the importance of informing communities of the effects of changes to the weighting system
- The purpose of adjusting the weights should be to support increased investment in the education of students tied to the commensurate weighting and/or to address the cost and associated tax rates reflecting sound investment in student learning and opportunity (not tax rate reduction as the goal of weighting changes)
- Legislative Actions should support a focus on what is better for students and fairer for taxpayers in the context of the education delivery system as a whole
- Acknowledge the challenges associated with planful utilization of resources for all communities affected by the weighting changes
- Policy action associated with weighting changes should be aligned with Act 173 implementation overall (i.e. categorical grant for special education or address through the changes to weighting, etc)

The importance of careful consideration of the process for implementing the weighting changes cannot be overstated. The weighting changes need to occur for more fairness and equity in the system. And, the implications and effects for all communities should be understood and considered in fashioning the specific method for making the change.

Regarding the "strike-all proposal" currently under consideration, my summary statement is this, action needs to be planned and taken with respect to the weighting study recommendations and the proposed amendment seems to accomplish that - albeit in a first phase.

With respect to specific recommendations, I have only one. I suggest that the Task Force established by the Amendment be required to determine and undertake reasonable methods to ensure that the voice of local school officials, school communities and citizens inform the report and the recommendations therein.

Thank you.