

Senate Education Committee Meeting; Rutland High School - December 5, 2025, 2:30 PM
- Written testimony is welcome, please send via email.

To the honorable members of the Senate Education Committee:

I live in Westminster, Vermont and am a former local school board director, Workforce Investment Board member, parent of children who attended our public school system, and have been a local employer for the last 45 years or so. Please consider the following point of view in your deliberations on Act 73 Education Reform.

The committee's assumptions, listed in the 11-10-25 Task Force Draft Report, are incorrect. Specifically, consider the following clear example.

On Page 5 of the committee's report:

"Markets won't fix the problems that markets create. Markets serve more dense and higher wealth regions more effectively, at the expense of rural and more disadvantaged communities."

On the contrary, Westminster's experience contradicts the committee's assumption. 'Markets' did not create the current demand for reform. In fact, markets (i.e., School Choice) are, demonstrably, far more effective at achieving economies of scale in rural and disadvantaged communities than a centralized one-size-fits-all governance. My Westminster School District provides a poignant comparison.

The Westminster School District is a K-8th grade program serving 164 students. The K-6th grade is a traditional public-school program with 125 students. In other words, the Westminster School District "maintains... one or more approved schools within the district in which elementary education for its resident students in kindergarten through grade six is provided." 16 V.S.A. § 821

However, Westminster does not "maintain one or more approved high schools in which high school education is provided for its resident students". Instead, Westminster provides for its 39 7th & 8th grade students "... by paying tuition to a public high school, an approved independent high school, or an independent school meeting education quality standards, to be selected by the parents or guardians of the student, within or outside the State;". 16 V.S.A. § 822

As the Senate Education Committee can see, Westminster provides the opportunity for us to compare both forms of governance - a traditional public-school program and a tuitioned school choice program, side by side, in the same "rural and disadvantaged community".

Again, on Page 5 of the report, the Task Force assumed the following.

"Per AOE data, there is no observable cost advantage associated with private schools in VT. Per AOE data, on average statewide in FY24, tuition districts paid more per student tuitioned to a private school (\$20,432) than to a public school (\$18,476).

Here's the actual data from the Westminster school district for FY 2025-26.

Again, the Westminster School district has 165 K-8 students and a \$5,308,124 annual school budget. Quick math: that's \$32,170 per student.

Of those 165 K-8 students, 39 have the advantage of its 7th & 8th grade school choice tuitioning program. The budgeted tuition is \$1,044,000 for all 39 students. Quick math: That's \$26,769 per tuitioned 7th & 8th grade student.

Of those 39 7th & 8th grade students, 8 attend independent schools, receiving \$20,910 per student. Quick math: That's a total annual tuition cost to the school district of \$161,520 for our independent school students.

That leaves an \$882,480 tuition cost for the remaining 31 students choosing public schools. Quick math: The public-school tuition is \$28,467 per student.

Please compare the annual \$20,910 per 7th & 8th grade tuitioned student costs for those students choosing independent schools to the annual \$28,467 per student cost for Westminster's 7th & 8th graders choosing public schools. Quick math: 7th & 8th grade Independent school tuition costs are 36% less than the 7th & 8th grade Public School tuition costs.

The Westminster School District experience has been consistent for decades. And the tuitioned school choice program has been the most popular program in the district – as indicated by the constant increase in enrollment in the 7th & 8th grade program.

Suffice it to say, the Task Force's assumptions in this regard are not only misleading, they are incorrect. And the majority of other assumptions should be called into question too. For example, Special Education costs for Westminster's tuitioned school choice 7th & 8th grades are consistently lower than the Special Education costs in our traditional public-school model.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my input. Again, as a former local school board director and Workforce Investment Board member, I've been following this issue, locally and statewide, for decades. If anything, making Vermont's school choice tuitioning program available to all Vermont students is the first education reform The Education Committee should undertake. In that regard, I will be happy to address any questions you may have.

Sincerely,
Jay Eshelman,
Westminster Vermont