



Public Hearing
Task Force on Implementation of Pupil Weighting Factors Report
October 29, 2021
Via Zoom

Written Testimony from:

Ted Plemenos
50 South Main Street
Rutland, VT 05701

My name is Ted Plemenos. I am the Chief Financial Officer of Rutland City Public Schools. I have followed the deliberations of the Task Force, and the work earlier this year by the four legislative committees who reviewed recommendations of the UVM Rutgers Study.

The work of this Task Force and, along with it, the educational opportunities for more than 85,000 Vermont students each year, are at a crossroads.

I hope that Task Force members will consider, and perhaps will reconsider, the directions and decisions that have been described recently by Task Force members.

I encourage all Task Force members to do so in the context of two short, but challenging questions:

- (1) What end product does the Task Force wish to deliver?
- (2) What data and analysis are required to ensure that such a deliverable is sound, and free of unintended consequences?

One Task Force member has stated the scholars who participated on the UVM-Rutgers Study were “asked a narrow question, and gave a narrow answer.”

I believe it is more accurate to say that members of the Study Team were presented with a focused and well-defined set of questions; to which they provided a focused, well-defined, and empirically-based set of recommendations.

I am concerned the Task Force believes that it has the responsibility and the wherewithal to undertake a less-well-defined scope of work, and to deliver “a broader package” of solutions.

I am also concerned that this new work is being conducted by only a few analysts, and that much of it has remained inaccessible to the public who is paying for that additional effort.

I wonder why the Task Force, now several months into its work, and having been granted \$25,000 by the Legislature with which to engage consultant services, has not yet released an update of the UVM-Rutgers Simulations, using more current actual data as recommended and requested?

I also wonder about inconsistent messages from different Task Force members about the path that is being followed:

- One Task Force member has reassuringly said that the Task Force “will make publicly available the tables and spreadsheets before we make final decisions and vote.”
- However, another Task Force member said last week that, “tonight, we will explain how we came to the decision that this would be a good way to go.” The decision that was being described was to replace the UVM-Rutgers recommended weight for ELL students with Categorical Aid.

I respectfully offer the following suggestions for consideration by the Task Force:

- Complete the updated simulations for the UVM-Rutgers recommendations using the more current, actual results that are now available.
- Release the updated simulation results, so that school systems, voters, and other constituents across Vermont can review the results, before the Task Force votes on any final recommendations.
- If the outcomes of the updated simulations seem reasonable, then implement the UVM-Rutgers recommendations, as they are structured and proposed.
- If the Task Force believes that it would be in the general public interest to supplement that funding with additional, selective grants, then it can do so, without disrupting the integrity of the UVM-Rutgers analysis.

The Task Force has an opportunity – many would say the obligation – to take a long overdue step toward equity for all Vermont students, by implementing the recommendations of the UVM-Rutgers Study.

The Task Force might also wish to consider sage advice offered by the late General and Secretary of State Colin Powell. Based upon his many decades of service to our country, Secretary Powell referred to the Pottery Barn Rule: *“if you break it, you own it.”*

Thank you for your time and service.

Respectfully submitted,

T. Plemenos