

Hello, my name is Betsy Nolan and for the past 22 years I have been teaching music to children in Chittenden County. As a music teacher I have the opportunity to work with every student in the schools in which I work. This gives me a broad perspective on the student population including their strengths and their needs.

For the past 14 years I have been teaching at Edmunds in Burlington. For the first ten I taught middle school and for the past four I have been teaching k-5 at the elementary school. People often assume that I left middle level because of the inherent challenges of working with students as they transition from childhood into adolescence. In truth I changed positions because over the ten years I worked at EMS I saw the needs of my students increase and resources to meet those needs decrease.

The recession forced our most vulnerable families into poverty, some experiencing homelessness and food insecurity. This results in students arriving at school with anxiety about their basic needs being met and unable to attend to their responsibilities as students. The opioid epidemic impacts families and the children in those families come to school thinking, not about how to achieve in their academics but instead about how their family member with addiction is doing and how that addiction is going to impact their life. Lack of universal health care creates stress for children whose caretakers have serious health issues, lack of a true liveable wage results in parents working multiple jobs and being unable to support their children's education, and lack of affordable housing results in students bouncing from apartment to apartment and sometimes from school to school.

While all of these societal changes trickled into our schools, I watched as the guidance department staff was cut by 50%, the school social workers were cut by 50% and class sizes increased across all content areas. We are not creating the school services our students need to be successful, instead we were creating the school services that tax payers are willing to pay for. This is not just a problem in Chittenden county. All over the state there is a disconnect between what communities want for their children and what land owners can afford and/or are willing to pay for.

How this plays out for teachers is that larger class sizes means more work. More papers to grade, more parent conferences, more differentiation for our diverse learners, more support to students struggling, and more enrichment to challenge high flyers. More students in classrooms who have experienced trauma and anxiety results in more teacher time being used to provide mental health support which means all the other work gets pushed to the evenings and weekends. Cuts to classroom budgets result in teachers spending their own money to get needed supplies and/or spending hours fundraising , not for special events but just to keep their programs a float. Most teachers, including myself, go into this line of work because they love teaching and working with children. This passion for the work, does not make it possible to continue to work harder, longer hours with less and less support.

In addition to the extraordinary amount of time teachers use to meet their students needs, since the move to our new high deductible healthcare plans teachers are also functioning as their own

healthcare administrators. I use to pay a co-pay when I needed healthcare. I paid it when I went to the doctor and then I received mail from Blue Cross Blue Shield letting me know that everything was all set. In the past year, I have spent almost 20 hours on the phone trying to navigate the new system. Some of my bills went to collections, at which point I paid them only to be told that they had already been paid. When I asked for proof of payment to give to UVMHC so I could be reimbursed for the money I had paid to the credit agency, I was told they don't keep proof of payment. This entire system of high deductible healthcare has resulted in many teachers spending hours and hours trying to navigate this new healthcare system and ultimately demonstrating the necessity for universal healthcare for all.

In closing, I'd like to say that I love teaching in Burlington. The diverse cultural and language backgrounds of my students creates amazing opportunities for teachers and students to learn about the increasingly small world in which we live. When I hear that the state government is seeking to reduce the cost of education by shifting healthcare costs to teachers, increasing class sizes and consolidating rural schools I have to ask, "what's more important than educating the next generation?" I believe that problem in Vermont is not that our citizens do not want excellent schools for our children but that the structure of funding schools using property taxes is not meeting our needs. It is time to look at funding public education through income taxes instead of property taxes; it is time for us to move toward a universal healthcare system for all Vermonters and it is time for legislators and educators to work together to develop student support systems that respond to the ever changing needs of our kids.