

Thank you for taking the time to hear my testimony. I am coming to you today with 13 years' experience teaching 9-12th graders visual art at a public high school in Chittenden county. I teach students in foundations class through AP art, from five different towns and four different sending schools. I wanted to let you know that the pressures on our students outside of the school have increased and their lives have shifted and changed so much that it impacts their ability to learn in the classroom in comparison to years past. Students are living with trauma, have increased instances of anxiety, are dealing with substance issues themselves or with their loved ones, live in a fast-paced technologically laced world where turning off a phone means disconnect to the extreme. They are all dealing with more complex issues than any one of us ever had and yet as a culture we are asking them to be "better" than ever before.

I wanted to let you know that the pressures on our teachers and support staff inside the school have increased to match the needs of our students - both in the classroom and out. Teachers are juggling staggering caseloads of intensely diverse and increasingly urgent needs alongside what was a "typical" student, trying to differentiate and meet each one where they are and move them forward. With the current best practices of standards based instruction and assessment, teachers are taking painstaking steps to create targets - and backed out targets - and stating what it looks like to exceed the target - so that their pedagogy is clear and success is not only attainable it is transparent. This is taken to the extreme in many cases to "prove" with data what could have been assessed easily and personally to each student, now done by creating assessments that can easily be churned into data to be tagged to student proficiencies and justify graduation. Teachers are not only teachers anymore. We don't just come up with great lessons, deliver them and assess work. We must teach to a wide array of student needs and in such a way that will work in our changing pedagogical landscape. We are also dealing with more complex issues than any one of us ever had and yet as a culture we are asking our teachers to be "better" than ever before.

On Thursday of last week, one of my students sat staring ahead as the others were all jumping in. I asked him if he knew what we were doing, asked if he remembered that at the start of the class we jump in with an activity to warm up. His response was, no - he had forgotten - but that he wasn't sure he could do it today. He had just found out the day before that his mother, sister, and grandmother were moving over break out of state and that he would need to stay with his step-father (with whom he does not get along) in district to finish out his senior year. Needless to say, art was a million miles from his mind. The role of student and teacher have drastically shifted over the years and it's not getting easier. As you consider policies, practices and make major decisions regarding funding - please remember that this is just barely holding together with the resources we have. Add a few to a class, reduce a support staff position, get rid of an elective program - it might all just fall to pieces. We all want what is best, we all want what is "better than ever before" but please know that we cannot do it without your support, and likely to attain that goal will need additional funds and staffing, not less. Thank you.