

TESTIMONY PROVIDED TO: House Education Committee
FROM: Meagan Roy, Ed.D. (CVSD Director of Student Support Services)
TOPIC: Education expenses due to COVID19
DATE: June 2, 2020

Education Expenses due to COVID19

The implications of the COVID19 crisis and subsequent school closures on education (schools, students and families) are significant and far reaching. The financial impact will be significant, both in the short and long term, and will evolve as districts continue to address the impact of COVID19 throughout the next several school years. Perhaps most challenging for districts is the reality that we are planning for sweeping changes to the way we deliver education with very little concrete information about what it will look like. The trajectory of school reopening is positive but tentative, and guidance does not yet exist with which to plan. This makes it difficult to fully ascertain the financial implications as we move forward.

The use of Federal CARES dollars and other sources of funding, if used effectively, can support schools as they navigate the next several months and years of this crisis. The following are a number of areas in which state and Federal funding could be deployed in support of students:

The Costs of Addressing Learning Loss

The abrupt closure of schools across the nation and a shift to a remote learning platform for the final third of the 19-20 school year will have an impact on each and every one of our students. Even with the most promising remote practices and the most seamless transition to virtual instruction, this Continuation of Learning phase does not replace the educational opportunities for students had they been in person. Thus, there will be a significant need for districts to make up for lost learning as a result of the school closure. This may present itself as increased need for intervention programming - both staff and software/programs; additional need for curriculum reforms as schools grapple with adjusting their curriculum sequence to account for the spring; additional professional development for teachers in the areas of differentiation and MTSS.

Much has been made in the special education world about the issue of compensatory services. It is important for this committee to understand that the term “compensatory education” is a legal one, with very specific definitions under IDEA. It is certainly true that districts will need to contend with an increase in need for compensatory services for students on IEPs, and that there is a financial component to this need - but I would remind this committee that this is *in addition to* the above-noted need to make up for learning loss that exists for all students. Districts will incur additional costs as they work to address learning losses.

Areas for Possible Reinvestment of CARES Funding:

- Intervention materials and programming (software licenses, instructional materials, etc)
- Staffing costs for service provision
- A funding source to support families independent of schools (funds to access outside tutoring, etc)

Equipment & Technology Expenses for Remote Learning

In many parts of the state - even within our more populated areas - the switch to a primarily virtual learning platform has been challenging. It quickly became necessary to deploy a 1:1 computing system for students across the K-12 continuum. As students return to school, schools will also need to grapple with assessing how many devices make it back to school, and in what condition. Regardless of how robust a technology platform existed before, there will most certainly be costs to schools to replace devices and expand the number of devices

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available to students, especially as we face the probability of needing to be ready to implement remote learning at any time during the coming school year.

In addition to devices and hardware, schools have an increased need to purchase software licenses for programs that support teaching and learning remotely, both as a part of the general curriculum and to support intervention for students who are struggling. These are costs that are above and beyond a district's typical technology budget, and in many cases would not have been built into the FY21 operating budget.

Areas for Possible Reinvestment of CARES Funding:

- Hardware and software purchases to support remote learning/hybrid models for education
- Funding to support increased broadband/bandwidth access for staff and families in order to implement/participate in remote learning
- Funding to support increase in tech support to manage the large number of devices being used outside of the school

Professional Development

As this committee is aware, the school closure required that all Vermont schools reinvent their entire educational delivery system in a matter of days. As we gather data and reflect on how this worked, we are learning more and more about the professional development needs of our systems moving forward. With the assumption that schools need to be prepared for at least a partial remote learning construct, schools need to contend with providing high quality professional development to teachers; this will come at a cost. These costs are both in terms of professional development opportunities (workshops, courses, etc) as well as ongoing instructional coaching to support teachers throughout the next year.

Areas for Possible Reinvestment of CARES Funding:

- Funding to support a coordinated statewide professional learning sequence regarding remote/virtual learning
- Grants to fund more targeted professional development in the area of intervention/MTSS (see below thoughts regarding Act 173)
- Targeted investments in the area of literacy professional learning: In addition to the clear need for professional learning around remote learning constructs, your committee is already well aware of the need for improved professional learning in the area of literacy instruction that existed prior to COVID19 and has only been exacerbated.

Health & Safety/Structural Changes to Schools

The logistical challenges of reopening schools in a safe manner is perhaps the most obvious challenge for schools. The financial implications of managing whatever health & safety guidance will be forthcoming is significant. Schools will need to grapple with obvious purchases (like personal protective equipment, thermometers, gloves, cleaning supplies) but also potentially with much larger scale purchases - like the addition of staffing to manage group size restrictions that may be required to maintain social distancing. We don't know if those types of human resource needs will exist, but if they do they will be significant.

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Areas for Possible Reinvestment of CARES Funding:

- Personal protective equipment for essential personnel (nurses, custodians, other high-risk/high-exposure employees)
- Health and safety equipment (thermometers, cloth facial coverings for staff and students, etc)
- Physical plant modifications to address public health guidance (e.g., improvements to HVAC to improve ventilation, additional space for health offices to be able to quarantine symptomatic students/staff, modifying open classroom designs to retrofit more spaces so that groups sizes could be managed, etc)
- Overtime for critical infrastructure/facilities staff (custodians, etc)
- Increased food service costs to address providing food in multiple formats (classroom lunches; transporting food during periods of remote learning, etc)
- Increased transportation costs if additional bus routes are required to accommodate social distancing requirements
- Staffing to address social distancing group size requirements (this would only be if schools were required to lower class size ratios to comply with social distancing)

Revenue Loss

A challenge that exists in school systems that is, as yet, under addressed is the issue of revenue loss due to school closure. In some ways the loss of revenue that schools are facing is more concerning than the increase costs, certainly for the current fiscal year.

Act 173/MTSS Implementation

Addressing the system-wide learning loss resulting from school closure will require that schools lean even more heavily on their MTSS structures. The ability to quickly assess students, identify areas of need, and respond quickly with high quality instruction and intervention will be paramount. These MTSS structures are central to implementation of Act 173 - therefore, COVID19 has highlighted the already existing need for schools to improve their systems of support for all students. This will have financial implications for professional development, for adequately staffing their intervention systems and for ongoing support and coaching.

In addition to the programming implications, and even with the recently passed delay in implementation of a shift to the census-based funding model, it is clear that Act 173 has financial implications for a large number of Vermont schools. Roughly half will be facing a reduction in state special education support as the transition to the census grant looms. While CARES funding may not extend that far in the future, it is important for the legislature to be aware of the pressures for schools of a likely increase in need for services with a subsequent decrease in funding. All the more reason to emphasize and support the professional learning necessary to make structural changes in schools so that instruction can improve in effectiveness and efficiency.