



To: Senate Education

From: Jay Nichols

Date: January 28, 2022

Subject: Testimony Pupil Weighting: English Language Learners (ELL) Categorical Grant Program

Let me start by stating a couple of things. First of all, I really appreciate the work that Tammy Kolbe and the UVM led committee did researching and trying to appropriately quantify and qualify appropriate measures of pupil weighting in Vermont. This effort to attempt to as best as possible provide for equity of need in terms of financing for students based on various categories is important work and I'm proud that Vermont has taken it on. As you know, the current weights we use don't seem to be derived from anything based on statistical relevance. Secondly, I want to thank the Pupil Weighting Study Committee for their work and especially Senator Hardy and Representative Kornheiser, both of whom I've heard share information on the study and the rationale for the findings including the recommendation to establish a categorical grant program for funding of English Language Learners (ELL). And, finally I want to state for the record I am no expert in this area whatsoever, that shared I do have a few thoughts:

1. Anytime a financial system or structure moves to a categorical aid system that relies on the General Assembly to look at it each year, I worry that it becomes potentially an area for political and/or state financial concerns that might be disadvantageous to these students who I believe are some of our most needy students in terms of support. Will the General Assembly fund appropriately during a time of tough financial crisis? You can make cuts to categorical aid a lot easier than you can change pupil weighting.

2. With pupil weighting for ELL it would simply be part of the process where the AOE looks at all the data and Brad James is sitting back with his spreadsheets and his magic potions using information reported by the school districts and he does his mathematical formulas and weights all the students and reconciles that with the amount of money voted for approved budgets by taxpayers, adds in other aid programs etc. and ELL weighting is treated like any other weighting and educational spending is calculated and taxpayers get their tax bills and it is what it is. And, I think what that would be in a word is **equitable**.
3. Finally, it sounds to me that a real big factor in the thinking of Senator Hardy and Representative Kornheiser, as well as others, centered around making sure that every school that had ELL students would have a certain amount of financial support – the number I believe as a placeholder was \$25,000. I understand the thinking behind this concept. I don't have a solution for how to go about it but I do worry about schools that may only have a couple of ELL students having the resources necessary to adequately provide for those students. Perhaps there should be a base amount payment for schools in that situation.

Subject to any questions that is my testimony on ELL and weighting vs. categorical aid.