

Senate Education Testimony

Ada Allen, Craftsbury Student

February 13, 2026

Hello, thank you for taking the time to hear my testimony today. My name is Ada Allen, and I am a sophomore at Craftsbury Academy in Orleans County, a public PK-12 school. With around 50 students in my high school, I feel that it is integral for you to hear the story of life at a rural school while you are making decisions that may completely change the future of Vermont education for generations of students to come.

Over the past year, I have heard much about consolidation and reimagining schools to lay out a better system. Many legislators have claimed that small schools provide limited opportunities and that forced consolidation is the only way to ensure equity of opportunity. I would like to provide testimony today to refute this claim and to share that rich opportunities can be found at schools both small and large across the state, including my community school in Craftsbury. Craftsbury is proof that small doesn't mean limited; it means personalized and connected.

As a student at Craftsbury, I have been able to expand my learning opportunities and intellectual growth. For example, I love language, writing, and learning about government, so this year I was supported to add upper-level classes to my course load, including AP Language and Composition and AP US Government. My teachers have offered a lot of one-on-one support to help me fuel my passions and to work through stumbling blocks and challenges. For my Junior and Senior years, I will have seven more AP Classes to choose from at Craftsbury, ranging from science to history, and all within my small school. The statement that smaller schools are unable to provide enough mentally enriching classes or opportunities is inherently

false. I have been fully immersed in challenging and fulfilling classes at Craftsbury and participated in ways that I feel wouldn't be possible at a larger school. I also believe that Craftsbury is better able to engage students in the classroom. In bigger schools, it is far easier to coast along without teachers noticing you falling behind, but at Craftsbury, each teacher is able to closely support every single student. We have class discussions where each student can share their opinion and be heard, not forgotten among a sea of too many students in a building far too large for a personal learning experience.

The commonly made claim that smaller schools don't allow for a diversity of connections between students is also false. At Craftsbury Academy, I have built relationships with individuals who are unique and different from me. Compared to the experiences of my friends at larger schools, who form groups based on similarity and tend to only be comfortable with familiarity, my experience at school has taught me so much more. Our small school community is not divided into categories; we all learn from each other, and have helped each other grow into the people we are today. This level of connection and support is not possible in larger schools. In addition to this, I have been able to connect with many ages. Because our school is linked to the middle and elementary school, we can learn and grow with all ages. I participate in the DREAM Mentorship Program, where I am guiding elementary students. I can learn so much from the younger students, and they are a very valuable part of our school community.

Similar to building diverse relationships, I believe that small schools such as Craftsbury are better able to support mental health, as our tight-knit community will support each student, no matter their differences. In bigger schools, students can simply get lost and forgotten, but at Craftsbury, every student is noticed, so if they are struggling, they will always have a community

to support them. To me, our school dynamic feels as if we are all one. When one of us is going through hardships, everyone is there to support them.

Additionally, next week I am beginning to help in the 4th and 5th-grade classrooms, as an aid to teachers, but also as an opportunity to explore my passion for educating. These opportunities would not be possible without the small school we have, and I hope that I can continue doing this, and that students to come are able as well. I would love to see the kids I teach and mentor grow up with the kind of support and acceptance I have received from the Craftsbury Academy community.

Another critique of small schools that I have heard often is that they are too small to offer extracurriculars or social opportunities. My experience strongly rebuts this and supports that small schools are even better able to provide students with opportunities. For athletics, we have partnered with Hazen Union to create strong teams together. Throughout the year, I enjoy soccer, cross-country skiing, and softball with my Craftsbury and Hazen team members. Through this partnership, I have been able to create more connections and learn skills from different perspectives. The athletics experience in large schools pales in comparison. Tryouts cut student participation, and even the opportunity to play on a team is limited, while at Craftsbury and Hazen, everyone is given an opportunity to learn and play, no matter their skill level. How, I ask you, are students going to be given more opportunities at larger schools when they can't even make the sports team?

Small schools like Craftsbury Academy are deeply rooted in the community, which is something I am very thankful for. This year, I chose to serve as a student representative on our school board, and I can participate in discussions on the decisions in our school. Each month, I take feedback from each middle and high school student and share it with the board, because I

believe it is important to allow everyone to have a voice. I am on my town's Freedom and Unity Committee, which has helped me to support both my school and community. These active roles are a key part of our school and further support our connection to the community.

While I am the only one here representing the students of Craftsbury Academy, their accomplishments and active roles in the school community speak for themselves. The clubs our school has to offer, including scholars bowl, animal husbandry, and rocketry club, are all thriving and being led by students. These groups are receiving help from community members and are learning skills that they will keep for the rest of their lives. Every day, I see the students and teachers around me supporting each other and doing their best. Whether it is students staying out in a snowstorm to help the janitors shovel snow without being asked to, or a high school student telling jokes to an elementary school student, our school community is strong. This strength doesn't come from having large facilities with better equipment, or more teachers and classes, it comes from the bond we have with each other and the strength in our community.

While each of you works on deciding the future of students like myself, I strongly suggest you keep in mind the experience I shared with you today. Please remember, statistics and percentages don't share the full story, so I thank you for allowing me to share what is most important, the student experience.