

Dear Senate Education Committee,

Thank you for visiting CVU on Monday. My colleagues and I appreciate the opportunity to share our perspectives on what makes Vermont's education system excellent.

I have been a high school social studies teacher for fifteen years—all of them right here in Vermont, in three different schools.

The only year of my life I've spent *not* teaching or being a student in Vermont was in 2017-18, when I served as a Roving Scholar in American Studies to the country of Norway, through a Fulbright Fellowship. I was sure my year of cultural diplomacy would help me unlock what makes Scandinavian schools so exceptional. My time abroad did some of that, but after visiting 100+ Norwegian high schools, I was surprised that my time away actually illuminated just how high performing *Vermont's* schools are.

I returned home committed to creating more experiential and place-based learning for Vermont kids, but also with a deep appreciation for just how academically rigorous our academic spaces are for *all youth*. Vermont educators design coursework that is highly personalized, where student voice and choice are prioritized and student proficiency is developed over time with thoughtful, deep feedback. Vermont teachers work unbelievably hard to live the philosophy that “you can’t teach kids you don’t know.” We devote significant time and energy in getting to know our students academically and personally so that we can deliver the best possible educational opportunities to everyone who walks into our teaching spaces. I see this devotion, creativity and persistence every day among my colleagues here at CVU, and at Colchester and Brattleboro High Schools, where I worked previously.

What our system *does* lack is a robust social safety net, funded by the local and federal government. Instead, schools in the US, and especially here in Vermont, provide education and so, so much more. Vermont schools are an entire ecosystem of support under one roof: we provide health care, food service and to-go meals, legal aid, meaningful social communities, community-based learning, and so much more. Teachers, staff and administrators do more with less year after year because we’re committed to our craft and quite simply, because we care deeply.

Our schools aren’t failing, but we are stretching our resources, both physical and human. Further cuts to personnel and/or consolidation in CVSD won’t help us do the work that we know transforms lives. Work that is rooted in relationship building, high quality, proficiency-based academics, and a system that wraps around every student to help guide them through adolescence.

When you return to Montpelier this winter please remember that Vermont schools and the young people we serve are one of our state’s most valuable resources. Please prioritize them.

Rachel Cohen
CVU Humanities Teacher