

Victoria Howard 2/12/15

Victoria Howard
Bellows Free Academy, Fairfax
Testimony to VT House Education Committee

I would like to begin by thanking the Vermont House Education Committee for allowing me to testify today, especially on a cause which I feel so strongly about.

I will begin my testimony by discussing student-centered learning. One story I always like to tell when talking about learning guided by the students is the story of my friend Seth, someone who I've known since kindergarten, who struggled throughout all of high school to find something he was interested in. Seth was always extremely outdoors-y, and grew up in the traditional Vermont-Hunting family, and enjoyed being in the woods much more than sitting in the classroom. His junior year of high school, Seth made the decision to begin attending a technical school for forestry, and now loves going to school everyday, and is planning to go into a career of surveying.

The story of my friend Seth is one I believe all students in the public education system deserve. Seth and I were lucky enough to go to a high school which provided us with options like access to tech. schools, and the option to take specialized classes using online services that our district paid for. And I believe that every student deserves options like we have at our high school, in order to ensure their education be relevant to their future, and to help them progress in topics that inspire them to work harder each and every day. However, these options aren't the only thing that need to be brought into public schools to inspire change. In order for students to truly begin exploring topics they may continue later in life, we need to begin taking the weight off of students backs. By this I mean not only the physical weight of the homework they may have to bring home every night, but the pressure to complete x amount of class hours in order to receive credit for a class. I believe that the future of public education needs to be centered on measuring student's proficiency rather than making sure they spend a certain portion of the year with the same teacher, learning things they may already understand entirely. The only way for this to work, is through the cooperation of the teachers and the guidance, checking regularly with students to ensure that they're neither falling behind nor getting bored with the material, or feel that the pace is too slow for them.

While this may be challenging to implement, I believe with the consolidation of districts, schools would be able to afford more for their students, and give them more options for learning, possibly in another school which is in their district. This would give schools more reason to create larger districts, cutting down on money spent in each individual small school.

As for the financial aspect, I have one very simple and strong opinion. Myself, like many others in Vermont, and even in the nation, don't always understand the political jargon of property tax or legislative bills. I believe that due to complex numbers, and confusion on rebates received by citizens of Vermont, many people don't understand where their money is going, and what it's paying for when they're paying property tax, or income tax. I think it's extremely important to communicate, state, and town wide, where tax payer's money is going, so citizens can better understand what they're paying for, and how it's going to help students in the long run.

I would like to finish by saying I believe very strongly in the education system of Vermont, and nothing is more important to me than the changes which are being implemented now to benefit students of the future. Thank you very much, once again, for allowing me to testify today.