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MEMORANDUM

TO: Superintendents, Principals, Independent School Headmasters, Special Education Administrators, Curriculum Coordinators
COPY: VSA, VPA, VT-NEA, VSBA, VCSEA
FROM: Rebecca Holcombe, Ed.D., Secretary of Education *RH*
SUBJECT: Gratitude and Support
DATE: November 14, 2016

As we enter our last week before Thanksgiving, I want to express to all of Vermont's educators how grateful I am for all you do. I am also grateful for the kindness, wisdom and insight of our amazing students.

Not too long ago, our Vermont community lost five wonderful young people from the Harwood area in an accident. Some amongst us, most understandably, are still struggling with the impact of this. One young man from Harwood Union High School offered words that can guide us all as we work to strengthen a more perfect union right here in Vermont.

He told the audience how he had climbed a mountain the day after the accident. As he looked down the valley from the top at the road where the accident had occurred, he wondered how something that looked as small as the cars crawling along the black belt of highway could cause so much hurt. He then observed that when you are ten feet from those most affected, the hurt and fear is overwhelming. He went on to thank the assembled crowd, which included high school students and educators from all over the state, for choosing to walk closer to the accident and the families, to carry some of the pain that otherwise would not have been theirs to bear.

I know that every day, you choose to move closer to challenges of the students you teach—challenges that are not yours—in order to lend them strength and aspiration until they themselves are strong and connected enough to thrive on their own. This is what educators do. This is who we are.

This past week we finally saw the election season for 2016 come to a close. No matter who you voted for or how you feel about the outcomes of the national campaign, I think we can probably all agree that we have all seen an election that was more acrimonious and divisive than the nation has seen in a long time. We have a lot of work and introspection ahead of us.

All lives **do** matter. That said, the wellbeing of some of our children is more precarious and vulnerable than others, including children of color, children with disabilities and children of all races who struggle against the ravages of poverty. This is not a Republican or Democratic issue: **it is a human issue**, and both our governor-elect and his opponent denounced the politics of fear that seek to legitimize demonization of some to benefit others.

Recently, I learned that some families, including some of our New Americans and families of color, are afraid to send their children to school for fear that they will be harassed or deported. I also learned that some Muslim women are fearful of appearing in public or sending their female children to school. Please stand with me in standing up against hatred and fear. Let's work together to create a more inclusive, supportive Vermont where large groups don't feel disenfranchised or threatened. Help create a Vermont where all our children can thrive in our communities and in our economy.

Vermont is a state where we believe there are ways to be successful that don't involve disadvantaging others. We believe we are all better off when all our children are able to develop the skills, knowledge and habits needed to thrive in both community and economic life. We support all children, but we know some may need a little more support and advocacy than others.

As you start this week, please work actively to ensure that each child in your community feels safe, accepted and valued. We do this by creating rigorous and equitable learning opportunities for students of all backgrounds and experiences so that each and every one of our Vermont children can grow to be successful in economic and civic life. We do this by creating a climate of joy and a climate of aspiration for all. We do this by comforting a child who is afraid, by listening to a teen who is angry, by cheering a success and celebrating good choices. We do this by setting a good example for how to collaborate and communicate- most especially when we disagree.

On behalf of the Agency, I thank you each for all you do on behalf of our youth.