

Public comment to Commission to Study School Funding

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Jeff McLynch is submitting comment on behalf of the NH School Funding Fairness Project in regard to the current draft materials being discussed by the Commission as it prepares its report. John Tobin will later submit a written comment about the “First and Last Dollar” discussion.

Our project is a multi-year effort. We will be advocating for a better school funding system after the Commission has completed its work.

I am submitting comments regarding the data behind the work of AIR and the Commission. Primarily I ask the Commission to make sure that all data used to analyze the current system and project a future system are open and available to the public in the most useful possible formats.

My comments are based on the following AIR documents

sim_cost_v8.xlsx

new_hampshire_simulator_explanation_v2.pdf

20-12685_nh_final_report_version_v5_draft.pdf

After my oral comment today reference was made to a version 10. In the Meeting Documents and Videos under the September 10 date is a link to "AIR Final Report Draft 9/10" which links to 20-12685_nh_report_version_v5_draft.pdf. I find no other AIR report under any subsequent date. If there were further versions up to a version 10, I have been unable to locate them on the "Meeting Documents and Video" portion of the website.

1) The simulator spreadsheet should be made available to the public in unlocked form. To have confidence in the results, the formulas used should be available to any individual or organization. This includes the NH Department of Education, the Legislative Budget Assistant, Reaching Higher, graduate students studying education finance, and other interested members of the public. Passwords should be removed.

2) The simulator draws data from at least two worksheets that have evidently not yet been made available. Cell C5 draws from “District Outcomes” worksheet. Cells in many columns rely on data in the “muni export” worksheet. Both worksheets should be made available unlocked with the data for each district or town.

3) Table 17 of the AIR report (page 29) provides the outcome measures, Z-scores, and “Outcome factor score” for 5 school districts. The table with all districts from which these have been extracted should be made publicly available.

After my oral comment today, I learned that this data was available. I searched and did find "District outcomes Z scores" on the September 14 date of the Adequacy Workgroup on the Meeting Documents & Video web page. I had not seen that before. I had been searching for anything with the AIR name. My bad. However, see #4 as this file has only the single average/merged number for the 11 years of each data element.

4) The AIR report notes that 11 years of each outcome measure were used in the correlation analysis. The annual data and how those were averaged or merged should be available in spreadsheet form and should be made public. To the extent that our current school funding system is changed we should track changes in those individual measures and in the summary score. In fact, 4-year or 5-year rolling averages might be best. A recent year can be substituted for a prior year, but the initial file with all 11 years should be available to start such work.

5) On page 23 of the AIR report is this statement ““There is no clear pattern between district size or grade shares and student outcomes.” This is an important statement, yet both district size and grade shares are used in the “Town Cost Simulator.” I worry that this is an important inconsistency. This is especially true because (1) the simulator effectively rewards smaller schools and (2) many towns are shown with “0” middle school students, which is factually incorrect.

6) AIR provides outcome correlation with four income related factors from the Census Bureau in Exhibit 13 (page 22), I am glad AIR rejected use of those factors. Published Census Bureau numbers for NH towns and school districts cannot be trusted because they are based on extremely small samples. The Census Bureau itself states those numbers should not be used for communities with populations under 85,000.