

Good evening. Thank you all for your dedication to resolving this equity issue and being a part of this task force. My name is Douglas Korb, and I am a parent and Board member in the Marlboro School district. Many of you have heard me provide testimony on this issue, so you may recall that I firmly believe the only real resolution to the equity issue is implementation of the proper weights in the formula.

The inequity that has existed within rural, impoverished, and high ELL communities these last 25 years is a stain on Vermont's educational reputation. Unfortunately, I hear repeat discussion of fixing the issue with categorical aid. To me that is a grave error in the making – Vermont is fundraising just fine – the problem is about distributing the funds we have raised and making that distribution equitable to ensure the cost of educating children is shared and the tax rate as close to even as possible throughout Vermont. Equity is about fairness and impartiality.

Fairness is easy to understand: Neighboring districts shouldn't have more educational resources than any other and vice versa. That's fair. We all pay our fair share and aim to support our schools appropriately. The trouble with trying to fix this issue by using categorical aid is the impartiality factor. Categorical aid is NOT impartial. Categorical aid defines and classifies people – that is not a healthy nor impartial way to ensure fairness. Additionally, categorical aid is just that - a band aid. The only true equity would be something impartial. And the question there is: do we know what is impartial? Yes, we do. Numbers are impartial. Formulas are dispassionate. A number does its job and a formula ensures all distributions go where intended. The use of categorical aid is dangerous for resolving this problem because it sees differing personalities enter the conversation each legislative session and potentially tweaking and modifying language. One such example of these modifications can be seen when the small schools grant definition changed to allow 12 schools from the previous 100 during the Act 46 process. Who changed the definition of a small school? How? Why? For this reason you can see that it is easy for a legislator or state board official to change the definition of a VT region but it is less so with the term poverty, rurality, or non-native speaker. These are established terms and the numbers should speak for themselves now and into the future as populations shift and change. Marlboro today will not be Marlboro in 25 years. The same can be said for any other district in Vermont. Therefore, let the numbers do the work of being impartial.

Categorical aid can be weakened over time as it has for other programs, and we will be right back here having the same conversation. While I trust all of you to make the right decision on categorical aid now, I would urge you to start thinking about the legislators who will succeed you. Will they have the same conscience? The same understandings? The same classifications? Please avoid categorical aid as a resolution. It's not a permanent fix.

Thank you for your time.

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