

Kim Gleason, State Board of Education, member; Chair of the Rule Series 1300 and 2360 Committee - *Testimony to the Task Force on Implementation of the Weighting Study, August 12, 2021*

Thank you all for the opportunity to testify today. I am Kim Gleason, State Board of Education member. I also had the privilege to chair the Rule Series 1300 and 2360 Committee of the Board, working with Bill Mathis, Jenna O'Farrell and Angelita Pena, our student board member, from the State board, Meagan Roy and Marilyn Mahusky, co-chairs of the Act 173 Advisory Group, and Emily Simmons and Jackie Kelleher, from the AOE.

Today, I am happy to share a bit about the State Board of Education rulemaking process as it pertained to the Act 173 Rules, should it offer insight into whatever process you might envision for this change in the equalized pupil weights. While I have no expertise in special education, I can offer insight into the process that allowed for broad voice from stakeholders and consensus building from experts in the field to arrive at a set of rules that reflected better alignment with federal regulation, and responsiveness to the concerns regarding adverse effect, consistency in implementation among Vermont school districts, and avenues for parent/guardian input in the special education process.

Our committee's time together followed a very extended rule making process in response to the changes in Special Education funding brought about by Act 173. As a matter of fact, at the first State Board of Education meeting I attended after my appointment in April of 2019, we received hundreds of pages of rules in their first draft form, and a review of what we anticipated might be the timeline for rulemaking. Over the next several months, as the Act 173 Advisory group was meeting, drafts were being revised with input from that group and the AOE, and with additional legal support, sought at the expense of stakeholders, to provide additional perspective on federal and Vermont special education law.

And also in that time, there was an extension of the implementation date, an extension of the public comment period, and a global pandemic.

The State Board of Education devoted time and attention to these evolving drafts, side-by-sides, and stakeholder voice, on nearly every board agenda, as we prepared to file the initial draft with ICAR. And then the formal hearings to gather input from the public began. The board offered several different occasions, times of day, and many hours of public hearing, and from that, with the help of Emily Simmons and Judy Cutler, from the AOE, arrived at themes from the feedback, which offered a roadmap for our committee and our charge to incorporate, as appropriate, the feedback that we had heard during the public hearings.

I am grateful that you have heard from the subject matter experts. My knowledge base is that of a parent and long-time school board member who leaned on the knowledge of my fellow State Board committee members, two of whom were long-time educators, Meaghan and Marilyn, from the Advisory group, and our Essex Westford School District Special Education Co-Director, Erin Maguire, to better understand how these regulations would impact students, families, and educators.

In our regulatory role, the State Board of Education's contribution is not necessarily that of a content-matter expert, but rather our “superpowers” lie in our ability to act as convener, listener, and consensus builder. (I am not sure that I recall that being in the board job description, but it is among the most rewarding parts of our work as a board.)

As you are considering your recommendations for implementation of the weighting study, recognizing that finding consensus may be challenging, I encourage you to consider what outcomes you are looking to achieve. For our Act 173 Rules work, those goals were better alignment with federal regulation, and improvement in consistency of implementation and parent participation in the process.

If greater equity is the goal of implementation of the weighting study, then that could benefit all Vermonters. If framed in the lens of “winners” and “losers”, with respect to impact on school districts, we may all lose. I don’t envy your work, nor your challenge, but the State Board of Education hopes to offer support where we can.

Thank you for your commitment to addressing equity concerns through the lens of the weighting study. Please let the State Board of Education know how we can be most supportive of your efforts throughout this process.

Best,

Kim Gleason

State Board of Education, member

Chair Committee on Rule Series 1300/2360