

MEMORANDUM

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

FROM: Jeff Fannon, Vermont-NEA Executive Director

DATE: August 12, 2021

I was asked to discuss the Agency of Education’s Education Quality Standards (EQS) and Vermont-NEA’s and our members’ experience with these rules. My comments here are based upon conversations and experiences from the field. My comments are also intended to be a starter, and I welcome a conversation with you about your work this weighting Task Force.

In short, while the EQS standards are well intentioned, the Agency needs more resources to actually enforce the standards, and that means more resources in the form of human resources. I say “enforce” the standards, but really what I am suggesting is more robust support by the AOE to school districts in need of improvement. And, districts in need of improvement should be provided with targeted and non-punitive supports and resources to improve the academic experience for its students.

The standards should be revised as Secretary French suggests, but the focus should be finding resources so the Agency can assess school districts’ performance on these standards, and then, again, getting the AOE additional resources to support school districts that could be doing better by students.

As for the weights by which to account for students, which is the focus of this Task Force, the standards are related to the weights. It is no secret that poverty is a main driver of students who are underperforming, and we need to account for that reality. Once the weights and/or categorical aids are adjusted, the Agency must receive additional resources to assess the effects of the proper funding model. Without such resources, we will not be able to assess the appropriateness of the adjustments, which is to say we will again be making changes to how we fund education and then crossing our fingers hoping the changes are correct.