

Vermont Department of Education
Open Letter to Vermont Parents

As we begin another school year I am taking this opportunity to write to parents across Vermont. I want to share some suggestions about supporting your children's learning experiences and to solicit your support in improving our educational system for all students.

Much has changed in our educational system since my generation attended school; the same is true for today's parents, most of whom belong to the generation that followed mine. However, one thing has not changed – the importance of parental interest, support and involvement in the education and learning experiences of children. You are the most important teachers for children. Although our teachers and school administrators play vital roles in the education of your children, it is you who will have the greatest impact on their attitudes about school, learning and the importance of education.

As a parent and grandparent I know that there are many challenges confronting all parents. The challenge of finding the time to both provide for a family and help educate your children is a difficult one indeed. However, the time you spend with your children is the most valuable and rewarding gift that you can give. Children learn from any number of activities they engage in with their families. For example, younger students learn from activities such as reading, walking in the woods and drawing pictures and high school students learn by working, playing and sharing family responsibilities with their parents.

There are many resources to assist parents to meet the challenge of helping their children, outside of school, to learn what they need to be successful. We are fortunate in Vermont to have a history of community involvement and support that provides resources so that children can learn in a safe and healthy environment. Every year, thousands of Vermonters commit their time and energy to supporting the education and development of children who are not their own. They volunteer their time to mentor students, provide real world work experience, coach, serve on boards and committees and transport children to after-school events. I encourage parents and other interested Vermonters to contact your local school to ask how you might get more directly involved in the learning process. I am also asking school administrators to continue their commitment to reach out to parents and families as key partners in the education of all children.

I am also asking for your support in another area. As Commissioner of Education I have many responsibilities regarding the development and implementation of state policies, laws, educational programs and State Board of Education priorities. I hear from a number of individuals and organizations about the work of the Department of Education. I now want to provide parents an opportunity to directly share with me their ideas about how we can continue to improve the quality of education in Vermont for all children. To that end, I am scheduling five regional *Parent Meetings* across the state during the coming school year. Further details on these meetings will be posted on our Web site (<http://www.state.vt.us/educ/>) by September 15. There you will also find a variety of information and resources regarding education in Vermont. Click on *What's New* on the top right-hand bar for locations, dates and additional information on the upcoming meetings.

I want to thank parents and everyone else who is involved in the learning experiences of the children of Vermont and to assure that the State Board of Education, the staff of the Department of Education and I will continue to do all that we can to support your good work.

Richard H. Cate
Commissioner of Education