

Thank you to the Senate Education Committee for choosing to visit WRVSU and for creating space to hear our voices.

My name is Joshua Budukiewicz, and I am the father of a seven-year-old son, Owen.

I was born and raised in Boston and lived there my entire life until about a year and a half ago. Owen began his education in Boston Public Schools, starting in Pre-K. While Boston is often praised for its education system, that reputation is largely tied to higher education—not public K–12 schools. After the pandemic and one year in BPS, we witnessed firsthand our son being bullied, and we watched his joyful, vibrant personality slowly become muted.

That experience led us to make a life-changing decision. We wanted a better life for our child. I gave up my career as an apprenticeship instructor and executive in a local trade union to pursue what I now consider my dream job: being Owen's full-time dad.

When we moved from a large city to a small rural community, we found something special here in Stockbridge, Vermont. Our family was embraced fully. We've learned that many families in our town are transplants like us—people who came here seeking a better future for their children and families.

Owen attends Stockbridge Central School, and I now serve on our local school board to maximize my ability to advocate not only for my son, but for all of our children and community members. I say our children—or cousins, as Principal Lindy Stetson so beautifully describes them—because that is truly how this school community functions. Children across grade levels bond, look out for one another, and accept each other exactly as they are.

In this environment, we have watched our son absolutely thrive. And frankly, so have I.

As a school board member, I can say with confidence that WRVSU is not part of the problem—we are part of the solution. We are small but efficient. Our district spends below the state per pupil average, and our taxes stay stable thanks to responsible WRVSU leadership. Our district is fiscally responsible. For fiscal year 2026, our projected tax impact is just 0.0106%. In Stockbridge, our schools provide students with access to healthcare, dental care, and mental health services on site—services that would otherwise require families to cross mountains to access.

Yet instead of addressing the true drivers of rising costs—healthcare and insurance systems where executives collect millions in bonuses while care becomes more expensive and less effective—the focus has turned to the low hanging fruit, our children's education. Is there still room to improve, absolutely but to take away local schools and local voice by getting ride of school boards is not the way.

Our children have already endured enough.

Sixty- to seventy-five-minute and unsupervised bus rides away from their communities and families are not the answer. Our school is our community. Without it, Stockbridge becomes little more than houses along a road that runs through.

I urge you to go back to the drawing board and find another path.

Vermont's population is aging and shrinking. People like my family are choosing this state intentionally—to build new communities, to raise children here, to invest in the future. With remote work now widely available, families have options. If rural education is erased, Vermont will lose both current residents and future ones.

Please don't close the door on Vermont's future.

Thank you for your time, and I ask you to make the choice that is right for Vermont—by doing what is right for our children

Joshua Budukiewicz
Stockbridge, Vermont