

December 22, 2021

To: Vermont Educators and School Staff
From: Sue Rosato, 2021 Vermont Teacher of the Year
Dan French, Secretary of Education

Dear Colleagues:

When we reflect on the last four months and all that has transpired, our first thoughts are admiration and gratitude. Admiration for the tremendous efforts to provide instruction, support and stability for your students, their families, and your communities under the most adverse of circumstances, and for the incredible successes achieved in spite of all the challenges. Gratitude for your hard work, resilience and irrepressible ingenuity in the face of hardship. There is no doubt this year has been hard, but it has also been marked with great achievements and many joys.

This is a challenging year to teach. We expected a return to the joys of full in-person learning, and that the worst of the pandemic would be behind us. Instead, we are collectively grieving. We grieve the loss of confidence and the continued stress of navigating this world. We grieve the lost time and negative effects of the past 21 months on our students, on ourselves and on our communities.

We're often told about the importance of self-care, of taking care of ourselves so we can take care of one another. We've heard metaphors and allusions - putting our mask on first before helping the person sitting next to us. If you're like us, you've probably heard them dozens, perhaps hundreds of times by now, only to be faced with new challenges. We are all human beings, and all of us are doing our best.

We are certain that each of you, more than once during this pandemic, have lifted up a colleague and kept them going when times were hard, helped a student see over that big bump in the road ahead, and helped a friend or family member in need. As teachers and school staff, all of you were doing that before COVID-19, and your response since COVID-19 has only been to give more of yourselves. It is important, even as we give more, that we do not go it alone. By acknowledging that we are stronger together, we can find ways to care for each other.

Our work is vital even in the best of times. Now, when the future is uncertain, when impacts to student learning, mental health and engagement are so significant, your efforts have never been more important and will yield an even greater return. We firmly believe that educators have a deep impact, not only on the lives of their students, but on the communities where they live and work. So thank you for giving so much. Thank



you for being exceptional human beings who show up for your students, your colleagues and your communities.

For both of us, the holidays are a time of reflection. This year, it is worth remembering how far we have come. It can be easy to forget our progress, but we have achieved great things. Vermont's overall response to the pandemic has been excellent, and the response of our education system has been as good or better. Most of our school districts welcomed students back to the classroom last year, while standing up substantial remote and hybrid learning options. Not many other states can say the same. This was a team effort: educators, administrators and the state working together to provide as much consistency and learning as possible.

This year, similar efforts have made Vermont's students the most highly vaccinated PreK-12 student body in the nation and provided tools to keep students in the classroom safely. So many of our students have achieved great things and demonstrated incredible excellence. So many of our teachers have demonstrated incredible ingenuity, developing new ways to help their students survive and thrive regardless of the challenges. Your hard work made all of this possible. This year, we reflect with gratitude on your efforts and the incredible teamwork that went into the system's many successes.

We hope that you have an opportunity to take time to rest, and that your winter break is joyful. This is an opportunity to celebrate the persistence, dedication and hope that our students, school staff and communities demonstrated this fall with each and every action, each and every day. Thank you, Vermont teachers and school staff, for being a calm voice in the storm. This holiday, we celebrate you.

We wish you very happy holidays and best wishes for the coming year.

Sincerely,

Sue Rosato
2021 Vermont Teacher of the Year

Dan French
Secretary of Education

