

TO: Senate Committee on Education

FROM: Colin Robinson, Political Director, Vermont-NEA

DATE: January 28, 2022

SUBJECT: Pupil Weighting and ELL

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Good afternoon and thank you for allowing Vermont-NEA to testify on the issue of pupil weighting and specifically how we provide equitable funding to support our English Language Learners.

As a general matter, like many if not all involved in this conversation, we are deeply committed to ensuring that our schools have the resources to meet the diverse and unique learning needs of all students. We are also deeply appreciative of the work of the Task Force on the Implementation of the Pupil Weighting Factors Report, building on the work of Professor Kolbe, to lay out a path forward for updating our unique education funding system. As we have testified previously in several committees over the past many years, it is critical that we make adjustments to our weights now and move toward a system that makes periodic calibrations, rather than seismic changes every couple of decades.

As to how we provide schools with adequate and equitable funding for English Language Learners (ELL), we believe that the foundation must be based in the empirically derived analysis of Professor Kolbe and her colleagues for what it costs to support the learning of our ELL students. We know from the Weighting Task Force's exploration of cost adjustments, the analysis of Professor Kolbe can be applied either through an adjustment to weights or through other direct aid constructs. Additionally, we know that when it comes to providing support to school districts for ELL students, there are some districts that have incredibly high ELL student populations and others that have very small or no ELL students. We believe it is critical that communities like Winooski and Burlington have the resources they and their students deserve to meet the learning needs of their ELL students. I know you have heard from leaders in these communities and there is no doubt that they need more resources than they currently receive – not less. Any construct that reduces their funding or holds them where they are now is not appropriate. We also believe that it is critical that districts that have a very small ELL student population also have the resources they need to provide robust and equitable support their students.

It may be that the weights are the most appropriate way to do this, however we do worry about those districts with small ELL student populations being able to adequately meet the needs of their students. To that end, we believe there is value in this Committee spending time looking at the hybrid opt-in approach that Professor Kolbe shared in her January 11, 2022 memo and that the Legislative Social Equity Caucus also highlighted in their letter earlier this week. This approach would allow school districts to access the model that most appropriately meets the needs of their students regardless of the size of their ELL population.

Thank you for your time and your work.