

May 20, 2022

RE: Education Recovery – New Opportunity and Growth

Dear Vermont Educators:

We have come a long way.

In March 2020, for the first time in living memory, schools closed their doors without a clear understanding of when they'd be able to open them again. The two years that followed offered a consecutive series of unprecedented circumstances; and through it all, Vermont's educators and school professionals remained steadfast in your dedication to our students.

You leapt into remote learning with both feet. Then, as nationwide leaders in the return to in-person instruction, you masked up and went to work. You got vaccinated, rolling up your sleeves to protect yourselves and your communities. This year, you tackled the Delta and Omicron waves. In uncertain times, you have maintained consistency, learning and hope for your students.

Now, in the spring of 2022, we face the future together. Fueled by unprecedented federal funds and guided by the accumulated wisdom of two consecutive pandemic years, we face a new landscape shaped by the historic disruption behind us.

It's time for recovery. It's time for opportunity and growth.

The years before COVID-19 were a period of reform and change for Vermont's public schools. From school governance reform, changes to the funding and delivery systems of special education, and implementation of flexible pathways and proficiency-based learning, Vermont was already innovating. Now we must build on our previous decades of education innovation with strategic investments that meet the urgent needs of this moment.

One thing we know that the pandemic only emphasized – strong, coherent, well-coordinated school systems are critical. The systems thinking we emphasized as part of Act 173 reform is as relevant to Education Recovery: well-coordinated curriculum, high quality needs based professional learning, strong local comprehensive assessment systems, and district-organized educational support teams.

As we engage in education recovery work, we have a duty to make sure every student is considered and every dollar is maximized. Our charge at the state level is to ensure that Vermont avoids duplicative efforts, takes advantage of efficiencies of scale, and implements innovative strategies at a regional rather than hyper-local level.



Education recovery must focus on boosting the academic achievement of students and supporting the social emotional and well-being needs of both educators and students. Our strategies for academic achievement include expanding remote academic supports for students, enhancing school-based afterschool and summer programming, and offering grants to Supervisory Unions to purchase data visualization platforms to help empower data-based decision making. We need to understand specific patterns of student need and ensure the strategies we are using are making a difference.

To improve social emotional learning and well-being, AOE will work with the Vermont Agency of Human Services to coordinate mental health and wellness supports. We will partner with AHS to offer grants that assist Supervisory Unions and their community partners in implementing activities such as universal social-emotional screening, expanded school mental health services, and professional development on youth mental health and suicide prevention. In addition, we will update the [SEL VT](#) platform, freely available to all of you, with additional resources and curriculum materials, and provide professional learning opportunities on trauma-informed practice and social justice.

Please know that we understand that your well-being as educators is critically important to education recovery in Vermont. In the coming months we'll be working with the Vermont Educator Health Insurance (VEHI) program to roll out staff wellness programs in addition to the recent Summer Recess Park Pass program. You all have demonstrated incredible strength and resilience over the past two years. Our goal is to acknowledge the exhaustion and burnout so many are feeling, help educators recover and renew their enthusiasm for teaching, and provide continued reminders of why Vermont is a special place to live, work and teach.

Collectively we face the profound obligation to reverse the damage COVID-19 caused to our students' academic success and personal well-being. We will recover, rebuild and reinvent. We will focus on systems, without forgetting our moral responsibility to educate every child. We will focus on unified strategies to amplify statewide success, without forgetting the power of local innovation to meet local priorities.

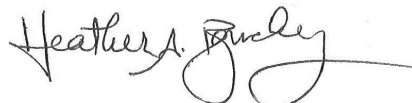
We will focus on transparency. We will focus on quality and equity.

We have our work cut out for us. But together, we can address the impacts of the pandemic and move beyond it, building a true 21st century education system for all Vermont learners.

Sincerely,



Dan French
Secretary of Education
Vermont Agency of Education



Heather Bouchey
Deputy Secretary of Education
Vermont Agency of Education

