

My name is Elise O'Brien. I am a representative of the sophomore class at U-32 and I live in East Montpelier. I helped found the council and have been on it ever since.

My name is John Stafford. I am a representative of the Junior class at U-32 and I live in Berlin. I've been on the Student Council for 2 years.

My name is Calister Boyd, I'm a senior at U32 High School and I'm from the town of East Montpelier and I helped found the council

John: Good evening. This is our third year as an established Student Council, which was a student led initiative from the changemakers class. Every year, up to three people in each grade are elected onto the council for one year, with both a middle and high school staff advisor. While on the council, we work together on projects to improve life in our school and our community. This year, we began a partnership with Up for Learning Vermont, which gave us the opportunity to learn new ways of lifting up student voice and leadership at U-32. They have supported us in many projects this year, including the one we will be telling you about today.

Cal: I stand before you today as a member of the U32 student council. I am joined by two of my fellow council members and we are here tonight on behalf of the students of U32. After the unfortunate failure of last year's budget and the profound impact it had on our school the U32 student body has taken an increased interest in our district's budget and the process through which it is passed. To this end the student council has interviewed a number of teachers, nurses, special educators, interventionists, and administrative staff to learn more about what the upcoming budget changes will mean at every level of our community. Additionally, we have also tabled at school lunches and held well-attended forums during our callback periods to not only collect data from over 100 students across 6 grade levels but also educate students and make them aware of how the budget works and the things that it affects. Through these means we have compiled a significant quantity of data directly from students with the goal of establishing increased transparency and student input in the budgeting process At the end of the day it is students who feel

the most direct results of this board's decisions and so it is only fit that student voices should be the loudest in the room.

Elise: During our callback focus groups, one question asked of students was “How can the board better communicate with U-32 students and families?” There was one common thread in every answer, and that was more accessible information. Students want to hear what is happening on their school board and be a part of those decisions, especially when the decisions directly affect them, like a budget. As Student Council members, we appreciate the transparency given by having the notes on the U-32 website and meeting open, but to most students, this is not very accessible. When they look at long documents of information written in language they aren't used to, it's hard for them to understand what is really happening. Students want information on the budget and other school board happenings talked about in school regularly and fed to students rather than having to seek it out. They also want to learn why the specific budget cuts are being made and be a part of that discussion. We need more education on what goes into choosing the proposed cuts, how taxes affect them, and the process of creating a proposed budget. Once students have more of an understanding of why these cuts are happening, they will be able to have more thoughtful and informed discussions about it and give more relevant feedback to be taken into consideration. On a more regular basis, achieving this transparency and collaboration can be done through surveys, emails, TA handouts, or any other way of information sharing, as long as it is written in understandable language or tailored to students. But students also want to hear this information from you. They want school board members to educate them in their classrooms and to hear presentations straight from the source. They want to be informed about what is going on and contribute to the conversation. The conversations about budget cuts and anything else that affects them directly should be held with students and the school community during the process, not after. The most important idea to take away from this is that students want inclusion in the

process of decision making and information given to them consistently. When students and adults in leadership positions can collaborate on big decisions, the outcome will be better for everyone involved.

John: We also came here to voice our opinion moving forward about the upcoming school year and the potential impact of future budget decisions on our education and the well-being of our school community. As students, we are deeply invested in our future, and after the events of last year regarding the budget, students have communicated to us they'd like to have access to a variety of different classes. be protec. One of the major concerns surrounding budget cuts is the loss of personalized education programs. Specifically, we are concerned about the potential reduction in advanced and elective courses that help students develop a range of skills, interests, and talents. The possible cutting of personalized learning programs is especially troubling, as they offer vital support to help all students succeed, regardless of their individual needs.

Cal: Throughout the course of our data collection one question that elicited particularly passionate responses was that of what should be protected or prioritized in a healthy budget. Overwhelmingly the responses from students pertained to services that improved their quality of life and academic outcomes. Student wellness services. Services like nursing staff or substance abuse counselors. Services that are sometimes overlooked and, in this draft of the budget in particular, seem to be considered secondary to teaching and administrative staff. Another service that was often mentioned in both our interviews and forums is special education. Despite the importance of special education many staff members are afraid that our programs may experience funding issues over the next few years and the student council shares this concern. To be clear, what we want here is for students to continue to have regular and consistent access to services like nursing staff, substance abuse counselors, and special educators far into the future. That way our schools can continue to meet the immediate needs of students and therefore give them more time and energy to put into classroom learning. If these types of

services continue to be cut our concern is that classroom learning will not only be less effective but any remaining staff in these departments will be seriously overworked further reducing their efficiency and the number of positive student outcomes. To put it simply this is an issue of equity. All students should be able to access all of these services regardless of their identity or grade.

Elise: We appreciate you taking the time to listen to us and the voices of the U-32 students. We believe student voice and opinion is a staple in any school, and when given the opportunity, many students in our schools jump at the opportunity to help improve and build our community. Thank you for listening to our input, we look forward to continuing to work with you in the future.

Cal: I'd like to finish up on a bit of a personal note. I'm here before you today not only as a student council member but also as a senior soon to graduate. It is my firm belief that I would not be here before you if I did not have these services available to me. Nor would I be able to wear this shirt I have on today. Everything I am and everything I have done at this school for the past 6 years has been thanks to regular and consistent access I have to these student wellness services. Furthermore, over the course of my 6 years I've been able to access tons of unique opportunities through the school from band, to theater, to football, I even got to go to Germany last spring with our model united nations team. Cumulatively these experiences have had a huge influence on my life and education and they represent the most spectacular thing about U32, there's lots of options. And this is not just about me either. I have two siblings in the district as well as a peer mentor and many friends who are younger than me, two of which are here with me today. I wouldn't want any of them or anyone else to have access to any less than I did during my time at this school.