

Good morning and thank you for your time today,

I'm Phoebe Martell-Crawford. I am 18 and a senior at Bellows Free Academy - St. Albans. While I attend school in St. Albans, I live in Georgia, Vermont. I've lived in Georgia my whole life. I grew up there, made friends there, learned life's most valuable lessons there, and most importantly I attended Georgia Elementary & Middle School, or "GEMS" as we like to call it. That play on words is intentional. It's a gem.

Georgia is a relatively small school with class sizes of about 70 students. I'm forever grateful for the care and attention I received. One of the best aspects about GEMS is the school choice. Before I even thought about picking a high school, our school board considered eliminating school choice and would send Georgia students only to BFA-Fairfax. Luckily, parents fought to repeal the idea and high school choice remained. School choice is an important part of communities like Georgia, because it is a great opportunity for students to choose the best fit for them. If consolidation were to happen, would that open doors for more students to have school choice?

Both my older brothers went to BFA -St. Albans, so in many ways my choice was predetermined. However, I am incredibly proud of who BFA helped me to become. Looking back, if I had been given the choice I would still pick BFA.

Part of why BFA is terrific is due to our multitude of outside-the-classroom activities lead by teachers and students. BFA strives to build a strong sense of community and personality. The programs BFA has is what makes it so great and gives it the community feel. One of the benefits of living in Vermont is we are a state that values deeply rooted communities. If consolidation were to happen, it should be assured that the sense of community is not lost. Those who work closest with students feel should feel involved in the decision building. Programs that allow students to get involved in their community through school must remain.

While preparing this speech, I talked to Polly Rico, a teacher I admire. We discussed a few items. One point she made: If we were to consolidate, we would have the space for additional students, but would resources be scarce? We also discussed class sizes and how schools with smaller class sizes often excel on test scores when students receive receive individualized attention. Smaller class sizes allow for discussion-based learning and differentiation of instruction. My AP Gov class has seven students, while my AP Calculus class has nearly 30. The smaller class allows me to create a strong relationship with my teacher and peers, as well as learn in a way that best suits my needs. If class sizes become too large, the sense of connectedness for each student could be lost.

To wrap this up, while consolidating may be an answer, we need to think of the students first by keeping those who work closest with them and keeping the programs that allow students to feel like a community member, rather than just a number.

Thank you for time today.