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MEMORANDUM

TO: Superintendents, Principals, All Educators and School Staff, Curriculum Coordinators, Business Managers, Vermont Superintendents Association, Vermont Principals' Association, VT-NEA, Vermont School Boards Association, Vermont Council on Special Education Administrators

FROM: Rebecca Holcombe, Ed.D., Secretary of Education
Molly Bachman, General Counsel
Heather Bouchey, Ph.D., Deputy Secretary
Emily Byrne, Chief Financial Officer
Amy Fowler, Ed.D., Deputy Secretary

SUBJECT: Thanksgiving Message

DATE: November 21, 2017

Last week, the AOE had our own in house potluck lunch, complete with turkey, to take a few moments to enjoy each other's company and reflect on all for which we are grateful.

It put us in the mind of thinking about what we appreciate and value about all the hard work happening in schools across the state on behalf of our youngest Vermonters. We feel privileged to work here, and thankful for the creativity, passion, hard work and purpose you bring into our schools every day.

Here are a few things for which we are thankful:

We are thankful for the many students who work hard and are kind to each other, and who, through their persistence, are able to graduate and go on to contribute to our civic processes and our economic prosperity. Our future is in their hands.

We are grateful for the many students who have joined school boards, participated in integrated field reviews, advocated at the Legislature, or otherwise used their voices to help our education systems become more responsive and supportive and creative in our preparation of our youngest Vermonters.

We are grateful to the young Vermonters who every year, demonstrate their excellence in academics, leadership and service, both here in Vermont and across the nation, while challenging expectations and expanding our understanding of what our young people can accomplish. (Did you know that young Vermont women have won Harley Davidson motorcycles for their schools two years in a row in a highly competitive national field of CTE students?)

We are grateful that our schools have maintained their strong commitment to ensuring that

every child feels safe, respected and valued, no matter how that child identifies.

We are grateful for our educators, who work hard every day to ensure that our children's achievement and opportunities are not dictated by the adversity in which they sometimes find themselves.

We are grateful for our educators and administrators, who—in their own schools and in collaborations across schools and on our Integrated Field Reviews— celebrate and share successful strategies for helping our children become stronger, healthier and more powerful.

We are grateful for our educators and administrators, who even as they celebrate their successes, turn unflinchingly into our challenges and work hard to develop new approaches that better engage our children, heal our divisions and promote our intellectual development.

We are grateful for our business managers, who get little attention, but work behind the scenes to make our systems run.

We are grateful for our food services staff, who provide good food, including fresh Vermont produce, to help our children grow strong bodies.

We are grateful for our essential staff, who keep our buildings clean and operating, who get the paperwork done, who care for our children and keep them safe, and who are often the first friendly faces they see when they enter our doors.

We are grateful for the community members, who volunteer their time and support to help our schools become stronger. The health of our communities is reflected in the health of our schools, and so often, their efforts to strengthen our schools, in turn strengthens our communities.

We are grateful for school board members who have been working hard and working carefully and intentionally, to think about how to redesign what we do to expand opportunities and improve quality in a time of increasing fiscal constraint. We are not in a position to add programs, but we are in a position to transform how we work, in order to focus on priorities and get more value for children out of the dollars we spend.

We are grateful for the state and national leaders, who advocate for the rights and dignity of all children, and who understand that taking care of our youngest citizens is our public trust and our commitment to a strong future.

We are grateful for all those who believe freedom and unity go hand in hand, and work together not for uniformity of opinion, but for a shared and prosperous pluralist future.

Please join us in taking a few moments today to reflect on all for which we can be grateful. For all our challenges, we are fortunate in so many ways.

We wish you a peaceful and pleasant Thanksgiving holiday.