
Testimony on S.13 and H.54 - Weighting Study

Testimony To: Senate Committee on Education and the Senate Committee on Finance

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Agency of Education Position on the Bill

The Pupil Weighting Factors Report, or the Weighting Study, contains important findings that should be considered by the General Assembly. I agree with the conclusions of H.54 that the equitable allocation of financial resources is an essential precondition to ensure equal educational opportunity.

The findings of the Weighting Study are complex, however, and therefore the implications of the study from an implementation perspective need to be fully evaluated. H.54 anticipates these challenges by proposing a phasing in of new weights. I think there needs to be a more complete analysis of their implementation, however.

S.13 proposes to have the Agency of Education develop an implementation plan, but I do not believe the Agency of Education has the capacity or expertise to develop such an implementation plan. I believe the General Assembly should commission an outside entity to develop and propose an implementation plan for its review.

Other Points to Consider:

- 1) The study could not identify the origins or basis of the current pupil weights. It is likely they were developed outside of any empirical evaluation. The study has described new weights that are grounded in solid empirical modeling. We should endeavor to utilize a weighting system that is based on defensible, mathematical analysis.
- 2) The proposed weights from the study are designed to be a complete model. Adjusting a single weight or group of weights without considering the impact on the other weights breaks the model.
- 3) An important consideration in the study is whether weights should be introduced into the calculation of the special education block grant and/or the general education funding formula to address a concern about the relative number of students with disabilities in districts. I think it makes more sense to adjust the weights in the general education formula since it is not clear from the study if adjusting the block grant might provide the wrong financial incentive for improving outcomes.
- 4) Modifying the weights does not provide districts with more money. Districts that have additional equalized pupils as a result of the proposed weights would have greater capacity to spend more on educating their students if they chose to do so, but

- there is no guarantee they will spend additional money. Implementation of the weights should be paired with regulatory reform to require the Agency of Education to ensure school quality standards are enacted in each district.
- 5) We are in a period of some instability in Education Spending as a result of the COVID-19 emergency. Districts have new costs as a result of the emergency, we are expecting additional federal revenues in the form of pandemic relief, and the General Assembly is contemplating several new initiatives in education (e.g. literacy grants, school construction aid, universal school meals, PCB remediation, additional funding for the Act 1 Commission, etc.) that will impact the Education Fund. Rapid implementation of new pupil weights in this dynamic context would likely create significant instability in the funding of our education system.