

I am writing as the parent of two students who grew up in Strafford, VT. Both my son and daughter attended the Newton School. My son is in college now and my daughter is a Junior at The Sharon Academy. To have TSA available as a high school 15 minutes away is ideal. More importantly, having TSA available as a secular, innovative, and progressive high school choice is essential. There are many things that make Vermont a 'good place to live,' but school choice is not an optional good, again, it is essential. I have no complaints about paying taxes that go directly toward my daughter having the option of TSA per se. She would not thrive at the other options as she has there. I have also had the privilege and honor of teaching a course at TSA, and will have the honor again come January, so I have dual perspectives, inside and outside the school.

I understand that Vermont has problems vis education and costs. I understand that consolidating public, statutory schools in a small population state has become necessary. But, those pressures and their attendant decisions should not come at the expense of small independent schools. What a school like TSA shows is that small is not only beautiful, as Buckminster Fuller put it, but flexible and innovative, as John Dewey and Tim Pitkin imagined and put into practice. This past summer my daughter attended the Governor's Arts Institute at Castleton. When her mother and I went to pick her up at the end of the two weeks and the culminating presentations were made and the assembly held, I thought to myself: "This feels like TSA." When I asked my daughter what she felt during her experience she said: "It feels a lot like TSA and I loved it; I felt at home here." When you see your daughter and her roommate crying because they lived a deep experience together and then realize that the same educational ethos exists where she attends school daily, you know how vital and crucial it is to keep independent schools like TSA alive and thriving.

Personally, I think there should be more independent schools like TSA in the state, and that larger statutory schools should learn from the smaller schools about person-centered approaches. It's great to have larger well-resourced schools and we are fortunate that Vermont does far better than most states in terms of education, but we need options - and, to be blunt, the wealthiest Vermonters should be more willing to make sure those options are available to the broadest scope of Vermont's children. Why? Because respecting differences and sharing wealth is in their self-interest. Vermont should never become a 'libertarian' state. Never.

Thank you for your time, your reading, and the opportunity to express my opinion.

Sincerely yours,
Byron Breese