



To: Vermont House Education Committee
From: Traci Sawyers, Vermont Council of Special Education Administrators (VCSEA)
Date: June 2, 2020
RE: CFR Funds - Added Expenses and Funding Concerns Related to COVID-19

As we move forward, we are going to have increased need, increased costs and decreased budgets. Overall, addressing regression and the impact of COVID-19 is one of the biggest concerns, and seems to be an important way to use CRF funds.

VCSEA members are very concerned about the amount of service that is about to be requested by parents regarding the COVID-19 impact on IEP goals. Creating a formal structure to apply CRF funds to these requests would be helpful. For example, we might create a state fund that parents can use to support their own access to services (through a list of approved providers or through after school services at their district) to address these requests. It's going to take a lot of work to figure this out as it's also not realistic for kids to be in classes 10 to 12 hours a day and schools will be inundated but there will also be great need.

There will likely be increased costs for outside evaluations due to the sheer volume that schools will likely see in the fall. There is a lot of worry about having enough people to meet the need so that's also a concern related to staffing and school budgets.

In addition to this larger regression issue (which all kids are going to face) and need for services, access to technology for both students and staff is critical. This includes hotspots, track phone coverage, postage and mileage for drop off and pick up. These are added expenses.

PPE is also going to be necessary and expensive, and in some cases hard to get in the quantities needed. And schools use tables, so they now have to all buy individual desks? There are many concerns related to this and more specifically how this affects children with certain disabilities. Physical and emotional safety for all is the goal but how are we going to ensure this and how will we pay for this?

In regard to professional development, targeted PD focused distance learning structures is going to be necessary. Looking into the state contracting with an entity that is trusted to offer statewide training for teachers could be helpful. In general, there should be more training on how to use Google Classroom, Zoom, etc. , and how to teach in a virtual manner. You can't replicate in person teaching through Zoom but it's clear it's going to need to be a tool - if not the primary method of teaching - for the foreseeable future. It is important that teachers learn how to use all of the features available through technology to offer a rich, robust virtual learning environment.

We will need to address anxiety and related issues with both adults and kids when we return. We will need funding for PD as well as possible staffing to help with these needs. Teachers and other school personnel should receive training on how to talk to and support children during a pandemic. Also PD will be needed on developing healthy and safe classroom routines. We are going to have to take the first several weeks of school along a developmental continuum to develop new routines in schools that will be different than when we left. Teachers are going to need to talk to kids about why things are different without scaring them. Everyone is going to need PD and help with this shift. Parenting classes and groups at night would also be helpful. Teacher wellness routines need to be the norm. Kids will be suffering but adults in school buildings will be too. Social emotional needs are going to have to be addressed first, before kids will be able to access academics.

In addition, the virus has changed how we deliver education and school communities are going to have to develop or relook at their strategic plans. To do this with fidelity there needs to be money for students, staff, parents and the community to engage in that process. We have changed our relationship with families and communities by virtue of going into their living space and there have been some positives. Schools need to capitalize on these and continue to move forward. For example, COVID has shown that some students are thriving in remote learning (particularly kids with anxiety who often wouldn't come to school). We need to think about a distance learning component as even a flexible pathway for some. The restructuring of education this spring was rapid and reactive. There is a lot of reflection and proactive planning that needs to now take place based on lessons learned and again with the input of students, parents, teachers and communities.

Another area of concern which has budget implications is transportation. If you look at the CDC guidance, we can't be doing all those extra but runs without significant costs or unless we stagger and limit the days kids go to school. We are going to have some kids who just can't safely ride a bus in this way.

With regard to literacy, as this committee is well aware, it is an issue across the state and that was true before Covid-19. At the same time, clearly literacy has suffered with the closure. There are some structured, direct instruction literacy programs that have been implemented in a virtual setting. However, more whole language approaches are more difficult to implement virtually. We need to make some decisions regarding literacy PD, programs and materials that work in a distance learning environment.

Finally, VCSEA continues to be very concerned about Maintenance of Effort implications. Schools will likely spend less specifically because of COVID-19, and we could very well be in a situation of needing to send money back, when we need it more than ever. We also want to make sure legislators and the Governor are mindful of funding cliffs from one-time financial support from the CRF. At least the next two years are going to be extremely challenging.