

TESTIMONIAL MEMORANDUM

TO: Senate Finance Committee
FROM: Jeff Fannon, Vermont-NEA Executive Director
DATE: August 25, 2020

Thank you for allowing me time to speak with you about Vermont's educators and our publicly funded school system. The last six months have been incredible for all of us, and Vermont's public school employees have stepped-up and provided a topflight education to students and are prepared to do so this fall. Public schools, however, will need more resources than ever to provide a high-quality education and the increased social services schools have been asked to provide because of the pandemic.

Public schools are being asked to be essential service providers to students and communities alike. As students return, in-person, remotely, or in a hybrid fashion, schools will begin to see and comprehend the affects of the pandemic. School will need to respond to students' needs, both academic and their social-emotional needs. And, of course schools will respond to students' health needs. This all requires resources they did not plan for when they created their 2020-21 fiscal year budgets.

When you departed in late June, you and your House colleagues "fenced off" \$100 million dollars to address any education fund holes. That money needs to remain secured for education purposes, as well as to assist school in addressing students' social emotional needs. The Governor's proposed budget apparently does not secure these funds for educational purposes, and I believe this federal money should be used for what was intended back in June.

Schools are being asked to do more, not less, right now. Schools are trying to fill holes in staffing, for example school nurses and bus monitors, just to respond to the health crisis. The federal CRF monies, which you protected last June, should be used for these and other education fund related purposes to ensure schools have the resources they need to educate all students and address their social-emotional needs as well.

The average daily membership ("ADM") issue also needs to be addressed now and should not wait until January. As the school management witnesses will suggest I am sure, school boards will soon start planning their budgets for the next school year, and schools should be held harmless for student enrollment numbers that have changed dramatically because of the pandemic. That hold harmless language should not wait because January will be too late for schools to adjust their budget projections in a measured manner. We know the ADM will be different this fall and it's important to give schools the comfort that they will be held harmless for student counts that we know now will fluctuate dramatically from last fall's student count.

Finally and while perhaps not a strictly "finance" issue, the number of school days, or contact days, students must attend should be relaxed. Current law requires students to have at least 175 days but given the September 8 start date and the likely need to close some schools as the virus blooms, we believe the 175 day requirement needs to be relaxed this school year.