

COVID-19 Near-Term Education Policy Proposals

Secretary of Education Dan French

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I have worked with my team to identify near-term education policy issues that have emerged as a result of our response to the COVID-19 emergency. Due the urgency of the emergency response, I believe these proposals should be considered before the General Assembly adjourns.

Reduce the Number of Student Days and Increase the Number of Teacher Days

Statute (16 V.S.A. § 1071) establishes a minimum of 175 student days and 5 teacher in-service days. For the 2020-2021 school year, an adjustment to these minimums would be enacted so there would be a minimum of 170 student days and 10 teacher in-service days.

Rationale: Districts need additional planning time with their teachers to make preparations to implement hybrid learning and the required health guidance for in-person instruction.

Adjustment to Average Daily Membership (ADM)

Statute (16 V.S.A. § 4010) requires the Secretary of Education to determine the ADM of each school district for the current school year. This language would be modified for the 2020-2021 school year to require the Secretary to determine the ADM for each school district at a count no lesser than the district's 2019-2020 ADM.

Rationale: Ensuring districts receive at least the same ADM count as last year would promote some measure of stability in the district budgeting process during the emergency period. Allowing ADM to be greater than last year's number will address the concern in some districts where the number of new pupils has increased significantly.

Enact a Waiver of the Online Teaching Endorsement

Regulations pertaining to teacher licensure are controlled by the Standards Board for Professional Educators (SBPE) as per 16 V.S.A. § 1694 which describes the powers and duties of the SBPE. The powers and duties of the SBPE would be amended so that during the 2021-2022 school year, no teacher shall be required to hold an endorsement for online teaching in order to teach online or implement remote learning.

Rationale: Districts need predictability now in the status of this requirement to plan for the coming year.

Require the Use of Australian Ballot for School District Meetings

Under current statutory language (town school district - 17 V.S.A. § 2680 or union school district –16 V.S.A. § 711e), the electorate establishes the voting methodology to be used at district meetings. The statutory language would be modified to require all school district meetings held during the 2020-2021 school year to be conducted through the use of Australian ballot.

Rationale: COVID-19 may cause restrictions for voter access to district meetings conducted through a floor vote, and the same restrictions will make it difficult for voters to hold special meetings in advance of district annual meetings to authorize the use of Australian Ballot.