



July 29, 2021

Weighted Study Task Force  
Vermont General Assembly  
15 State Street  
Montpelier, VT 05633

Dear Weighted Study Task Force Members,

In Vermont, we prioritize public education and care about the future of our children. We spend significant money on our schools and our public education system is considered among the finest in the country. If you ask almost any Vermonter, they would agree that all children, regardless of their family's income, background, or home language, deserve equitable access to educational opportunities. Unfortunately, most people would be surprised to learn that currently, in Vermont, this is not the case. While both the State and individual school districts clearly want to prioritize closing the opportunity gap, achieving this goal requires an equitable, strategic, long-term, and well-funded plan not currently in place in our state.

As Superintendents of the Winooski School District (WSD) and the Burlington School District (BSD), we prefer immediate and full implementation of the recommendations in the Pupil Weighting Factors Report, but will also support a phased-in approach as a compromise. As a result, we can correct the existing inequities in weighting so that districts serving historically marginalized students can better provide the resources students need, without spending more money on education in our state.

We strongly discourage the state from considering categorical aid for English Learners (EL) students. Across the nation, 33 states and the District of Columbia, including Vermont, include ELs in their foundational formula. This practice shows a long-term commitment to serving EL students and provides greater equity. A categorical allocation would not solve the current problem of underweighting in WSD and BSD, as categorical aid is unreliable, does not allow for long-term planning, is an administrative burden, and does not provide adequate resources to EL students. This model also does not solve for inequities in the weighted formula for poverty and special education and it furthers inequities across the state for districts with significant numbers of students living in poverty or with special education needs.

WSD and BSD have the highest percentage of EL students in the state; ***combined we serve approximately 47% of all EL students across Vermont.*** 35% of students in WSD qualify for EL services and 16% of students qualify in BSD. Our EL students enrich our districts with their dynamic cultures, multilingual skills and make our



classrooms exceptional places of learning that prepare our students for a truly diverse and global future. However, providing a great education for multilingual learners also requires additional resources such as smaller class sizes, targeted curriculum, staff that reflect their own lived experiences, and robust parent engagement programs.

Meeting these critical needs is expensive. With the corrected weights implemented, both WSD and BSD would be able to hire general education and EL staff, arts and world language staff, math and literacy interventionists, school counselors, social workers, and/or multilingual liaisons. We would also be able to look at funding for professional development for general education and EL staff, translation and interpretation services, transportation, and/or technology equipment/staff to better meet the needs of our students and families.

Our districts deserve the same opportunity to access taxing capacity as the wealthier districts that do not educate as many historically marginalized students so that *all* districts are able to provide their children with the resources they need. Through bolstering the services and positions outlined above, our districts would be able to make more meaningful progress toward truly closing the opportunity gap for our students.

Lastly, it is important to recognize that the equitable funding of districts is in the best interest of our state long term. An equitable education funding formula that appropriately resources all districts and students leads to more individuals with the skills and training needed to be successful, contributing citizens who will improve the economy and quality of life for everyone in our wonderful state. Again, we urge you to consider immediate and full implementation of the recommendations in the Pupil Weighting Factors Report and hope to see Vermont continue to be the most forward-thinking state in providing an equitable education funding system.

Sincerely,

Tom Flanagan, Burlington Superintendent  
Sean McMannon, Winooski Superintendent



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## ELL Investments in WSD: The Numbers

Prepared by Nicole Mace, WSD Finance Manager

Fiscal Year	Total ELL Staffing FTE	Total # of K-12 Students Receiving ELL Services	Student to ELL Staff Ratio	Total Expenses	Total Expenses Funded by Local Budgets	ELL Weight for Equalized Pupils	ELL Expenses as Percentage of Local Budget	ELL Weights as Percentage of Eq Pupils
FY 22	26	276	10.6	\$2,062,816.00	\$1,483,318.00	55.2	7.60%	5.58%
FY 21	20.3	297	14.6	\$1,532,876.00	\$1,364,377.00	59.4	7.18%	5.75%
FY 20	20.3	247	15.8	\$1,262,712.00	\$1,152,909.00	49.4	6.37%	4.73%

	Title III English Learner Grant	Refugee School Impact Grant	CRF/ESSER	Total
<b>FY 22</b>	\$66,463.00	\$28,852.00	\$484,183.00	\$579,498.00
<b>FY 21</b>	\$64,362.00	\$47,297.00	\$56,840.00	\$168,499.00
<b>FY 20</b>	\$69,203.00	\$40,600.00		\$109,803.00

- Current ELL weights are not keeping pace and do not reflect the actual costs we incorporate into our local budget on an annual basis.
- In districts like WSD, where we have chronically underfunded our schools over many years, building up staffing to better meet the needs of students is a multi-year endeavor. Yet, our ELL enrollment numbers fluctuate year over year, and often are the result of housing instability resulting in cross-district movement between BSD and WSD (and increasingly, other communities in Chittenden County).



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- Current ELL weights do not give us the flexibility to make staffing investments we know we need to make, because enrollment numbers fluctuate and there is no index in the weights to reflect increased costs in wages and benefits.
- Despite these dynamics, we have grown our ELL program substantially over the past few years, but the weights are not keeping pace, and we have reached our capacity to increase local budgets.
- The pandemic clearly illuminated the dire need for greater investments to better serve our ELL students and their families. The WSD has made the difficult decision to invest ESSER funds in increased ELL staffing and interventionists in order to meet the needs of our students.
- Use of one-time funds to staff programs is inherently risky, but the needs of our students and families are so substantial that we felt we must use the funds the way they were intended - to support vulnerable populations in our community.
- Categorical aid for ELL students is an inherently inequitable approach for the following reasons:
  - It separates ELL students from all other students in VT and subjects funding for their programs to an inherently political and uncertain process, as opposed to a process that is based purely on enrollment and is used for all other enrolled VT students
  - Because the amount of categorical aid would be unknown year to year, staffing for ELL programs would be subject to greater instability, which may discourage ELL teachers from taking positions in high poverty schools, greater disadvantaging districts like WSD who are already at a disadvantage in attracting and retaining staff due to our comparably lower compensation package
  - Categorical aid would mean a tax increase for everyone. Even underweighted districts like WSD would have to contribute taxes into categorical aid, which otherwise should have been taxing capacity free and clear from the corrected weights.

# Winooski-BSD Presentation to Weighted Pupil Task Force

July 28, 2021



**BURLINGTON**  
SCHOOL DISTRICT



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# Long Term Need to Support English Learners

- Supporting inclusive and equitable communities across Vermont will create a stronger Vermont.
- Supporting English Learners is complex and interconnected
  - Student Learning
  - English Language Acquisition
  - Family Engagement
  - Communication
  - Social Emotional Support
  - Post-Secondary Success

# Categorical Aid Furthers Inequities

Categorical Aid furthers inequities for districts serving students with higher levels of need.

Categorical aid is not a solution because it is:

- Not reliable
- Does not allow necessary long-term planning
- Perpetuates under-resourcing
- Creates administrative burden

# Current Funding Does Not Support Need for ELs

- Current EL weights do not reflect the actual costs
- Staffing investments is a multi-year endeavor
- EL enrollment numbers fluctuate (often the result of housing instability)
- There is no index in the weights to reflect increased costs in wages and benefits
- EL programs have grown substantially and we have reached our capacity to increase local budgets
- Made difficult decisions to invest one-time ESSER funds in increased EL staffing and interventionists to support vulnerable populations in our community



# What are we required to provide? What does this look like in VT?

- We are required to provide equitable access to educational opportunities and language education programs. - *ESSA Title 1 and Title 3*
- We are required to provide support for English language acquisition for students identified as EL. These services should be provided by qualified personnel.
- Vermont uses the WIDA assessment as the bar to measure the success of ELs in acquiring English. In Vermont, students must score a 5 on WIDA exam to exit EL status.

# What does teaching and learning look like in Burlington and Winooski?

Our mission is to provide a complete and equitable educational experience which stretches far beyond the teaching of English. To accomplish this we offer:

- Newcomer Programs - Designed for students new to US school system and who are beginners to English. Programs offer sheltered content, accelerated English, and cultural adjustment to American schools and schooling. (STEP, MS Newcomer, and AEP in BSD & Newcomer Academies at WSD Schools)
- Congruent/Parallel Teaching - EL teachers pull students out of classrooms to offer language support that parallels mainstream instruction in terms of content and skills. Emphasis on literacy and oral language for academic purposes, with other content areas addressed.

# What does teaching and learning look like in Burlington and Winooski?

- Push-in/pull-aside - Specialist teachers and instructional assistants support EL students in mainstream classrooms, collaborating with other educators to address specific needs.
- Stand-alone EL Classes - Generally Language Arts and content classes taught in Middle and High school by EL specialists certified in the content area. (EL 1, or EL Math, EL Science, etc. in BSD)
- Co-taught Classes - EL specialist and classroom/content teacher work together to provide content instruction that is appropriate for EL students (currently offered through a grant in BSD.)

***Resourcing, organizing, and appropriately matching students with these diverse supports is an equity-focused imperative that requires consistent, predictable funding.***

# What does programming look like in Burlington?

- Family Engagement
  - Eleven full time Multilingual Liaisons
  - Parent University
- Communication
  - Translation and interpretation for the top 10 languages and additionally for the full 42 languages when appropriate
- Social and Emotional learning
  - Social workers, Restorative Practices, Racial Justice Academy
- Post Secondary Success
  - Guidance counselors
- Professional Learning
  - PL for general education and EL teachers

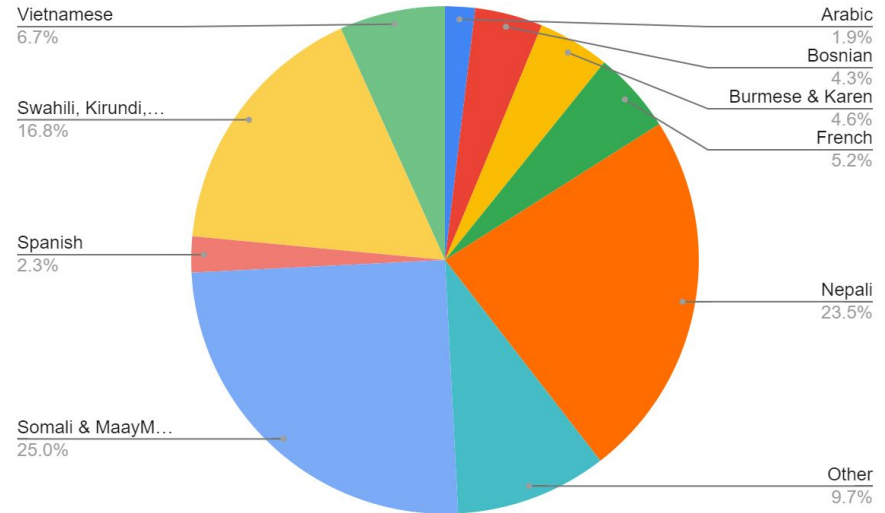
# What does programming look like in Winooski?

- Family Engagement
  - Eight full time Multilingual Liaisons
  - New ELL Family Engagement Educator
- Communication
  - Translation and interpretation for the top 6 languages and for other languages when appropriate
- Social and Emotional learning
  - Social workers, PBIS, Restorative Justice
- Post Secondary Success
  - Guidance counselors, Community-Based Learning Program
- Professional Learning
  - PL for general education and EL teachers

# Burlington Student Demographics

## 3340 Students

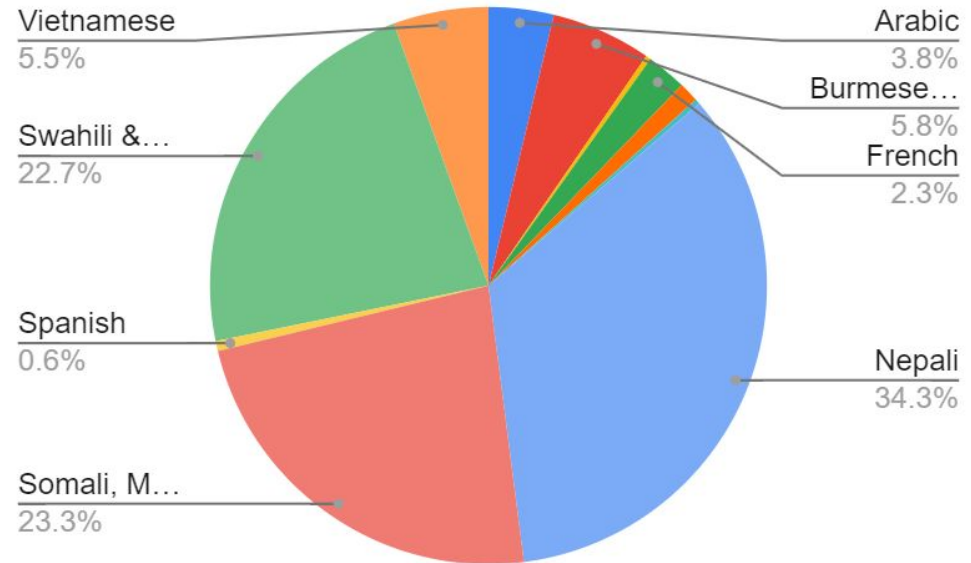
- 16% Receive English Language Learning Services
- 48 Home Languages
- Most common languages
  - Somali (37)
  - Swahili/Kiswahili (93)
  - Nepali (123)
  - Maay Maay (138)



# Winooski Student Demographics

## 823 Students (2019 enrollment)

- 35 % Receive English Language Learning Services
- 17 Home Languages
- Most common languages
  - Nepali (118)
  - Somali/Maay Maay (83)
  - Swahili/Kirundi (78)
  - Burmese/Karen (20)
  - Arabic (13)



# Implications of weighted study - Do we agree with recommendations as they relate to EL?

*BSD and WSD believe using a weighted formula is far more equitable than categorical funding and we fully support the recommendations of the weighted study.*