

My name is April Morse and I am a Kindergarten teacher in Poultney who is proud to serve as president of my local education association. I want to tell you a little bit about the issues we face in our schools.

I am here today on behalf of not only my 14 amazing students, but on behalf of my fellow educators. As you know, our district – like many others – is dealing with the changes brought about because of Act 46. We now have eight schools in our district after our merger.

In my district we have a school where violence from students has become prevalent, making other students and educators fearful of their safety. In one instance, a student who exhibits violent behavior has been in crisis but is not receiving assistance that would help alleviate that crisis. Sadly, there is a lack of communication about how to move forward when a safety plan has not been put into place.

We have another school where new teachers who have been given excellent classroom reviews have been told that they need to either resign or that they will be non-renewed. Other teachers who have been in the school for quite a bit of time are being targeted and put on plans for things that parents have said -- not as a result of their classroom evaluations. Again, teachers are scared to come to work.

This state of affairs is because schools have been forced into districts together and there has not been a cohesive way in which this was done. Also, there hasn't been sufficient time to acclimate to the changes. Consolidation is supposedly to alleviate costs to the taxpayers. However, in my district, there was no consolidation at the supervisory union; in fact more positions were added as a result of the merger, but budgets were frozen in the schools in December.

We have students who are in need of more mental health services as evidenced by the student with violent outbursts. This is not an isolated case. In fact, it's happening more and more often. I had a student in my class a few years ago who would hit, kick, and throw things almost on a daily basis. It was necessary for me to evacuate the other students from my classroom almost once a week for their safety.

As we move forward, we need to ensure that merged districts do so in a planned and cohesive manner. We need to provide the resources for our students – in crisis or otherwise – so that they and their peers can learn. And we need to make sure that all eight of our schools – and schools everywhere – are safe, secure, and conducive to learning and teaching.