

Good afternoon, my name is Meg Norman and I teach Social Studies at North Country Union High School in Newport, Vermont. I live nearby in Derby. I have been a dedicated and passionate teacher since 2006.

I'd like to tell the story of a student, intelligent and capable, who grew up in crippling poverty. This is a child who slept on the floor in his family's laundry room because they didn't have room in the bedrooms for him. He confided in me that he had limited access to food outside of school and would stand at my desk and beg for snacks, to the point that he would search my briefcase when my back was turned, so I never brought food into class unless I had enough to share. And eventually, I would just bring in snacks every day for everyone. That led to an arrangement with the cafeteria for him to pick up extra sandwiches every afternoon before he left so that he could have something to eat that night, or over the weekends. He came to school in sandals in the month of November because he needed boots, jackets and pants, so our team collectively purchased them for him, or found hand me downs among our faculty. This student had limited access to hot water and therefore, didn't bathe regularly. In fact, he didn't even know how to bathe. Working with the health office, we printed off a laminated instruction sheet so he could bathe, properly, in the private shower at school as well as wash his clothing in the laundry facilities so he didn't smell of cat urine.

We spent almost three months in our behavioral program trying to understand why he struggled with reading in class until I finally asked about whether or not he needed glasses, which he didn't have. He stated he did need them, he had broken them over the summer and his mother didn't have a car to get him to an appointment to get a new pair. He had Dr. Dinosaur. He had the cost covered but she didn't have the ability to transport him the thirty miles from their home to the doctor's office so he had spent the last six months unable to clearly see.

Once we learned this, we tried to call her but her Trac phone was out of minutes. We emailed and sent letters but the reality was that it was nearly impossible to facilitate a conversation with mom because of the intense poverty that they lived in. We finally had him call the doctors and make an appointment as close to the end of the school day as possible so that I could transport him and accompany him to his appointment and he could also make the after school bus at 5:15pm. When the appointment day finally came, he forgot and went home on the regular bus. We rescheduled and reminded him repeatedly that day. When we arrived, he was terrified and insisted his case manager and I sit with him in the room during his eye exam. It turned out he hadn't been in over five years. Afterward, we helped him choose his new glasses and he was beaming with excitement. On the way home we knew he was hungry and so we treated him to Wendy's to reward him for his bravery and as a celebration.

I wish I could say that this was an isolated incident, or even that it was rare for teachers to address such concerns and issues at our school but the truth is that it is not. There are many students like this young man that our teachers help every year on varying levels.

Another example is a student I teach who is Autistic. He loves dance and sings in chorus but didn't have the funds to purchase the necessary dance costume or the black pants and white shirt for chorus this year. Our teaching team took his measurements and purchased everything he needed, and provided transportation, so he wouldn't miss his performances and could participate in the activities he loved. He had me take his photo in his snazzy new duds so he could use it on his social media.

The reality of teaching today is that we are not only educators. I not only assess for their understanding of history, I also have to assess and understand their home lives and their everyday needs and struggles. In addition to content, and maybe paramount to that, I have to teach some of my students basic life skills and help to provide for their most basic needs because without those foundations, how can I expect them to even be able to think about learning. How can I expect them to care about learning the foundations of our government when they are hungry, or haven't slept all night because their mother was doing laundry and they sleep on the laundry room floor? Or they are homeless and couch surfing. Or Dad hasn't been home in two weeks because he's using again. The demands placed on teachers in today's society goes so far beyond the classroom, and certainly beyond an eight hour day and a forty hour week. It even extends beyond the school year. In a class of twenty seven students, it is possible for one teacher and one Para-educator to be working to meet the needs of fifteen students on IEPs, several on 504s and most on free and reduced lunch. The reality of education today is that we are no longer faced with just teaching our content standards and helping our students to be proficient, but in many cases we are also caring for the whole child.

We now have legislation that will directly impact the funding mechanisms and costs of our schools, such as Act 46, and Act 77 as well as unfunded mandates which demand that we all do more with less. What teachers need to serve our students is support from their legislators and understanding that although the numbers may communicate one story, the reality is that our resources are already significantly strained. The ones who suffer the most are our students. Amend Act 46 to allow for an alternative model of school governance and modify the deadlines to reflect the unique needs and interests of our communities and allow the Agency of Education the capacity and resources to ensure that EVERY Vermont school will serve any and all Vermont students.

Thank you very much for your time and attention today.