

Good afternoon, Chair and members of the Committee.

My name is Chrissy Park, and I currently teach 4th grade at Burke town school in the north east kingdom and this is my 10th year in education. During that time, I have taught grades 2nd through 6th, and I stepped out of the classroom for two years to work with students specifically on social-emotional learning. In that role I provided social groups, helped create behavior plans, and supported teachers in the building to create classroom systems that were supportive to students with sensory and behavioral needs.

Last year, I returned to the classroom to support a 3rd grade class that was struggling significantly with behavior.

That year, that class had over 280 behavior referrals.

This year, as 4th graders, they have just a little over 50.

I wish I could stand here and tell you that I implemented a groundbreaking strategy or that my years of experience alone turned things around. But I can't.

What changed that classroom from chaos to high-quality learning was passion.

Passion from me, because I was back in the classroom doing what I love—teaching curriculum, watching lightbulb moments, and seeing students grow.

Passion from the students, because they began to see themselves as learners. They started to understand that reading, writing, and problem-solving open doors. When students feel capable and valued, behavior changes. Engagement changes. Outcomes change.

We talk a lot about teacher burnout. And burnout is real. But I'd like to talk about teacher passion.

Teaching children is both a science and an art. It requires understanding the science of how the brain develops and learns. It requires applying that science through the careful art of instruction, relationships, and responsiveness. It requires teachers to believe deeply that the work we do every day matters.

I get to work alongside passionate educators every day. My colleagues show up for students in ways that go far beyond a job description. And the learning gains we see reflect that commitment. Too often, the narrative around education focuses on burnout, declining test scores, and behavior challenges. What if we flipped that narrative? What if we focused on passion, growth, and teaching students how to solve real problems they will face in the real world?

Many of you have stepped into schools in the past few years and seen that passion firsthand. If you haven't, I invite you to visit. When you see it, I believe the conversations that happen behind closed doors will shift. They will center on how to support teachers—not diminish them based on salary rhetoric. They will center on what is best for students when discussing consolidation and district maps, especially for children who may lose connection to their hometown schools.

We do have real challenges in how we fund education in Vermont. We need real solutions. But as you consider the future of Vermont education, I ask that you remember this: the rhetoric we put into the world matters. It can either fuel passion or extinguish it.

I encourage you to lean on the recommendations of the redistricting task force—educators and community members who have invested time, research, and care into what will best serve both students and teachers. Forcing children who are already in buildings that are falling apart into another building that is also falling apart is not what is best for our students. Having class sizes that are way over what a classroom can hold and what a teacher can teach is not what is best for

our students. It is not what will provide the success and passion that I was able to see with the 19 students in the 4th grade cohort that I teach this year.

Please protect the passion that is alive in our schools.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to Vermont's children.