

Good morning. My name is Marc Schaubert. I have the great privilege to be a member of the River Valleys Unified School District Board, representing Dover. I am also fortunate enough to have the great honor of being the Executive Director of The Coalition for Vermont Student Equity, a Vermont non-profit.

The Coalition was formed last year by a group of school directors from disparate districts frustrated with the lack of progress on the implementation of the recommendations from the Pupil Weighting Factors Report.

We currently have 21 member Boards from districts ranging from the small and rural to large and urban, and from all parts of the state. While most of our member districts are currently underweight, we do have some member districts and towns, such as my own town and Washington Central School District, that are overweight. Equity ultimately benefits everyone.

I want to sincerely thank the Legislature for your unanimous recognition of the need to correct the weights. A special thank you to the eight of you and to the staff and stakeholders involved, for your willingness to take time out of your post-COVID summer to serve on this very important task force.

The Coalition for Vermont Student Equity has one very straightforward goal: we read all 150+ pages of the 2019 pupil weighting factors report, most of us multiple times to fully understand the intricacies of the report, and the results came as no surprise to those of us who have lived in these communities for decades. Now we are saying it's high time to fix the flawed formula by implementing the recommendations in the report.

Winooski School District, a founding member of The Coalition, can't afford sufficient bussing, forcing some very young children to walk long distances to school in our frigid VT winters. Windham Southeast School District doesn't have the funds to hire enough staff and instructors, causing their teachers to go without enough time to collaborate, plan, learn, and practice together. Wardsboro Elementary, now part of River Valleys School District, had an HVAC system that, until COVID money became available, pulled air into the system from the attic instead of fresh outside air.

These are just a sample of needs that have gone unmet due to insufficient resources caused by inadequate pupil weights for small schools, rurality, high ELL populations and high poverty populations.

Correcting the weights as recommended by the 2019 report is the only way to fix this inequitable funding formula. Categorical aid, while it may seem like a simple, logical

solution, does not address the actual inequity in the system. It creates a separate funding system for students with the greatest need. In addition, categorical aid doesn't provide struggling districts with any certainty. Grants can come and go, their measurements and purpose are apt to change by the year. Districts need certainty. Using categorical aid also doesn't get to the root of the issue, which makes it hard, if not impossible, to measure differences in student needs throughout the state. The weights are how we map out student needs. Simply put, categorical aid is not equity, as it only allows for local agency and flexibility in spending decisions for some districts, but not for others.

The Coalition is here to be a resource for you and we want to help. The often overused phrase "Children are our Future" really needs to be "ALL Children are our Future," not just those from well to do communities.

Thank you for this opportunity to introduce myself and our coalition.

Coalition for Vermont Student Equity, Inc.

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