MAKING REVISIONS TO THE GRAMMAR OF SCHOOLING
Education After COVID-19

Continuity of Learning Task Force Final Report and Recommendations

September 2020

"If we teach today's students as we taught yesterday's, we rob them of tomorrow."
— John Dewey

September 4th, 2020

Dear Secretary French,

On behalf of the members of the Continuity of Learning Task Force, which you commissioned in April of 2020, I am pleased to submit our final report and recommendations. This report is the culmination of over four months of reflection, discussion, and research.

There are many directions that this task force could have taken. Ultimately, we focused on the urgency to shed elements of the entrenched "grammar of schooling" in favor of a student-centered paradigm of education. Our recommendations are closely aligned with and extend the educational policies that are currently being implemented within Vermont.

One recommendation specific to your role as the secretary of education is to support a shift toward increased consistency and coherence across Vermont school districts, specifically in regard to policy implementation. Though Vermont is well known as a "local control state" and each school district likely enjoys their untrammeled autonomy, this task force believes that the high variability between districts is leading to significant inequities. We know that this is a highly political topic, but we felt it critical to bring this to your attention.

I, and all the members of the Task Force would like to thank you for your visionary leadership and for convening this group. We look forward to your public support of this report and the Vermont Agency of Education's efforts to disseminate it to various stakeholder groups throughout Vermont.

Sincerely,

Andrew B. Jones
Task Force Chair

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Executive Summary

Introduction

This task force, initiated by Secretary Dan French of the Vermont Agency of Education (AOE), focused on two overarching questions: 1) What opportunities can we leverage now for the future? and 2) What will education look like after COVID-19? This report attempts to answer these questions and proposes a variety of recommendations aimed at multiple stakeholder groups. Though school districts are still in crisis mode and bandwidth for education reform is in short supply, it is critical that we turn our current crisis into an opportunity to realize a world-class educational future in Vermont for all students.
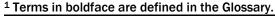
The Grammar of Schooling

In 1983, the report "A Nation at Risk" shocked the country and prompted a flurry of reform initiatives to bolster our education system. Nearly 40 years later, not much has changed. The report warned of a "rising tide of mediocrity" which still appears to be a problem today. Desks in rows, the teacher at the center of the classroom, transmitting knowledge with students being compliant passive recipients, these are the trappings of what Tyack and Cuban (1995) term the "grammar of schooling." They argue that rather than significant changes to the U.S. education system, we have merely been tinkering. Schools today look remarkably similar to those in the 1950s. The "grammar of schooling," which has remained relatively unchanged for over a century, is not preparing our students well for the 21st century knowledge economy -- it is imperative that we make corrections now. When the COVID-19 crisis has passed, and we return to a less restrictive environment, we must resist a return to "normal" as we know it. We cannot rebound back to the status quo -- to do so is tantamount to "educational malpractice." We must leverage the opportunity, and embrace the creative outgrowth and ingenuity surfaced, as a result of the constraints we faced during this crisis and harness the new learning of what is possible for our students and communities.

Learning from Crisis Teaching

Though termed **"distance learning**[1]," what occurred in the spring of 2020 was actually crisis teaching. School districts shut their doors literally overnight and had mere weeks to design **remote learning** systems. Going fully online was new for all stakeholders involved. It was imperfect to say the least. Educators and school leaders have learned quite a bit since then and have made significant modifications in preparation for the start of the new school year. Not only have we learned how to improve instruction in a distance environment, but many of the enduring flaws with our education system have been exposed as well. Two central themes emerged from this spring. The importance of equity and access. Gross inequities were apparent and continue, while access, especially to technology, was quite unequal.

Moving forward, more training needs to be provided to classroom educators with regard to remote and **hybrid learning**. Though technology has had significant impacts in other fields,

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[1] Terms in boldface are defined in the Glossary.

education remains largely untouched by any sort of disruptive technology. Generally, new education technology has only provided "a modest supplement to traditional classroom instruction" (Reich, 2020, p. 5). After COVID-19, it will be imperative to leverage technology using blended models of teaching and learning. Through the intentional use of technology, teachers can better support students using personalized learning strategies. Getting students to take ownership of their learning requires providing greater autonomy in the classroom, along with ample opportunities for reflection and self-assessment.

Furthermore, teachers were not able to get through their normal curriculum this past spring and will likely need to help students catch up this fall, constraining the amount of time for new learning. Therefore, the intended curriculum will need to be adjusted, shifting towards what Marzano (2003) identifies as a "guaranteed & viable curriculum." This means focusing on depth over breadth and not attempting the futile efforts at "content coverage." Finally, there needs to be an increased focus on transferable skills and social-emotional learning, in addition to academic proficiency. Students are dynamic and complex individuals, and thus schools are more than just places for academics. Students need support as they develop a multitude of skills and dispositions to prepare them for the future, many encompassed in Vermont's Portrait of a Graduate and the identified **transferable skills**.

Moving Towards Student-Centered Learning

Many people outside of schools see teachers as "transmitters of knowledge." If a teacher isn't at the front of the room "teaching," then they aren't working. The idea of having students in the driver's seat of their education is sometimes seen as radical, potentially leading to chaos in the classroom. However, we need to rethink the roles of teachers and the purpose of schools overall. Student-centered learning (also referred to as **personalized learning** in Vermont) requires positive student-adult relationships, opportunities for student ownership, **proficiency-based learning** progressions, flexible pathways to high school graduation and learner profiles. In Vermont, we have numerous educational statutes and policies that support a statewide shift towards student-centered learning, with some of the work already underway.

Identifying Educational Malpractices

Change tends to be slow in education and many practices, even when identified as not working, tend to remain entrenched. As Scheninger and Murray (2017) illustrate:

> The traditional model of schooling in which students are taught to regurgitate information, ultimately preparing them for the industrial model of the past, must dramatically shift to a more personal approach if we are to prepare this generation of students to become successful citizens in a global society." (p. 23)

They go on to say that "...utilizing a traditional, one-size-fits-all approach to teaching and learning is educational malpractice" (p. 23). This archaic system has increasingly caused an engagement crisis, with much of what is being taught in schools having little relevance to students. Thus, a shift towards **student-centered learning** is needed.

Crafting Policy Coherence

The education policy arena in Vermont is forward-thinking but crowded. Act 77, the Educational Quality Standards (EQS) and Act 173, to name a few, are all incredibly progressive

and promise to bring excellence and equity to Vermont schools. Yet, we are far from seeing these policies implemented with any sense of fidelity. Six years in, Vermont is still working toward the goal of universal implementation of **personalized learning plans (PLPs)** and equitable access to flexible pathways in all secondary schools. However, this piecemeal and partial approach to implementing student-centered learning across our K-12 system perpetuates educational inequity. Though most high schools in Vermont are at some stage of implementing **proficiency-based graduation requirements** (PBGRs), this philosophy is not yet institutionalized and as recently as February 2020, was being widely criticized by parents, community members, students and teachers. This failure of implementation and understanding often comes back to the overriding issue of "local control" in Vermont. Implementation of education initiatives in Vermont tend to be "all over the map" as each district, with its own governing body, designs a system for its own schools. Additionally, lack of coordination between our PreK-12 and post-secondary institutions and employers exacerbates implementation barriers and the discordance that creates confusion for Vermont students, families and communities. Though local context matters, greater consistency, coherence and coordination across school districts and education institutions will be imperative to the transformational changes needed in Vermont's education system.

Preparing Students for the Knowledge Economy

Our current education system is not organized in a way to prepare students well for the future. Entrenched in past practices, the grammar of schooling hinders innovation. However, our student's livelihoods are on the line. One of the central tasks of public schools is to prepare students for the future, yet we are preparing them for an economy and jobs that no longer exist. An increasing number of jobs are highly susceptible to automation and many sectors continue to shrink, unable to provide the stable middle-class jobs of the past (Ford, 2015). Thus, education is a critical component to preparing students for future careers and citizenship. Levy and Murnane (2004) argue that "...over the long run, better education is the best tool we have to prepare the population for a rapidly changing job market" (p. 155).

Something we have known for quite some time is that merely teaching the "three Rs" of reading, writing and arithmetic is insufficient to prepare students for work in the knowledge economy. There is an enduring perception that educational practices that seemed to work for some in the past are appropriate for our current students. As Mehta and Fine (2019) indicate, "...the education that would have sufficed in 1970 will not prepare students for the workforce today" (p. 11). Bowen, Chingos, and McPherson (2009) state that, "It will not do for high school students to believe that 'just getting through' is enough" (p. 111). The jobs of the future require more of employees than in the past - they require individuals to adapt, to re-skill and up-skill. Markovits (2019) warns that "competence and an honest work ethic no longer assure a good job" (p. xiv). Dintersmith (2018) solemnly reminds us that "Our education system is stuck in time, training students for a world that no longer exists" (p. xvii) and that "These kids are sitting ducks in the innovation era" (p. 14). It is time that we re-skill, up-skill and adapt for our future.

In many Vermont high schools, students can still skate by with D-s, and ultimately earn their diploma without learning much. This manifests into students not having the skills for both college and work, in addition to requiring millions of dollars for remedial courses when students enter college -- often in the form of debt that students (and ultimately adults) carry

throughout their lifetime. Labaree (1997) reminds us "... that students eventually leave school and enter the workforce, whether or not their schooling prepared them to carry out this work effectively" (p. 47). Schools must embrace the opportunity to educate students to be successful in a knowledge economy, and this means change. Schools can no longer operate as they have for the last hundred years.

Conclusion

This work cannot fall on any one group of stakeholders -- improving our schools is a collective effort. Parents will need to support change and innovation, even if schools look different than when they went to school. Education leaders need to be willing to take risks and push against the status quo. Teachers need to rethink their roles, not as content experts that transmit knowledge, but as coaches that facilitate student learning. Students will need to take on greater ownership of their learning, no longer acting as passive recipients of information and chasing grades, but focusing on mastery instead. All Vermonters must recognize that schools need to be better at preparing students for life after high school. Their livelihoods depend on it.

The next sections detail work conducted within two distinct committees of the Continuity of Learning Task Force: (1) a committee focused on identifying and disseminating best practices for remote learning that emerged in the context of COVID-19, and (2) a committee focused on identifying key aspects of Vermont's vision for the future of education post-COVID-19.

Noteworthy Practices from Remote Learning

Definition of the Work

The committee defined the work as – *to gather best practices that have emerged in terms of remote learning, inclusive of the differing resources in order for cross-cultivation within and across districts, and the identification of potential professional learning opportunities to strengthen remote learning for the unknown future.*

Themes

During our analysis of this past spring, two central themes emerged: equity and access. It is the committees' recommendation that to make remote learning a viable option for instruction for Vermont students, access to high speed internet and devices are fundamental. Additionally, access to educators trained in engaging learners remotely is important, regardless of where the educators live or work. We recognize that the Spring 2020 COVID-19 "Stay Home, Stay Safe" orders, where Vermont's teachers and learners were in an emergency remote learning situation, was not ideal nor representative of remote learning potential. It is critical, if remote learning continues, whether in full or in a hybrid situation, that thoughtful curriculum development and professional learning for ALL educators in the state is provided. The Vermont Agency of Education has a critical role to play in providing resources for all districts and coordinating remote learning efforts.

Areas of Discussion and Recommendations

The committee discussions encompassed six areas: Communication with Stakeholders, District/School Leadership, Instructional Practices, Professional Learning, Parent Training and Support, and Wellness and Mental Health (see below).

Limitations

This committee, though representative of PreK-12 education, only skimmed the surface of remote learning recommendations. This report is just a starting place. We know that there are many creative and resourceful educators and families in our state that could likewise add to this list. We encourage the Vermont Agency of Education to explore ways of capturing and documenting the positive work of Vermont educators and develop a platform where ideas are shared and resources linked.

Noteworthy Practices

Communications

This committee spent much of our meeting time discussing communications. In the emergency instructional period from March 2020 through the end of the school year, the number of emails and school communications was overwhelming to educators and families alike. Some of the communication was difficult for some families to understand. One special educator called each of her parents and said, "only read the emails that I send you," as a way to translate the information so that it was understandable. At the same time, other parents felt like they did not

have enough information to help make remote learning a success and wanted more information about schedules, curriculum, and assignments.

It was also noted that communications between educators and parents/students made the workday last from morning until late at night - the educator's and parent's workday never ended.

Noteworthy Practices from the Field:

- Districts develop one site with all communications from the school. Use local Front Porch Forums or other means to communicate with the community, including those who do not have children at school.
- Districts create a communications plan for educators so that parents/guardians receive consistent information, without being overwhelmed, from all their children's teachers.
- When communicating with parents, use accessible language by avoiding jargon and/or acronyms/initialisms. Communications should be in the parent's home language.
- Districts create a remote learning hub for families that include resources to support families during closure. This might include user-friendly documentation for different tools used as part of instruction.
- Districts create a "Start of School" series of questions (which may be conducted as a survey or in an interview format) for students and parents asking about remote learning (what worked and what did not), concerns about the year (academic, social/emotional, resources needed (including family resources), best way to communicate, etc.) Teachers will be able to best meet student needs with a strong partnership with families, in preparation for a possible At-Home order if/when another wave of COVID-19 occurs.
- Educators set boundaries so that "school time" and "personal time" is honored. Flexible office hours (evening and during the day, when appropriate) is one approach that has worked for some.
- Students may benefit from a 1:1 conversation with their teachers during the week as a check-in. Building time for this in a teacher's schedule is important.
- Provide parents with easy access to virtual class schedules, assignments, due dates and assessments, even for older students who typically are independently handling their schedules. Parents need these tools to partner with the schools in making remote learning a success.
- Parent groups can play a key role in sharing questions and information between families and administration.
- Consider other forms of outreach, such as local access television and local media interviews. Additionally, parent groups can play a key role in sharing questions and information between families and administration.
- Superintendents and School Boards can offer virtual Q&As in order for community members to learn the reasons behind decision-making.

District/Building Leadership

A school system is a system. Therefore, to make it work as a system, it is important that communication is clear and collaborative. Within a school system there are a myriad of roles and responsibilities that intersect at multiple levels, all with the single purpose of educating Vermont students.

<u>**Noteworthy Practices from the Field:**</u>

- Districts create a COVID-19 Committee representative of all the roles within the district to engage in planning, data collecting, reflecting and purposeful continuous improvement.
- Align COVID-19 planning with overall district mission and values.
- Develop clear and consistent communication between the superintendent and school board.
- Cultivate collaborative culture within schools, virtually.

Instructional Practices

During the Spring 2020 remote learning, some educators possessed skills which allowed them to quickly and creatively transform their teaching to the remote environment, while others struggled both with the technology and how to transform teaching practice to work in a remote environment. Unfortunately, digital equity was an issue in Vermont, so many educators had to provide work through work packets delivered to homes. This was not ideal and any future remote work must address this issue. Additionally, we have not addressed special education specifically in our work together. Note: The practices below are not in any specific order, either to priority area or developmental appropriateness.

<u>**Noteworthy Practices from the Field:**</u>

- Meeting virtually regularly with students was important. Google Meet and Zoom were the two platforms most used by Vermont educators. Zoom, although not used as widely as Google Meet, allows for easy breakout rooms for engagement, while Google Meet allows you to have separate "meets" but no breakout rooms, though a newer version looks to include this component. Regardless, holding synchronous meetings allowed for educators to "see" their students.
- If remote or hybrid learning continues into the fall of 2020, it will be important to educate students on the tools utilized during remote learning early in the year in order to be prepared for remote learning.
- Select a few engagement tools and use them well with students. (i.e. Jamboard, padlet flipgrid, parlayideas, etc.).
- Provide substantial planning time for teachers for transforming learning into remote learning.
- Prioritize and align curriculum goals and focus planning and instruction on the major standards for the grade/subject taught.
- Include independent projects in learning.
- Build student reflection and self-assessment in order to strengthen student **<u>metacognitive skills</u>**.
- Balance **<u>asynchronous</u>** and **<u>synchronous learning</u>** activities.
- Create online forums with students to discuss curricular topics. Ensure they understand how to provide a strong entry as well as comment on another student's entry. Co-creating a rubric to define expectations and support self-assessment and assessment is always a good idea.
- Set clear expectations for students and parents during remote learning.
- **<u>Use "Flipped" instruction</u>** utilizing teacher-created lessons (length developmentally appropriate) so online can be used for engagement in the content.

- Utilize Student Management Systems and ePortfolios so that students and parents can see where students are in the progression of their skills. It is important to be very transparent and make sure that students are clear on the learning targets being taught and assessed.
- Include intentional, ongoing **<u>formative assessment</u>** on key standards with strong student involvement in self-assessment in order to determine next steps in the learning process.
- Develop activities and projects that integrate learning across subject areas.
- Use project-based learning/independent project activities developed with clear curricular outcomes.
- Consider use of choice boards to allow for student choice.
- Consider use of paraprofessionals during instruction to support small group work.
- Paraprofessionals and teachers utilize office hours to support student learning.
- Team teaching is emerging as an instructional practice that schools are using more than previously to facilitate remote learning.

Professional Learning and Training

The range of expertise in working remotely and with engagement tools varies considerably around the state. Districts with strong Information Technology (IT) departments created stronger opportunities for students during remote learning. Closing this equity gap is critical in 2020, and we believe all Vermont teachers and their students should possess the knowledge and skills to work remotely.

<u>Noteworthy Practices from the Field:</u>

- Many educators have demonstrated excellence in working remotely. To recognize this, the AOE should consider offering an "online teaching specialist endorsement" to educators who can document their expertise, without needing to take the Vermont Virtual Learning Cooperative (VTVLC) coursework or pay the peer review fee. Alternatively, the AOE could offer teachers the courses free of charge with their work as evidence of a practicum or develop micro-credentials that will satisfy the competencies for the online teaching specialist endorsement.
- Develop online webinars conducted by district technology integration specialists so that all teachers would have access to the learning.
- School districts offered "just in time" training on many programs that educators applied quickly into practice.

Family Training and Support

Many families were unprepared to support their children during remote learning. During this time, many teams of teachers were able to engage caregivers in training and in one case, a virtual curriculum night. Again, equity of digital access as well as technological knowledge created a divide within our state's districts.

<u>Noteworthy Practices from the Field:</u>

- Hold a virtual curriculum night and perhaps in-person training for families so that they can navigate the technology their children are utilizing for remote learning.

- Identify key person(s) to communicate so that families are not inundated with emails, phone calls, etc.
- Provide scheduled updates (e.g. weekly "plan of the week").
- Provide clarity about how students will be assessed and way(s) to view student performance (e.g., assessments and evaluation tools clearly communicated/identified).
- Offer audio/video and translated materials.
- Create a series of how-to videos regarding the technology (ex. How to log onto Google Classroom, How to join a Google Meet, etc., Spreadsheet of tutorials).
- Offer materials to families in their home language.
- See Communication for other ideas.

Wellness and Mental Health

This committee spent a great deal of time discussing child and family welfare as a result of remote learning during the spring of 2020. The term "Maslow before Bloom" rang to all of us as we know the importance of child welfare before learning can happen, remotely or in-person. Wellness and mental health are also important to every adult working within the school environment.

Noteworthy Practices from the Field

- In a webinar with Dave Melnick, he envisioned reflection to restore well-being. Similar questions might also frame some of the lessons learned through the COVID-19 crisis.
  - What is most memorable for you about COVID-19? The darkest and the lightest moments? What is sticking to your ribs?
  - What personal strengths did you draw upon to survive/thrive during the pandemic? Are these reminiscent of other skills used during times of adversity?
  - What do you and people in your community/family do to avoid helplessness, worry, frustration and feelings of being overwhelmed?
  - Describe someone you know who has been "good at stress" during this pandemic? What can you emulate or learn from them? What are they specifically doing?
- As identified previously, it is important that educators check-in with each family prior to the start of school to ensure that supports are in place for each child when school begins.
- Integrating social/emotional learning into class instruction is essential as we transition back into in-person schooling.
- School counselors might support classroom teachers and paraeducators to highlight ways to integrate social/emotional work within the classroom.
- Train all educators in "Youth Mental Health First Aid."

Shifting Towards Student-Centered Learning

Classroom instruction has room for improvement. The crisis teaching of the past spring exposed many of the flaws with the current grammar of schooling. When we return to the classroom full time and without COVID-19 restraints, we cannot go back to "normal." The teacher-centered, knowledge transmission, breadth over depth mentality cannot continue. We must rethink the roles of both teachers and students. The challenges and opportunities that emerged during remote learning highlighted the need for more student-centered teaching and learning.

Educational research and experience show that remote learning cannot replace in-person learning. That said, there is significant potential for blended learning after the COVID-19 health crisis. A key premise of blended learning is that the teaching and learning process is student-centered. Though forced to engage in hybrid learning for the Fall of 2020, there are certainly elements of this structure that can be retained as the COVID-19 crisis lapses. Most would probably agree that it is inappropriate to lecture for long periods of time through Zoom or Google Meet. However, this is common practice in many classrooms, particularly in the upper grades. We cannot revert back to lecturing students when we return to school full time nor should we be doing that in a distance learning setting either.

Student-centered learning shouldn't be a reform ideal that is contested. We know that many past practices do not serve all students well and some of these are actually harmful to students. We cannot do what is easy, comfortable, or what worked for some in the past. Tier I classroom instruction must be structured to serve the needs of ALL students.

To truly personalize learning, we must know the strengths and weaknesses of our students in addition to knowing them as people. Heaps of empirical research supports the idea that teacher-student relationships are important for increasing engagement and motivation. This doesn't mean that teachers are "friends" with students, but we need to discard the notion that teachers are merely content experts and that they don't need to know their students as individuals.

The lift required to move away from the traditional mindset of teacher as knowledge transmitter towards a classroom milieu that puts the student in the driver's seat of their learning will require broad stakeholder support. Policymakers, state agencies, school boards, superintendents, central office leaders, principals, classroom educators, students, parents and community members must all understand the importance of rethinking how we "do school."

In Vermont, we have several policies that support a student-centered paradigm of teaching and learning. Over six years into the passage of Act 77, we are nowhere close to seeing this policy to fruition. We need to realize the promise of Act 77, the potential of Act 173 and finish what was started within the Educational Quality Standards.

Recommendations

Policymakers

- Do not repeal Act 77 or Act 173 if pushback is encountered → stay the course and maintain support.

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- No new education laws that impact classroom instruction → more time is needed to effectively implement Act 77, Act 173 and the EQS.

State Agencies

- Provide training to school boards, district/school leaders and classroom educators on student-centered learning practices to instill a common and consistent understanding amongst Local Education Agencies (LEAs). Utilize an outside consultant to provide the aforementioned professional development.
- Collect and share examples of "bright spots" from schools in Vermont that are successfully implementing PLPs, flexible pathways and other elements of student-centered learning.

District & School Leaders

- Ensure the entire leadership team has a common understanding of student-centered learning → collective sensemaking is critical.
- Be willing to experiment and try new strategies → be willing to take risks.
- Provide teachers with more leadership opportunities so they have a voice at the table with decisions.
- Prioritize student-centered learning as the district/school change efforts in line with the principles of Act 77, the EQS, and Act 173.

Classroom Educators

- Teachers will need to let go of the notion that the classroom is "my territory" and forgo the "do my own thing" mindset.
- Classroom educators will need to commit to the shift towards a student-centered paradigm of education and to rethink the traditional role of teaching as knowledge transmitter towards a mindset of facilitator of learning.
- Balance the teaching of academic content and transferable skills.

Identifying Educational Malpractices

Shifting towards a new paradigm of education requires more than a new set of practices. Significant unlearning must occur, alongside the jettisoning of certain past practices. We cannot just graft new practices onto old. Sometimes old practices are not complementary and may actually hinder the implementation of the new. Therefore, school leaders and classroom educators must give serious consideration to the specific practices that should stop and that might even be labeled as "educational malpractices." Letting go of long-held practices and beliefs is not easy, but if we are to move away from the century-old model of teacher-centered classrooms, there are some things we simply can't do anymore. This will require some difficult conversations and deep reflection regarding what is working and for whom. "Because that is the way we've done it" is not a reason to keep doing it. These "educational malpractices" act as barriers to the implementation of reform initiatives including proficiency-based graduation requirements and personalized learning.

Though not the only education policy of record, Act 77 should be seen as a critical foundation for developing a student-centered paradigm of schooling. Act 77 rewrites the relationship between teachers and students, focusing on truly "knowing" students through PLPs, providing flexible pathways through secondary education, and leveraging proficiency-based assessment to promote learning for career, college, and civic readiness. These practices take on even greater significance as Vermont seeks more equitable school environments, learning opportunities, and student outcomes. Moreover, PLPs can help break down the systematic alienation of students, particularly traditionally marginalized students, from the schools they attend. Flexible pathways can dislodge oppressive curriculum that frequently precludes equitable access to learning experiences of personal, cultural and social significance to students. Proficiency-based assessment can eliminate entrenched, subject-specific grading and reporting systems that are poorly aligned with career, college and civic readiness and serve primarily as brutal instruments for sorting and control.

The practices discussed below are by no means exhaustive. There are many practices that need to be left behind, but the following are critical in supporting a paradigm of student-centered learning.

Carnegie Units & Traditional Grading Practices

Grading homework, allowing students to "pass" classes with a D-, and otherwise continuing with the antiquated seat-time mentality of graduating students must end. Too many students require remedial courses upon entering college, especially in math, as evidenced by data from the Community College of Vermont. It is clear that in Vermont and elsewhere, report card grades and transcripts are masking student proficiency and that students are not as well prepared after high school graduation as many think.

Content Rigid Approach to Learning

There is too much to teach and not enough time. Additionally, a singular focus on content knowledge at the expense of transferable skills will not serve our students well in preparing for life and work in a knowledge economy. Pathways to graduation remain inflexible and do not

adequately support student engagement and motivation. Some high school course offerings are often dated and need auditing. Also, there are opportunities to integrate the Vermont State Colleges offerings into our high schools.

Conventional Notions of Purpose, Space, Time and Roles

We need to prepare students for the 21st century knowledge economy. The system of sorting and ranking is archaic. Learning doesn't just happen at school and under the guidance of a teacher. School day schedules and calendars need a 21st century update based on current research of brain development and the realities of the future, not of our agrarian past. Teachers and students alike will need to rethink their roles in schools. Teachers should not be thought of as knowledge transmitters and students need to take more ownership of their learning.

Recommendations

Policymakers

- Maintain support for the proficiency-based graduation requirements element of the Educational Quality Standards. Do not repeal or otherwise dilute this aspect of the EQS.

State Agencies

- Continue providing guidance on Act 77, Act 173 and the EQS to improve consistency and coherence across districts.

School/District Leaders

- Bolster efforts to implement proficiency-based graduation requirements, PLPs and flexible pathways.
- Focus on making sure teachers know their students and students know themselves.

Classroom Educators

- Embrace a "facilitator of learning" role that provides students with ownership over their education.
- Leverage proficiency-based assessment to gauge accurate information on student progress to better understand stude nt strengths and weaknesses.

Crafting Policy Coherence

The education policy landscape in Vermont is forward-thinking but crowded. Act 77 (2013), the Educational Quality Standards (2014), Act 166 (2014), Act 46 (2015), Act 189 (2018), and most recently, Act 173 (2018) constitute the bulk of the most important education policies currently in play. These policies are laudable and represent significant opportunities for improving the education system in Vermont and closing equity gaps for students. But what impact have these policies had? Have these policies been implemented successfully? Are these policies being put into practice in a complementary fashion or in isolation? Do any of these policies conflict, or are there barriers to implementing new legislation and policy created by statutes that need to be sunset? Merely layering one policy on top of another will not bring about substantive change. Similarly, viewing these policies in isolation or implementing them piecemeal will also limit growth and change. Certainly, all of these educational policies have had some impact, but as currently implemented, they are not reinforcing one another and sometimes they are in tension. We have a policy coherence problem in Vermont. Many stakeholders do not understand how the aforementioned policies can and should work in unison. With the current pause to schooling as we know it, we have an important window of opportunity to reduce the policy incoherence and to attain higher levels of policy implementation consistency across Vermont school districts.

In light of what we learned from this past spring, the importance of personalizing learning for students and the critical role of knowing our students has come to the forefront. If Vermont schools were further along with their implementation of Act 77, would we have been better placed to support students via distance learning? A renewed focus needs to be put on the implementation of Act 77. Additionally, Act 173 and the EQS need to be conceptualized and implemented in unison with Act 77.

Vermont is often touted as a "local control state," living up to our state motto "Freedom and Unity." This mentality has led to rampant variation of policy implementation in Vermont schools. This is not always a bad thing. Context matters, and each LEA has its own needs, so the implementation of certain policies should not look the same at every school district. However, this "do your own thing" philosophy also has negative ramifications. For instance, with each district having their own proficiency-based graduation requirements, transient students and students attending career and technical centers are often at a disadvantage.

We need to execute on our current vision of education that is informed from Act 77, the EQS and Act 173. We don't need a new vision. We need to focus on realizing the vision of student-centered learning.

Recommendations

Legislators/Policymakers

- First and foremost, there needs to be a moratorium on any new education policies that focus on pedagogy. School districts need more time to effectively implement the current set of policies.

- For future policies or revision to current policies, establish realistic implementation timelines and provide appropriate funding. Too often policy initiatives are vague, with little in the way of guidance or financial support.

State Agencies

- Context matters for policy implementation, but higher levels of consistency are needed between districts, and the Vermont Agency of Education can help support this tightening for consistency.
- Establish a regional approach to policy implementation. This is particularly important for career technical centers that have multiple feeder schools.
- Lead efforts towards a statewide calendar.
- Develop common proficiencies for all districts to adopt.

School/District Leaders

- Refocus efforts on Act 77, specifically the development of PLPs.
- Help support district stakeholder (principals, board members, classroom educators) understanding of how various Vermont policies fit together.
- Use evaluation systems and needs-based professional learning as levers to ensure adherence to policy and practices.

Classroom Teachers

- Given the recent implementation of Act 173, general education teachers need to embrace the mindset that ALL children can learn and that ALL students deserve high-quality Tier I instruction in the general education classroom.
- To increase motivation and engagement, provide students with more opportunities to take ownership of their learning. Using PLPs in the classroom is an effective way to develop meaningful relationships and student agency in their own learning by tapping into their aspirations and interests.

Moving Forward

Upending the entrenched grammar of schooling is no easy task. Shifting towards a student-centered paradigm of teaching and learning will require the support of numerous stakeholder groups. Ultimately, this change will require rethinking the role of teachers and students and of the overall purpose of schools.

First and foremost, we must acknowledge that the status quo is driving inequities and is not adequately working for ALL students. Beyond malpractice, maintaining the status quo is educational sabotage for the future success of students. Returning to "normal" after COVID-19 shouldn't be something we strive toward. We have the opportunity to reorient and map a new path forward.

There is a sense of urgency with this work. Yes, we are still in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and yes, our immediate attention is fixed on making hybrid or remote learning work, while attempting to remedy our budget shortfalls, but we cannot remain myopic for too long. We have a window of opportunity *right now*. Everything has been put on "pause" to a degree and it is incumbent upon us to take advantage of our current state of affairs.

We need to do better. We can do better. We have an opportunity for Vermont's education system to be the envy of other states. If we don't work to step away from the status quo, we can all be named as culprits in robbing our students of an innovative and high-quality education that prepares them for the future. *Going back to "normal" should not be seen as an option.*

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Resources

1. [Administrator Tips: Caring for Yourself and Staff in the Time of COVID-19](#) - From the Vermont Agency of Education.
2. [Dave Melnick Series sponsored by Vermont-NEA](#) - Links to the webinars and materials are found at this link.
3. [The Vermont Principals' Association's Running List of COVID Related Resources](#)
   a. This is a long list of resources and thinking that has emerged since the start of distance education in Vermont. Here you can find notes from school administrators around the state (specific stories/names not to be shared publicly), many related webinars, guidance, collaborations, and leadership information.
4. [Kim Marshall-Marshall Memo](#) (May 22): Kim Marshall put together a list of perspectives, articles, and resources from around the country and beyond for school leaders to utilize.
5. [Exemplars of Continuity of Learning Plans from the Vermont Agency of Education](#)
6. [Grading and Reporting: Guiding Considerations in Remote Learning Environments from the Vermont Agency of Education](#) - Included in this document are additional resources from a variety of sources.
7. Vermont School Counselor Association report on Social Emotional Learning (SEL) considerations for re-entry to school this fall: [VTSCA SEL Guidelines for School Reopening](#)
8. [Grading and Reporting: Practical Strategies from the Field during Remote Learning](#) from the Vermont Agency of Education.
9. To support your efforts during COVID-19, the 10 Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs) have produced a series of evidence-based resources and guidance about teaching and learning in a remote environment: https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/projects/covid-19/.
10. [7 Must Have Apps, Tools and Resources for Maximum Student Engagement](#)
11. [121 Tools for Distance Learning & Strategies for Student Engagement](#)
12. [7 Tips for Increasing Student Engagement in Online Courses](#)
13. [Top 10 Tools for the digital Classroom](#)
14. [Ten Ways to Overcome Barriers to Student Engagement Online](#)
15. [Polling in the Classroom: 4 Free Polling Tools to Keep Students Engaged](#)
16. https://www.vtvlc.org/covid-19
17. https://veep.org/for-teachers/resources/home-learning-options
18. Dave Melnick Webinar Series - Series of 3 webinars "Supporting Each Other, and Ourselves in the time of COVID-19."
   a. [Webinar 1](#) - "Stress, Self-Regulation and Resilience in Times of Crisis"
   b. [Webinar 2](#) - "The Reflective Educator and Workforce Resilience"
   c. [Webinar 3](#) - "Endings, Beginnings, and Re-establishing the School as Community."
19. [Child Care Reopening: Resources to support social emotional needs](#) and [PDF](#) (Building Bright Futures, Department for Children and Families, Agency of Education, Vermont Department of Health)

20. [Health Guidance for Childcare and Summer Programs](#): This is the most up-to-date information from Vermont Department of Health to inform re-opening of child care and summer programs. Tracking this work will be critical to informing the reopening of schools in the fall
21. [COVID-19 Guidance for Child Care Services with Breena Holmes, MD](#) (accompanying [slide deck](#)) May 12, 2020
22. Early Childhood Forum on Mental Health for Families and Providers:
    a. Families (May 27, 2020)
        i. [Slides](#)
        ii. [Webinar](#)
    b. Providers (June 4, 2020)
        i. [Slides](#)
        ii. [Webinar](#)
23. Zaglas, Wade. "[Education Expert John Hattie Weighs in on the Impacts of Distance Learning.](#)" Education Review, 23 Apr. 2020,
24. [Google Tools Tutorials for Students and Families](#) - This spreadsheet contains multiple tutorials for Google tools.
25. Youth Mental Health First Aid - This free training is available to Vermont school employees through Lance Metayer at lance.metayer@ncssinc.org .
26. The Vermont Agency of Education and Vermont Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) will continue to move forward in their efforts to provide high-quality programming and supplemental materials to support children's learning by offering [At-Home Learning](#) all summer long. Find great educational [teacher](#) and [family resources](#) as well as [tutorials.](#) For the summer months, the schedule is focused on two channels, the Main and Plus+. Search by program, content, grade level or learning standard. PBS programming is always commercial free and educational. Standards-aligned curricular connections support engagement beyond screen time. Contacts: Pat Fitzsimmons at pat.fitzsimmons@vermont.org or Heather Duhamel at hduhamel@vermontpbs.org

Glossary

Asynchronous instruction. Instruction occurs via a pre-recorded format, using webinars, written documents, and detailed instructions; common component of on-line instructional methods. Lessons, assignments, quizzes, etc. are completed by the student independently, without the teacher present. Opposite of *synchronous instruction.*

Distance learning. Students receive instruction and complete required assignments, tests, etc. outside of the regular school-based classroom. Typically involves online instructional component.

Flipped instruction. In contrast to more traditional models in which students learn new content in the classroom and then practice it at home by completing homework, studying, etc., in flipped instructional models, students learn new content initially at home, outside of the classroom, and classroom time is subsequently used to practice and master the new content by working through exercises with the benefit of the teacher's presence, completing assignments together, etc.

Formative assessment. Gathering information that helps both educators and students understand what has been learned, which objectives have been addressed, and what techniques have been successful. Typically administered several times throughout a learning unit. Can help teachers adjust instructional practice in real time. In contrast to *summative assessment*, which is typically used to verify students' learning and confirm what they know, understand, and can do relative to state standards.

Hybrid learning. Any model that includes a combination of both remote/distance learning and instruction and in-person learning and instruction.

Metacognitive skills. Literally, "thinking about thinking." Advanced learning strategy in which student reflects on their learning strengths, limitations, organizational skills, and knowledge base, and plans next steps accordingly in order to improve their learning.

Personalized learning. Systems and approaches that deepen student learning by incorporating each student's interests, strengths and needs – including student voice and choice in what, how, when and where they learn – to achieve the goals of active engagement, academic success, and preparation for post-secondary opportunities. Personalized learning and personalized instructional approaches are critical to students in kindergarten through grade 6 as well as grades 7-12.

Personalized Learning Plan (PLP). Individual student's road map (minimally beginning in grade 7) to help them progress through their educational experiences, informing choices through middle and high school, and beyond. PLPs not only help articulate and clarify students' goals and needs but reflect the importance of student agency in learning as they work to meet graduation proficiencies. Created by the student, with the support of parents/guardians, teachers/mentors and peers, that defines the scope and rigor of academic and experiential opportunities leading to secondary school completion, postsecondary readiness and civic engagement.

Proficiency-based graduation requirements (PBGR). Locally defined set of the content knowledge and skills connected to state education standards that, when supplemented with any additional locally-developed requirements, qualify a student to earn a high school diploma.

Proficiency-based learning. Refers to systems of instruction, assessment, grading and academic reporting that are based on students demonstrating mastery of the knowledge and skills they are expected to learn before they progress to the next lesson, get promoted to the next grade level, or receive a diploma. Students gain the skills, abilities, and knowledge required in an area of study, along with those necessary to be successful in college, career and civic life. This is in contrast to traditional systems that advance students based on seat time.

Remote learning. Instruction and learning materials are provided to the student outside of the traditional classroom setting. Can include both on-line learning and analog learning (e.g., use of packets, materials sent home to student, etc.).

Student-centered learning. See "personalized learning."

Synchronous instruction. Instruction (and learning) takes place live, in real time. Common component of high-quality on-line instructional methods, in combination with *asynchronous instruction*. Teachers and students come together via technology to cover pedagogical content together. Can occur with one student or groups of students. Lessons, assignments, quizzes, etc. are completed by students in the virtual/on-line presence of the teacher.

Transferable skills. Broad set of knowledge, skills, work habits, and character traits that are believed to be critically important to success in today's world, particularly in collegiate programs and modern careers.