

Montpelier Roxbury Public Schools

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Our schools are caring, creative, and equitable communities that empower all children to build on their talents and passions to grow into engaged citizens and life-long learners.

House Education Committee Testimony 3/27/2020

COVID-19

Libby Bonesteel, Superintendent of Schools, Montpelier Roxbury Public Schools

I encourage the committee to check the [MRPS COVID-19 page](#) to view how our district has supported our community through this time. On this website, the committee can view:

- all communication to the community
- health and wellness information
- learning plans and resources
- food services
- child care services
- processes for community involvement in board and interview processes
- newly created [MRPS Curriculum & Technology blog](#)

Immediate Highlights:

1. the Vermont network of superintendents and VT Superintendents Association has tirelessly worked together:
 - a. sharing of information, plans, resources, and communications
 - b. consistent source of encouragement
2. MRPS staff, faculty, and community have pulled together in a way previously unimaginable giving us a great platform to work from when things are “normal” again

Learning:

- Teachers were asked to change their entire professional reality virtually overnight and they did it without blinking an eye.
- maintenance vs continuity of learning is still being worked out
 - huge ramifications for how we support our students with special needs, English Learners, and parents who may not have the capacity to do their own job and be a teacher to their child
 - continuity is hard in the context of ages 5-18
 - so much of early learning is social and play based

- primary learners rely on teachers for heavy support and scaffolding in real time
- teaching is a skill--in-person teaching is different than online teaching
 - lack of capacity in synchronous (real time) learning
 - stress on network connection at homes, lack of devices, professional capacity of teachers, etc...
 - most parents are not trained teachers
- school professionals provide so much more than academic lessons (eg. mental health services)
- parents have jobs that have also been flipped upside down; they are struggling at keeping up with their employers and working with their children on academics
 - expectations need to be kept in check (see [letter](#) to community)
- MRPS will be focusing on our priority standards for each grade level or content area
- Districts need clarity around exact AOE expectations as we move into continuity

Food Service

- MRPS has capacity to serve 150 meals using our current system
 - we are hovering around 100 now
- Director of Food Services, Jim Birmingham, is now our chef; able principals and Central Office administrators are his support
 - we have shut down our buildings and significantly cut off access in order to keep our people who are doing food service as safe as possible
 - four drop off locations in our District
- Our system may not be sustainable once either families get sick and request door to door service or our staff get sick and we can no longer make the food
- No worries about supply chain yet
- USDA has not waived some stipulations and rules making unnecessary complications (eg. Summer food sites)

Child Care for Essential Workers:

- Using our buildings was never possible, we immediately moved into a community-based solution
 - would need full custodial staff and cleaning supplies (cleaning supplies are now being rationed for military and hospitals), full kitchen staff in addition to other food service expectations for community, at least 20 trained people (more if you include substitutes)
 - lack of enough staff to do a school site
 - 24/7 need - families have completely different hours of need depending on their job
 - CDC guidance of how to keep the site clean and children separated is virtually impossible to maintain

- Working closely with our private preschool partners Turtle Island and Orchard Valley
 - they have many concerns around liability and health benefits for their workers
- I personally called every family in need of school-age care
 - very few wanted their children to leave their house
 - nearly all wanted a District-paid babysitter
 - incredible cost to the school District
 - we have currently met most needs through placing a background checked babysitter (primarily using Part 2 afterschool staff) in the home with hazard pay of \$25 in addition to their average hourly rate or using community volunteers who are willing to “adopt” a child into their homes as needed
- The child care ask of schools was/is an enormous lift. It significantly and negatively impacted staff morale and put enormous pressure on an already stressed system.

Other Stressors:

- Future budget projections and economic fall out are just starting to be predicted; knowing how to financially move forward is an unknown
 - could significantly impact negotiations with unions - MRPS is currently in three different negotiations
- Teacher and staff morale as more and more demands were placed on school employees
 - contractual issues and challenges
 - needed clarity around what continuation of learning looks like & can be possible based on parent ability to support children
- Communication with AOE has improved over this time period
- As people get sick, every system we have gotten in place could quickly fall apart
 - we need a plan B from the governor’s office that does not rely so heavily on schools
- Providing services to students with special needs, English language learners, and students with mental health challenges-we need significant guidance from the AOE

Needs from this committee:

No new legislation for this school year going forward. We are at max capacity.

