



TO: Task Force on the Implementation of the Pupil Weighting Factors Report

FROM: Sue Ceglowski, Executive Director, Vermont School Boards Association

RE: Education Quality Standards, Poverty Weights, English Language Learners

DATE: August 12, 2021

The Vermont School Boards Association (VSBA) welcomes the opportunity to collaborate with the Task Force by providing testimony and information in support of its important work. You have asked the VSBA to address three areas today: Education Quality Standards, the poverty weight, and English Language Learners.

The foundation of VSBA's testimony in the three areas is based on the following positions of the association.

1. The VSBA fully supports the findings as presented in the Pupil Weighting Factors Report.
2. The VSBA supports the establishment of a thoughtful and expeditious implementation plan in pursuit of equity of opportunities for all students and one that is designed to build capacity within our systems to absorb the changes in funding due to changes in weights.

My testimony is framed by the [roles and responsibilities in Vermont school systems](#). School boards are not involved in the day-to-day operations of schools. Their role as elected officials is governance. They are responsible for providing high level, student-focused oversight and assuring the delivery of an effective education program in their communities at a reasonable cost for taxpayers in accordance with state and federal law.

Education Quality Standards (EQS)

The Task Force has asked whether the EQS are a useful mechanism in this process and asked for recommendations of how to use the EQS going forward.

The stated purpose of Vermont's EQS is to "ensure that all students in Vermont public schools are afforded educational opportunities that are substantially equal in quality, and enable them to achieve or exceed the standards approved by the State Board of Education."

The VSBA supports evenhanded use of Education Quality Standards across the board in Vermont, including all schools where public tax dollars are educating our students. Currently, the EQS cover public schools and do not apply to all schools where public tax dollars are educating students.

We do not have specific feedback on using the EQS as a mechanism in this Task Force's work and see that as the appropriate role of the Agency of Education and the State Board of Education.

Poverty Weights

We understand that the Task Force is looking into how to measure poverty and the possibility of moving to one statewide form (the alternative household income form).

The VSBA supports efforts to improve the collection of data related to poverty so that it is more accurate and timely. Currently, 16 V.S.A. Section 4010(h) requires the Secretary to determine the equalized pupil count for the next fiscal year for district review on December 1 of each year and make any necessary corrections on or before December 15 on which date the count shall become final for that year. What we have seen is that the Agency of Education changes the equalized pupil numbers for districts well into the spring and sometimes as late as May. It is problematic for school boards to have equalized pupil numbers changing during and after the time that budgets are being voted on. To the extent that collection of data related to poverty causes any delay in determining districts' equalized pupil counts, improving the collection of the data to address accuracy and timeliness makes sense.

Finally, we were asked for feedback on the current calculation for poverty that includes English Language Learners not living in poverty. We don't have any information about the origin of this part of the calculation and don't think it falls within our expertise to provide feedback on it.

English Language Learners

We understand that the Task Force has questions about whether categorical grants are useful to school boards in conversations with the voters about the budgetary needs of the district. The answer is that categorical grants are not directly part of the education spending voters are asked to support (because education spending is total expenditures less offsetting revenues such as categorical grants). School boards tend to focus on those areas of the budget that are within education spending when they are speaking with voters about the budgetary needs of the district.

Regarding the use of categorical aid in place of the recommended changes in pupil weights, the VSBA supports the use of categorical aid, in place of the recommended changes in pupil weights, only where the study and the study's authors have indicated that such an approach would be an effective alternate way to achieve the goals of the study in terms of providing equitable educational opportunities for students.