

Vermont State Board of Education***Legislative Policy Recommendation: Equity and Legislative/Regulatory Levers*****From: Kim Gleason**

We are living in extraordinary times. The pandemic has amplified the challenges presented by equity of access and capacity for students, families and schools. Children in Vermont have struggled with access to technology and broadband, lack of daily in-person direct instruction, and separation from social connections and trusting adults. And in acknowledging these realities, we have also been required to recognize the structures in our education system that have contributed to the inequitable treatment of marginalized populations as well as those living in poverty. The Vermont State Board of Education denounces racism and affirms its commitment to equity and excellence for all students.

Student involvement and voice on these matters has demanded that policymakers challenge assumptions, seek broader input and evaluate the impact of current structures. We cannot assume that efforts borne of good intention are necessarily having the intended effect. We must be prepared to have difficult conversations, to create space for authentic engagement around racism and equity, and pursue change with urgency, intention, and the support necessary to be sustainable.

In this regard, the State Board of Education:

- 1.) supports the finding of the weighting study as a tool to more accurately reflect the cost of educating our students.
 - a.) encourages a systematic, intentional implementation plan to include support to districts to ensure capacity to best utilize any additional resources, and mitigate the impact of any reduction in funding resulting from the changes in weights.
 - b.) This implementation plan should be informed by a working group charged with developing plans for implementing the Weighting Study report's key findings. Specifically, the group should be tasked with:
 - i.) Reviewing the report's findings and establishing policy priorities, including considering different policy options for revising the current weights used in the State's equalized pupil calculation.
 - ii.) Identifying concurrent changes that would update the current funding system to reflect contemporary educational circumstances and policy priorities in the state.
 - iii.) The working group shall meet as needed from (Spring 2021) to January 1, 2022 and, on or before December 15, 2021, provide a plan to the legislature that describes policy-making priorities for the legislature, including explicitly differentiating those for immediate action as well as those for a long-term phase-in.

- c.) The process must avoid the inherent risk of “winners” versus “losers”, and should approach this challenge with a focus on seeking greater equity in funding to benefit all Vermont students.
- 2.) Supports a review of the Education Quality Standards, centering the modifications with a focus on equity
- 3.) Supports consideration/modification of the 2200 Series Independent School rules, and any legislative change required as a result of those findings.
- 4.) Consideration of other structural impediments to equitable access to high quality education opportunities for all students (e.g., pre-k access, dual enrollment, capital construction, etc.)

Our schools are charged with the maintenance and strengthening of democratic life and governance. The Vermont State Board of Education is committed to listening, learning, and advocating for action to ensure equity, diversity, and inclusion for all Vermonters.