

Weighing the Weighting Study: Some Observations, Some Questions

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- I. Have we overlooked the purpose? Tax equity is comparatively easy to design. However, we have to figure what we are buying before figuring the cost. We haven't done that.¹ Test scores are not opportunity to learn. They are not a treatment.
- II. The spider web – In regression models or zero sum models, you tweak the web on one side, it causes changes on the other sides. If you arbitrarily change one variable, it will force other changes in perhaps strange ways.²
- III. Items for closer consideration. The predictors need to have a causal relationship to outcomes. If not, you start having low correlations. Concerns:
 - a. Census based funding – Requires a uniform distribution of special needs children across districts. This condition does not exist.³
 - b. Small schools grants – Swapped away in Act 46 but reintroduced as density – The study shows it exists and is significant. This is Vermont⁴ CAUTION: Don't build a cliff – People jump off them. Look out for dichotomous variables.
 - c. Assumes early ed programs have resolved equal opportunity issues.⁵
 - d. Note the repeated remarks addressed to mental health and social problems. There are limits to what can be achieved by traditional pedagogy.⁶
- IV. Excessive Ornamentation – State aid formulas are primarily the province of dedicated statisticians. They are not easily understood. There are lessons to be learned:
 - a. If it is clearly not education, don't fund it from the education fund. This exaggerates spending

- b. Don't half-fund a program area. The other half is unlikely to show up next year and the result is a financially regressive program.
- V. Expanding the achievement gap –
- a. Note that all the listed weighting factors affecting are external to the schools. Note that these funds do not address root causes. The actions that should be taken are not well defined.

¹ In modern usage, required since 1981 (16 VSA 166)

² i.e. – arbitrarily changing the weights.

³ P.6, executive summary, Census based block grant

⁴ Table E-1 reinstates small school enrollment and density

⁵ <https://education.vermont.gov/student-support/vermont-multi-tiered-system-of-supports/educational-equity>

⁶ See Richard Rothstein in Mathis and Trujillo.