

**2009 Report on Act 82 of 2007, Section 8**  
**An Act Relating to Education Quality and**  
**Cost Control: Weighted Membership**

**Report/Recommendations to the House and Senate Committees on**  
**Education**

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**Submitted by:**



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## Overview

A primary factor in Vermont's education funding formula is the concept of equalized pupils. An equalized pupil can be thought of as an average pupil in terms of educational costs. An equalized pupil within a school district would have the same cost as any other equalized pupil, whereas the actual per pupil costs of students would vary.

Various categories of students are presumed to have significantly higher or lower educational costs. Vermont statute recognizes four such categories (current weighting factors are in parentheses):

1. Prekindergarten children, including those receiving Essential Early Education services (0.46)
2. Secondary students, grades 7 through 12 (1.13)
3. Students from economically deprived backgrounds (1.25 by formula)
4. Students for whom English is not their primary language (1.20).

The weighting factor for secondary students had been 1.25 prior to and up through Acts 60 and 68, based on the assumption that the cost to educate a secondary student was 25 percent greater than the cost to educate an elementary student. There was general consensus that average costs for secondary students were lower than 25 percent of those for elementary students. A study of FY2007 budget data suggested secondary costs per pupil were approximately 13 percent higher than elementary costs per pupil. Legislation enacted during the 2007 session changed the secondary weighting factor to 1.13 for FY2009 (2007, No. 82, § 7).

Act 82, section 8 of 2007 included a statutory biannual requirement for the commissioner of education to study the accuracy of the weights and to recommend adjustments, if any:

### **16 V.S.A. § 4010. Determination of weighted membership**

(i) The commissioner shall evaluate the accuracy of the weights established in subsection (c) of this section and, at the beginning of each biennium, shall propose to the house and senate committees on education whether the weights should stay the same or be adjusted.

Of the four pupil categories to which weighting factors are assigned, it is currently feasible to only look at the accuracy of the secondary weighting factor for secondary union schools and the elementary schools from the towns that are members of those union schools. Budget data are not reported in such a fashion that would allow the isolation of secondary and elementary costs for school districts that are not members of secondary union schools.

Isolating costs attributed to students from an economically deprived background or those for English Language Learners is a far more complex task. School districts do not currently track those costs separately as expenditures for those two categories of student are spread across functions. In order to ascertain those costs, business managers would likely need to change their current practices.

### **Recommendation for Secondary Weighting**

A study of FY2009 budget data suggests that a secondary weight of 1.13 is still appropriate. Budget data are reported in such a manner that only secondary union school districts and the local schools of their district members can be used for the study. Unless a district belongs to a union high school, expenditure data are reported as an aggregate prekindergarten through grade

12 number. It is not possible to disaggregate those data to prekindergarten, elementary and secondary levels.

While various methods were used, the most logical method was to look at the secondary spending per equalized pupil statewide and compare that to the figure for elementary spending per equalized pupil. If the result of dividing the secondary spending per pupil by the elementary spending per pupil approaches 1.00, the secondary weighting factor is considered to be correct. At a secondary weight of 1.13, the ratio of secondary spending per pupil to elementary is 1.01.

**Table 1: FY2009 budget data**

	<b>Count</b>	<b>Education Spending (ES)</b>	<b>Equalized Pupils (EP)</b>	<b>ES / EP</b>	<b>Ratio: secondary / elementary</b>
<b>Union high schools, statewide</b>	28	\$274,892,035	23,184,.04	\$11,865.95	1.01
<b>Local elementary costs of member districts, statewide</b>	119	\$301,696,120	25,701.94	\$11,738.26	

If the ratio grows beyond 1.01 in the next review, we will recommend a change but this year, keeping the secondary factor at 1.13 is recommended, providing stability and continuity to the longitudinal data.