



STATE OF VERMONT
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

transmitted via email

February 2nd, 2020

The Honorable Mitzi Johnson
Speaker of the Vermont House of Representatives

The Honorable Tim Ashe
Senate President Pro Tempore of the Vermont Senate

Madame Speaker and Mr. President:

To overcome over twenty years of inequity in school resources, we respectfully request that the General Assembly take action this session to implement the weighting recommendations contained in the [Pupil Weighting Factors Report](#).

H.897, An act relating to enhancing the effectiveness, availability, and equity of services provided to students who require additional support passed the House by a vote of 144-0 and the Senate by a vote of 26-2. H. 897 was signed into law by Governor Scott on May 28th 2018 and became Act 173.

The Vermont Agency of Education (AOE) was directed under Section 11 of No. 173 of the 2018 Acts and Resolves of the Vermont General Assembly (Act 173) to undertake a study that examines and evaluates whether: 1) the current weights for economically-disadvantaged students, English language learners (ELL), and secondary-level students should be modified; 2) new cost factors and weights should be incorporated into the equalized pupil calculation; and 3) the special education census grant should be adjusted for differences in the incidence of and costs associated with SWD across school districts.

On January 8th, 2020 the House Ways & Means and Education Committees [heard testimony](#) from the study's authors. The authors called the existing student weights "historical artifacts" and indicated they could find no empirical evidence to support them. The recommended new weights. The Senate Education Committee heard this same testimony on January 16th.

On January 29th Dan French, the Vermont Secretary of Education, charged by the Vermont Legislature with conducting the assessment, [testified in the House Ways & Means Committee](#)

The cost factors recommended by the Pupil Weighting Factors Report (Poverty, % ELL, Enrollment, Population Density, Middle Grades, and Secondary Grades) were based on regional and national comparisons and confirmed by an empirical modelling of Vermont data. These factors should be adopted to replace the current factors, the origins of which could not be confirmed by the Report.

*The Report found the current pupil weights to be outdated. They do not represent current educational circumstances or costs. In particular, the variation between the current poverty weight (0.25) as compared to the poverty weight determined through the analysis from the Report (3.14) **suggests immediate action by the General Assembly is necessary to address a significant equity concern in the current education funding system.** Addressing the mechanics of the educational funding system consistent with the Report are necessary to ensure equal tax effort and to establish the necessary financial preconditions for equal educational opportunity.*

We have read the report and examined the projected tax impacts had the corrected weights been in place in districts 2018 budgets.

Several issues are very clear.

- Our current funding mechanism has incentivized more spending for students who it costs less to educate and incentivized less spending for students who it costs more to educate.
- This mechanism has cost all Vermont taxpayers in addition to rural and poor students – for twenty years. That is an entire generation of students and taxpayers.
- The cost in lost opportunity and increased spending has almost certainly had compounding negative effects for students in rural and poor districts and taxpayers throughout the state.
- Taking the necessary action this year will require courage, but it must happen.

Given that this is a matter directly and significantly impacting our most valuable resource, our Vermont youth, and most directly and most significantly impacting our most vulnerable students, we are respectfully requesting the following:

1. Prioritize action on the study this year by the related committees.
2. If a multi-year implementation is needed to soften the tax effect to those districts who have had access to more state resources than the rest of Vermont, find the funds to put in place the funding needed for those students who we have denied equitable resources to, this year.

Sincerely,

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