

STATEMENT PROVIDED TO: Chairs, House and Senate Education Committees

FROM: Meagan Roy, Ed.D. (Chair, Census-Based Funding Advisory Group)

TOPIC: Recommendations regarding weighting study

DATE: February 5, 2020

As part of its duty to “[R]ecommend to the General Assembly any statutory changes it determines are necessary or advisable to meet the goals of this act...,” the Census-Based Funding Advisory Group discussed the Weighting Study as it relates to the implementation of Act 173. The Advisory Group identifies the following core principles for the General Assembly to consider in its deliberations:

Ensure that entitlement services for identified students with disabilities are preserved

Special education services remain an entitlement under IDEA. It is essential that districts continue to have adequate funding to ensure that students with disabilities receive the services outlined in their Individual Education Plans, while at the same time ensuring all students have the necessary resources to support their education. As the general assembly contemplates changes to education funding, it must do so in a way that preserves a district’s ability to maintain appropriate services to students with disabilities.

Ensure that additional funding is targeted in support of student programming, not tax relief

Funding models outlined in the Weighting Study would have the impact of bringing additional funding to school districts with a high population of students in poverty (among other characteristics). These shifts are meant to address the reality that additional financial resources are required to adequately meet the needs of historically disadvantaged students, including those living in poverty and those for whom English is not their first language. It is imperative that any legislation enacting recommendations of the weighting study ensure that any additional funding provided to eligible districts is used to enhance services for students, rather than to lower tax rates.

Consider a phased-in implementation to allow districts to adjust to resulting financial impacts

The Advisory Group believes that adjustments need to be made in the education funding system to adequately address issues of equity across the state. It also recognizes that those adjustments, though essential, will financially impact many districts. In order to minimize the financial impact on districts, the Advisory Group recommends that adequate transition time be provided so that districts can budget thoughtfully to account for changes that will result.

Caution against enacting changes to the calculation that could incentivize eligibility for special education

A central premise in the shift to a census-based funding model was a recognition that Vermont’s existing reimbursement model may have had the unintended consequence of incentivizing eligibility for special education - because districts receive funding directly from the State for all services associated with a student on an IEP, there may be an inherent incentive to identify students. Act 173 (among other things) was meant to decouple funding from eligibility. Adjustments to the census-based grant calculation that place additional weight on students eligible for special education may have the effect of re-incentivizing eligibility and is contrary to the intent of Act 173. Further, the weighting study identified that there is a correlative relationship between poverty and disability - which means that, in a sense, adjusting the weights will in and of itself address the issue of disability. The Advisory Group recommends that changes be made to the overall weighting of students as outlined in the study, rather than adjusting the census grant.

Submitted on behalf of the advisory group by:

Meagan Roy, Ed.D., Chair