

The Burlington School Board has a broad range of responsibilities, most of which are focused on our district's strategy and operations. But we are also responsible for advocating on behalf of our community for changes beyond Burlington. For the past year - in addition to dealing with COVID and the contamination of our high school - the Board has been advocating and lobbying to address systemic inequities in our state's education



Kendra Sowers

School Commissioner's Corner By Commissioners Kendra Sowers and Mike Fisher

system. As Chair I would like to acknowledge Commissioners Kendra Sowers and Mike Fisher for their selfless time commitment and leadership as they were instrumental in helping to create The Coalition for VT Student Equity.

Vermont's students come to school with dissimilar learning needs and socioeconomic backgrounds that may require different types and levels of educational supports for them to achieve common standards or outcomes. Vermont's formula for calculating funding utilizes a system that weights factors such as poverty or students that are learning English. The weights and factors were created over twenty years ago and have not been updated since.

Under mounting pressure, Ver-

mont's legislature in 2018 directed the Agency Of Education to commission a study to consider and make various recommendations for changes to the educational finance system. The resultant study released a report in late 2019 that was clear in its recommendations: the current factors and weighting had no known scientific or academic basis, and do not reflect contemporary educational policy, circumstances or costs. The report concluded that our children who live in poverty, in rural communities, attend small schools and who are New American English Language Learners are not being provided with adequate resources to help them keep up with their peers, and made recommendations to adjust the weighting factors. It is now clear that Vermont's 20-year-old formula underweights Burlington's students, and therefore underfunds Burlington schools.

Understanding the critical equity components of this issue, the Burlington School Board led an effort to create a coalition of school boards from districts across the state that shared our common equitable funding goal. This coalition of over 20 Vermont boards has been advocating for months now that the legislature act on this study without delay. With the strong voices of some legislators (including Burlington's) and our lobbying efforts, the legislature approved a bill to form a task force to plan the implementation of new weights.

This will be a difficult and important conversation for Vermont legisla-

tors and for our entire state, as the districts that are currently overweighted will see a reduction in money from the state. However, if Vermont is really committed to promoting equity for all its students, it must fund education in an equitable manner.

You can learn more about the coalition at www.cvtse.org and follow the legislative task force's work at <https://bit.ly/vtweighttaskforce>.



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