

Sibilia Weight TF Public Comments 8-27-2021

Thank you I wanted to offer a brief comment here today because I am worried about the ongoing discussion about using categorical aid to correct the 20 year injustice that has been done to a generation of Vermont's neediest students and their local communities, rather than correcting the weights as recommended in that peer reviewed pupil weighting analysis that the Vermont General Assembly requested.

As you know, because our formula for providing equitable access to state resources is improperly calibrated some districts have been over accessing and are overweight and some have been under accessing and are underweighted.

The technical problem to correct that improper calibration is well evidenced in the recommendations from the Rutgers/UVM Pupil Weighting Analysis.

I appreciate that correcting the injustice also creates a political problem, which is that correcting the funding formula will also cause some wealthy and large districts to pay more in taxes if they do not modify their current budget trends.

I realize that political tax problem can be solved by awarding categorical aid instead of fixing the formula.

We can also address the political problem by fixing the formula and weights and ALSO providing tax mitigation as was envisioned in H.54

I thought Deb Brightons's testimony today was illustrative of the problem that occurred with Act 60 – and the 20 years that have followed - legislators focused almost exclusively on the state mechanism for the equitable COLLECTION of education resources – taxes – and not on the mechanism for districts to equitably ACCESS those resources to educate students – weights, categorical aid, and also not on ACCOUNTABILITY for what those resources were buying things like eqs, chart of accounts which we are currently trying to hold districts accountable to as if they have equitable access to resources.

Importantly, I heard Deb say that categorical aid is separate from the equity calculation.

Finally I am pleased to hear the questions about accountability but I do hope we all agree that questioning the ability of our poor communities to make the same decisions related to budgets and tax rates that wealthy communities have been making for 20 years is unacceptable. I believe the administration has testified repeatedly about tying the corrected weights to the EQS – a concept that is included in H.54 along with other accountability measures.

Equity throughout the system requires fixing the formula. Expanding opportunities for all students equitably requires fixing the formula.