

Testimony to the Weighting Study Committee

Richard Werner

Thank you for allowing me to address this Committee. I know that you all have been very busy and working hard on your charge to report back to the legislature. This committee has the ability to recommend corrections to Act 60/68 that have been festering for over 20 years, improper weighting of students throughout the State, which has caused many districts to put off many needed buildings repair and reduce programs to keep the ask of its' communities at a level that will not bankrupt their Towns.

I have been a member of the Dover School Board since 1995 and Chairman since 1996 until it ceased to exist. I currently serve as Chairman of the River Valley School District of which I have served as since its' inception. I have also served as Chairman of Windham Central Supervisory Union for approx. 20 years, over two terms. This experience has offered me a unique perspective of Education Funding in Vermont from Pre- Act 60 through Act 68, from both the perspective of giving and receiving schools in our district. I also became very knowledgeable on Act 60/68 funding having spent many hours talking to both Brad James and Bill Talbot. I was able to access the financial tools supplied to the Business Managers as in Dover School we did not access ourselves to the school business manager. The School District would many times postpone votes on the budget until May so as to home the budget to allow for the maximum utilization of funds for the betterment of our students.

In the early days of Act 60 the legislature recognized that small and rural schools had additional challenges, as well as students from high poverty areas and English Language learners. To correct this there were several adjustments made, some through weighting and some through grants. A couple of years after the original weighting there these weights were adjusted, and since then seem to have become stagnant.

Many of the grants have changed over time, it seems that many have been reduced, with the reductions being announced late in the Legislative season, usually after many schools have already set their budget. One example is the transportation grant, which started life as 50% of the budgeted transportation expenses, to 50% of the previous years reported expenses, with that number over the years being reduced to less than 50%.

However, over the years with the weights being stagnant and the changes in education, our communities, it has become quite apparent that many of the smaller rural and high poverty areas are being severely underfunded.

This was made quite apparent with the study commissioned by our legislature that resulted in the formation of this committee.

Although the Town of Dover will adversely be affected when these weights are adjusted it is important that these changes are made as it affects our most vulnerable students in our rural areas, which makes up a large percentage of our students. I ask that this committee recommend that the weights be changed as recommended in the Legislatures requested study, and that the only categorical grants that be made available are those that allow the State and School Districts to access Federal Funds which require matching funds from that entity to avail themselves of those monies.

Lastly- I would like to ask for a publicly transparent that updated modeling of the local impact of the options so that we can see these numbers, especially for weighting reform that should be measured at the local level even if it is administered at the Supervisory Union level, as suggested by the experts in the study.

Thank you for the important and valuable services you are providing to our students in Vermont.