

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you.

My name is Kathy Olwell. I am a Burlington School Commissioner and a retired social worker, who spent 25 years working with middle school youth. I was hopeful when the weighting study was initiated and hopeful that it would show what we knew was happening for the past 20 plus years. And it did!

The legislature commissioned UVM, Rutgers and the American Institute for Educational Research to conduct The Pupil Weighting Factors Report that has been praised by educational, scientific and mathematical institutions as one of the most equitable education weighting studies done to date in the United States. We, the taxpayers, paid for the study because AOE and JFO did not have the personnel to research and model the weighting formula. However, last week the task force stated to the Coalition that the reason the categorical aid modeling is taking so long to finish is because AOE and JFO have lost personnel and new staff need to be trained. This does not sound reassuring to me and I do not understand why a completed, scientifically credible study is being set aside for an unfinished and unvetted study? That's not how good science nor how good government works. You do not design a study for the answers you want, nor do you take out a portion of the population based on a class or race when you are trying to find an equitable solution. That is what I would call racism, not science nor government looking for equity.

It is imperative that you show the categorical aid proposal as well as the updated modeling of the reports recommendations. If you refute the Weighting Factors Report, the full Legislature must fully understand what it is you are refuting and why. Additionally, you should provide the Legislature with an updated data simulation of both Simulation B.1 of the Weighting Factors Report and Categorical Aid simulation so that comparisons are accurate and the work is transparent.

I hope that you find the civil courage to make the politically difficult choice before you. Please do not play politics with the education and future of Vermont's impoverished and ELL children. They are depending on each one of you to right this inequitable wrong that has burdened education for the past 20 years. Prove to the children of this state, that Vermont does what is equitable and right, even when it may be difficult.

Thank you!