

Request from the House Education Committee: "we want to gather testimony on the state of education in Vermont: our students, our families, our faculty and staff, our communities since March. How are we doing? What do we need to know? What are we learning? Challenges, opportunities."

Rutland City Public Schools went fully remote March 2020 and opened in Fall 2020 with 100% in-person 5 day a week for K-9 and 50% (hybrid alternating days in person and remote) for grades 10-12 with remote options for all grade levels.

While we were able to roll out remote learning and very quickly deploy technology, additional costs were incurred. We anticipate needing to replace technology faster than our current schedule, due to faster device depreciation from deployment to homes. Increasing our technology resources has afforded us the opportunity to explore more flexible student learning.

Our district has been committed to in-person learning. We have had a few disruptions and on occasion have had to return to remote learning due to positive cases, contact tracing, post-holiday travel concerns, and most recently transportation staffing capacity.

Our administration and staff have worked tirelessly to provide education, technology, food, medical resources, contact tracing, and stability to our school community.

Our students, staff, families, and community are obviously under increased strain due to the impact of COVID-19. COVID-19 has presented new challenges and compounded previous existing inequities. Rutland City has a high level of poverty that was already a great challenge. With poverty comes trauma and an increased need for student supports to enable them to participate in learning. We have alternative programs and supports to help these students thrive, but these come at a cost.

The results of the UVM Study of Pupil Weights in Vermont Education Funding speaks to many of the challenges districts, like ours, with high poverty rates face. The study also demonstrates the strain on financial resources when compared to our current weighting funding mechanism.

While students are often resilient, we know that some students have not fared well academically. The schools are currently addressing learning losses from last year. We expect this to continue at least through the next school year. We hope that we will be able to access federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding in order to help provide further interventions in support of these students. We also have no idea how this will socially impact students for years to come. Many recent graduates and current seniors' paths changed or paused due to the pandemic.

Our families are feeling overall economic strain. Many working parents are also challenged with balancing duties of employment, childcare, and education through the waves of the pandemic. Childcare being tied to education is a state-wide challenge. Our Universal PreK partners

struggled to reopen after initially closing in March. Staff and facility safety, PPE, and protocols to limit COVID transmission created hurdles that were hard for our community partners to overcome.

Our teachers have felt the strain of simultaneously teaching students in-person and students remote. There have been challenges around learning new techniques and platforms. Our nurses have added many tasks to their daily duties. Our administrative team has overcome one challenge after another. Our bus drivers have taken on new roles delivering meals, equipment, and screening children. Our custodians have brought on new products, adjusted techniques, and procedures to reduce potential for transmission. Our support staff has been flexible to bridge and accommodate needs. There is no doubt that COVID19 has stressed school resources.

As a school board our biggest challenge is going to be getting our FY22 school budget passed on town meeting day. Our districts Homestead property tax rate could be driven significantly higher for the coming year due to the change in Common Level of Appraisal (CLA). We are currently looking at a \$0.04 increase from CLA and another \$0.04 from the property tax yield. These state metrics alone would increase our tax rate by \$0.08, representing over a 5% increase. Asking taxpayers to pay such a large increase over one year, especially when many are facing economic hardship is certainly challenging.

We have incorporated staff reductions in our FY22 budget. Despite this reduction in force our budget line for employment cost is staying close to the same due to increased healthcare costs. Our per pupil spending is below the state average. We believe we have made responsible cuts to our budget and if not passed on town meeting day, deeper cuts could have lasting effects on our quality and continuity of our programs.

Changes to tax metrics and the implementation of recommended changes to the weighting formula to address poverty would significantly benefit RCPS, where our K-8 low-income percentage is close to 100%.

Respectfully Submitted.

Alison Notte, President of Rutland City Board of School Commissioners