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Testimony to the House Education Committee

Vermont School Boards Association

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Status Update on COVID-19 Response including Finance and Funding Considerations

EdWeek (5/29/2020) [How CDC Guidance Could Shape What Back-to-School Looks Like in the COVID-19 Era](#)

Summary Points

- Public schools are an essential component of Vermont's successful economic recovery.
- School officials and all personnel are contemplating the "return to school" in the fall, but don't know yet what that will look like
- Each of our Associations is participating in planning and preparations for school in the fall - but all necessary information is not in place yet, and we are not sure when it will be
- Every day, we are learning more about the scores of items that need to be addressed and resolved in order to put school decision-makers in the best possible position to support schools in the fall. Examples of these decisions include:
 1. Social Distancing
 2. Personal health and safety equipment
 3. Will school be distance, site-based, staggered schedules or some combination thereof?
 4. What will be the requirements for building operations protocols, mechanical systems?
 5. How will transportation be managed?
 6. Will vulnerable members of the community be able to work, how will they be protected?
 7. How do we contend with an incident of COVID-19 infection or outbreak?

These are just examples of issues -- there are others, more specific and more broad

Re-Opening schools will include strategies to reduce person-to-person contact and to promote social distancing. This may be most difficult and confusing for our youngest learners. Vermont's prekindergarten system provides only 10 hours of education per week, which results in many children being in the presence of more than one environment in any given day. How can we reduce person-to-person contact in a system that does not provide the extended hours needed by working families? Providing Early Childhood Special Education services outside of the public school setting further increases potential exposure. Two specific topics:

1. Duplication of PreK staff fingerprints is still an issue
2. If there is a way to move to full school day PreK, could we prioritize four-year-old students?

School districts are still awaiting guidance on best and eligible uses of the ESSER Fund, the Coronavirus Relief Fund, and the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund.

VSA and The Joint Fiscal Office are collecting information from some school districts in an effort to determine what types of expenditures may be eligible for reimbursement. Once further decisions are made regarding the eligible uses, it will be imperative that school district leaders are informed of the decisions and guided with strategies to address fiscal concerns. The Joint Fiscal Office can provide further information about their analysis of those findings.

We appreciate the approach put forth in H959 because it acknowledges that budgets for most districts in FY2021 have been settled and most expenses are fixed.

We continue to have specific concerns about the fate of the school systems and communities that do not have budgets approved for FY2021. The State has contributed significantly to the challenges of default budgets at the FY2020 education spending level by adding expenses that districts cannot control in the form of the statewide bargaining for health insurance for school employees, which goes into effect during FY2021.

In summary, the delivery of public education has grown far more complex, and likely more expensive.