



September 8, 2021

Public Hearing on Student Weighting Calculations

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Via Zoom

Dear Task Force:

My name is Ted Plemenos. I am the Chief Financial Officer for the Rutland City Public Schools.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on planning by the Task Force to implement recommendations of the UVM Pupil Weighting Factors Report.

I have worked with many dedicated members of the State's Agency of Education, all of whom perform very beneficial services on behalf of Vermont students.

However, as recognized in 2018 by the State's Legislature, over time, and with changes in demographics, the methods used to allocate State education funding to school districts and supervisory unions have not kept up with changing needs, in spite of good intentions to do so.

It is encouraging that four committees in the House and Senate passed legislation unanimously, signed by Governor Scott, to take on the challenging and critical task of realigning educational funding practices with current costs and needs.

The analysis and recommendations of the 2019 UVM Study provide a solution that is both *reasonable in concept* and *grounded in solid data analytics*.

Are the UVM recommendations the only viable approach? No. Are these recommendations the best approach? That would depend upon what attributes are considered to be "best."

However, the Study's recommendations provide a *comprehensive, well-thought-through set of changes* that would move the State forward to achieving objectives involving *quality of education and access* to that education.

Implementing these recommendations would benefit students statewide, most likely to a far greater extent than doing so might involve working out potential issues along the way.

The State could continue to deliberate and hope for a more perfect solution. Of course, Vermont could also wait for another 20 years without making needed progress.

Deferring substantive action could have its own set of long-term costs and issues for our students, families, and communities. There is a saying that, “the cost of a good education is high, and the cost of an inadequate education is even higher.” That observation is true in so many ways.

It is true in terms of employment opportunities that a person will or will not find; his or her lifetime earnings, and the taxes that he or she will remit on those earnings; a person’s health and wellness; whether someone might become unemployed; or whether someone will have a greater need for other public services.

This is without question a *quality of life issue*; and yet it also *involves significant public funding issues* over the long term.

There is a large body of information supporting these observations, whether from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the U.S. Census Bureau, universities, policy institutes, or other organizations.

As was said so well by Representative Katherine Sims, in a commentary that she wrote in June: “Equity is not a zero-sum game. Everyone in Vermont will benefit from a fair, equitable education system.” (June 11, 2021, *VT Digger*)

On behalf of all students in Vermont and their families, I respectfully submit that it is in the State’s best general interest and long-term interests to implement the recommendations as they were offered by the UVM Weighting Study; and that the State also should plan to periodically and systematically revisit these metrics. Doing so will help to ensure that Vermont continues to move forward toward its educational objectives.

Thank you so much for your commitment to this challenging work and for your efforts to serve Vermonters.

Sincerely,

Ted Plemenos
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