

## Senate Education Testimony

1. Thank You

2. Invite - one or all

3. TSA: established 1996 - 12 students  
small by design - now 150 grades 7-12  
serving up to 20 towns in the greater UV

Sending towns:

Sharon, Strafford, Tunbridge, Hartland, Stockbridge

4. Hallmark of a small inde school - nimble/flexible/frugal

Over last 8 years put lots of supports into place:

i. EF - 7-10

ii. Guided study halls - w/ trained coaches 5 or fewer students

iii. 504 - have always offered

iv. ESP - used frequently to support students who need help but don't

otherwise qualify

v. SST

vi. Kid Talk

vii. School guidance - separate from Post-secondary support

viii. BBL - 12 hours in 2015

ix. Monthly Master Classes - faculty driven - BBL

x. Advisory - 2x/wk

xi. Breakfast and Lunch. - 300 lunches in 10 days in Dec - 30% FREE

AND REDUCED

xii. Sp Ed - SLD and OHI

5. WE DO ALL THIS ON THE AAT - AN ARTIFICIALLY LOW TUITION AMOUNT CALCULATED ANNUALLY BY THE AOE - \$3K lower

6. Other vulnerable populations served well by inde schools:

Queer

Adopted

Children of Color

Adopted children of color

7. Next wave of need is here:

Anxiety

Depression

Both of epidemic proportions

Open Enrollment:

Of some interest to you all might be the fact that we still ask for the majority of information we used to require in our admission process, but now we ask for it AFTER the student has been enrolled. It is extremely useful in helping us get to know the student and their family before the student's first day of classes so we have all of the necessary social, emotional and academic supports in place. We do ask that students come visit the school for a day and when they do I meet with them all for 15-20 minutes to answer any of their questions. Visiting students are assigned a TSA student to "shadow". Those students volunteer for that responsibility and they are provided some training. Parents are welcome to call and/or visit anytime.

If the SBE is looking for public money to only go towards schools that offer open enrollment what are they going to do about UVM and the state college system?

Special education:

Explain my circumstances:

- a. Public Elem School experience 2nd and 3rd grade...
- b. 2 of my 3 children - IEP's 3-12 and 504's 12-18...

TSA had been experiencing an increasing need in our population and moved to try and support the greatest needs with two areas of special education services - SLD (specific learning disability) and OHI (other health impairment). It took us two years to get approved - there was little support from the AOE, which is admittedly understaffed. We really needed to rely on other independent schools. Even with that support it was still a formidable task. Without longstanding, positive special education relationships with public school supervisory unions and their special ed directors an independent school is at a significant disadvantage.

1. You don't have a special ed director, you lack the training and the network of specialists, not to mention an understanding of the language and the politics of special education.

2. SU's are now in charge of special education, not the individual districts, and if a special ed director for the SU does not want to "share" special ed staff with an independent school you are not working in a cooperative environment where the student's needs come first.

3. It is not clear that IEP teams are letting parents know that we are an option for their child if they fall into one or both of the areas we have been approved for (together those areas represent approximately 45-48% of Vermont's special education population).

4. Learning how to bill for services has been and continues to be a nightmare for us. It is not clear to us that there are consistent practices. We get little support from some SU's.

5. Public schools are seeing significant declines in student enrollment and are frankly reluctant in some cases to send a child to a school outside of their SU since they feel they can provide those services themselves.

6. The idea that we would all submit a "plan" for services should a child enroll at our schools with special ed needs defies reality. Most special ed teachers (public and independent) will tell you that there is a real shortage of qualified special ed staff in the state. This is particularly true in areas like speech and language. For us to be able to offer reliable, competent services in special education, we would by absolute necessity have to have qualified special ed teachers on retainer. But you can't find them at the last minute and trying to hire someone, even with advance notice, for a limited need (say one or two students as you build your program) is extremely difficult.

7. AAT

8. The state has spent a considerable sum on training public school staff, providing them with software and the training in how to use it and perhaps even the hardware to run the necessary programs - will that same service and money be provided to independent schools?

9. So we find ourselves in the difficult position of being accused of not serving special ed students and when we move to make some of those accommodations available IEP teams are reluctant to send those students. Then we get accused of not accepting special ed students. It's a vicious circle.