

My name is Kendra Sowers and I am a Burlington School Commissioner as well as the Chair of the Coalition for Vermont Student Equity. Thank you all for serving on this Task Force to correct the per pupil weighting inequities that currently exist in our educational funding formula.

I applaud the Legislature for commissioning the now nationally acclaimed Pupil Weighting Factors Report which definitively concluded the need to update our over 20-year-old pupil weights given the contemporary costs of education. We know that when students come to school with greater needs, they need additional resources to succeed. What we didn't know prior to this data driven report was **what** numerical value our per pupil weights should be. We now know. And what we know shows a glaring underfunding for districts serving students coming from low-income households, children who attend small or rural schools, and children who require English language services. To correct this inequity, the value of the per pupil weights must be adjusted in this next Legislative session.

You've heard testimony from Superintendents, school board members, educational organizations, and other hands-on educators in districts that are underweighted that categorical aid is not the answer. These underweighted districts do not need more administrative and political hoops to jump through to get the additional funding needed to pay for programs and services for our most marginalized children. Adjusting the per pupil weights allows school districts to be able to plan and properly budget what they are receiving from the state every year.

The formula is transparent, impartial, and a tool to ensure equity without political interference. Vermonters have used this formula for over 20 years to adjust for the different cost factors needed to provide an excellent education to all of our students no matter their background and zip code. Where we strayed was when we did not evaluate the formula on a regular basis to ensure that it remained equitable given the changing and evolving landscape of education.

The Pupil Weighting Factors Report identifies the current costs, quantifies them using statistical modeling and analysis, and provides us with all the information needed to correct course and ensure that districts are funded according to the needs of the children they serve.

Now is the time for leadership, action, and courage. Courage to implement policies that create more equitable systems. Courage to be a champion of equity not in just words, but in purposeful action.

The Legislature is waiting for your recommendations for implementation and Vermonters from all over the state are asking you to improve the educational experiences and opportunities for our most vulnerable children. Together we can do what may seem hard, but what is right.

Thank you for your time.