

Vermont State Board of Education

Legislative Policy Recommendation: The Weighting Study

From: Bill Mathis

The re-examination of the equity of the various components of educational funding (commonly called the “weighting study”) was an undertaking of significant importance. As the nature and needs of society evolve, it is vital that the finances of the educational system be periodically re-evaluated. Arguably, this last occurred in 1997 with Act 60. Even then, the necessary resources set aside for various special needs (“weights”) was not comprehensively addressed.

The General Assembly, in order to address this concern, contracted a weighting study to ascertain what funds should be allocated to particular groups of students. This report, developed by the University of Vermont and its consultants, defined what the relative allocation or funding weights should be.

The next requirement is to develop a systemic plan to identify, prioritize and set timelines to move the report’s key findings into action. Despite a variety of fiscal, health, and governmental limitations facing the state and the nation, it is a Constitutional and moral obligation to move this work.

The state board therefore recommends that the General Assembly establish a work group charged with developing plans for implementing the Weighting Study report’s key findings. Specifically, the group will be tasked with:

1. Reviewing the report’s findings and establishing policy priorities, including considering different policy options for revising the current weights used in the State’s equalized pupil calculation.
2. Identifying concurrent changes that would update the current funding system to reflect contemporary educational circumstances and policy priorities in the state.

The work group shall be composed of no more than seven individuals, consisting of Vermonters with proven technical knowledge and expertise in the field of educational finance, the State’s existing funding formula, and the weighting study produced by UVM. Participants should be compensated at a rate commiserate with professional rates for such work and provided with clerical and statistical support, as necessary but not be taken from current resources.

The work group shall meet as needed from (Spring 2021) to January 1, 2022 and, on or before December 15, 2021, provide a plan to the legislature that describes policymaking priorities for the legislature, including explicitly differentiating those for immediate action as well as those for a long-term phase-in.