

Hello, my name is Martine Larocque Gulick. I am a School Commissioner in Burlington and a member of the Coalition for Vermont Student Equity.

I am here to speak to you today, because I have a unique perspective as someone who works in an over-weighted district and lives in an under-weighted district. As the Director of Library Media Services in an overweighted Chittenden County District I oversaw my own budget and led a staff of six. As an English and French teacher, I was directly affected by resource allocation and worked closely with faculty and staff.

For years I was baffled by the discrepancies I saw in funding between the two districts. I came to realize that my library budget was 10 times larger than the library budget at Burlington High School. Where we had 6 assistants, Burlington had 1. Where librarians in Burlington took care of technology integration for their schools, where I worked, we not only had tech integration specialists across the district but also a well-staffed IT department with an IT Director. Burlington has no IT Director and an understaffed IT department. I could go on, but I hope that gives you a flavor of some of the inequities the BSD faces.

As you may know, Burlington is a Refugee Resettlement City and we have many English language learners in our district. We are also a district where over 50% of our students have Free and Reduced Lunch eligibility, with some of our schools as high as 71%. Our needs are great.

Implementing the student weights would allow us to:

- Hire more multilingual liaisons and be able to pay them year around for the great demands on their time.
- We could increase training and offer stipends for teachers to improve engagement with families, including conducting home visits in the summer and after hours.
- We could increase funding for pre-K, so that we could offer more classes with increased staffing.
- We could implement our own equitable funding model.
- We could add much needed special education teachers, counselors, social workers, EL teachers, paraeducators and specialists to support our students in a more inclusive setting.

I'd like to close by giving you an example of a program that is unique to Burlington, and that serves our diverse population. Years ago, we realized that focusing all of our efforts on our students was not enough. We realized that especially with our New American population, it was critical to bring parents and families into the learning environment as well. We started a program called Parent University which teaches language skills to parents of Burlington students but also helps them navigate American culture and understand the challenges and joys of raising children in Vermont. This is a vital program that is funded by the Burlington School District and uses resources that might otherwise go to other programs. Many of our neighbors in Chittenden County have no such program since they don't have the need.

Thank you so very much for devoting your time to learn about this important funding issue in our schools, and to finding a way to implement the more equitable formula as recommended in the 2019 Pupil Weighting Factors Report.