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**State of Vermont**  
**Vermont Department of Education**  
120 State Street  
Montpelier, VT 05620-2501

## MEMORANDUM

**To: Principals, Superintendents**

**From: Armando Vilaseca, Commissioner**  
**David Osborne, Engagement Manager, NCEE**

**Re: National Center on Education and the Economy State Board Exam Update**

**Date: October 27, 2010**

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On behalf of the Vermont Department of Education and the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE), we would like to thank you for your interest earlier this year in exploring participation in the Board Examination System (BES) pilot project. You will recall that board examination systems are comprehensive programs of study used by the world's highest performing countries in their high schools. They are powerful instructional systems made up of course syllabi, instructional materials, exams, and teacher training.

As you know, Vermont joined a consortium of states organized to pilot and evaluate board examination systems in the U.S., as part of the Race to the Top High School Assessment grant process and Invest in Innovation (i3) fund. Although the U.S. Department of Education did not award the i3 grant and the RTTT HS assessment funding to the State Consortium on Board Examination Systems, the planned program nonetheless will go forward. NCEE is scaling back the work, but keeping all of the initiative's essential elements.

NCEE is recruiting 40 leading schools across the country to participate in this cutting-edge initiative. Schools are committing to implement at least a lower division board examination diploma program, because the rigorous evaluation is focused on degree to which the lower division program will produce strong achievement gains for the participating students; enable participating students to graduate with a performance based diploma after passing the lower division courses; and enroll, if they choose, in an open enrollment college without having to take remedial coursework. High schools selected to participate also can implement an upper division board examination program, either immediately for 11<sup>th</sup> graders who have not taken a lower division board examination program or later, as the 9<sup>th</sup> grade cohort moves into 11<sup>th</sup> grade.

NCEE has committed to fund the core research and evaluation agenda, as well as to provide its staff, using its own funds, to help with school implementation. However, NCEE has no funding to support the school-level implementation costs and has asked the participating schools and districts to consider funding the pilot schools to purchase the necessary materials, examinations and professional development services from the providers during the full four years of the pilot (an average of \$32,000 per cohort per school for each year of implementation, depending upon the provider selected).

Implementation costs include three years of teacher training, four years of instructional materials that may be needed to supplement current materials, and five end-of-course examinations at the end of one-year or two-year courses; but it does not include compensating teachers and leaders for the time they spend in training or the costs of providing substitute teachers while teachers are being trained.

Although we recognize that funding constraints are more challenging than ever, we believe this program has great potential for raising student achievement in Vermont and urge you to carefully consider participation in this very important pilot program. We will work creatively with you to identify all possible funding sources. One possibility is to redirect federal funds to which you already have access toward this program. Among the candidates you might consider are School Improvement Grants, Title II, Title I, Title I Part G., Advanced Placement Programs, or Title V-A Innovative Programs, funds. In addition, NCEE may be able to help you identify and secure local and state funds from corporate or private philanthropic sources.

If you are interested in participating in this program, or at least in exploring this possibility further, please notify me immediately at the Department of Education, or notify David Osborne at NCEE at [dosborne@ncee.org](mailto:dosborne@ncee.org), or (401) 633-2766.

Thank you so much for your interest in improving outcomes for Vermont's students.