

VSA All-Member Meeting July 28, 2020 3:00 pm - 4:30 pm via online platform

Following is a general record of the all-members meeting for reference by VSA members. It is not an official document or formal minutes of the meeting. It is not intended for distribution beyond VSA members.

Comments and information indicated below were accurate as of July 28.

Welcome and Introductory Remarks:

VSA President David Younce likened our struggles right now to the tension inherent in our state motto “Freedom and Unity”. We are living in times where freedom without boundaries and parameters actually limits us. The changing boundaries, information and guidance make things more difficult. We also need to acknowledge that all of our individual district decisions impact our neighbors and the greater Vermont community in sometimes unexpected ways.

Panel Discussion-Sharing Reopening Plans:

Bev Davis, Orleans Central SU

Give us a 1 minute overview of your reopening plan and to what degree is your community aware of that plan?

- K-8 Schools will be open 5 days a week to families for in-person instruction (77% opted for in-person)
- Full remote model for families who choose
- High School Freshman and Sophomores two days a week and Juniors and Seniors 2 Days Remote, remote for when not in person, can opt for fully remote
- School will always be available for those who need special services/accommodations
- Community is appraised of the plan

What aspects of your plan are you most confident about?

Bev shared that they are confident that they will have enough space for physical distancing and that the choices provided by the schools will mean that most people will have an option that will make sense for them.

*What aspects of your plan are you most concerned about? ... and you can't say **staffing!***

Bev shared that she is concerned about staffing, of course. She is also concerned about the SEL needs of her students and staff.

How is your plan affected by the actions of all the other districts around you?

The worry is that the staff live in other SUs, with their 5-day-a-week schedule, concerns about staffing.

Libby Bonesteel, Montpelier-Roxbury School District

Give us a 1 minute overview of your reopening plan and to what degree is your community aware of that plan?

- K-8 students will have a virtual academy option that the curriculum director will serve as principal
- 5-day a week with shortened day schedule
- 16% looking for virtual academy
- Each student will take two classes per quarter (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday), attend wither in am or pm
 - Wednesday - 1.5 hour virtual class and an option for:
 - SAT prep, writing, enrichment classes offered in 'free blocks'

What aspects of your plan are you most confident about?

Libby feels confident that she could fit all district K-8 students in the building full-time with social distancing. She is confident that teachers are largely behind the plan and that they will reach out to her and school leaders when they have concerns.

*What aspects of your plan are you most concerned about? ... and you can't say **staffing!***

Libby was extremely concerned about the decision matrix that came out about closing schools without much help from the VDOH. She worries that we will be out on our own.

How is your plan affected by the actions of all the other districts around you?

Libby shared the same concern. She is situated in a place where her staff comes from multiple areas of the state and some families have multiple school schedules they must contend with to be available for teaching. No statewide schedule is difficult.

Lynn Cota, Franklin Northeast SU

Give us a 1 minute overview of your reopening plan and to what degree is your community aware of that plan?

- CVSA Model - All students will be in a hybrid model 2 days a week in person and 3 days remotely
- Wednesday is professional learning
- 20 percent are choosing fully remote at FNESU
- The high school is moving to a 4x4 model (block schedule)
- Looking at strengthening their MTSS to support students who are struggling and may bring some struggling learners in on Wednesdays
- FNESU will be looking at VTVLC as a remote option for families and they are examining what the staffing capacity will be

What aspects of your plan are you most confident about?

Confident about community engagement. Teamwork with CVSA. Stuck to the health and safety guidance. Feels most confident in areas where there was the clearest guidance.

*What aspects of your plan are you most concerned about? ... and you can't say **staffing!***

Lynn is also worried about staffing. The provision of special education and serving students well. She worries that we are running out of time and we keep getting guidance that requires big shifts.

How is your plan affected by the actions of all the other districts around you?

Lynn shares that concern. She has teachers in multiple counties struggling to balance their work schedule with the school schedule of their own children. Childcare issues with closure modes or more restricted modes.

Barbara Anne Komons-Montroll, Windham Southeast SU

Give us a 1 minute overview of your reopening plan and to what degree is your community aware of that plan?

- 4 days in-person
- Wednesdays is a common remote learning day, teacher planning and training, specialized services, cleaning
- 21c directors plan to provide childcare on Wednesday, paras to staff
- All remote option (70 percent are *interested*)
 - Learning on VTVLC

What aspects of your plan are you most confident about?

Barbara Anne feels confident with the hybrid model and the meetings with the community and school boards have been helpful.

*What aspects of your plan are you most concerned about? ... and you can't say **staffing!***

For Barbara Anne she is also concerned about the decision making matrix for closing schools. We are going to need more help than that. She had that experience of having to close for a COVID case in the spring and it will be very difficult.

How is your plan affected by the actions of all the other districts around you?

Barbara Anne is concerned about the labor guidance and side agreements some districts are putting into place. As those agreements and working conditions get shared, it affects what her employees will be looking for.

Cat Gallagher, Lamoille North SU

Give us a 1 minute overview of your reopening plan and to what degree is your community aware of that plan?

- Two plans went to the board
- Option 1 - Full-time remote model with a full-time virtual learning coordinator (19 percent)
 - Anyone can do it except tech
 - Tech students would have 4 days in person and remote on Wednesday
- The High School will be in an octave model with 2 classes per quarter and 2 days in person with Wednesday remote learning and two other remote learning days
- The elementary schools are looking to do a hybrid model with 2 days in person and Wednesdays remote but they are having difficulty staffing that option
- Cat holds a virtual meeting weekly with anyone who wants to ask questions of her and association members
- Notes difficulty with neighboring SUs/SDs re. staffing concerns

What aspects of your plan are you most confident about?

Cat feels confident that the union is on board fully and the input from stakeholders was comprehensive.

*What aspects of your plan are you most concerned about? ... and you can't say **staffing!***

Cat is concerned about the moving target regarding the contagion of this virus and the conflicting reports about children and the degree to which they can spread the virus. People are starting to not believe anything they read. We also need to tell people that things could change at any time. Superintendents should not be standing alone in making these decisions.

How is your plan affected by the actions of all the other districts around you?

Cat shared that teachers are asking if they can bring their non-resident children to our schools. We are not being advised to do that by school attorneys. We have to remember that what a big school such as Burlington does will need to look different than what smaller rural schools can do. Helpful if statewide decisions were made.

Randi Lowe, Bennington-Rutland SU

Give us a 1 minute overview of your reopening plan and to what degree is your community aware of that plan?

- Had a perceived community outbreak in July, right after beginning her role as superintendent. This event has deeply impacted the level of concern in her community about reopening school. She is choosing to start slowly to help families feel comfortable.
- The first few weeks will have about 10-20% of students learning in person.
 - That will serve students who require in-person instruction to access their education. The rest will be remote. This will allow teachers and families to get used to routines.
 - Then a hybrid K-5 model will be in place. Elementary and Middle school students will have a hybrid model with 2 groups of students each learning in person 2 days a week and remotely the rest of the week. This will last for a few more weeks. They hope to increase in-person learning from there as the virus allows.
- Will offer a fully remote plan as well

What aspects of your plan are you most confident about?

She feels confident that her teachers feel supported by the plan.

*What aspects of your plan are you most concerned about? ... and you can't say **staffing!***

Randi is also concerned about the unknowns of how this virus is spread. We can be screening and keeping our perimeter tight and then it turns out that we were letting asymptomatic children in our schools all along and we have an outbreak in our school.

How is your plan affected by the actions of all the other districts around you?

Randi feels that their region has as many different models as there are school systems.. The difference in plans is an indicator that everyone is making the best decisions they can with very little guidance. Such widespread variability creates instability in the system and we need more support and direction as a state to address that. She is also concerned about childcare for families and staff. Also, the messages about safety are mostly about children. We are not hearing a lot about the impact of this virus on teachers and their safety. That is a concern.

David Younce, Mill River Unified Union School District

Give us a 1 minute overview of your reopening plan and to what degree is your community aware of that plan?

- The original plan was that all elementary students will learn in a typical 5-day-a-week in-person model. The Middle-HS will be hybrid. There have been so many concerns since sharing this model that he will soon be announcing a fully remote plan until November 1. There will be an option for IEP students who need in-person instruction.

Open Discussion:

Guiding Questions:

- What more do you need in terms of reopening schools?
- What are you most concerned about?

Zach McLaughlin, Springfield: Are any updates on the possibility of changing from six feet? Has an impact on the region.

Jeff Francis, VSA: Jeff shared an email with us covering the Governor's decision to open school on September 8th. There was a heavy emphasis on the importance of in-person instruction for children K-5 and they are encouraging that but he fell short of mandating it.

Jeanne Collins, RNESU: Shared an update on the Healthy Start taskforce. The updates will take place once a month to see if any modifications are needed for current public health guidelines. The update reflects the current nationwide focus that students younger than 10 are not transmitting the virus to the same degree as older students. The guidance has been drafted and will include physical distancing parameters for children younger than 10 being between 3 to 6 feet. Guidance is still being reviewed.

Beth Cobb, EWSD: In regards to change in start date with contracts for teachers, we need to advocate for a reduction in the number of school days.

Dave Younce, VSA President: VSA will be advocating for 170 student days.

David Wells, Barre: Asked if the rumor about the elimination of temperature checks at the point of first contact is true.

Jeanne Collins, RNESU: Replied that question screenings can be done outside the school. The temperature will still need to be done at the school.

Sean McMannon, Winooski: Observed that Burlington and Winooski have the preponderance of students of color in the state, but that we do have students of color across our state. There is research that students of color are at higher risk with this virus and we need to address that somehow. His experience with the VDH with their outbreak was that they were very supportive and helpful. He is worried that we have a serious staffing shortage that needs to be addressed.

Tracy Wrend, Lamoille South: Asked if there will be advocacy for a reduction of the student 175 days that reflects the local calendars and their needs.

Mark Tucker, CCSU: Is worried that the decision about the calendar is not well-timed and wonders who will have the authority to waive the student days.

David Younce, Mill River: That will be a legislative decision. David Younce said he is also advocating for an ADM hold harmless if impacted by homeschool applications. He will be looking to make calendar adjustments locally and acknowledges that we could be doing that throughout the year. Also, collaborating regionally on the calendar.

Susette Bollard, CVSU: Had a question about how people are staffing the remote academy options. Are people staffing that remotely or in the building? What are your expectations?

David Younce, Mill River: Offering options to do both.

Randi Lowe, BRSU: Shared that she is trying to boost the use of certain LMS's and they are getting PD. They will be teaching remotely from the classroom.

Jen Botzjoorns, Kingdom East: Commented that we need to be concerned about making employment decisions based upon a health condition. It is discriminatory. She wonders if there are any discussions about how school choice and how models could help us with staffing and families with options. Regional high school choice plans and non resident (children of parents) students.

John Castle, North Country: Wanted to know when the legislature will reconvene.

Jeff Francis, VSA: Shared that will be August 25th. The disposition to adjusting the mandatory student days is expected to be looked at favorably. We need to put together a list of important asks for the successful navigation of the reopening.

Brigid Nease, Harwood: Apologized to anyone for whom her letter caused any difficulty. She shared that a report on NBC pointed to issues of transmission that are contrary to the medical information we are getting. You all are aware that my position is that we will not be able to staff these plans and/or sustain them. The problem isn't medical, it is operational. NBC news just reported, while underrepresented, that 7572 children between 5 years and 18 tested positive. I am wondering as the weeks go on and more reports like this occur what impact it will have on our workforce? We need state level agreements with VTNEA.

Jeff Francis, VSA: There is a disposition in the unions that is different across the state. This makes navigating this an additional challenge. Leadership of VSA needs to bring labor questions to AOE and NEA. Is the guidance being provided the safest guidance for teachers as well as children? Contending with statutory considerations. Fluidity of the endeavor. Need to have the safest environments, reconcile with workforce considerations, impress upon decision-makers that they can't change the guidance and expect the school districts to turn on a dime. Lead time for any changes needs to be measured in weeks not days.

Susetta Bollard, CVSU: Shared that families can not turn on a dime either.

Lynn Cota, Franklin Northeast: Stated that childcare will be an issue throughout the year. Can we work collaboratively with other organizations or lessen requirements as they pertain to school-aged children?

Jeff Francis, VSA: Responded that he met with Steve Berbeco, the new director for the Department for Children and Families and the Child Development Division is looking to have conversations about the demand pressures in the workforce generally and those that will be due to possible outbreaks. Then Jeff discussed with David Young of South Burlington that there is a subcommittee working in CVSA that is trying to work proactively with interagency partners to solve the childcare dilemma. Many childcare players are getting together in a meeting now to be proactive and try to find solutions to some of these issues. Jeff acknowledged that there are significant differences in resources across regions of the state.

Closing Remarks:

David reminded us that these positions can be isolating. Please reach out to him or colleagues because we are not alone.