

Public Hearing - Task Force on the Implementation of the Pupil Weighting Factors Report

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In favor of implementing the Recommendations of the UVM/Rutgers Weighting Study

1. Introduction and Thanks
 - a. Greetings. My name is Robert Bliss. I reside, vote, and pay taxes in Rutland City. I also serve Rutland City Public Schools as the Assistant Superintendent of Schools.
 - b. Thank you for your service on this task force, and for welcoming me a second time to discuss the needed solution to Vermont's inequitable system of weighting student needs.
 - c. The term "inequity" is not used lightly. In Rutland we have been focused on building a more equitable school system for the last several years. Our efforts to serve our community well has brought some points of excellence, but the increasing need and outdated data on poverty at the state level has left us in a precarious situation. Our students and our community need your help, as do many communities across Vermont.
2. Results of the Weighting Study
 - a. The results and recommendations of the weighting study are un-mistakable. There is no need to review them here. It suffices to say, a bright light has been cast on Vermont's education funding formulas that are creating a widening gap between "underweighted" and "Overweighed" Communities.
 - b. Not long ago, the Brigham Decision Court noted, *"Even if we are to assume that [the Foundation Plan] is working adequately to accomplish its purpose, we must confront the constitutionality of the system in light of the limited nature of the Foundation Plan's purpose. The object of the Plan is not equality of educational opportunity generally, or even equality of local capacity to facilitate opportunity. It is only to equalize capacity to produce a minimally adequate education, assuming the voters can sustain the state-selected tax rate (253-54)."* To me, the current funding situation and the proposed categorical aid solution would only accomplish "a minimally adequate education" and access to learning experiences that engage and enrich our students.
3. The Problem with a Political Solution and Avoiding an Empirical Solution
 - a. The problems associated with a political decision, categorical aid, are just that... Political. They lack the view of statespeople who serve Vermont's citizens now, and in the future.

They are subject to political pressure, lobbying, and the impact of the zip code on decision making.

- b. The empirical and neutral study that yielded the recommendations you all are considering was focused on “what’s best for Vermont’s students.”
4. The Story of Rutland’s Reality and the State’s Obligation
 - a. October 22 raid in Rutland’s Northwest Neighborhood and the impact on the young families here.
 - b. As we know, in the USA, education is a function of the state. The lack of an equitable solution that correctly supports all of Vermont’s students places us all at the same place we were in just prior to the Brigham decision. I believe there is only one correct and eventual outcome.
 5. Request Full Implementation, and Thanks Again
 - a. As stated above, please support the full implantation of the UVM/Rutgers Weighting Study Recommendations. It’s the correct action to take for our students.