The "Disconnects" in Calculating Equalized Pupils & Tuitioned Pupils

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Why does Vermont tuition some students?

Every school district has **a constitutional obligation** to provide a publicly-supported education to its residents. *Vermont Constitution, Ch. 2 § 68*
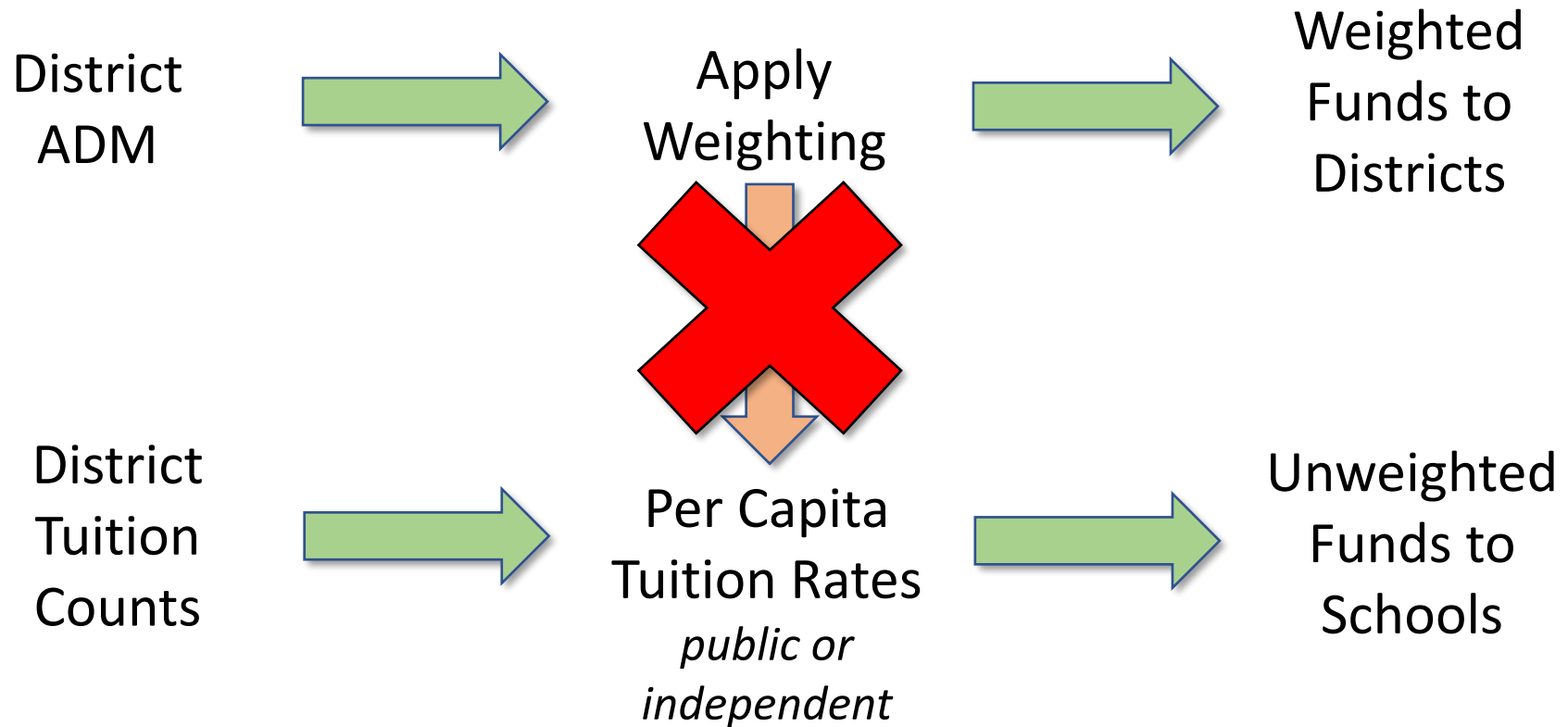
Consequently, districts that do not operate schools for some or all of grades K-12 must pay tuition for their students to attend schools elsewhere.

No distinction is made between attending public or independent schools, nearby or distant.

This model has been followed since the mid-19th Century. It is deeply embedded in sending-town culture and property values.

A statutory formula caps payments to independent schools. *16 V.S.A. §§ 823 - 824*

Education Fund Money Flows

District ADM → Apply Weighting → Weighted Funds to Districts

District Tuition Counts → Per Capita Tuition Rates *public or independent* → Unweighted Funds to Schools

How is tuition determined?

Two differing approaches:

Public school tuition is whatever each district chooses to announce.

- Sending districts must pay the announced amount.

Independent School Tuition is capped by 16 V.S.A. § 824.

- Sending districts pay no more than the capped rate.

How is independent school tuition determined?

16 V.S.A. § 824: *[A] district shall pay an* ==amount not to exceed the average== *announced tuition of Vermont union high schools for the year of attendance for* ==its students enrolled in an approved independent school== *not functioning as a Vermont area career technical center, or any higher amount approved by the electorate at an annual or special meeting warned for that purpose.*

Three exceptions:

- Schools functioning as a Vermont area career technical center.
- Any higher amount approved by the district electorate.
- Any school meeting *School Quality Standards.*

Public v. Independent Comparisons, SY 2021-2022

	Elementary Lowest	Elementary Highest	Secondary Lowest	Secondary Highest
Public Schools	$10,300	$20,265	$11,016	$20,647
Average Announced Tuition	$14,859	$14,859	$16,233	$16,233
Excepted Independent Schools	--	--	$17,990	$19,670

Computing the Average Announced Tuition

At first, it's very simple:

- Obtain the elementary & secondary tuitions announced by every union school district.

- Compute the average elementary and secondary rates.

Computing the AAT

Then it gets complicated:

Announced tuition is not required to be linked to actual operating costs *or to anything at all*.

Districts may choose any number they wish.

- Some compute their tuition carefully.

- Some may set low rates to attract tuitioned students.

- Some choose a figure with minimal effort.

Is AAT precisely determined?
Example: Tuition Announcements SY 2021-2022

	Elementary	Secondary	
Washington Central UUSD	20,265	20,647	**13% are this precise**
Mt Abraham Unified SD	16,015	19,357	
Mt Mansfield UUSD	14,600	14,400	**55% are this precise**
Otter Valley USD	14,500	14,500	
Twinfield USD	16,000	17,000	**32% are this precise**
Green Mountain Unified SD	15,000	17,000	

Does AAT reflect real operating costs?
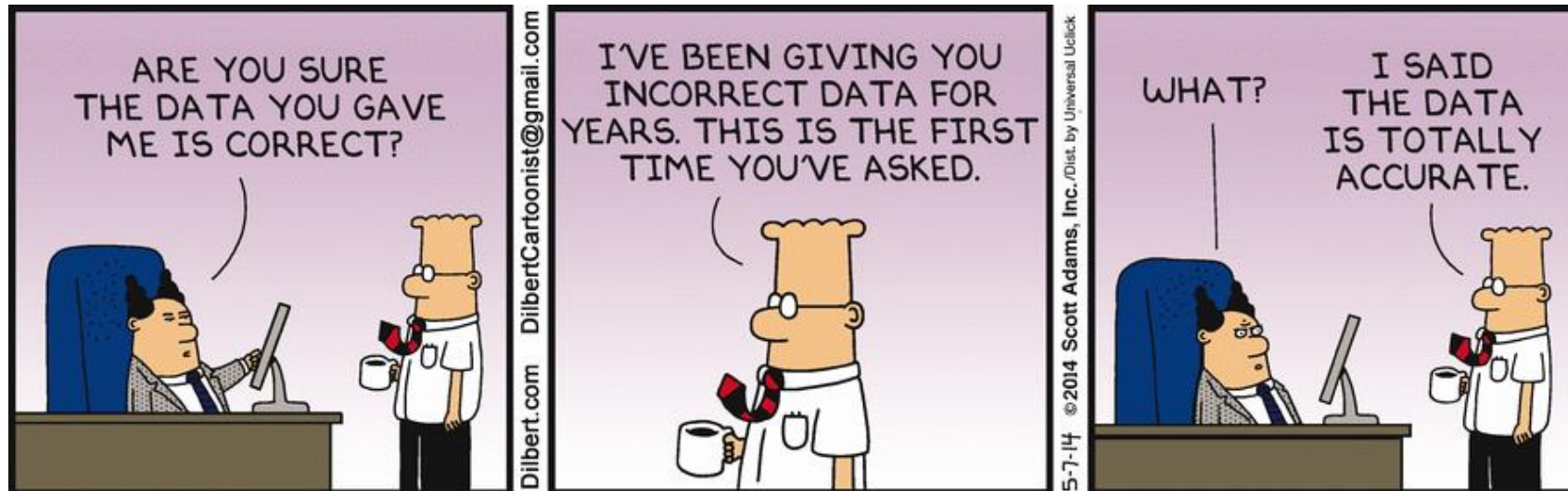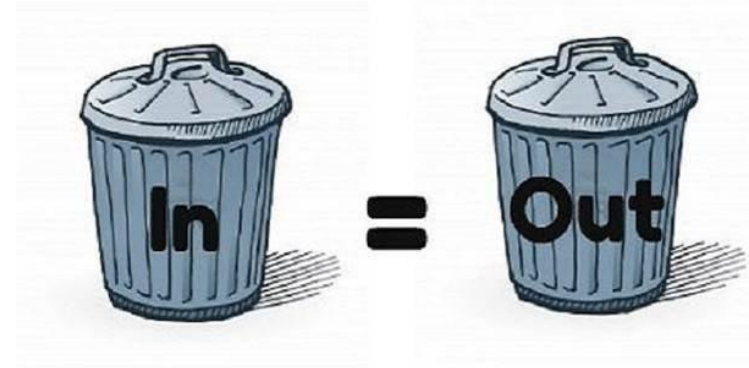Examples: AAT v. Cost per FTE, SY 2018-2019

	Full Cost Per FTE	Elementary AAT	Secondary AAT
Maple Run Unified SD	18,738	11,500	17,500
Mt Mansfield Modified SD	21,557	16,600	15,240
White River Unified SD	20,637	15,000	16,000
Montpelier-Roxbury UUSD	18,270	12,000	16,000
Statewide medians	**16,724**	**14,500**	**15,400**

70% of all AAT figures are below their district's FTE full cost.

Computing the AAT

<mark>Now it's *very* complicated:</mark>

- The input data are not grounded in a reality,
- nor are they precise.

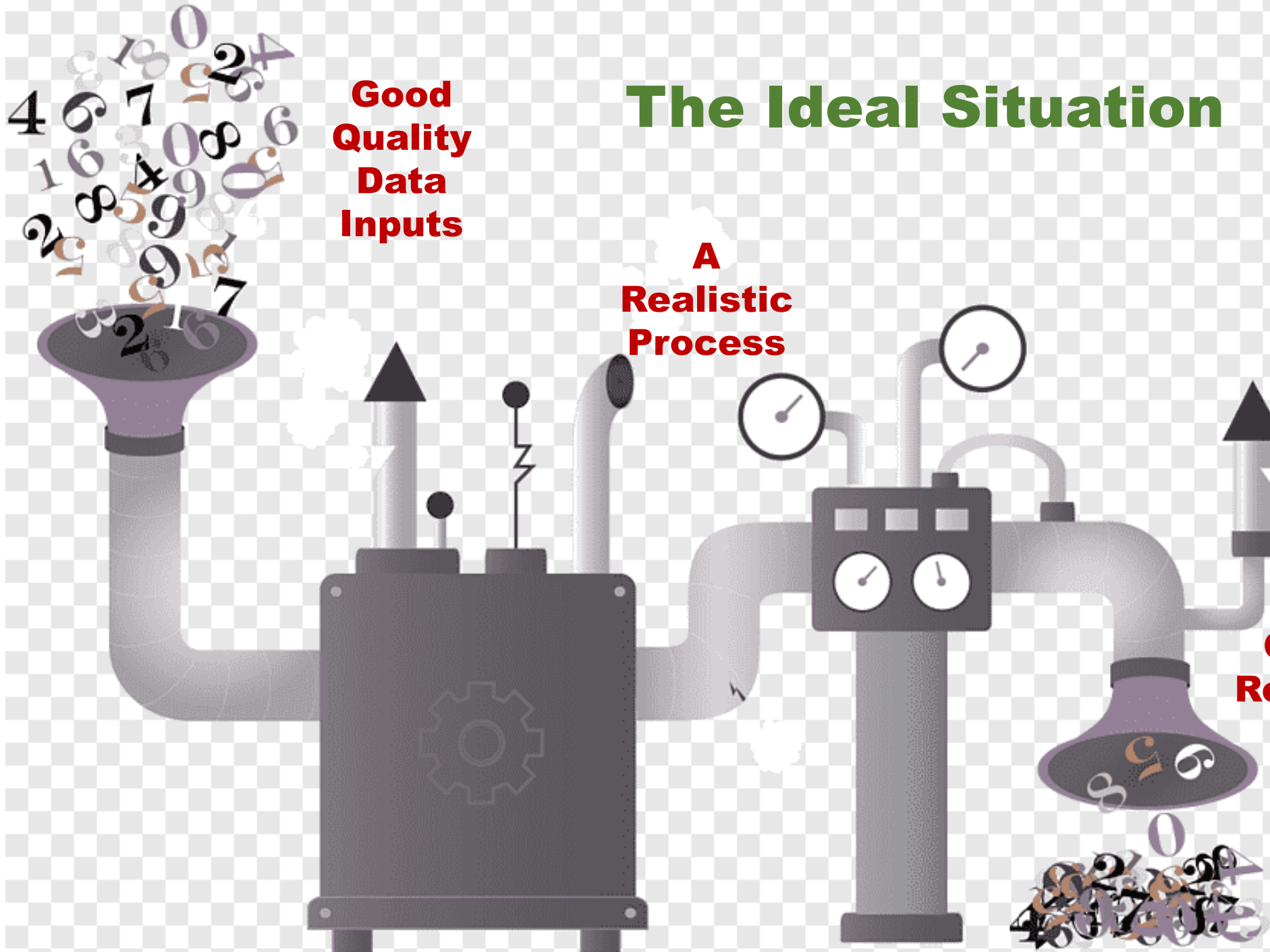- We don't know what the output is supposed to represent.

The Ideal Situation

Good Quality Data Inputs

A Realistic Process

Good Results!

Vermont's policy goal is to provide fair compensation to all receiving schools.

If so, then …

- Are low-ball or arbitrary values acceptable AAT inputs?

- Is AAT expected to be a proxy for actual operating costs?

- Should tuitions be weighted?

We see two disconnects:

- No link between weighting and tuition, and

- Very low confidence in the quality of data inputs to the tuitioning formula.