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—Contributor..... Ross Powers
—Contributor email..... rpowers@gosms.org
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Notes from editor (not for publication):



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 School choice made an Olympic dream possible

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

2 Critics look at schools like Stratton Mountain School and
3 see exclusivity. I look at them and see a pathway for local kids to
4 stay in Vermont and reach their full potential.

####END SUBHED####

5 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

6 VERMONT’S ONGOING and necessary discussion of
7 education reform has had an unfortunate side effect: elevating the
8 voices of people who are [manipulating facts to fit their narrative](#).
9 They want you to believe that Vermont’s independent schools are
10 harming public education — particularly those that educate some
11 of our most gifted student athletes.

12 A recent [opinion piece](#) argued that it does not make
13 sense for public education dollars to follow students to
14 institutions like Stratton Mountain School. The argument suggests
15 that for families of modest means, these options should stay out
16 of reach, and their dreams should be unattainable.

17 I am living proof that this narrative is categorically
18 wrong.

19 I didn't grow up with lots of money. I grew up with a
20 single mom who worked in food services at Bromley Mountain.

21 I like to say that Bromley was my babysitter. I spent my
22 childhood on its trails, eventually trading skis for a snowboard
23 when the mountain allowed it and falling in love with the sport.

24 I had the passion but certainly not the funds to pursue
25 the training that would lift me to the top of my sport at the Salt
26 Lake City Winter Olympic Games.

27 * * *

28 WHEN I WAS ready for high school, Stratton Mountain
29 School (SMS) was launching its snowboarding program. It was the
30 perfect local place to pursue my professional snowboarding
31 dreams, but on paper, it should have been impossible.

32 I lived in South Londonderry, however — a small
33 community nestled between snowy slopes that doesn't operate a
34 public high school. That allowed me to apply the tuition dollars
35 my town would have spent on me elsewhere to my education at
36 SMS.

37 Public tuition made the impossible manageable for my
38 family. Without that support from my town and the state, I never
39 would have walked through those doors.

40 I made the U.S. National Team during my freshman year
41 at SMS. The school provided flexibility to travel for competition
42 while keeping me on track academically. It provided a
43 community that supported my specific ambitions in ways a
44 traditional school couldn't.

45 That support system launched a career that took me
46 around the world and to the top of the Olympic podium.

47 Critics look at schools like SMS and see exclusivity. I
48 look at them and see a pathway for local kids to stay in Vermont
49 and reach their full potential.

50 This isn't just my story. Vermont rightly prides itself on its
51 winter sports heritage and outsized presence at the Winter
52 Olympics.

53 Look at fellow Vermonters who have won Olympic
54 medals, athletes like Kelly Clark (Mount Snow Academy),
55 Hannah Teter (Okemo Mountain School), Alex Deibold (SMS),
56 Ryan Cochran-Siegle (Mt. Mansfield Academy), and others. We
57 all represented the U.S. — and Vermont — on the biggest stage,
58 helping deliver immeasurable economic benefits to the state we
59 love.

60 Many of us came from local Vermont communities and
61 relied on the public tuition system to access the training we
62 needed without having to leave Vermont.

63 * * *

64 OUR SYSTEM IS providing rural kids these diverse
65 educational opportunities extremely cost-effectively. The numbers
66 tell the truth.

67 [According to the latest Agency of Education data](#) , the
68 town of Stratton, where I now live and work, is projected to
69 spend \$11,572 per pupil in FY26. That's below the state average
70 of \$13,947, and far below the state's highest-spending district,
71 Norwich, which spends \$18,295. We are delivering exceptional
72 education and launching careers without burdening taxpayers.

73 Restricting school choice doesn't impact wealthy out-of-
74 staters who can pay tuition; it hurts the local Vermont families,
75 like mine when I was young, who need a leg up to bridge the
76 gap. Restricting choice means telling Vermont kids from rural
77 towns that unless their parents are rich, their specific talents —
78 whether in skiing, snowboarding, the arts, or STEM — don't
79 deserve to be nurtured.

80 School choice in Vermont allows families to find the
81 environment where a child will thrive. For some, that is a

82 traditional public school. For others, it might be an institution like
83 Long Trail School, Burr & Burton Academy, or a ski academy.
84 Why shouldn't public tuition support a child's success, regardless
85 of the building it happens in?

86 * * *

87 MY JOURNEY has come full circle. I have traveled the
88 world and chose to come home to Vermont.

89 I am back at Stratton Mountain School coaching the next
90 generation of athletes. I am a proud Vermonter, contributing to
91 my community and the state's economy. And I am proud that in a
92 small way, my dreams have helped highlight Vermont on the map
93 as a small state with a prodigious history of winter sports success.

94 I often wonder where I would be if the system had been
95 different, if the state had decided that a food service worker's son
96 didn't belong at an independent school like SMS. I likely
97 wouldn't have the gold medal, but more importantly, I might not
98 have built my life here in the Green Mountains.

99 We should be proud that Vermont offers these
100 opportunities to kids from all backgrounds. Let's not deny today's
101 students their dreams, or their home.

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

####BEGIN BIO/COATTAIL####

102 **ROSS POWERS** is an American Olympic gold medalist
103 and world champion snowboarder from South Londonderry. He
104 is currently the director of the snowboarding program at the
105 Stratton Mountain School.

####END BIO/COATTAIL####

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####BEGIN LOGLINE####

####END LOGLINE####