

October 7, 2020

Dear Vermont Educators:

On September 26, 2020 we moved to Step III in our health guidance when offering in-person learning. Moving away from Step II is a recognition that we are capable of operating a system of in-person instruction that is protective of the health of our students, our staff and our families, and able to respond quickly to shifting conditions or a resurgence of the virus. Step III will bring with it increased flexibility in our practices and modes of instruction, while still keeping us safe in the classroom.

I wanted to write to you, because I believe that recognition of this milestone highlights the critical and impressive work that you and your colleagues have done during the months leading up to the start of school, and in the weeks since. Through your efforts, we have moved through the critical first few weeks of school while safeguarding the safety and health of our school communities. This is an incredible achievement and a testament to the hard work of all involved in the reopening of our schools.

Your efforts to date have been exemplary. Many of you have served on your school's reopening task forces, finding ways to adjust policies and practices to meet the new public health requirements. Many of you have taken on new leadership roles in your schools, your districts, or your professional associations, as part of this work. All of you have used ingenuity and innovation to find new ways of doing things so that you can continue to safely provide excellent educational experiences to your students. All of you have learned new skills or adjusted whole courses and curriculums to new modes of instructions. All of you have had to adapt your teaching to a changed world, and you have done so with kindness, flexibility, and endless grace. While this was difficult work, exhausting work and sometimes uncertain work, I have heard from many of you in the past few weeks that it was all worthwhile once students began coming back to school.

Over the last several weeks, I have watched as you demonstrated, again and again, that you have the skills and the capacity to rise to the unique challenges that teaching and learning present in this context. I hope that you have had an opportunity to test the systems that you have built, make adjustments as necessary, and gain confidence that, working together, we can educate our students safely and sustainably. In many ways, starting at Step II has been a confidence building exercise. On the basis of pandemic conditions, Vermont has been at Step III for many months, but the team of health and education experts who drafted our reopening guidance were united in opinion that we needed to open schools at Step II, to be confident that we could operate at the more protective level.



Based on what I have heard from educators and administrators around the state, I am confident that we will be able to educate students safely at Step II, should the need arise. I very much hope that we will not need to do so, but if conditions worsen, I am confident that Vermont schools will be able to rise to the challenge, moving with flexibility and minimum of disruption, back to a more protective mode. I am certain that, no matter what comes, we will have the skills, tools and confidence we need to keep our schools safe.

The Governor often remarks that, while we have been lucky as Vermonters to come through COVID-19 as lightly as we have to date, we have done so well only because individual Vermonters have stepped up, made tough choices, and put the safety and health of their families and communities first. I have seen this very same spirit reflected in every aspect of our collective efforts as we reopen schools. While we are currently, I would argue, the state best prepared for school reopening on the basis of the public health conditions alone, I know that is not the only reason why we will be successful. I have every confidence that we have the tools, the capacity and the heart to take on any challenge that may come, and keep our students, our families and ourselves strong and healthy.

I am proud to be a Vermont educator, and grateful to you for your continued efforts. Good work!

Sincerely,



Dan French
Secretary of Education

