

Hello,

My name is Lauren Buck and I'm a 4th year teacher of history at Spaulding High School in Barre. Over my 4 years I've witnessed many challenges to the abilities of students to succeed in secondary education. Barre is an interesting place to work as many students come from families of means, while many other students come from struggling families.

I have students who have had to miss class due to court dates relating to either offences they have committed or to offences committed by parents, or to appear as part of a DCF or divorce testimony. These students struggle more in school because the pressures of their home lives weigh heavily on them. In addition to legal issues, students come from families who struggle to put food on the table, so students come to school hungry. While there are options for students to receive free or reduced-price meals at school, the paperwork can be lost in the shuffle, or students are too ashamed of their situation to take advantage of the meal situation. I have had students who go home to broken families, families who are addicted to drugs and then make drugs readily available for my students, as well as students who are homeless--either literally or because their family shuffles between friends' and other relatives' homes. I remember one student coming up to me in my 1st year talking about how excited she was that she, her mother, and her sister were finally moving into their own apartment where she would have her own bed and her own closet. They had been without their own home for months. Spaulding High School does not have a school bus system so students are responsible for either walking to school or arranging their own rides. This often makes them late due to circumstances beyond their control, and unable to come in early or stay late for additional help if needed. Many rush to get to jobs after school to earn money either for themselves and their own needs or to contribute to their households. Many students, who do have cars, are in charge of picking up their younger siblings at one of the Middle/Elementary schools because their parents have to work and can't take the youngest siblings to appointments or practices. My students are contributing more and more to their families and are struggling to maintain focus on their own scholastic needs at school.

New opportunities have been given and mandated for students in school. Many of my students have been lucky enough to take on an internship in town through the Flexible Pathways program. They have been thriving and learning a lot about what the job market entails and what specific professions look like up close. Many have either cemented their plans to go into a field or done an about-face when they realized that what they had imagined is not what the reality is. Unfortunately, this program is only available to a select few. While Flexible Pathways was designed to give students opportunities to grow outside of the classroom, because students need transportation to get to these internships, this portion of Flexible Pathways is only available to students from families who can afford to have a car for their child. This excludes a large portion of students who are only able to walk home or rely on others for transportation.

The above issues relate most directly to those without large means, but one issue that has affected students of all walks of life is Proficiency Based Graduation Requirements. With Proficiency Based Grading, students have been given the opportunity to reassess on materials

throughout the grading period to show growth and achievement at their own pace. This sounds wonderful on paper, but what we have been seeing in the classroom is a disregard for studying and trying to get something right the first time, or even complete something on time. Proficiency Based Grading has seemed to be interpreted as a “no-deadlines” form of learning. Students will put off studying or writing an essay because they know their teachers have to accept it no matter what throughout the grading period, and they know they can’t be docked points for turning something in late. This means that students no longer care about homework as it isn’t always graded, and will often not complete work until the end of the grading period.

If teachers put a time limit on when they grade something, they still have to accept outstanding work by the end of the semester. This means that students are putting off work and then struggling to complete assignments because the materials were introduced months ago. Students no longer have the materials fresh in their minds. This also means that teachers are under a great deal of stress because they are receiving a lot of outstanding work at the end of the grading period, and then still have to grade it and put it into the gradebook by a fixed date. In many ways Proficiency Based Grading was supposed to take the pressure off of learning by allowing students to learn at their own pace. Instead, it’s added pressure to get a lot of work done in a short period of time because students are more apt to put off their assignments. They are learning skills that will get them fired at their jobs. No job will request for a report to be due in October and then still accept it in December. Not having work done on time at a job is grounds for probation and eventual termination, and yet we are teaching these kinds of skills at school.

Thank you for your time.
Sincerely,
Lauren Buck