



To: Members of the Task Force on the Implementation of the Pupil Weighting Factors Report

From: Aly Richards, Chief Executive Officer, Let's Grow Kids (LGK)

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Testimony to the Task Force on the Implementation of the Pupil Weighting Factors Report

On behalf of Let's Grow Kids, I would like to thank the Weighting Study Task Force for pursuing a robust and community centered approach to trying to achieve fairness and equity for all Vermont kids by implementing components of the Pupil Weighting Factors Report, and for the opportunity to provide this testimony today.

Our shared vision is a Vermont in which all children regardless of race, gender, ability, or economic background have equitable access to the early childhood education opportunities they need for a strong start in life. As a result of work done in close partnership with parents, business leaders, educators, health care providers, partners, and lawmakers, we have made important strides in achieving this vision, but we know there is more work ahead. We strongly support the task force's work to recommend investments that will level the playing field for economically-disadvantaged students, English language learners, students receiving special education services, and secondary-level students.

Increased funding and pupil weights within the K-12 system is only part of a successful strategy to improve equitable access to education among Vermont's children. Increased investment in education from birth to five, including Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) services, is also critical to support the equity outcomes the task force seeks to achieve. Research shows that high-quality early childhood education has the potential to close or eliminate opportunity gaps for children and families caused by poverty, racist policy, and social inequity. Reimagining how Vermont can best ensure affordable, equitable access early childhood education for all children is an important step in the process of addressing inequity and dismantling systemic racism in our communities. High-quality early childhood education experiences delivered by well trained and supported early childhood educators can address the biases and negative racial constructs that are often experienced learned at an early age by helping children develop empathy, practice inclusion and develop positive relationships.

Investing in early childhood education, including Pre-K, is a smart short-term and long-term investment, with dramatic returns. Ensuring all children in Vermont have equitable and affordable access to early childhood education is essential for Vermont's economic recovery

from the pandemic. Now, it allows for the rebuilding of Vermont's workforce; over time, sustained investments in the healthy development of our youngest children will help significantly reduce downstream spending on special education, health care, and corrections. The Vermont Business Roundtable estimates that expanding Vermont's early childhood education system would yield \$3 in net benefits to our government and society for every \$1 invested in early education.

Additionally, we would like to submit the following recommendations to the task force:

- **We suggest evaluating the current weight for Pre-K, and increasing the ADM used for Vermont's Pre-K funding formula.** The Pupil Weighting Factors Report did not evaluate the existing weight used for Pre-K students; nevertheless, we know that the current ADM of .46 does not cover the cost of providing high-quality Pre-K for Vermont's youngest students. We strongly suggest further investigation into the appropriate weight for the provision of Pre-Kindergarten in Vermont, to ensure students have a strong foundation for future learning.
 - We also strongly urge the Task Force to keep in mind that any change to Pre-K pupil weighting **must** be fully coordinated with any investments in the birth-five education system to avoid serious unintended consequences for children and families.
- **Continue Vermont's commitment to an equitable mixed delivery system in Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK):** Although not explicitly mentioned in the Pupil Weighting Factors Report, it bears mentioning that one of the fundamental components of Vermont's UPK system is a mixed delivery system that allows for UPK in public and private settings. This structure makes UPK more equitable by allowing all families to access their 10 hours nested within a much more accessible mixed-delivery system, and must be preserved.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss how increased investments in Pre-K within schools and in private settings can be part of a comprehensive strategy for birth to five education. Thank you again for your commitment to achieving greater equity in Vermont's education system. Our children, our educators, and our communities will be better off for it, and we are grateful to be included in this critical conversation.