

I'm Eli Goldman. I was born and raised in Underhill, VT. I grew up attending the public schools in the Chittenden East school district. I always managed to get by in these schools, however I rarely enjoyed myself or felt very much engaged with my learning at all. It did not become a problem for me until my sophomore year at Mount Mansfield Union High School, when I became so disengaged and unmotivated that I was on the brink of failing several classes. I knew I needed something new for my education; something better suited to me as an individual.

This year, as a junior, I'm attending a program through Vergennes Union High School called "The Walden Project", a school that a few of my friends had attended. Based on the writings of Henry David Thoreau, with a broad focus on philosophy, environmentalism, sociology, and ecology. Three days a week, year round, we meet at a plot of land in Monkton, around a campfire, and have discussion based classes, read great works of literature, and walk around the area, observing and discussing the land in it's natural state. We look at plant and animal species' patterns in nature and talk about their significance. To me, being very close to my roots in nature, this program makes me excited to get up and go to school in the morning, excited to learn and expand my horizons.

The Walden Project is one example of a program that is geared towards a specific group of students (it takes a tough person to sit around a campfire all day in the dead of february), but Walden also offers what a lot of kids really need. If it could be summed up in one word that word would be "options". Students need options so they can explore any of their interests outside of the standard tract. the more options students have, the more secure they will feel, and thus more invested they will end up being in it, having known they had the choice to be where they are, rather than being forced there. So regardless of your decisions on spending, school district consolidation, and all the other issues you're looking at, which are all important in their own right, I'd ask that you not forget the student in the mix. Remember that the education system's purpose is to serve the student, and as one, I must reiterate that one size DOES NOT fit all; students need options. Thank you.