

March 15, 2023

JULIE HANSEN

THANK YOU REPRESENTATIVE CONLON AND COMMITTEE FOR INCLUDING US IN THE CONSIDERATION OF THIS BILL. AND A VERY SPECIAL THANKS TO REPRESENTATIVE WILLIAMS FOR YOUR RESPONSIVENESS AND YOUR CARE FOR THOSE OF US WHO LIVE IN THE NORTHEAST KINGDOM.

I AM JULIE HANSEN, FOUNDING HEAD OF THADDEUS STEVENS SCHOOL LOCATED IN EAST BURKE, VERMONT. I ALSO SERVE ON THE ACT 1 ETHNIC AND SOCIAL EQUITY STANDARDS ADVISORY WORKING GROUP. IN JANUARY, THADDEUS STEVENS SCHOOL COMPLETED ITS SECOND ACCREDITATION SELF-STUDY THROUGH THE NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES (NEASC).

I'D LIKE TO TELL YOU A BIT ABOUT OUR SCHOOL AND THEN TALK ABOUT SOME SPECIFIC ISSUES WITH REGARD TO INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS AND THEIR ROLE IN VERMONT'S EDUCATIONAL LANDSCAPE.

IN 1999, I AND A SMALL GROUP OF PARENTS, FOUNDED THADDEUS STEVENS SCHOOL AND OPENED OUR DOORS TO SEVEN 7<sup>TH</sup> AND 8<sup>TH</sup> GRADE STUDENTS. WE SLOWLY GREW INTO THE PREK TO 8 SCHOOL THAT WE ARE NOW.

AS YOU KNOW, THADDEUS STEVENS WAS BORN IN DANVILLE, VERMONT IN 1792 INTO A DEEPLY IMPOVERISHED FAMILY. HE WAS BORN WITH WHAT USED TO BE CALLED A CLUB FOOT AND RED HAIR, BOTH OF WHICH WERE DEEMED TO BE THE RESULT OF A PAST FAMILIAL SIN. IN 1807 HIS SINGLE PARENT MOTHER MOVED THE FAMILY TO PEACHAM, VERMONT SO THAT THEY COULD ATTEND THE PEACHAM ACADEMY. UPON COMPLETION OF HIS EDUCATION AT BOTH UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT AND DARTMOUTH, HE MOVED TO PENNSYLVANIA AND BECAME A REPRESENTATIVE TO THE US CONGRESS. HE WORKED HIS WAY THROUGH THE LEGISLATURE TO EARN THE CHAIR OF THE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE, JUST IN TIME FOR THE CIVIL WAR. A STRONG ABOLITIONIST, HE WORKED WITH PRESIDENT LINCOLN TO PASS THE 13<sup>TH</sup> AMENDMENT AND WAS THE PRIMARY AUTHOR OF THE 14<sup>TH</sup> AMENDMENT.

HIS LEGACY PERMEATES OUR SCHOOL CULTURE. HE CERTAINLY PROVED THE POWER AND TRANSFORMATIVE NATURE OF EDUCATION; HIS COMMITMENT TO EQUALITY AND INCLUSIVITY HAS INSPIRED OUR CURRICULAR OFFERINGS AND OUR POLICIES; OUR CULTURE OF ANTI-DISCRIMINATION AND INCLUSION IS WOVEN THROUGHOUT EVERY ASPECT OF THE SCHOOL.

AND, FINALLY, HE SERVES AS A PATHWAY TO INSPIRE OUR RURAL STUDENTS: THADDEUS STEVENS WAS FROM AN IMPOVERISHED SINGLE PARENT FAMILY AND WAS BORN WITH A DISABILITY, AND BECAME ONE OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL REPRESENTATIVES IN AMERICAN HISTORY. HE EMBODIED THE HIGHEST IDEALS OF THE AMERICAN CONSTITUTION. AS WE SAY THE TO STUDENTS, THADDEUS STEVENS DID NOT KNOW WHEN HE WAS TWELVE THAT HE WOULD BECOME INSTRUMENTAL IN LEADING THE NATION IN ACCOMPLISHING THE PROMISE OF LIBERTY AND JUSTICE FOR ALL. MARTIN LUTHER KING DID NOT KNOW, WHEN HE WAS 12, HE WOULD BECOME AN INTERNATIONAL LEADER IN THE CONTINING FIGHT FOR

FREEDOM AND EQUALITY. OUR MESSAGE TO OUR STUDENTS IS “BE READY TO BE GREAT.”

I UNDERSTAND THAT ONE OF THE CONCERNS DRIVING THIS BILL IS WITH REGARD TO ANTI DISCRIMINATION LAWS AND RULES. THERE ARE TWO COMPONENTS TO ADOPTING SCHOOL POLICIES: ONE IS THE ADOPTION OF THE RULE, AND THE SECOND IS ENSURING ITS ENFORCEMENT OR ACCOUNTABILITY.

FOR INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS, ACCREDITATION IS A FORM OF THAT ACCOUNTABILITY. INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS MUST DEMONSTRATE COMPLIANCE WITH A SET OF STANDARDS. WE MUST SHOW EVIDENCE THAT OUR CURRICULAR OFFERINGS AND OUR POLICIES RELECT AND HONOR DIVERSITY, ENSURE EQUITY IN OUR STUDENT AND PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITIES, AND EMBRACE THE INCLUSION OF ALL STUDENTS IN ALL OF OUR OFFERINGS. IF WE HAVE NOT MET THE STANDARD WE MUST SHOW THAT A PLAN IS IN PLACE TO MEET THAT STANDARD. SECRETARY FRENCH INDICATED YESTERDAY THAT SUCH A MECHANISM IS NOT CURRENTLY IN PLACE IN THE PUBLIC SYSTEM.

THIS MOVES US TO LOOK AT THE REASONS A FAMILY MIGHT CHOOSE AN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL. THE DIVERSITY OF VERMONT'S FAMILIES PROPELS THE NEED FOR A DIVERSITY OF APPROACHES IN EDUCATION. WE HAVE HAD SOME FAMILIES WHO SEND ONE OF THEIR CHILDREN TO THADDEUS STEVENS SCHOOL WHILE ENROLLING ANOTHER CHILD IN THE LOCAL PUBLIC SCHOOL.

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS ARE SMALL, INTENTIONAL, AND ADAPTIVE. WE IN PARTICULAR AT TSS ARE DRIVEN BY A MISSION OF INCLUSIVITY THAT GUIDES ALL DECISIONS THAT IMPACT OUR SCHOOLS.

ONE SCHOOL SIMPLY CANNOT MEET THE NEEDS OF EVERY STUDENT. ONE METHODOLOGY CANNOT SERVE EVERY STUDENT. TO FULLY ACHIEVE THE MANDATE TO PROVIDE AN EDUCATION FOR ALL STUDENTS, THERE MUST BE A DIVERSITY OF OFFERINGS TO OUR FAMILIES.

WITH REGARD TO SPECIAL EDUCATION AND STUDENTS ON IEPs:  
EVEN THE BEST INTENTIONED IEPs DON'T ALWAYS WORK FOR A  
CHILD. OUR SCHOOL HAS ENROLLED STUDENTS WHO ARE ON IEPs  
AND WE HAVE NOT HAD A SPECIAL EDUCATOR ON SITE (WHICH WE  
DO KNOW WILL CHANGE BY JULY OF 2023). IN ORDER FOR A  
STUDENT ON AN IEP TO ENROLL IN OUR SCHOOL, PARENTS ARE  
FORCED BY THE DISTRICT TO SIGN OFF ON ANY SERVICES FOR THEIR  
CHILD. ANY SERVICES THAT TSS OFFERS THE STUDENT WILL COME  
FROM OUR EXISTING BUDGET. WHY WOULD A FAMILY DO THAT? (AN  
ANECDOTAL STORY).

ANY FAMILY THAT LIVES IN A TOWN WITH A DESIGNATED SCHOOL  
AND WISHES TO ATTEND TSS, WHETHER THE CHILD IS ON AN IEP OR  
NOT, ALSO FORFEITS A FREE AND PUBLIC EDUCATION AND MUST  
PAY OUT OF POCKET. WHY WOULD THEY DO THAT? (ANECDOTAL  
EXAMPLE)

WE WERE ABLE TO MEET THEIR NEEDS BECAUSE OF A COMMITMENT  
TO THE PRINCIPLES OF THADDEUS STEVENS, AND BECAUSE WE ARE  
SMALL AND ADAPTABLE, AND WE ARE GUIDED BY THE VISION THAT

ALL STUDENTS MUST HAVE SAFE PLACE AT THE EDUCATIONAL TABLE. THAT MEANS PROVIDING ALL STUDENTS THE TOOLS FOR ACCEPTING AND HONORING ALL THEIR FELLOW STUDENTS.

AS AN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL, WE ARE ABLE TO SET OUR OWN CALENDAR. WE DO NOT TAKE VETERANS DAY OR MEMORIAL DAY AS A HOLIDAY. WE JOIN THE VETERANS DAY CEREMONY IN LYNDONVILLE AND PRESENT THE MEMORIAL DAY CEREMONY IN PEACHAM.

LICENSING OF TEACHERS IS ANOTHER AREA OF DIVERSITY OF OPINION AND APPROACH. THERE IS NO STUDY THAT CONFIRMS THAT A LICENSED TEACHER IS A BETTER OR MORE EFFECTIVE TEACHER. LICENSING DEMANDS COURSEWORK AND I WOULD PREFER THAT IF TEACHER SIGNS UP FOR MORE CLASSES THAT THEY TAKE CLASSES WITHIN THEIR SUBJECT AND CONTENT MATTER TO DEEPEN THEIR KNOWLEDGE IN ORDER TO GUIDE STUDENTS TOWARD WHAT WE CALL HIGHER ORDER THINKING SKILLS, SKILLS THAT REACH BEYOND MEMORIZATION AND APPLICATION. WE WILL

PROVIDE THE TEACHER TRAINING AND HOW IT FITS WITH OUR MISSION.

WE SHARE YOUR COMMITMENT TO EDUCATING ALL THE CHILDREN OF VERMONT. WE SHARE YOUR COMMITMENT TO ENSURING THAT ALL CHILDREN ARE SEEN AND HEARD EQUALLY IN THEIR ACADEMIC JOURNEY. WE SHARE YOUR COMMITMENT TO EDUCATING FOR A PLURALISTIC DEMOCRACY.

WE CHOOSE TO DO IT ACCORDING TO OUR MISSION AND VISION OF A ROBUST INCLUSIVE LEARNING COMMUNITY. THE STATE OF VERMONT RECOGNIZED THAT FAMILIES IN RURAL AREAS NEEDED TO FIND SCHOOLS FOR THEIR CHILDREN AS WELL. AS WE LOOK AT THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF THIS COMMITTEE, WE SEE THAT THE MAJORITY LIVE IN THE URBAN AREAS OF VERMONT. JUST AS WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE NEEDS OF OUR VERMONT STUDENTS ARE DIVERSE, THE LEGISLATURE MIGHT CONSIDER THAT THE NEEDS OF ITS RURAL POPULATION ARE ALSO DIVERSE.



USE US TO ENSURE THAT WE, INDEED, ARE EDUCATING ALL OF VERMONT'S CHILDREN TO FULLEST EXTENT POSSIBLE; LET'S PROVIDE EVERY OPPORTUNITY FOR EVERY CHILD TO FIND THE ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH THEY WILL FLOURISH RATHER THAN LIMIT THEM AND THEIR GROWTH BY PROVIDING ONLY ONE POSSIBLE ROUTE TO THEIR GREATNESS.

AGAIN, THANK YOU FOR INCLUDING US IN THIS VERY IMPORTANT DISCUSSION.