

Dear Voters of Barre Town and Barre City;

On Town Meeting Day you will see three separate ballot items related to education, the BUUSD budget, CVCC budget, and a bond proposal to purchase property and build a facility to house and expand alternative education programming in our district. This proposal has been thoughtfully planned with the support of the Superintendent, the finance committee, and the BUUSD Board. I am providing the following information to help clarify our vision to increase the capacity of our alternative programming in the district to improve student outcomes and save taxpayer dollars.

The SEA (Spaulding Educational Alternatives) is an in-district high school alternative program designed to meet the academic, social, emotional, and behavioral needs for many high school students who are unable to access regular education curriculum in the traditional school setting. This program is the result of a merger of the long established Granite Academy and ACT (Alternative Career and Technology) programs. The current SEA program offers:

- Experiential learning opportunities up to 30 students.
- A therapeutic environment.
- Small group special education instruction that is aligned with Spaulding's proficiency model.
- Vocational exploration and job readiness skills through our shop electives such as woodworking/building, culinary, automotive/small engine repair, bike repair and welding.
- Outdoor adventure programming including healthy outdoor activities such as mountain biking, hiking, and skiing/snowboarding through the Vermont Adaptive Ski and Snowboard Program.
- A well established and effective program that supports some of the district's most at risk students with the highest needs to graduate high school and become college or career ready.

Our vision for a new location is a district owned facility that will support our current needs and allow for expansion as we create new programming to address the needs of students that we are currently sending to outside placements at great expense.

- Expansion of our group program up to 35 students offering high quality academics, greater flexibility, and a variety of individualized learning experiences.
- Creation of a dynamic independent learning program to meet the needs of students who cannot manage socially/ emotionally/ behaviourally in the group setting- up to 10 students.
- Introduction of a high school completion program to target students who need special ed instruction but who have only a few credits left to graduate.
- Eventually increasing our continuum of services to support students in middle school grades.
- A building space designed for modern classrooms, 1:1 work rooms, sensory/ regulation space, common areas, therapy offices, kitchen, maker space and workshops.
- Outdoor space with enough land to allow for outdoor activities, team building, movement/ emotional regulation breaks as well as agricultural and adventure based programming.

- Create an environment that is conducive to learning, socio-emotional growth, and encourages success.

Some things to consider as you prepare to vote on Town Meeting Day:

- If this bond vote passes, it will not affect the District budget until fiscal year 2022.
- This is an investment in some of our highest needs students that will improve their outcomes and save the district money by not sending as many students to expensive out of district independent schools.
- An architect was hired to consult on the feasibility of the project and he recommended a bond amount not to exceed 2.75 million as necessary to meet the Vermont State building code requirements for an educational facility.
- Currently, we pay \$85,000 a year in rent for a space that does not fully suit our children's needs and to expand programming we would need to rent more space. By approving the bond vote, your tax dollars will be spent towards an investment in district assets, rather than in rent.
- The average cost of placing students in out of district placements is over \$100,000 per student per year.
- The SEA currently provides programming for students with similar needs for around \$35,000 per student per year.
- The total number of students enrolled in SEA programming will increase from 30 to 45 students. At that capacity, projected costs are still around \$35,000 per student per year. This increase in the number of students we can serve will immediately offset any increased annual cost, as well as continue to save the district money moving forward.
- Eventually, these programs may attract the interest of other school districts to tuition their students to us at a cost savings compared to other independent school programs.

I realize that there are many voters who are very concerned about tax increases this year but I am hopeful that most will recognize this bond vote as an opportunity and an investment in our district's infrastructure. There are currently over 140 students in grades 1-12 that require significant social/emotional/behavioral and academic support in settings outside the regular education environment in either an in-district program or an out of district placement. This number gives an idea of the scope of student need in the district. Many students receiving early interventions in elementary school may not need them later. Other student's needs may always be beyond the district's ability to support within district placements but expanding our internal capacity will allow more of our students to get the support that they need to be successful without significant increases to the current budget and ultimately saving the taxpayers significant money down the road.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jason Derner
Alternative Programs Administrator