

I am here to address my deep concern surrounding the problems with special education funding that are associated with the new foundation formula that would be implemented under Act 73. The foundation formula, as written, will cut significant funding for special education, and EWSD will be forced to replace these funds or lose 1.4 million dollars of government money.

The Essex Westford School District was, just last year, forced to cut almost 6 million dollars from our budget, which had undeniable effects on our community. We cut 100 staff positions, closed a school, and made many other sacrifices.

To maintain our special education funding under the foundation formula, something we are required by law to do, we would have to cut another 6 million dollars from our general education budget. Six million dollars is over a quarter of EWSD's entire special education budget. To make up this amount of money, what would we have to cut? Taking 6 million dollars out of our budget would be the equivalent of cutting our entire student transportation budget AND our entire athletics budget, and it would still fail to fill the deficit.

Special education is an important facet of the education of hundreds of students across EWSD, over 30% of all students in the district. I personally benefit from special education as a student with a 504 plan, which gives students with disabilities the equitable opportunities they need to learn effectively in the classroom. Having this plan allows me to make the most of my education and has undeniably improved my experience as a student in EWSD.

While underfunding special education will obviously have the most impact on students, it also affects staff across the district. My mother works in special education, managing and supporting students with 504 plans, and I see personally how hard she works every day to ensure that all of these kids get what they need. She loves her job, but her case load is already huge, and I know that cutting this much money from special education would be devastating.

It is easy to think of the "grand scheme of things", the monetary effects that will play out over years and years, but this thinking can neglect students in our schools right now.

Our dedicated approach to special education is one of the things I value most about my district. For example, our High School offers programs that encourage both special education students and non-special-education students to collaborate and learn from each other in subjects such as art, music, cooking, and physical education. Without the funding that supports our wonderful and dedicated students and staff, programs like these would not be possible.

You are claiming to develop and enact Act 73 in pursuit of equity for all students, but a plan to reduce funding for some in order to "average out" support for all hurts the hundreds of

students who already rely on these services. I agree that we need to promote equity and reduce costs, but these goals will not be achieved by harming students in our top performing districts. We need to focus on lifting all schools up to higher standards and with greater equity and affordability in mind, instead of hobbling Vermont education.