

To: The Vermont House Education Committee

From: Harmony Belle Devoe, Council Chair of The Vermont State Youth Council,
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Date: February 28th, 2025

Re: Education in Vermont

Good afternoon! My name is Harmony Belle Devoe, I'm in 10th grade at Harwood Union High School, I live in Warren, and I'm Chair of the Vermont State Youth Council.

An ideal public school system, to me, would make an effort to academically challenge students and prepare them to benefit society while in school, and after they graduate, and provide them with the appropriate holistic supports to do so.

An aspect of this public school system would be a strict, educational consequence policy for bullying and discrimination. These consequences would be suggested by individuals trained in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, including lessons, presentations, workshops, Restorative Justice practices, and dialogues related to the topic of discrimination, in a strong effort to change the patterns of their actions, without requiring the victim to speak with their discriminator. In this public school system, all students would feel comfortable reporting bullying and discrimination, and would know something will be done to end the harmful behavior. These schools would also have boxes for students to write reports of incidents.

Another feature of this school would be free breakfast and lunch for all students, so no student is hungry in class. There would also be nurses on-site at all times, as they are some students' only access to healthcare. There would also be strong supports for addiction recovery. If a student was found with a substance at school, they would be asked if they want help quitting, and would receive support from there. There would also be mental health supports. There'd always be counselors available to speak with, and homeroom teachers would regularly check in with students.

The school would also keep the school community aware of issues by demonstrating clear communication with families if there were issues at school, both schoolwide, in an email newsletter, and individually, if a student was struggling, with their permission.

In an effort to incorporate student voice into the administration, there would be a suggestion box with the option of being anonymous, where students could write any ideas for staff to improve the school. Students would also be able to start clubs, based on their interests, including advocacy, with support from staff members. Younger students could also learn from older students, to create a close, multi-age, school community.

Another characteristic of this school system would be having advanced classes offered starting in 9th grade to challenge students, along with specific-topic classes to choose from, that relate to careers and college majors. For example, instead of just English, there could be journalism, business literature, storytelling, and poetry. Teachers would also educate students on how the topics relate to real life and careers, and would lead projects for students to analyze and benefit their communities. Multiple perspectives, especially those of marginalized communities, would be taught about in the classroom, while allowing students to develop critical thinking and form their own opinions.

There would also be opportunities to demonstrate learning in different styles that work best for each student, such as posters, art, writing, tests, videos, and speaking. Teachers would ask if students understand what is being taught each step of the way, and students could also meet one on one with teachers when they feel they need additional support in class.

There would also be allowance for brain breaks in class, so students could move their bodies and clear their minds, to better focus when they return to the classwork.

If there was a substitute teacher, the teacher would be equipped to teach the class, so class time would still be used effectively.

There would also be specific teachers and supports for English Language Learners, and for students with mental and physical disabilities.

The school buildings would also provide a vibrant, colorful environment. There would be windows in every room, allowing for natural lighting, as well as live plants to clean the air. There'd also be posters or murals reminding students that all are welcome. There would also be opportunities for classes to go outdoors.

Overall, this public school system would allow for each student to achieve success, by taking into account each student's needs, and making them feel part of a supportive school community.

Thank you.
