

Hello, my name is Chris Herz. I am a Rhode Island resident and I have worked as a computer teacher at the Narragansett School District for the past 30 years, the past 28 of which was at the high school. I am also the President of our local teacher's union representing approximately 150 NEARI members.

My colleagues and I are passionate about our work and dedicated to delivering high-quality education to our students. Our motivation stems from a genuine desire to be in the classroom, guiding children as they learn, grow, and strive for the best possible life. We take pride in our accomplishments in our district, where we have successfully implemented programs and witnessed notable student outcomes.

However, it's important to acknowledge that certain aspects of our profession have become increasingly challenging over the years. The job we cherish has undeniably grown more demanding. Today's educational landscape is vastly different from the traditional classroom settings many of us experienced. The evolving requirements, heightened responsibilities, and intensified training demands have all contributed to a more complex environment.

Moreover, we are confronted with unprecedented challenges in student behaviors and a prevailing mental health crisis. The strain on our resources and the exhaustion experienced by all my colleagues at the end of each day are tangible indicators of the evolving difficulties. Our commitment to providing an excellent education to our students is unwavering, but each passing year presents new obstacles.

Compounding these challenges is the perpetual underfunding of our schools, exacerbating the struggle to recruit and retain sufficient staff, including educators, substitutes, and support personnel. Despite our dedication, the task becomes increasingly arduous. Our collective hope is that, with recognition and support, we can continue to overcome these hurdles and ensure our children receive the exceptional education they deserve.

If these cuts go through, our students would have reduced access to programs and support that are vital for our education. Specifically, the programs which are the fun things students get to do after school and on the weekends. We talk about mental health, but what really works? I believe it's socialization. I noticed that directly after my students returned from the Covid lockdowns they barely spoke to each other or to me. That first year was hard on everyone and I spent the year just getting them to open back up. It took a year before we offered to renew after school programs at which time I actively got the students involved. Those students are now graduating and they seem pretty well adjusted. One would think that after 3 years we are over the effects of the lockdowns, but we are not.

The new students entering high school who are not actively engaged in clubs, activities, or sport teams seem to be in great need of socialization skills. Teachers who run clubs don't do it to get rich, but need to have some compensation for their time in order to make ends meet. The money we get often just goes back to the students in the form of snacks, supplies, drinks and of course, pizza. Unfortunately, cutting funding to our school system reduces the available funds for after school programming.

I ask that you please reconsider cutting funding to our school system. As stated above, the impact of the cuts you make will exacerbate the mental fragility and low engagement of our students. We as a community and as a society owe it to our young people to create opportunities for them to thrive, not just survive in this world. School is a place to learn academically and interpersonally and you need skills in both areas to be a productive, well-functioning member of society and pursue life and happiness.

Sincerely,

Christopher Herz
Lead Computer Teacher
NEA Union President
Narragansett High School