

## **Small Schools Adjustment and Sparsity Weights Compared with Current Law Small School Grant and Merger Support Grant Analysis**

Prepared by: Joint Fiscal Office

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**Introduction:** Historically, the small school grant was intended to support the operational cost of small schools through categorical aid. The annual aid was determined by a formula, so the amount of funding for each school changed year to year. To be eligible for a small school support grant, the two-year average enrollment is less than 100, or if the average grade size is 20 or fewer. In addition, the merger support grant was a categorical aid program designed to be an incentive for small schools to merge. Each district that receives a merger support grant receives the same amount of aid each year through this program. In FY20 the appropriation for small schools grants was \$3.5 million dollars and \$4.9 million for the merger support grants.

In the 2020-2021 session, Act 73 was passed into law which states that, “a school district that received a small school grant in fiscal year 2020 shall continue to receive an annual small schools grant.” Effectively, this changes the small school grant to act like the merger support grant because the amount of aid each year shall be the same as the amount from fiscal year 2020.

The “Pupil Weighting Factors Report” recommends replacing the small school grant with small school adjustment weights. The report states, “Stakeholders were uniformly frustrated with the State’s Small Schools grant program, both in its design and operations. Stakeholders recommended abolishing the program, and instead, integrating weights in the equalized pupil calculation for geographically-necessary small schools.” (page. 4) Geographically-necessary is defined by population density (people per square mile). The report also recommends using weight to adjust for sparsity using population density. The definitions for these weights are on page 2 of this analysis and are direct quotes from the report.

There is overlap in the design of the small school and merger support categorical aid and the small school adjustment weights. The categorical aid programs provide a constant value of financial support in perpetuity, whereas the weights adjust annually based on the student body characteristics. The table in this analysis indicates that 41 school districts would qualify for both the weight adjustment and the categorical aid; 49 would qualify for the weights adjustment; 51 currently qualify for the categorical aid.

Additional policy decisions regarding the small schools adjustment weights include the enrollment size and the population density threshold. The current law small schools grant eligibility is based on average daily membership (ADM) of 100 students or the average grade size is 20 students or fewer. Whereas, the weights eligibility is 250 students and requires "geographic necessity" as defined by population density of 55 persons per square mile. For example, a school with 120 students in a district with 30 people per square mile would qualify for the small schools adjustment weight, but a school with 120 students in a district with 100 people per square mile would not qualify.

### Definitions from the "Pupil Weighting Factors Report"

- **Population Density Adjustment.** The simulations apply a population density weight to a district's weighted long-term membership (Table 6.1, Step 3). Districts are eligible for this adjustment if they are in geographic areas with less than 100 persons per square mile. Our simulations adjust a district's long-term PK–12 membership using three gradients of population density by applying an additive weight: (1) <36 persons per square mile, (2) 36 to <55 persons, and (3) 55 to <100 persons.
- **Small Schools Adjustment.** A district's weighted long-term membership is also adjusted for the additional cost of operating small schools in geographically isolated areas of the State (Table 6.1, Step 3). The simulations apply a school size weight to the long-term membership of a school when a district is in a sparsely populated geographic area (i.e., schools with an ADM of less than 250 students and in a district with less than 55 persons per square mile). Appendix B lists the schools that qualified for this adjustment, based on FY2018 enrollment.

This table shows the FY20 school districts eligibility for the Small School Adjustment and Population Density from the "Pupil Weighting Factors Report", the eligibility for a small school or merger support grant from current law, and the overlap of the small school adjustment weight and the small school or merger support grants. Additional information on school that qualify for the Small School Adjustment can be found in Appendix B of the Report.

Location			Weighting Study		Current Law	Overlap
County	District Name	Towns	Population Density Adjustment (people/m <sup>2</sup> )	Eligible for Small School Adjustment	Small School/ Merger Support Grant	Eligible for Small School Weights and Current Law Grants
			Totals	49	51	41
Addison	Addison Central USD #055	Bridport, Cornwall, Middlebury ID, Ripton, Salisbury, Shoreham, Weybridge	55 - 99.9	no	yes	no
Addison	Addison NW USD #054	Addison, Ferrisburgh, Panton, Vergennes, Waltham	55 - 99.9	no	yes	no
Addison	Granville-Hancock Unified District	Granville, Hancock	Less than 36	no	no	no
Addison	Mt. Abraham Unified School District	Bristol, Lincoln, Monkton, New Haven, Starksboro	36 - 54.9	yes	yes	yes
Bennington	Arlington	Arlington	36 - 54.9	yes	no	no
Bennington	Mt. Anthony UHSD	Mt. Anthony UHSD	Greater than 100, NA	no	no	no
Bennington	North Bennington ID	North Bennington ID	Greater than 100, NA	no	no	no
Bennington	Sandgate	Sandgate	Less than 36	no	no	no
Bennington	Searsburg	Searsburg	Less than 36	no	no	no
Bennington	Southwest Vermont Union Elementary School District	Bennington, Pownal, Shaftsbury, Woodford	Greater than 100, NA	no	no	no
Bennington	Stamford	Stamford	Less than 36	yes	yes	yes
Bennington	Taconic and Green Regional School District	Danby, Dorset, Landgrove, Londonderry, Manchester, Mt. Tabor, Peru, Sunderland, Weston	Less than 36	yes	yes	yes
Bennington	Winhall	Winhall	Less than 36	no	no	no

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Caledonia	Caledonia Cooperative Unified Union School District	Barnet, Walden, Waterford	Less than 36	yes	yes	yes
Caledonia	Danville	Danville	36 - 54.9	no	no	no
Caledonia	Hazen UHSD	Hazen UHSD	36 - 54.9	no	no	no
Caledonia	Kingdom East Unified Union School District	Burke, Concord, Lunenburg, Lyndon, Newark, Sheffield, Sutton, Wheelock	36 - 54.9	yes	yes	yes
Caledonia	Peacham	Peacham	Less than 36	yes	yes	yes
Caledonia	St. Johnsbury	St. Johnsbury	Greater than 100, NA	no	no	no
Caledonia	Stannard	Stannard	Less than 36	no	no	no
Chittenden	Burlington	Burlington	Greater than 100, NA	no	no	no
Chittenden	Champlain Valley USD #056	Charlotte, Hinesburg, St. George, Shelburne, Williston	Greater than 100, NA	no	no	no
Chittenden	Colchester	Colchester	Greater than 100, NA	no	no	no
Chittenden	Essex-Westford EC USD #051	Essex Town, Westford	Greater than 100, NA	no	no	no
Chittenden	Milton	Milton	Greater than 100, NA	no	no	no
Chittenden	Mt. Mansfield UUSD	Bolton, Jericho, Richmond, Underhill Town, Huntington	55 - 99.9	no	yes	no
Chittenden	South Burlington	South Burlington	Greater than 100, NA	no	no	no
Chittenden	Winooski ID	Winooski ID	Greater than 100, NA	no	no	no
Essex	Brighton	Brighton	Less than 36	yes	yes	yes
Essex	Canaan	Canaan	Less than 36	yes	yes	yes
Essex	Northeast Kingdom Choice School District	Bloomfield, Brunswick, East Haven, Granby, Guildhall, Kirby, Lemington, Maidstone, Norton, Victory	Less than 36	no	no	no
Franklin	Enosburgh-Richford Unified Union School District	Richford, Enosburgh	55 - 99.9	no	no	no

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Franklin	Fairfax	Fairfax	Greater than 100, NA	no	no	no
Franklin	Fletcher	Fletcher	Less than 36	yes	yes	yes
Franklin	Franklin Northwest Unified Union School District	Highgate, Franklin, Swanton	55 - 99.9	no	no	no
Franklin	Georgia	Georgia	Greater than 100, NA	no	no	no
Franklin	Maple Run USD #057	Fairfield, St. Ablans City, St. Albans Town	Greater than 100, NA	no	no	no
Franklin	Northern Mountain Valley UUSD	Bakersfield, Berkshire	Less than 36	yes	no	no
Grand Isle	Alburgh	Alburgh	55 - 99.9	no	no	no
Grand Isle	Champlain Islands UUSD	Grand Isle, Isle La Motte, North Hero	55 - 99.9	no	yes	no
Grand Isle	South Hero	South Hero	Greater than 100, NA	no	yes	no
Lamoille	Cambridge	Cambridge	55 - 99.9	no	no	no
Lamoille	Lamoille North MUSD #058A	Belvidere, Eden, Hyde Park, Johnson, Waterville	36 - 54.9	yes	yes	yes
Lamoille	Lamoille North Unified Union School District	Lamoille North MUSD #058A	36 - 54.9	no	no	no
Lamoille	Elmore-Morristown USD	Elmore, Stowe, Morristown	55 - 99.9	no	no	no
Lamoille	Wolcott	Wolcott	36 - 54.9	yes	yes	yes
Orange	Blue Mountain USD	Groton, Ryegate, Wells River	Less than 36	no	no	no
Orange	Orange Southwest USD #059	Bakersfield, Berkshire, Montgomery, Sheldon	55 - 99.9	no	yes	no

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Orange	Orange Washington Unified Union School District	Orange, Washington	Less than 36	yes	yes	yes
Orange	Oxbow Unified Union School District	Bradford, Newbury	36 - 54.9	yes	yes	yes
Orange	Rivendell Interstate USD	Fairlee, Vershire, West Fairlee	Less than 36	yes	no	no
Orange	Strafford	Strafford	Less than 36	yes	yes	yes
Orange	Thetford	Thetford	55 - 99.9	no	no	no
Orange	Waits River Valley UESD	Corinth, Topsham	Less than 36	yes	no	no
Orleans	Charleston	Charleston	Less than 36	yes	yes	yes
Orleans	Coventry	Coventry	36 - 54.9	yes	yes	yes
Orleans	Craftsbury	Craftsbury	Less than 36	yes	yes	yes
Orleans	Derby	Derby	55 - 99.9	no	no	no
Orleans	Holland	Holland	Less than 36	no	no	no
Orleans	Jay	Jay	Less than 36	no	no	no
Orleans	Lake Region UHSD	Lake Region UHSD	Less than 36	no	no	no
Orleans	Lowell	Lowell	Less than 36	yes	yes	yes
Orleans	Morgan	Morgan	Less than 36	no	no	no
Orleans	Newport City	Newport City	Greater than 100, NA	no	no	no
Orleans	Newport Town	Newport Town	36 - 54.9	yes	yes	yes
Orleans	North Country Jr UHSD	North Country Jr UHSD	55 - 99.9	no	no	no
Orleans	North Country Sr UHSD	North Country Sr UHSD	36 - 54.9	no	no	no
Orleans	Orleans Central Union Elementary School District	Albany, Barton, Brownington, Glover, Irasburg, Orleans	Less than 36	yes	yes	yes

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Orleans	Orleans Southwest Union Elementary School District	Greensboro, Hardwick, Stannard, Woodbury	36 - 54.9	yes	yes	yes
Orleans	Troy	Troy	36 - 54.9	yes	yes	yes
Orleans	Westfield	Westfield	Less than 36	yes	no	no
Rutland	Barstow USD	Chittenden, Mendon	Less than 36	yes	no	no
Rutland	Ira	Ira	Less than 36	no	no	no
Rutland	Mettawee School District	Pawlet, Rupert	Less than 36	yes	no	no
Rutland	Mill River USD	Clarendon, Shrewsbury, Tinmouth, Wallingford	36 - 54.9	yes	yes	yes
Rutland	Otter Valley USD	Brandon, Goshen, Leicester, Pittsford, Sudbury, Whiting	55 - 99.9	no	yes	no
Rutland	Pittsfield	Pittsfield	Less than 36	no	no	no
Rutland	Quarry Valley Unified Union School District	Poultney, Proctor, West Rutland	Greater than 100, NA	no	no	no
Rutland	Rutland City	Rutland City	Greater than 100, NA	no	no	no
Rutland	Rutland Town	Rutland Town	Greater than 100, NA	no	no	no
Rutland	Slate Valley Unified Union School District	Benson, Castelton, Fair Haven, Hubbardton, West Haven	36 - 54.9	yes	yes	yes
Rutland	Wells Spring Unified Union School District	Middletown Springs, Wells	36 - 54.9	yes	yes	yes
Washington	Barre Unified Union School District	Barre City, Barre Town	Greater than 100, NA	no	no	no
Washington	Cabot	Cabot	36 - 54.9	yes	yes	yes

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Washington	Central Vermont Unified Union School District	Northfield, Williamstown	Greater than 100, NA	no	no	no
Washington	Harwood USD #060	Duxbury, Fayston, Moretown, Waitsfield, Warren, Waterbury	36 - 54.9	yes	yes	yes
Washington	Montpelier-Roxbury Unified Union School District	Montpelier, Roxbury	Greater than 100, NA	no	yes	no
Washington	Twinfield USD	Marshfield, Plainfield	36 - 54.9	no	no	no
Washington	Washington Central Unified Union School District	Berlin, Calais, East Montpelier, Middlesex, Worcester	36 - 54.9	yes	yes	yes
Windham	Bellows Falls UHSD	Bellows Falls UHSD	55 - 99.9	no	no	no
Windham	Marlboro	Marlboro	Less than 36	yes	yes	yes
Windham	River Valleys USD	Dover, Wardsboro	Less than 36	yes	yes	yes
Windham	Rockingham	Rockingham	Greater than 100, NA	no	no	no
Windham	Southern Valley Unified School District	Halifax, Readsboro	Less than 36	yes	yes	yes
Windham	Stratton	Stratton	Less than 36	no	no	no
Windham	Twin Valley Unified School District	Whitingham, Wilmington	36 - 54.9	yes	no	no
Windham	Vernon	Vernon	Greater than 100, NA	no	no	no
Windham	West River MUED	Brookline, Jamaica, Newfane, Townshend	Less than 36	yes	yes	yes
Windham	West River Union Education District	Brookline, Jamaica, Newfane, Townshend	Less than 36	no	no	no
Windham	Windham	Windham	Less than 36	yes	yes	yes



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Windham	Windham Northeast Union Elementary School District	Athens, Grafton, Westminster	36 - 54.9	yes	yes	yes
Windham	Windham Southeast Unified Union School District	Brattleboro, Dummerston, Guilford, Putney	Greater than 100, NA	no	yes	no
Windsor	Rochester-Stockbridge Unified School District	Rochester, Stockbridge	Less than 36	yes	yes	yes
Windsor	Barnard	Barnard	Less than 36	yes	yes	yes
Windsor	First Branch Unified School District	Chelsea, Tunbridge	Less than 36	yes	yes	yes
Windsor	Green Mountain Unified School District	Andover, Baltimore, Cavendish, Chester	36 - 54.9	yes	yes	yes
Windsor	Hartford	Hartford	Greater than 100, NA	no	no	no
Windsor	Hartland	Hartland	55 - 99.9	no	no	no
Windsor	Ludlow-Mt. Holly Unified Union School District	Ludlow, Mt. Holly	36 - 54.9	yes	yes	yes
Windsor	Mount Ascutney School District	West Windsor, Windsor	Greater than 100, NA	no	yes	no
Windsor	Norwich	Norwich	55 - 99.9	no	no	no
Windsor	Sharon	Sharon	36 - 54.9	yes	yes	yes
Windsor	Springfield	Springfield	Greater than 100, NA	no	no	no
Windsor	Weathersfield	Weathersfield	55 - 99.9	no	no	no
Windsor	White River Unified District	Bethel, Royalton	55 - 99.9	no	no	no

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Windsor	Windsor Central Modified Unified Union School District	Bridgewater, Plymouth, Pomfret, Reading, Killington, Woodstock, Barnard	Less than 36	yes	yes	yes