

November 10, 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to provide public comment this afternoon.

My name is Marc Schaubert, I'm the executive director for the Coalition for Vermont Student Equity.

To date, the process this task force has set out on, is lacking the transparency that is so critical to a process that creates a proposal with statewide implications. I was heartened to see the Task Force leaning towards using school level data, which the researchers themselves say is more statistically accurate. And we might support the other policy decisions as well, such as switching to additive and using FRPL data to define poverty.

But right now, you are asking Vermonters to blindly trust your math without a base level for comparison. The numbers Brad presented today show impacts that are far different than past simulations. It's important that you show districts that the net of this proposal with your policy assumptions included isn't so far off from the baseline recommendations in the reports B.1 simulation. You must show Vermonters how your proposal compares to the original recommendations.

We want to be collaborators in this work, but we can't collaborate with a Task Force that refuses to show how their proposal stacks up against the popular recommendations of the report. There is precedence in Vermont statute that requires a cost benefit analysis between certain proposals and their economically viable alternatives. If this is truly a capacity and bandwidth issue, remember that your Task Force has a \$25k appropriation to work with a consultant. This should be a sufficient amount of money to provide updated simulations of B.1.

I think it's also worth pointing out that the JFO analysis from 2020, based on B.1, only excluded the small schools' weight, but did include rurality. So it's actually quite close to what the updated B.1 simulation would show for FY20.

As the definition of equity was discussed earlier, I'd like to quote Merriam-Webster dictionary, "Equity is often related to justice or proportional fairness. Equality differs from equity in that it relates more to sameness or equal distribution. In society, equal treatment does not always produce an equitable result."

The cost equity formula strives for equality, not equity. I urge you not to consider reverting back to any portion of the foundation formula as it was clearly ruled inequitable by the Brigham decision. The fact is, it doesn't cost the same to educate the same or similar students in different districts and across the state. The recommendations from the Pupil Weighting Factors Report, if implemented in full, WILL create equity in our funding formula and do take into account these differences.



In regards to ELL, As stated in the Kolbe memo, “it is important to note that there are efficiencies in operating a formula that adjusts for differences in the cost of educating ELL students using weights incorporated in the equalized pupil calculation. A categorical funding program for ELL students could be a viable policy alternative if the funding available through this program is equivalent to the cost offset that would be generated by the weight identified in Model 4 (Table 1). This would require the General Assembly to calculate, each fiscal year, a new funding amount for the program.” Thus making categorical aid a political football, something the weights wouldn’t do.