

To the Editor:

As signatories to the Thomas B. Fordham Institute's report "Fund the Child," we never viewed its recommendations as the "100 percent solution." In fact, we agree emphatically with your Commentary authors Bruce Baker and Michael A. Rebell that implementing a weighted-student formula is not a silver bullet for improving student performance.

Our work and research on school funding and resource use in districts across the country have shown us that changing the funding system does not, of itself, ensure that the flexibility, capacity, and support exist to use resources in ways that are likely to improve student performance. Moreover, the details of these funding formulas, we've learned, make a big difference in whether they promote equity—or not.

Yet we continue to advocate that our district clients evaluate their funding systems and consider adopting a weighted-student formula as part of a set of reforms aimed at creating more-effective systems of schools. Why? Because quantifying district spending by type of student and across schools provides the basis for public discussion and further research about how resources are currently allocated and how much it takes to educate students with different needs. Examining the funding system also shines a light on the root causes of inequity and inflexibility in resource use.

A third reason is that a weighted-student formula makes it much easier to determine whether charters and other alternative school models are being funded at the proper levels, given the student populations they serve.

Resources matter—how much a school gets matters; how it organizes its resources matters. Implemented with care, a new funding system can empower entrepreneurial superintendents and principals to reorganize the time, people, and money in their schools in ways more likely to improve student performance.

A weighted-student formula is not a panacea for all ills, but it can be a vital part of designing better systems to support schools if it is combined with efforts to ensure adequacy, flexibility, leadership capacity, and accountability for improved performance.

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Vol. 26, Issue 16, Pages 31-32