

Organizing Toolkit



BEYOND COVID RECOVERY

**american
rescue plan**

**mental
health &
wellbeing**

**student
engagement**

**academic
success**

**just &
equitable
school
systems**

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**\$285
million**
over 3 years

background

Vermont school districts are receiving a combined **\$285 Million** as part of the **American Rescue Plan** to be spent over three years. The question remains as to whether schools will use this money to **push for transformation** or to return to the status quo.

We as students, caregivers/parents, educators, and community members have an opening to push to invest this money in transformation towards more just and equitable school systems.

This **Beyond COVID Recovery Organizing Toolkit** includes funding recommendations that push for **education justice** and offers strategies to **organize in your local community** to impact your school district's spending plan. We've also included a **timeline** as well as some additional **resources** links. This toolkit was developed through collective wisdom from our first event in this series with work, love, and input from the Coalition Education Organizing Committee and Coalition Core Members.

equity lens

TO APPLY TO ALL FUNDING DECISIONS

When implementing the following recommendations, careful consideration must be given to **centering the needs of historically marginalized students** and ideally centering them and their families in all funding decisions.

examples

If we create outdoor classrooms that are not accessible to students using wheelchairs then we are excluding students with disabilities.

If we hire trauma-informed counselors that are not fluent in the issues facing trans students both at home and in the classroom, then we are excluding LGBTQIA+ students.

If we build restorative justice programs that involve School Resource Officers (SROs) then we are excluding BIPOC students who often do not feel safe around police.

Consider centering those most impacted in the decision-making process. **Families of color, immigrant families, poor families, students with disabilities and their families, LGBTQIA+ youth need to have input.** By centering the lived experience and needs of youth and families most impacted by COVID and inequity in the classroom, we can develop solutions that lift all students and families in Vermont schools.

focus areas

RECOVERY PLAN FOCUS AREAS (DETERMINED BY THE STATE OF VT)

- 1 Social Emotional Functioning, Mental Health & Well-Being
- 2 Student Engagement
- 3 Academic Achievement & Success

recommendations

COLLECTIVE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE EDUCATION JUSTICE COALITION OF VERMONT

1 Social Emotional Functioning, Mental Health & Well-Being

Support the hiring of trauma-informed counselors (preferably those from historically minoritized backgrounds) who are able to work full time in schools.

Replace school resource officers with the newly hired trauma-informed counselors and peer support programs.

Create pathways and pipelines for historically marginalized individuals to become employed in schools and pay for their credentialing process.

Professional learning for all members of the school community (educators, administrators, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, maintenance team, etc.) around trauma-informed practices taught by practitioners who center equity in their work.

Bolster resources and training related to transformative justice that allows for a restorative approach among all those within the school system.

Support educator well-being through mental health days, collective somatic healing, and sufficient planning.

SUCH AS:

Dr. Dena Simmons, Rhiannon Kim, Michael Hill Jr., Alex Shevrin Venet, Dr. Marissa Coleman

recommendations (CONT.)

2

Student Engagement

Engage with students to create culturally relevant and ethnic studies curriculum that is flexible and allows for student choice.

Invest in programs where students can teach, co-teach, and design classes.

Professional learning for all members of the school community (educators, administrators, drivers, cafeteria workers, maintenance team, etc.) around ABAR (anti-bias anti-racist) instruction.

Ensure all students have access to necessary technology (including WiFi access and broadband payments for families who require assistance).

FM Systems for all classrooms to increase hearing access.

Flexible seating and sensory materials as needed by districts.

Create accessible outdoor classrooms.

Fund at-home libraries by providing books for students to take with them.

3

Academic Achievement & Success

Building off of the success many students named, create a flexible schedule for students 6–12, with the ability to engage independently on Wednesdays and/or with support provided digitally.

Creation of a culturally relevant local assessment system that ensures students have access to high quality instruction and reduces reliance on federal standardized testing.

impact

HOW TO HAVE IMPACT IN YOUR DISTRICT

Background

On April 15th your local school district or supervisory union was required to post their preliminary report on needs assessment and planned interventions for COVID Recovery spending. Before making the plan publicly available, they “shall seek public comment on the plan and take such comments into account in the development of the plan” ([according to this federal guidance](#)). If your district has not yet sought public comment you can push them to do so.

Gather Your Team

This work will be most powerful when we connect, build relationships, and center the voices of students and those most impacted by school injustice. When gathering your team make sure to reach out to existing student, teacher, and community groups such as GSAs or school or community racial justice clubs and folks that are part of the disability community. Find a time to connect, deepen relationships, and create an action plan.

Contact Your Superintendent

Send an email to your superintendent (Cc your school board, whose email addresses should be available on your district website) to ask the following three things:

- Who makes up your district’s COVID-19 Recovery Team (it might be called something slightly different in your district) and could you have the emails of these individuals?
- What is the process for public comment and is there a commitment in the initial plan for ongoing community involvement and review?
- Could your group review the preliminary COVID Recovery spending plan?

A sample letter you can use to send to your superintendent to address these three questions is included at the end of this toolkit.

Ways to Raise Your Voice

Once you have the school's initial plan, gather with your team to decide how you want to focus your advocacy and messaging. You can also advocate directly for the Collective Recommendations shared above. Below are some strategies you can use to raise your voice:

1

Have a **letter writing or call-in campaign** targeted at the superintendent and the COVID Recovery Team.

2

Organize a **speak-out or public meeting** where folks can share their stories and what they need. This could be either at an existing district meeting or an event your group helps organize. Make sure to invite key people (superintendent, school board and COVID Recovery Team) to this meeting.

3

Bring youth into the conversation, by using creative ways to **engage youth** in the things they know they need to make their schools better as they recover from the impacts of COVID on their schools. Using social media, polling, texting, and in person meet ups to get youth to weigh in on what they want, and helping to make it happen.

4

Schedule a **series of individual meetings** with decision makers. Appeal to friends, students, family members, teachers in your community to come along to these meetings. Invite decision makers into the vision of what this money can do for your school and community.

5

Visibility and education about these monies and what your team wants to happen is a key way to develop allies among your community. Get on the radio, write a collective letter to the editor, speak in public settings about what you want to have happen. Invite others into this plan.

6

Share about this campaign on your **social media** platforms (consider using #vted on Twitter).

district timeline - 2021

MARCH
15

- Establish district-level **Recovery Team** to coordinate the recovery response
- Identify **Recovery Coordinator** to serve as the primary contact to the Agency of Education

MARCH
/APRIL

- **Gather and review data** and information to inform needs assessment
- Assignment of **State Support Teams**

APRIL
15

- **Preliminary report** on needs assessment and planned interventions.

APRIL
/MAY

- Continued work on **planned interventions**
- **Meeting with State Support Teams**

JUNE
01

- **Final Recovery Plan submitted** to Agency of Education

JUNE/
AUGUST

- **Implement summer programming** and finalize work to implement full Recovery Plan

SEPTEMBER

- **Implementation of full Recovery Plan**

additional resources

- [COVID Recovery Funds Come to Vermont: An Overview Document](#) (Deborah Lisi-Baker)
- [COVID-19 Education Recovery Toolkit](#) (Vermont Agency of Education)
- [Schools Need Redesign Not Recovery](#) (Michael S. Martin)
- [A P-12 Education Agenda in Response to COVID-19](#) (Ed Trust)
- [What do schools look like in Wakanda?](#) (Collective Vision)
- [Racial Impact Assessment](#) (Race Forward)

sample letter

Dear Superintendent _____ ,

I am writing on behalf of the students and families in our school district who are most impacted by the reality of COVID-19. A group of us has come together to hold out hope that the funding coming to this district as part of COVID-19 recovery will be used to make things better for all students in the district. We know this process of deciding on how these funds will be used needs community input, and we want to be part of that conversation and decision-making. I have some questions that will help the group I am a part of know what is happening, and know to whom we should direct our input and actions.

- Who makes up your district's COVID-19 Recovery Team?
Could you please share the emails of these individuals?
- Could my group review the preliminary COVID Recovery spending plan?
- What is the process for public comment on this plan? How will you assure that community involvement and input is reflected in the plan?

Thanks for answering my questions. I want to thank you for all the work you and your team have done to keep schools going in these challenging times. This money is so needed to bring schools back from this period of crisis. I look forward to hearing from you and sharing what I learn with my group, so we can be sure to be counted as community partners in this process.

Contact the Education Justice Coalition of Vermont for support:
vtethnicstudies@gmail.com.
We are here for you!