

Hello, Chair Samuelson -

I'd like to share a few thoughts regarding the search for Vermont's new Secretary of Education.

Though I am the Chair of the Champlain Valley School District Board of Directors, I am not speaking for the board on this matter. The thoughts expressed here are my own.

I bring to this conversation my experience as a State Representative, a school board member, and – most importantly – a parent. My kids are now in 10th and 8th grade. I grew up in this wonderful state, also attending Vermont public schools, and knew that no matter where I lived when my children were born, I would return to Vermont so that they could go to school here. I believed that anywhere we settled, the schools would be great and my kids would be cared for.

And I was mostly right. My kids have been taught and loved by some truly incredible teachers. They've also been underserved at times, in various ways, and the gaps that we've encountered are systems-based, not personnel-based.

Vermont has an opportunity, thanks to our relatively small population and geographic size, to build a robust, cohesive educational system – one that serves all students, in every part of the state, in the most important ways by focusing on things like inclusion, personalized learning, and flexible pathways.

Through various legislative and AOE efforts, a solid foundation is in place. Act 1 and the recent updates to our education quality standards bring us closer to the potential that I know this state is capable of. But we need a leader who lives and breathes public education to see this through.

We need a Secretary of Ed who understands special education, career and technical education, and the complexities of middle school education (which, I'm telling you, we have not yet mastered). We need a visionary leader who models universal design while setting clear expectations with compassion and respect. This role must be filled by someone who believes in accountability and transparency, and can deftly explain everything from the local budgeting process to the problematic tuition voucher system.

It's a tall order, but our students, families, and taxpayers deserve this.

School board education in Vermont has recently focused on understanding the connection between board effectiveness and student outcomes. I'd wager that this proven correlation is equally strong – maybe even stronger – between the Agency of Education and the roughly 85,000 preK-12th grade students in our state.

There is so much potential here. Our next Secretary should be the key to unlock it.

With gratitude for all you do,

Rep. Angela Arsenault

*Rep. Angela Arsenault
Williston (CHI-2)*

*House Judiciary Committee
Joint Judicial Retention Committee
Women's Caucus Planning Team
Climate Solutions Caucus*