

Molly Pratt

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Hello, my name is Molly Pratt. I am a speech-language pathologist in Bennington County, currently with the Battenkill Valley Supervisory Union in Arlington. I grew up in Bennington County and attended school in Arlington when it was part of the Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union. My four children also grew up in Arlington and attended the same schools. In addition, my mother was on the Arlington School Board in 1977 when it made local history with the first budget that was a million dollars. The Battenkill Valley SU consists of one elementary school and one middle/high school. I have worked in the public schools for 27 years.

Indeed, over those years I have experienced the increase in the demands upon educational staff to provide more and more mental health services as a direct result of budget cuts in that sector. We, teachers and educational support personnel alike, also provide more and more food and clothes and shoes, many times with money from our own pockets. One thing that we cannot do is close the gap in economic status and opportunities.

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Another aspect of this bill is the notion of “deployment” of resources across schools and programs. I am one of those resources. It’s not as simple as naming a warm body to be in a position. I am a professional. I take great pride in providing needed therapy to students with communication disorders. What is not taken into account in this bill is the number of students that I have on my caseload, their needs, the time it takes to communicate with multiple case managers, communicate with multiple families, communicate with multiple classroom teachers and the planning time and travel time. Sometimes that travel time is a ten minute walk between buildings but it still means that I have to take the time to put on boots, coat, gloves and hat and get the materials ready on either end of the journey. In addition, I have between 20 and 40 evaluations per year. Each evaluation takes two to three hours to do the actual testing and another two to three hours to analyze the information and write the report. I usually have to cancel services for students in order to conduct an evaluation. By “deploying” me across more schools and programs, my effectiveness is yet again watered down. How can I provide the very best under those circumstances?

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Additionally, I believe that you must take the testimony and recommendations from Vermont-NEA very seriously. Especially with regards to supervisory unions and superintendents. I have found over the years that some superintendents feel that he or she must direct and inservice time at the beginning of the school year. I have sat through some pretty boring, ineffective and off-the-mark inservice times that are especially painful when you have to sit for three or more hours on cafeteria benches. These most meaningful inservices are the ones where the educational leaders-the principals, building and team leaders- develop goals, map out a path to reach those goals, and encourage educators to be creative in how to achieve those goals. A uniform definition of superintendent is needed.

I believe that these are major points I want to make. Every time a "mandate" comes down from Montpelier it usually means more work for school personnel and increased costs to the community. Think carefully about the impact.