

SENATE EDUCATION 1/21/22

I am Alison Notte. I serve on the Rutland City Board of School Commissioners and the Coalition for Vermont Student Equity.

Rutland City has seen a tremendous growth in student needs over the last couple decades. We have been fiscally responsible and streamlined our school budgets to balance decreased student population with decreased staffing. Despite these reductions, our per pupil cost continues to grow. Our proposed budget for FY2023 is for the first time above the estimated state average for per pupil cost.

Over 75% of our student population lives in poverty, closer to 95% of our younger students. Rutland City Public Schools has done some amazing work with limited resources. Resources have been stretched and are at a breaking point. The student needs are real and being unable to meet children where they are at and provide meaningful support and education is causing harm. We need a system that will correct the inequities and not cause further harm.

Rutland 's population has dropped by 5,000 people. We recognize that refugee resettlement is a key part of revitalizing our city. Rutland is an approved Refugee Resettlement site. Prior to resettlement being halted in 2016, Rutland welcomed only 3 Syrian families. Now, Rutland is poised to welcome around 100 Afghan Allies. This means our school system is preparing to increase our ELL capacity and services.

As we look to educate more ELL students it is imperative that the funding be balanced through appropriate weighting rather than a segregated categorical grant system. As we welcome our new neighbors, we shouldn't have to worry about creating an unfair burden on our school system.

Categorical Aid for ELL means that the most diverse districts in Vermont are unable to make the same local spending decisions as less diverse and more affluent districts. Our city has supported our schools and budgets to the best of their abilities. To segregate funds and imply that less affluent communities, like ours, do not support their schools or represent the needs of the school community is insulting. While the intent may be that grants protect those districts and students, segregated funding ties the districts hands and discriminates against students of varying national origin and native language.

The first step in fixing inequities needs to be acknowledgement of the harm that was done. To brush that aside and make judgements regarding how underweight districts spend their money is causing more harm.

The UVM Pupil Weighting Study showed that poverty, ELL, and rural students cost more to educate, resulting in schools that had been underweight for the past quarter century. The Task Force on Pupil Weighting then decided to look at average spending in those districts and ball park "needed costs". This thinking is creating another system that perpetuates the

inequities. It has already been demonstrated that these districts are spending less per pupil than less diverse more affluent districts. Even if a large dollar figure such as \$25000 per ELL student was adopted as categorical aid, there can be unintended consequences and inequities that grant funding can perpetuate. The weighting system is empirically derived with known outcomes. Categorical grants may still provide some schools with too much money and some schools with not enough. There are various needs, factors, resources, and costs that are not equal across the state.

Please consider the harm that has been done by underfunding our more diverse school districts and consider adopting corrected weights to implement change and support equity of educational opportunities for all Vermont's children.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter and your service to our state.

Respectfully submitted,
Alison Notte