

TESTIMONY PROVIDED TO: House Education Committee
FROM: Meagan Roy, Ed.D. (CVSD Director of Student Support Services)
TOPIC: COVID Recovery
DATE: January 21, 2021

It is well understood that the COVID19 pandemic has had lasting impact on families, students and systems in Vermont and across the world. As the education system wrestles with how to recover from those impacts, it is critical that policy makers emphasize two broad tenets: First, we need to ensure that decisions are made based on real-time data that specifically describes the actual impacts, rather than trying to respond to vague, global presumptions. Second, we must build and expand upon existing structures within the education system, especially as it pertains to how to spend potential COVID relief funds. I share the sense of urgency to quickly understand the impacts of COVID19 and respond. Our response, though, needs to be thoughtful and targeted in order to maximize the resources we have and lay the foundation to continue being able to respond as recovery extends into the next several years.

Data-Based Decision Making

Reframe “recovery”

We are bombarded with commentary about the impacts of the COVID19 pandemic on students. The very term “COVID recovery” suggests real harm that requires immediate attention. And in many ways that image is appropriate - it provides a sense of urgency and compels us to action. But there is risk in a global assumption that *every single student* has been severely impacted, and therefore needs attention and recovery. Certainly all students have experienced delayed educational opportunities - but not every student has experienced learning loss, and not every student requires immediate intervention. To assume that every single student has experienced irreconcilable harm and therefore deserves recovery attention could result in a “watering down” of the resources that need to be carefully targeted toward those who truly need it. A laser focus on those students who have been impacted is required - those who have been unable to access remote instruction; those whose disability or other circumstance has made much-needed interventions impossible to provide; and all of our historically marginalized populations. Further, assuming a broad need for recovery impacts our ability to learn from redefined educational structures that benefitted all during the pandemic - some of which should be preserved.

Identify and support those students most impacted by the pandemic

Districts need to be supported so they can quickly identify and intervene with those students who have been most impacted. Any efforts to provide COVID recovery need to begin with valid data illustrating exactly what “impacts” need to be remedied. How many students have lost ground in basic skill areas? Has the proficiency gap widened? For whom, and in what areas? Districts will need to closely examine their common assessment data, disaggregating across historically marginalized populations. Such clear indicators of learning loss are critical so that specific, targeted interventions can be provided to those who need it. SBAC data will have limited effectiveness in identifying the efforts needed to address learning loss - districts do not have scores from the 19-20 school year, and any data collected from that measure during this school year will be limited in its validity. Instead, schools should be supported to use their local common assessments.

Keep mental health and social emotional learning in mind

COVID impact is not limited to academic areas - significant social, emotional and behavioral impacts exist as a result of the pandemic. As districts consider the measurement of COVID impact, they must ensure that social emotional learning and mental health measures are included. Creating or expanding partnerships with

TESTIMONY PROVIDED TO: House Education Committee
FROM: Meagan Roy, Ed.D. (CVSD Director of Student Support Services)
TOPIC: COVID Recovery
DATE: January 21, 2021

community mental health agencies is essential so that families and students are supported in the short- and long-term.

Use of One-Time Relief Funds

As the general assembly considers how to use potential one-time funding to support COVID recovery, it is critical that attention be paid to supporting spending that will benefit districts long-term. Setting aside funding for isolated interventions (similar to how NCLB funds were used for families to access tutoring) will not benefit school support systems moving forward, and may not reach those families who are most in need of support. Instead, consideration should be given to recovery plans that simultaneously provide intervention to students who need it most, but also support ongoing efforts to implement MTSS to support struggling learners long-term.

Target funding to impacted students

As noted above, it is critical that funding not be generally made available for tutoring or remediation for perceived learning loss on behalf of all students. Care should be taken to analyze formative assessment data that has been collected to date so that districts can clearly identify students who have been most impacted. If data structures do not exist, districts should first be supported to develop them. Funding will not be well spent if not targeted to students who need it most.

Build upon current school improvement requirements (Continuous Improvement Plans - CIPs)

School districts in Vermont are already required to submit annual plans to the Agency of Education to address equity gaps and outline their steps for Continuous Improvement. Rather than requiring additional, separate plans for COVID recovery, efforts to address learning loss should be included as part of the school's CIP rather than a separate requirement. Parallel plans will be confusing and risk fragmenting efforts.

Enhance existing structures (MTSS)

In order to effectively identify and target students who have been most impacted by the pandemic, districts will need to rely on their multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS). Vermont already has extreme variability of MTSS implementation across the state, as evidenced by the challenges associated with implementation of Act 173. If one-time funding becomes available to support schools, it should be prioritized so that it will build upon elements of existing MTSS structures, therefore supporting critical infrastructure moving forward. Several options for this include:

- Funding expanded intervention structures over the summer, with a dual goal of providing specific intervention and supporting professional development. Using one-time funds to develop “lab schools” over the summer allows funding to directly reach students and provides critical professional development for teachers (particularly in the area of early literacy)
- Short term coaching positions, wherein coaches will help districts analyze their current MTSS structures and make recommendations for improvement
- Professional development for first instruction, particularly in the area of early literacy, or intensive literacy instruction for struggling learners - this would support the development of Expertise moving forward, a critical component of an effective MTSS