



State of Vermont
Vermont Department of Education
120 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05620-2501

May 4, 2009

Dear Superintendents/Principals,

Following the recent poverty summit held by Governor Douglas, I would like schools to think about how they can better accommodate working parents in getting involved in their child's education. I believe there are small steps that school administrators can take that can have a large impact on this issue.

It is currently the practice at most schools to hold parent-teacher conferences during the school day. As we all know, most of our students have parents who work during the day. Parents in poverty or who are struggling in this economy are met with obstacles regarding transportation, child care and missed wages that make it even more difficult for them to participate in this important part of their child's education. Yet we all know that a key tenet of those students' success is parental engagement. It is my expectation that schools will refrain from holding parent/teacher conferences during the work day and rather schedule these meetings in the late afternoon/evening to accommodate the majority of parents in your district.

My expectation holds true for in-service days as well. Many schools schedule teacher in-service days for half the school day, which can also cause child care and transportation issues for these families. I would suggest scheduling in-service work outside of the regular school day or after school; for example, offering those services from 3:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m. These schedules may not be the most convenient for our staff, but it is in the best interest of our children and families.

Some districts have set up arrangements with local providers to accept, free of charge, all students as a positive place for children to go should you choose to continue this practice. Transportation would need to be provided in those districts that transport students. This type of arrangement would be acceptable to me.

I realize that these changes take time and you may be met with some resistance. However, it can be done, and it is imperative that school practices do not wreak havoc on the families of students in poverty in order for them to participate in their child's education.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Armando Vilaseca".

Armando Vilaseca, Commissioner
Vermont Department of Education