

Testimony to Weighting Task Force 9/7/2021

First of all, thanks to you all for your time and energy addressing this important issue. The time and effort you have been putting in to improve the way Vermont's kids' education is paid for is much appreciated and I thank you.

My name is Dan MacArthur I have been a school board member in Marlboro for too many years to even mention, I am here today to tell you how I see that the distribution of funding grants, referred to as categorical, over the last 40 years has been detrimental both to the taxpayer residents of our town and to the children.

I have watched as our Small Schools Grant has fluctuated over the years:- some years we have been notified that we would receive it ahead of time and other years we have waited till the last minute to find out whether we would get it. In some cases we developed and presented for voter approval a budget that did not include the grant because we were not sure, and were left entering the upcoming year short on voter approved funds. Because of this, education tax rates have fluctuated wildly in our town, having the most negative impact on our poorest taxpayers because the minimum Ed tax percentage that residents pay based on income increases with the increases in local educational spending (ranging I believe to up to 4 % of household income now). Categorical Grants have contributed greatly to the swings in tax rates.

And educationally, a grant like we receive (when we do) of about \$115K means an entire teacher with classroom assistants in our school- either we get the SSG and a class has a teacher or the class gets divvied up into other classrooms with split grades and with too few resources. My observations have been that it is likely to be the neediest kids who slip through the cracks in this situation- even the very best teachers have a harder job when the classroom has too many kids in it and the age and ability range among those kids is further spread. My testimony today is that categorical aid such as the SSG has created a budgeting roller coaster for our small town over the years which has made funding hard to predict, has been detrimental to our kids, and I believe that a properly implemented weighting formula would be more equitable and less chaotic.

Not for verbal testimony but my own personal pet peeve: (As you may know the Income Sensitivity portion of the Education Tax was originally ceilinged at 2% of household income and has been changed, raising that ceiling to try to coerce poorer taxpayers to vote against local school budgets. The ceiling is now above

3% or at least one and a half times as big an economic blow to poorer taxpayers than was originally designed.)