



Vermont Independent
Schools Association

August 27, 2021

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

From: Mill Moore, Executive Director

Re: VISA Collaboration with the Task Force

The Vermont Independent Schools Association (generally known as VISA) welcomes the opportunity to be among the stakeholder groups to collaborate with the Task Force.

VISA represents the community of 125 Vermont independent schools, which educate approximately eleven percent of all K-12 students present in the State of Vermont. Ninety-three of those independent are eligible to receive public tuition.

VISA's interest in the Task Force's work is principally focused on tuitioning. But, ours is not the only interested party. In addition to the 3,000 students being tuitioned to independent schools, another 3,000 are being tuitioned to public schools. That's a fifty-fifty enrollment split, and the cost splits fifty-fifty also – 45 million dollars to public school districts and 45 million to independent schools.

The sources of most of these 6,000 tuitioned students are the 55 school districts and four unorganized towns and gores that do not operate one or more public school grades.

Every Vermont resident student has a constitutional entitlement to a publicly-supported education through grade 12. Consequently, those non-operating entities must pay tuition to any public school or state-approved independent school chosen by the family. Vermont has followed this school-choice model since the mid-nineteenth century. School choice is very deeply embedded in the local education culture and it supports increased property values in those districts.

Special education was not on legislators' or educators' minds 150 years ago, but as Act 173 shows, it certainly is salient now. Among the 6,000 tuitioned students I mentioned are 800 students who attend any of 33 therapeutic independent schools. These are schools staffed and equipped to provide special education services for students whose disabilities are too severe for them to remain in their original school.

Unlike the other 5,200 tuitioned students, special ed students are not enrolled on a school-choice basis—they're placed by their Supervisory Union with a contract and an IEP that specifies the services they must receive. These 33 schools exist because the public schools absolutely need their services.

We look forward to supporting the Task Force with our knowledge and to answering your questions now and in the future.

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