

My name is Peter Davenport from Fairfax and I'm a Behavior Interventionist at St. Albans City School. I came to this job by accident, but I've since found it to be my calling in life. I've had many jobs before but I've never felt I've had more of an impact on people and our society than with the work I do in schools. For those of you who don't know what a BI is or does, I primarily support students with extreme and/or dangerous behaviors in a 1:1 capacity to ensure that they and their peers are able to access their education as best as possible. Many children need support in order to be successful at school and eventually be independent adults. Through my work daily I support students exhibiting extremely challenging or dangerous behavior and make sure they and their peers are able to learn and grow as individuals. I could give literally hundreds of examples of situations I've been in that would shock most people - and I've only been in this field for 4 years. If we don't provide the care these kids need when we can, we set them up for failure in life with catastrophic knock-on effects to our larger society. Despite the intense situations I find myself in daily and barely making enough money to live, I love my job. The growth I'm able to see in students keeps me coming back to do this important work every day. In many cases, I've had students with severe mental distress and sometimes violent behaviors improve so significantly under my care and the care of my coworkers that they are able to participate at school on par with their peers and maintain emotional regulation so well that they regularly do not need support throughout their day. These are the miracles that everyone who works in schools performs for our students and our society. Nothing makes me happier than seeing my work help students be happy, healthy, independent people.

To be clear, students should not have to struggle so much just to get an education; and educators should not have to do so much for so little to provide an education to Vermont's youth - our only constitutionally mandated public right. Much of the root causes of our students' distress comes from socioeconomic factors outside of their families control and certainly out of their control as children growing up in a broken system. Schools do much more than just teach academics. We teach emotional regulation, we provide breakfast and lunch to food insecure children, host after school programs, and are a stopgap for essential social and mental health services children need to be healthy. This is a lot for a fragile education system to take on. As a state, we need to make sure we're doing more than just the bare minimum to keep these children on a satisfactory path. We need to make sure we're giving them everything they need to be successful. For me, that means a few things. 1. We need to make sure all school staff are paid fairly for their work they do for future generations of Vermonters. 2. We need to establish a universal healthcare system that provides adequate physical and mental health coverage to people of all ages so that children and adults don't have to struggle so much just to have a fair shot at life. And 3. Affordable housing must be a right of all Vermonters so we no longer have homeless students who are more comfortable at school than outside of school hours.

I am beyond proud of the work done in Vermont's schools and I look forward to making as much of a difference as I can for our kids for the rest of my career. I love what myself and my colleagues do for Vermont's children, I just wish it wasn't so hard. Thank you for your time and your continued collaboration to make Vermont's public education system the best it can possibly be.