

Annie Schneider, Teacher, Winooski High School
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Good afternoon, and thank you very much for allowing me and my student to speak with you today. My name is Annie Schneider, and I am a teacher at Winooski High School. I am not a special education teacher, but I am going to be talking about the value of special education today, as the work I do as a classroom teacher to teach and support students with a variety of needs is only made possible because of the special education structures, funding, and supports which allow all students to succeed in our classrooms.

I know that most of you are former or current educators or school board members. While you are here making decisions about policies, funding, and structural changes for our education system, what I would invite you to do is picture your students. Put a face to the numbers. Think about those kids you know from your hometown or your local school and how your decisions will impact them. Let me tell you about a student I have worked with who helps ground me in the work I do every day.

My student started life with a terrible accident. As a very young child, he fell out of a car and was dragged and was badly injured, which affected his development and abilities. Years later, he came to the United States and started high school in my class. Right away, I noticed that this student needed extra support. His writing wasn't progressing beyond very repetitive phrases and he was having trouble communicating, not because of his English, but in other ways. At the time, he was not receiving services or had been identified as needing extra help. Through my advocacy and the work of other teachers, we eventually learned about our student's background, did testing, and were able to place him on an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Because of the special education supports he has received for the last few years he has become an exceptional writer and a strong communicator. I'm so proud of him and grateful that we were able to get him supports.

I'd love the chance to tell you about another student of mine. She is sitting right here in the room with me. She's an incredible young woman, the very top of her graduating class, a passionate advocate with an astonishingly bright future, and has overcome challenges that she will tell you about. When I first had her in class, the 504 Plan that I was given with her needs and accommodations was incredibly helpful in letting me know how I could support her in a way that will allow her to succeed. Because of the work of the special education team, I as a teacher have the tools that I need to work with students of many different backgrounds, and help their natural abilities shine. I'm so excited for you to hear from Alexis, but I want to leave you with one closing thought.

In one of my classes, students have to give their own definition and example of what Equity means. My students talk a lot about how equity is really related to special education. One of my students told me, "Ms, Equity is how my friend needs help with reading, so he gets that extra help, but I don't need it, so why would I get it? We don't all need the same things." I really

appreciate this understanding and example of what equity means, and I urge you to think about this when you consider funding for special education, and for our schools in general. Not all students and not all schools have the same needs, and it is our job as educators, and as people like you, who make the decisions about the structures and budgets, to consider the needs of all students. Please, when you are making hard decisions, think of a kid you know. Put a face to the numbers and let that guide you.