

Good morning, Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the committee.

My name is Kylie Cleanthes, and I am a graduate student at the University of Vermont in the Advanced Specialties in Educational Practices program. I also completed my undergraduate degree in Elementary Education and Special Education at UVM. I am from West Dover, Vermont, and I was born and raised in Vermont.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

I chose to become a teacher because I believe every student deserves to know they matter and to have the space to grow and learn. That belief has guided my work throughout my time at UVM and in Vermont schools.

Through my preparation program, I have had the opportunity to work with many students across different settings. One of the most meaningful parts of this experience has been building relationships with students and then seeing them out in the community. It highlights how important schools are as a central part of our communities.

At the same time, I have seen challenges in Vermont schools, especially related to staffing and budgets. These challenges can impact how consistently schools are able to meet student needs, particularly for students who require more support.

My preparation at UVM has been incredibly valuable. Starting in my first year with NEST, I gained hands-on experience that helped build both my confidence and my skills. I feel far more prepared now than when I began at UVM in August 2021.

Currently, I am working at Charlotte Central School as a .5 special educator and a .5 intensive paraeducator. While I am grateful to be working in Vermont, it was difficult to find a position, and I did not secure this role until about a week and a half before the school year began.

Additionally, the cost of living in Vermont is high, and it has made me question whether I can stay here long term. I know this is a concern shared by many of my peers.

Financial supports such as loan forgiveness or financial support during student teaching would have made a significant difference for me. A teacher loan forgiveness program would have been attractive to me and likely to a number of my classmates, including those who are choosing to teach outside of Vermont. While I can't say it would have changed every decision, I do believe these kinds of supports could encourage more graduates to stay and begin their careers in Vermont.

Vermont has strong preparation programs and dedicated future teachers. With the right supports, more of us would choose to build our careers here.

Thank you again for your time. I am happy to answer any questions.