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Thank you for taking time from your busy day to meet with VTNEA members.

I'd like to talk to you about an issue that affects every Vermont public school—school safety, in particular student verbal and physical assaults. Since VTNEA members at Rutland City schools first brought statewide attention to this topic several years ago, we've come to see how common these problems are in all of our schools.

Because of school shootings, we've seen an increase in efforts to make schools more secure from external threats—more locked doors, more cameras, more safety drills, yet we know the greatest security threats are internal. School shooters are often current students or recent graduates of the schools they attack—and school personnel often recognize these individuals as the troubled people they are. Adults in schools frequently discuss students we consider dangerous. A student at my school readily comes to mind. He has lots of red flags—he is socially isolated and inappropriate, has a history of “stalking” female students, is obsessed with weapons and ammunition, has a survivalist mentality and a raging temper. He's a big guy. He gets regular counseling, but is that enough?

I may be naive, but my greatest worry at my school is not an active shooter, but that a fight will break out during lunch duty when I'm the only adult in the cafeteria. At my school students are often unsupervised. Some of them arrive before the official start of the school day. Many of them stay after school for as long as three hours waiting for a sports event to start. A couple of weeks ago, long after the end of the school day, two teachers saw students streaming out of the cafeteria because two female students were having a vicious fight. One teacher reported there were disgusting amounts of hair on the floor. Locking up schools and leaving students unsupervised makes no sense.

I have had several conversations with people who think teachers who want to should be allowed to carry weapons. No thanks. When our schools become more like prisons, our students become more anxious, especially younger ones and those with disabilities at any age. My school's wonderful school resource officer retired at the end of last school year and we have not been able to find a replacement. Three high schools in my area are without one—the training is too demanding, and the pay is too low. Part of the solution to increasing school safety is building stronger relationships between schools and their communities. Think of the schools you know—many of them aren't even in neighborhoods. Mine isn't. It's located outside town on a busy state highway. No one walks or bikes to school. No one just stops by for a visit.

The Rutland City teachers and paras who “aired their dirty laundry in public” have not received the support they deserve. They were told, for example, to wear close-toed shoes. While administrators and school board members seek ways to make schools more secure, they sometimes look in the wrong places. On Election Day last November voters in my supervisory union defeated a \$5.5 million safety, security, and operations bond proposal. This proposal came as a surprise to many and some of the important conversations came after it was voted down. If we want secure schools, the stakeholders—voters, school board members, administrators, teachers, paras, parents, and students—rather than reacting to incidents, need to talk to each other honestly about what's happening right now. Thanks again for your time.