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Dear Education Partners,

It has been a privilege to work with you over the past four years to make sure all Vermont children have access to high-quality opportunities to learn within supportive communities.

Education is a nonpartisan imperative. We work to ensure equity in access, excellence in opportunity and affordability in delivery, because we are committed to making sure every Vermont child grows up able to contribute to economic and civic life. The health of our communities is reflected in our schools; supporting one strengthens the other.

Last week, I submitted my resignation as Education Secretary to Governor Scott, effective April 1. It is time to move on. I thank Governor Scott for the opportunity to serve in this role. I am confident the Governor, working with the State Board of Education, will appoint a Secretary who shares his vision and I wish him the best moving forward. The Administration is already working to ensure continuity of operations in the transition.

I share the Governor's belief that we must make living in the state more affordable. We do this while strengthening our education system and protecting opportunity for those who work hard to make ends meet. As you well know, the state faces tough fiscal and demographic challenges that require compromise and sacrifice as we pull together to care for our communities. We did not get into our current situation overnight and we will not get out of it by tomorrow. I thank you for your continued efforts to address our shared challenges. This is difficult and important work.

Challenges aside, we have much to celebrate. In the face of dire warnings from critics, many of you formed new school districts with neighboring towns. Some of you have managed to reduce education costs *and* expand opportunities and supports for students. While challenged by frequent policy changes and new mandates, you have worked to keep the focus on what truly matters: keeping our children safe and improving learning in our schools.

Overall, although there were individual exceptions, most districts worked hard to bring down tax rates and deliver budgets that resulted in about \$29 million less in education spending than expected. Some districts did this even as they made new investments in prekindergarten, post-secondary education and mental health clinicians.

Our schools are national leaders in farm-to-school programs, and their work on flexible pathways and problem-based learning led the national organization for State Agencies to host a conference in Vermont this spring, complete with tours of our schools.

Our career and technical centers are collaborating with employers and colleges to help students figure out how to move towards high wage opportunities in key Vermont economic sectors, from health care to advanced manufacturing.

And, our educators, school leaders and students helped us develop a nationally recognized, on-site education quality review process, which our schools tell us builds their capacity to lead local improvement efforts.

Just as I am inspired by visits to schools and conversations with students, I am grateful to our team at the Agency of Education. For the large amount of money we oversee, we are a small Agency. Like you in the field, we always have room to get better. The Agency team works hard, every day, to implement statutes faithfully while constantly looking for new ways to minimize administrative burdens so our schools and adult learning sites can focus first and foremost on teaching and learning. I would be hard pressed to find a more dedicated group.

Education secretaries come and go, but your schools and the communities you create around them will continue to prepare our children for a strong Vermont future.

Thank you for all you do.

I wish you all the best as you continue this important work and look forward to collaborating with you down the road.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rebecca Holcombe', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Rebecca Holcombe