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STATE OF VERMONT
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
TASK FORCE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
PUPIL WEIGHTING FACTORS REPORT

October 28, 2021
Statement from Co-Chairs on Modeling Delays

The Legislative Task Force charged with examining modifications to the pupil weighting factors in the Vermont school funding formula has been working since June to establish recommendations by December 15, 2021. Based on extensive expert testimony and analysis, the Task Force has made several preliminary decisions regarding updates to the pupil weights included in the state's school funding formula, targeted funding for English language learners, a more accurate measurement of students in poverty, and a mathematically consistent means for applying the weights.

In order to determine the impact of these decisions on equalized pupil counts, education spending, and tax rates for each school district, analysts from the Agency of Education (AOE) and Joint Fiscal Office (JFO) have been working to build a statewide data model of our very complex school funding system. We had planned to release the results of this modeling at our October 20th Task Force meeting, however, several factors have delayed this work and we again must delay the release of the results.

We know many people are eager to review these results, however, the AOE analyst has had to build an equalized pupil model from scratch – a model that allows for analyzing the impact of both the new pupil weights recommended in the Pupil Weighting Factors Report and modifications to the tax equalization formula requested by the Task Force. This model must go through multiple reviews and updated versions to ensure accuracy.

Further, the Report was based on data from 2010-2018 and modeled on FY2018 and thus did not reflect governance changes and new school district configurations that followed the implementation of Act 46. These changes had a significant impact on school budgeting and resource allocation decisions, enrollment figures, and school district sizes, all of which impact the findings of the Report and needed to be included in the Task Force decision-making and the AOE model.

Variations to the current school funding formula that would impact the force of the pupil weights, including updating the measurement of students in poverty and moving to a more mathematically consistent application of weights, requires that the pupil weights be recalculated, as outlined in testimony on October 8, 2021. Currently, JFO and AOE do not

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have the capacity to do this recalculation in-house, thus we've had to rely on outside analysts, which has delayed the work. Coordinating remote work sessions between AOE, JFO and the Report authors has taken more time than expected because everyone also has additional significant work and personal commitments.

The models and underlying data are complex and need to be thoroughly vetted for both conceptual and data accuracy. Releasing results prematurely can cause confusion and additional work and undermine confidence in the analysis. While we know that school districts statewide are eager to see the results of our modeling, we want to ensure that the analysis upon which we are basing public policy and financing recommendations is as accurate as possible because, ultimately, these decisions will impact the education of students statewide.

Thank you for your patience and understanding. We look forward to a continued robust conversation about this work and the forthcoming results of our modeling.

Sincerely,

Senator Ruth Hardy and Representative Emilie Kornheiser
Task Force Co-Chairs