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*Agency of Education*

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Dear Vermont Teachers, Educators and School Staff:

I write to wish you a happy, healthy and restful holiday season. When I was a superintendent, I always used to encourage my staff to use the break as an opportunity to rest and reflect, on the months of school that had just passed, and on the months yet to come. This year, I encouraged my staff at the Agency of Education to reflect on the incredible pace of change and the incredible amount of work done in a very short period of time.

This holiday season I am reflecting on many things; chief among them all of you, and the incredible work that you have done since the pandemic began. From finding ways to continue to teach, maintain and advance student learning in an unprecedented situation, to making sure the meals were provided to Vermont children, to making sure our buildings and facilities are functional and safe for in-person learning, Vermont's education workforce has gone above and beyond what any of us ever dreamed we would have to ask of you.

Over the last nine months, Vermont teachers have accomplished a lot. You were asked first to move to entirely remote teaching, and to provide as much consistency and care for your students as possible in the face of unprecedented circumstances. You were asked next to return to in-person instruction, and to learn to navigate a school environment profoundly changed to safeguard the health of you and your students. Many of you have also been asked to continue online learning, or juggle a hybrid of both. And along the way you have led and innovated, you have served on planning committees for your school or your district, you have developed new ways of teaching and shared them with your colleagues, in your school and around the state. You have worked to solve problems, like with internet access, or with students not receiving needed services. And you did it during a time of enormous personal challenge and anxiety, caring for your own families and loved ones. Despite everything, you have done nothing less than your absolute best for your students.

Outside of the classroom, the work has been equally impressive. Many Vermont schools kept serving meals to students that needed them without interruption, and I am proud to say that every district in Vermont stepped up to make sure student nutritional needs were met during a time when economic and food insecurity increased. Whether it was delivering packaged meals by bus, car or truck, finding ways to safely prepare and package meals for students to bring home, or navigating an increasingly complex environment of federal rules and regulations, our school nutrition professionals have done an incredible job.

Their efforts and excellence are mirrored in every part of the building. Our special educators and student support professionals have done sterling work to



make sure students continue to receive the supports they are entitled to, and combat the impacts that COVID-19 is having on student learning. Our facilities teams have worked hard to keep buildings safe, healthy and operating smoothly. Our school nurses have shone, working hard to apply state health guidance to keep your school communities strong and healthy and implement a statewide surveillance testing effort. And administrators and business offices have worked hard to navigate state and federal guidance and keep your buildings functioning and operational and access critically-needed federal funds.

In reflecting on this, I have immense appreciation and gratitude for you and for all of your efforts. With two vaccines approved, and more in the pipeline, we are hopeful that an end to the public health crisis is in sight. If the rollout of these vaccines continues to go smoothly, we expect that we will be able to begin relaxing some of the restrictions on our communities. For us as educators, the critical work will enter into a new phase, as we begin to address the impacts COVID-19 has had on student learning, on how we teach and on our education systems themselves. I have every confidence we will meet those challenges, as we have met everything the last nine months has thrown at us.

Before this crisis, I knew that Vermont educators and school staff were an incredible group of committed professionals. Since March, you have proven that to be true time and time again. So, in this season of reflection, gratitude and giving; thank you, for your incredible, incalculable efforts so far, and your continued work as we see this pandemic into recovery and beyond.

Happy Holidays.

Sincerely,



Dan French  
Secretary of Education

