



Wednesday, September 29, 2021

Dear Governor Scott, Dr. French, and Dr. Levine,

We appreciate your quick response to our request last week regarding taking Surveillance testing off the districts' plates to support "Test and Stay." We were encouraged by the communication sent out to Superintendents on Friday, but disappointed by the open announcement at the press conference yesterday, which once again caught School Nurses off-guard. We need you to think about the mental health and stress levels of School Nurses and school district leaders, before making such public announcements. Please give the common courtesy to first explain the thought process to the district leaders and School Nurses who will be most impacted by your decisions. The message sent yesterday was that there are three different types of testing now in some stage of implementation. What School Nurses heard translates as more hours added to already overloaded days.

Please understand the fragile state in which we find School Nurses. School Nurses who heard your announcement yesterday are in a panic. Across the state, School Nurses are overwhelmed with contact tracing, taking verbal abuse from parents and community members when informing them about covid protocols. School Nurses are concerned that their usual school nursing responsibilities are falling to the wayside, and feel conflicted when this demanding work competes with and infringes on our personal lives. As a result, you must clearly state to School Nurses and then ensure that these testing programs WILL NOT create more work. You must make it clear how balance will be established.

While we recognize you are doing your best to alleviate these extreme pressures, **we strongly urge you to include a School Nurse representative on your decision-making team, or create a weekly meeting to consult with the VSSNA executive board.** We are here and ready to help with creative and critical solutions to the new problems COVID strains have created. We care so much about our school communities, children, staff, and families, so please utilize all we have to offer to ease the anxiety felt across the state around these testing programs.

We understand the intent behind changes to contact tracing was to alleviate School Nurse workload, but sometimes solutions provided are not always realistic. For example, the new guideline that when 80% of the student population is vaccinated, then contact tracing does not have to be done was meant to help decrease School Nurse workload. The system by which we receive vaccination status voluntarily from parents, is one in which realistically most schools will never reach 80% vaccinated status. Lessening contact tracing also feels very misguided when we are seeing more COVID cases than ever. This solution does not sit well with School Nurses who feel families and staff deserve the transparency of knowing when they or their student is a close contact, so they can be informed and make choices that are right for them and their loved ones.

**"Test and Stay"** needs to be clearly defined by a statewide team of stakeholders before rolling this program out to school districts or parents. It is of utmost importance that **"Test and Stay"** is rolled out in a collaborative, uniform way that proactively considers the front-line perspective and how it will affect our nurses, the incredibly valuable boots on the ground. We respectfully urge you to include a School Nurse representative on your planning committee to ensure a thoughtful, thorough plan that creates solutions before more problems or stressors evolve.

School Nurses from Massachusetts experienced a rollout where despite the promise from state leaders of additional staff support with testing, some School Nurses were faced with the reality of writing their own protocols to roll out the testing program themselves in the absence of that state support. We respectfully ask that Vermont to do things differently. **Please place a School Nurse at the decision-making table.** If you do not, we fear the worst case scenario whereby School Nurses feel forced to leave because they are drowning in the unrealistic workload. We can all agree that in the midst of a pandemic no school or district can afford to lose

valuable School Nurses. We demand less workload on School Nurses. We will only support “**Test and Stay**” if the staffing is state-provided.

At the very least, we ask that before any more announcements about this program are made, that the decision making team fully explain the plan for “Test and Stay” roll out to School Nurses at a School Nurse Town Hall as soon as possible.

We appreciate your consideration and anticipated acceptance of our request. We look forward to hearing from you and collaborating with you so we might successfully implement “Test and Stay” into Vermont School while also creating work-life balance and less stressful workload for School Nurses.

Sincerely,

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