



VERNON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 1, 2020

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VERNON HOSTS GOV. LAMONT, LT. GOV. BYSIEWICZ, EDUCATION COMMISSIONER CARDONA AT SKINNER ROAD SCHOOL

School District showcases reopening plans to keep students, staff safe so focus can be on learning

Mayor Daniel A. Champagne and Superintendent of Schools Dr. Joseph P. Macary welcomed Governor Ned Lamont, Lieutenant Governor Susan Bysiewicz, state Education Commissioner Miguel A. Cardona and other state leaders to Skinner Road School Tuesday morning to showcase Vernon's work to reopen schools and to keep children and staff safe.

The visitors, including state Reps. Timothy Ackert, R-Coventry, and Michael Winkler, D-Vernon, spoke with administrators and viewed teachers in action educating children while at the same time following guidelines to keep everyone safe.



Vernon Superintendent of Schools Dr. Joseph P. Macary, left, explains how Vernon has safely reopened schools to Governor Ned Lamont, right, and (left to right) state Rep. Timothy Acker, R-Coventry and Vernon Mayor Daniel A. Champagne. Governor Lamont visited Vernon's Skinner Road School on Tuesday, September 1, 2020.



Skinner Road School Principal Bryan Kerachsky, left, speaks with Governor Ned Lamont, right, and Lieutenant Governor Susan Bysiewicz. Lamont and Bysiewicz visited Vernon's Skinner Road School on Tuesday, September 1, 2020.

“The most important thing we need to do is build confidence in the community to bring them back,” Superintendent Macary said. “Students learn better when they’re in school and we want everybody to come back to school.”

Vernon has instituted a hybrid program. One cohort of students attends school Monday and Tuesday while the second attends Thursday and Friday. All students attend school virtually on Wednesday while schools are carefully cleaned. When not in school, students work virtually on assignments.

The hybrid program will be reevaluated every two weeks. School officials are keeping a close eye on health data and are prepared to respond according.



Skinner Road School kindergarten teacher Kelly Zimmermann introduced Governor Ned Lamont, right, and Lieutenant Governor Susan Bysiewicz to her class, which she is teaching virtually. Lamont and Bysiewicz visited Vernon’s Skinner Road School on Tuesday, September 1, 2020.

“The goal right now is to keep kids safe and I think we’re doing a good job of that,” Mayor Champagne said, adding it was encouraging to see students wearing masks. When one child removed his mask, staff quickly redirected the child to put his mask back on, the mayor noted.

“It’s good to have kids in school to learn, but it’s also good to have the opportunity for parents to have choice as well,” Mayor Champagne said.

For the times students are not in school, school staff have been in contact with families to assess their technology needs and ensure children are able to learn, Skinner Road School Principal Bryan Kerachsky said.

Inside the school, Governor Lamont and Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz visited prekindergarten and fifth grade classrooms and a virtual kindergarten classroom, joining teacher Kelly Zimmermann engage her students via laptop computer.

“Friends can you all say ‘good morning?’” Zimmermann asked her students.

The governor said he was energized to see students and teachers who were enthusiastic and engaged.

“We really wanted to come to Vernon, to Skinner Road School to show parents and teachers a community that’s doing it in a very thoughtful way,” Governor Lamont said. “I loved walking through the classrooms. The kids were excited to be back. The teachers were really excited to be back. But you’re doing it carefully.”



Governor Ned Lamont watches as kindergarten teacher Sue Zylberman, seated, and paraprofessional Usha Sridhar lead a pre-kindergarten class at Vernon’s Skinner Road School on Tuesday, September 1, 2020. Because one of their students is hearing impaired, Zylberman and Sridhar wear masks with a vision panel so the student can read their lips.



Vernon Superintendent of Schools Dr. Joseph P. Macary speaks with Connecticut Education Commissioner Miguel A. Cardona outside Skinner Road School on Tuesday, September 1, 2020.



Vernon Superintendent of Schools Dr. Joseph P. Macary points out to Governor Ned Lamont a modification town maintenance staff made to water fountains so that students can use them to fill water bottles. The innovation cost only \$7 for each fountain. Governor Lamont visited Vernon’s Skinner Road School on Tuesday, September 1, 2020.

The Governor also noted that one teacher altered her mask so that there was clear plastic over her mouth so that a hearing-impaired student in her class could read her lips.

“The Superintendent just reminded me, there’s nothing more important than a kid a classroom being with his or her friends and teachers,” the Governor said.

Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz said it was impressive to see pre-kindergarteners and older students all wearing masks and the other efforts school leaders have taken to ensure schools are clean and safe.

“The whole idea is to get parents comfortable,” she said. “Right now, 22 percent of the families have chosen to keep their kids home and the goal with this continued hard work, innovation and cleaning and keeping kids safe is that everyone will be back to school shortly,” she said.

Superintendent Macary highlighted for the governor an innovation by town maintenance staff to convert water fountains into spigots for students to fill water bottles. All it took to retrofit the water fountains was \$7 in parts, the superintendent said.

“Vernon did it right,” Commissioner Cardona said. “The district and the town planned well together. They communicated well together. They were realistic and they shared with the community what to expect. It really was a community effort and we saw that today.”

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