

Thank you in advance for the opportunity to present these items and for your service to our state.

My name is Karen Chitambar, and I teach Automotive Technology at the North Country Career Center in Newport, Vermont. I have also taught English, and I am a veteran and former dairy farmer.

You are serving on the most important committee.

At a time when Governor Scott is hosting education forums titled "Do More With Less," you are tasked with finding long term solutions to provide a balm for school systems that have had a staggering number of unfunded mandates imposed, are struggling to adapt to students' needs, and are shifting under Acts 46 and 77.

But they say I should tell you a story...

I'm going to tell you about my son. He's brilliant, creative, and at seven loves anything he can color or build. He has also had his classroom cleared for safety reasons.

He was the safety reason.

You see, somewhere between being separated from addicted parents and spending two of his first three years in foster care, his brain said "enough," and his trauma history is now a moving target that requires a whole lot of work from every adult he encounters. He is a million dollar baby, and I have students just like him.

We all do.

With a 100% increase in the number of children entering foster care in our area, we can expect to see more.

But what does this mean for the scope of your work?

You will need to look ahead, at census data, Department of Health reports, law enforcement data, whatever it takes to fully project the scope of need for a full array of services in schools.

Being trauma informed is not enough, we need trauma restructuring.

We also have to consider...

Fewer people are entering and staying in education as a field. Our district is providing many emergency and provisional licenses to get people in the door. Special Educators are especially difficult to find and retain.

Truancy rates are skyrocketing.

More students are accessing alternative programming. The school to prison pipeline is alive and well, ensuring that the impact of the opiate epidemic and extreme poverty will be generational.

Quality early childhood programming and childcare are hard to come by.

We are shifting schools toward proficiencies and pathways. While the concept is noble, we should look to states such as Maine who began that work earlier and have since thrown it over.

Vouchers are not the path forward. If we force districts to merge in order to consolidate resources under Act 46, it is counterproductive to mandate that they lose that funding to private entities.

Most importantly, you need to cheerlead. Let the other members of the House know that the quality education we provide in Vermont costs money, and is likely going to get more expensive as we mitigate the crisis we ignored for too long.