

To: Task Force on the Implementation of the Pupil Weighting Factors Report

Submitted By: Oliver Olsen, Chair, State Board of Education

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Introduction & Background

The State Board of Education has 11 members. This includes the Secretary of Education, who serves as a non-voting ex-officio member of the board. Eight members are appointed by the Governor and serve six-year terms. Two student members serve staggered two-year terms; the junior student is a non-voting member, while the senior student can vote in his or her second year of service. Current members of the board come from a variety of backgrounds, but we all share a common interest and dedication to the education of Vermont's children. Two members were educators and principals in Vermont's public school system, two members chair their local school boards, one member was the headmaster at Vermont's largest independent school. And our newest member of the board (just appointed a few days ago) is a prominent member of the higher education community in Vermont.

Prior to the passage of Act 98 in 2012, the State Board was effectively structured as a board of directors, with the Commissioner of Education, who managed the Department of Education, reporting to the board. Act 98 elevated the role of the Commissioner and the Department to Secretary and Agency, respectively, and made the Secretary of Education accountable to the Governor. The General Assembly preserved a role for the State Board, which continues to have responsibility for a number of important functions, including adjudication of certain education-related matters, approval of specific types of governance changes, and rulemaking. This brings us to the subject of the Educational Quality Standards (EQS), rules that were last revised in 2014.

The State Board is a somewhat unique state entity, in that all voting members are limited to a single term (unless they are filling a vacancy). This has the effect of limiting the board's institutional knowledge of past rulemaking, including the current EQS rules, that was undertaken more than 6 years ago. While I am the most senior member of the board, I have only served for three years. To the best of my knowledge, we have not been asked to consider revisions to EQS during my time on that board. During my tenure, the State Board's work has been largely consumed by directives of the General



Assembly - principally Act 46 and Act 173 - and an increasing number of complex adjudicative matters. Given the volume of work and lack of resources (we are essentially volunteers who meet monthly, with no dedicated staff), the board has had limited capacity to proactively tackle any other matters beyond these substantial undertakings.

General Comments

I have always found it interesting that we have an education finance system that emphasizes equity of tax effort yet is virtually silent on the equity of educational opportunity and outcomes. Back in [April of 2016](#), during a debate on the House floor about the precursor to your work - a plan for the weighting study - I highlighted the example of two public high schools in Vermont: one in a Chittenden County suburb and the other in a rural, so-called "gold town". The suburban school offered numerous AP courses, advanced videography, multiple world languages, and a vast array of sports and recreational programs - all at a cost of \$13,300 per pupil. The rural school had almost no AP courses, and only two world languages - both taught by the same teacher. No videography - just a basic photography course, and students were required to supply their own camera. The cost per pupil - over \$16,000.

I bring these two examples back to the table because they bring a key point into focus. Both schools in these examples met the EQS. There is very little in the standards that speak to equity of opportunity - the emphasis is on baseline expectations. Critically, the underlying education finance statutes do not permit equalization through the EQS (or other rules) of the many variables that influence the relationship between monetary inputs and educational outputs.

As you begin to consider the many approaches to addressing this complex problem, I would encourage you to allow ample time to consider the impacts of the many variables at play, particularly as you consider the delegation of any rulemaking. A [June 2018 memo](#) written by a former Chair of the State Board, Krista Huling, regarding the challenges faced by the State Board when it was directed to implement standards for Small School Grants is particularly informative.

