



The University of Vermont

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES

# Preliminary Comments on Report of the Task Force on Pupil Weighting

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Making  Difference

# Policy Goals

- Equalize educational opportunity
- Generate revenues for education in a fair and efficient manner

# Two Proposed Policy Responses

1. Update weights in current equalized pupil calculation
2. Adopt new categorical funding approach to equalizing costs

# Option 1: Updated Weights

- **Clarification:**
  - New weights are empirically-derived *using same models* presented in initial “Weighting Study” report with updated assumptions (i.e., different measure of student economic disadvantage; and
- **Modification to report recommendations:**
  - Option 1 proposes categorical grant to adjust for costs of educating ELL students, rather than weights

# Option 2: Categorical Funding

- “Reverse foundation formula” (RFF)
  - Provides “foundation” grants for specified categories of students and schools intended to offset differences in educational costs

# Trade Offs & Limitations with Proposed RFF

- Challenging to appropriately calibrate and maintain grant amounts
- Equity concerns
- Cost containment
- Politization
- Competition for resources

# Calibration & Maintenance

- Challenging to appropriately calibrate and maintain
  - Difficult to get grant amounts “right”
  - No consistent “foundation” to which the grants will be applied
  - Will need to be updated frequently
  - Added legislative/administrative burden for appropriating and allocating funding

# Equity Concerns

- May widen gap between top and bottom spenders
  - Dollar-based adjustments are most effective “at the middle”
    - Average grants favor districts/schools with lower-than-average costs (per category) & disadvantage those with higher-than-average costs
  - May run counter to local control/decision making
    - i.e., Doesn’t adjust approved spending, but rather assumes a fixed dollar amount as an adjustment)



# Cost Containment

- Categorical grant program will likely increase average per pupil spending statewide
  - May “over adjust” costs in some districts, creating incentives to either spend more than needed or provide insufficient disincentive to constrain spending.
    - In current formula, weights are intended to help constrain inappropriate spending
    - Unclear how grant program will connect with current excess spending threshold policy
  - Districts will likely “budget maximize” and increase average per pupil spending

# Politization

- Appropriation levels for categorical programs may be subject to legislative manipulation

# Competition for Resources

- **Problematic construction:**
  - “Further, since cost equity payments would be distributed first, before determining base funding, it would be important to ensure that the payments **do not draw so much funding toward specific costs** and needs than insufficient base funding per pupil would be available statewide. In other words, what percentage of overall spending on K-12 education **should go toward these areas of identified need compared to general spending per pupil?**” (pp. 14-15; emphases added)