

Good Afternoon.

I'm Katya Cooke, a native Vermonter, and I have been teaching for 28 years and in Vermont for 19 years. I currently teach Russian and French at Mill River Union HS/MS in the MRUUSD. Thank you for allowing me to speak about the special relationship between our schools and our communities.

Make a journey south on Route 100 from Montpelier, get off at Route 4, head south on 7 and you'll come to a series of small towns – some in the hills and some in the valley.

Head up the road into the hills of Shrewsbury and you will find a school that is the center of this community. Enter the school and you may find older students helping younger students practice their reading skills as "Book Buddies" (an initiative that's getting results). Or you might find multi-age tables in the lunchroom as students from different grades converse during lunch, or perhaps you will find students helping members of the community organization SAGE create the compost that nourishes the school garden and orchard.

Now head down the hill, across the valley and up the big hill on the other side of Route 7 to Tinmouth – another school at the center of a community.

Here you may find elementary students learning Spanish or having lessons integrating math and language in their outdoor classrooms. Once a month a class is joined by their parents for lunch. In this school outdoor education is a priority; beginning first thing in the morning all grade levels play together outside even before the school day starts.

Head back to Route 7 to visit Wallingford. Here you will find active learning by day and a growing elementary sports program in the afternoons and evenings. Wallingford is a school that is also a community center and a place where students join with community members for things like Green Up Day and recognizing Veterans at Memorial Day and Veteran's Day ceremonies at the school.

On the way to Clarendon Elementary, you pass the dairy farm whose children attend our schools. At Clarendon you can stretch your legs on the community walking path constructed by the school and community volunteers. Clarendon is also the home of our district's alternative education program for our elementary students who need extra support.

From Clarendon, head south down the road to Mill River Union HS/MS where you will find the academics, arts, and athletics we value reflected in the image of the three-cornered hat of our Minuteman mascot.

As you walk through the halls of Mill River, you will see students' art work on nearly every wall in the school, whether it's senior murals or art from current art classes on display. In the halls of the middle school, you will see topics from the science classes also on display, as well as messages from student advisories encouraging kindness. You might see students building robots, athletes in the gyms, or instrumental and vocal musicians rehearsing before or after school. If you enter classrooms, you will see and hear a wide variety of core – math, science, history, and English – classes, as well as electives from woodworking and cooking to culture courses and book clubs. If you come on a weekend, you might watch a movie sponsored by the Tri-M club, enjoy a community breakfast organized by the senior class, or see the state wrestling or cheerleading competitions. Students also have opportunities for AP courses or intervention or flexible pathways – according to their needs. Mill River is a school that truly offers something for everyone.

Behind the incredible work and opportunities at our schools are highly qualified and dedicated faculty, staff, and administrators who help our students grow their minds and skills every day beginning in pre-school (we have a program in each elementary school). And behind the people working in the schools are the people in the communities who support our schools by working and playing alongside us.

Won't you help us keep doing the good work we are doing in our schools and our communities by continuing to support local, school-centered decision making about our schools and programs?

Thank you very much for your time and attention.

Catharine (Katya) Cooke

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