

Annie Harte
House Committee on Education
Testimony on the Future of Vermont Education
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I would like to thank Chair Webb, Vice Chair Cupoli, and Ranking Member Conlon for the privilege of speaking and representing my community in the future of Vermont education. Additionally, I would like to thank all of the members of the committee for their continued work and attention that treats education with the importance it deserves.

My name is Annie Harte. My fellow student representative and I represent the students of the Burlington School District on the Burlington School District School Board. I am a junior at Burlington High School and a proud, active member of my community. I am the managing editor of my school newspaper, *The Register*. Every month, I work to edit and publish a new edition of the paper, informing my community, shedding light on important issues, and providing a safe platform for my fellow journalists to write. I am also a member of my Principal Advisory Board, where I, along with my fellow peers, advise school policies to solve issues like inequities in club access and funding, absenteeism, and excessive phone usage. At a more micro level, I am involved in a wide range of clubs, from writing plays for the drama club to attending nationals with my philosophy team. I have a deep love and understanding of the community I represent.

I value most how personal my education feels. I am taught by teachers who know me. On the school board, policies and practices are made by my neighbors and my crossing guard. Decisions are made by the people who will feel their effects. To begin, I will discuss how much I value my teachers and the relationships they work to form with their students. The relationships I have built with my teachers are among the most valuable gifts my school district has given me. I have attended the past four years in a makeshift school, transformed from a department store. Going to school in a mall is hard. My 950 peers and I have had to learn how to adapt and motivate so we can learn in a building without windows or walls that reach the ceiling. I credit the care and dedication of my teachers to my *excitement* to attend school every day. My teachers cultivate a safe space where every question is valued and thoughtful discussion is encouraged. I have never once felt like a burden for staying late or arriving early to ask questions. In fact, on several occasions, my teachers have opened their doors to me during their lunch times and preparation blocks. BHS teachers are updated on their students' sports events, siblings, and break plans. My teachers do more than just educate. They are trusted adults to so many students (81% according to BSD's 2023-24 strategic plan survey). In its current condition, BHS could not operate as a place of education alone. BHS is fueled by the relentless positive attitudes of its teachers and the strong, genuine bonds between students and staff. More than anything, my teachers create a community. They know every student and, as a result, serve them better. 17 million dollars is a quantifiable number but 150 teachers cut is the loss of *countless* student-teacher relationships.

Additionally, I am grateful for how the members of the school board know and understand the people of the Burlington school district and the problems those people face. For

example, through the district's five priority areas, the School Board has an active commitment to ensuring the belonging and representation of all students and staff. An important factor when considering belonging and representation is that Burlington is the second most diverse school district in the state. There are a few metrics I would like to call to your attention. In the 23-24 school year, 70% of students reported that they see adults treating all students fairly.¹ This represents a 5% increase from the previous year. In the 23-24 school year, 6% of the faculty were of the global majority.² This represents a one percent increase from the previous year. We've achieved the aforementioned progress by attending hiring fairs at HBCUs, creating hiring materials intended to attract candidates of the global majority, and by working with the Summer Racial Justice Academy. I bring up these numbers because they both represent two things: 1) BSD is making progress. For the most part, we are seeing an upward trend in terms of achieving our strategic goals, and 2) there is still progress needed. The consolidation of the school districts makes this work much more difficult. With roughly 10 times the number of students to account for, how will the priorities of the district change?³ Additionally, compared to the districts that Burlington is proposed to merge with, Burlington has, on average, roughly 4x the number of students who make up the global majority.⁴ What makes a school district like the Burlington School District successful is the decisions made and informed by people who understand the community. The Burlington School District has worked diligently to create BSD a safe and equitable place for all students, regardless of race, socioeconomic factors, or intellectual learning abilities. I am nervous that as the number of students the district is accounting for grows ten times larger, and students of the global majority will make up a smaller percentage of the student population, the attention and focus on equity will decrease.

The proposed education plan reveals how important it is that decisions are made by the people who will feel the effects of them. The relationships I have formed with my teachers and the progress that I have seen towards creating a safe and equitable learning environment prove to me how vital it is that the new education plan will reflect the needs of the students, teachers, and community members, not only the budget. I understand that a change has to be made. I also understand that in order to benefit all populations, we need to work together to create this change. I am a student. I, and my fellow school board student representatives, represent an important piece of the puzzle. I thank you for the opportunity to share my perspective, and I implore you to consider what we have shared. As you create new policies, please remember that my peers and I will feel the effects of these decisions every day.

¹ *BSD Annual Student Surveys*. Canva, https://www.canva.com/design/DAGWS-k8Eys/1-kZxO65hc4JN5mFObeRIA/view?utm_content=DAGWS-k8Eys&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link2&utm_source=uniquelinks&utlId=h6b7c443f0d#4. Accessed 2 May 2025.

² *BSD Human Resource Data*. Canva, https://www.canva.com/design/DAGbuGZyb7U/JpvyCy6ls6ZmkB9H7oma8w/view?utm_content=DAGbuGZyb7U&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link2&utm_source=uniquelinks&utlId=h4061b6e603#7. Accessed 2 May 2025.

³ "Champlain Valley Unified Union School District." *U.S. News & World Report*, <https://www.usnews.com/education/k12/vermont/districts/champlain-valley-unified-union-school-district-56-113623>. Accessed 2 May 2025.

⁴ "School Assessments & Data." *Burlington School District*, <https://www.bsdyt.org/district/superintendent/school-assessments-data/>. Accessed 2 May 2025.

