

Testimony 3/7/24

Good evening, my name is Heather Dailey. I live in Burrillville, RI, and this is my 26th year as a high school math teacher for the Scituate School Department. I'm also the president of the Scituate Teachers' Association representing 135 NEARI members.

In Scituate we pride ourselves on the advantages of a small community. Our schools have a family feel to them; we have strong relationships with our students and their families, and work closely with our colleagues to support our students and each other. We are particularly proud of the high school CTE programs and their supporting elementary and middle school STEAM programs that we have developed over the last several years. It is no small feat to introduce new programming in such a small school with tight scheduling requirements, but we have met the challenge.

My colleagues and I chose this profession for a variety of reasons: some of us always loved school and wanted to spend our careers in education; some didn't and wanted to spend our careers working to change it from within. Some of us were inspired by that one special teacher and wanted to do the same for future generations. Some of us found an affinity for a particular subject matter and want to open others up to having that same experience. But all of us enjoy working with and want the best for our students. I think that most of us would agree that the best part of our day is when we are in the classroom, teaching students. We did not become educators to spend our time writing testimony or analyzing state budgets, yet we find ourselves in a situation in which we have to fit that into our days, too.

The passion for following the calling to education that we each felt has not changed, but the day to day realities of following it have changed dramatically. The fallout of the pandemic colliding with the explosion of the use of technology in education has placed a heavy burden on our schools. It often feels like we are experiencing a new pandemic of mental, social, and emotional health issues for both students and teachers, born of our collective experiences over the last several years. It seems as though there is constantly a new platform to learn, a new initiative to implement, new curriculum restrictions and requirements to work in, and new graduation requirements to adhere to, yet less time, and in the face of the proposed funding cuts, less money, to make these things happen in a thoughtful and meaningful way. We can only be stretched so far, and are working exhausted. Pandemic related funding has helped schools to navigate these new realities to an extent by implementing new training and initiatives to mitigate them, but what happens when the funding is cut?

The simple answer is that I don't know, and that is terrifying. Could we be looking at fewer teachers, counselors, nurses, cafeteria workers, paraprofessionals, bus drivers and monitors to educate and support our students next year? Fewer custodians and maintenance staff to keep our environment safe, healthy, and clean? Fewer programs to help students reach their full potential? Increased class sizes in a community that prides itself on its student:teacher ratio? Inadequate supplies to support instruction, maintenance, health, and safety? None of these are viable options.

My colleagues and I want nothing more than to continue to do our best for our students, but we are concerned about our ability to do so adequately without the necessary funding, so we ask that you do not let these cuts go through. Please do not put our school committee in the position of having to choose who or what to cut from our budget. Please provide Scituate with the funds that we need to provide the education that all of our students deserve.

Sincerely,

Heather L. Dailey

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Senior Seminar Leader
Scituate Teachers' Association President