

## INTRODUCTION TO ENTRY POINTS

### From Standards to Grade Expectations

*Vermont's Framework of Standards and Learning Opportunities* (2000) identifies Standards that articulate the essential knowledge and skills that should be taught and learned in schools. In *Grade Expectations for Vermont's Framework of Standards and Learning Opportunities* (2004), specific content areas (e.g. math, reading) are subdivided into domains, or sets of related skills and concepts (e.g. numbers and operations, geometry). These skills, concepts and knowledge are expressed in objectives called Grade Expectations (GEs), which serve the same purposes as Vermont's Standards but are identified by grade-level for most content areas.

The Grade-Expectations support comprehensive local instruction, curriculum, and assessment practices essential to improving student performance for all Vermont students and narrowing achievement gaps. Each GE includes a statement called the "stem" that is meant to communicate the main curriculum and instructional focus of the GE across the grades. GEs also include "evidence" statements, which indicate how the objective can be demonstrated to determine whether or not the student has met the GE.

Local and statewide assessments are based on the information contained in the GEs. Every content area is taught and tested locally, and some are also tested in statewide assessments such as the NECAP and VTAAP (e.g. reading, math, science). A smaller set of GEs are assessed on these tests as compared to those tested locally, but they still cover all the domains of these content areas. The VTAAP assesses one GE per grade for each of four Reading and Math strands, for a total of eight assessment targets (as compared to 25+ GEs assessed via the NECAP). This distribution ensures that well-rounded, comprehensive reading and math programs will be represented in the VTAAP Achievement scores. It also reinforces the goal for students taking the VTAAP to be instructed and assessed on a similar range of skills as their peers.

### Grade Expectation Entry Points

As written, Grade Expectations (GEs) represent grade-level performance. To make these skills accessible to students with a wider range of skills and abilities, "Grade Expectation entry points" have been created. The GE entry points are extensions of the academic content captured by the GE, but at a different range, balance, and depth of knowledge. These entry points provide a range of alternatives so all students can access the learning standard at a challenging level. Each GE has been "worked down" to three additional options for appropriate and aligned instruction and assessment.

### Levels of Symbolic Communication

The three different entry points for each GE have been associated with specific **levels of symbolic communication**. The descriptions below will provide the Student Evaluation Team (SET) with information about the communication skills that are typically associated with each level. The descriptions of the Levels of Symbolic Development below are meant to support the

instruction of students taking the VTAAP. The SET can use the following descriptions to better understand the communication skills associated with each of the entry point levels.

**A. Abstract Symbolic Communication:**

- Student uses some sort of symbolic communication system: speech, signs, text, line drawings, photos etc.
- communicates in multi-word utterances
- has some reading abilities: simple CVC words, individual sight words, short phrases, or simple connected text
- may use a high-tech dynamic display system
- large vocabulary set
- may use text-to-speech

**B. Early Symbolic Communication:**

- communicates using symbols of any kind: speech, signs, line drawings, photos etc.
- communication purposes may be primarily wants/needs, or may serve a range of functions (e.g. comment, question, socialize)
- length of utterance ranges from single word to multi-word messages
- may know the names of letters; recognizes text vs. illustrations
- can use high-tech (computerized) or mid-tech (recorded) speech system
- vocabulary set size varies based on language needs, but should include sufficient words/phrases for participation in curriculum activities and learning higher levels of language

**C. Pre-symbolic Communication:**

- communicates with vocalizations, actions, gestures, eye point, facial expressions, change in muscle tone, etc.
- does not yet consistently use a symbolic or representation communication system (e.g. words, pictures, signs, etc.).
- may be working to develop a consistent motor signal for communicating (e.g. controlled start/stop to move hand, raise eyes, vocalize etc.)
- beginning awareness of text as meaningful
- can use pre-programmed single-target/message devices paired with specific activities
- multi-message devices can be used as tools for curriculum participation, social interactions, learning language and access skills

It is important to be clear that the purpose of these symbolic levels is to match the student's form of communication with the demonstration expectations of the entry points as closely as possible. Students are not expected to exhibit all of the features listed for a particular entry point. This is simply a guide to some of the common characteristics of students at different levels of symbol use. *These levels are NOT meant as statements of cognitive functioning or potential for learning.* In some cases, the student's communication is restricted not by their abilities, but by their access

to appropriate and effective assistive technology (AT) supports to compensate for their physical challenges. Other factors that impact the accurate identification of a student's cognitive abilities include: physical disabilities that limit production of responses; sensory or physical access issues that impact the child's ability to receive information; or limited access to learning opportunities that reflect an external barrier to experiences and resources. Given the difficulty in "knowing what they know", especially for students without reliable signal systems in level C, it becomes even more important to provide access to information and opportunities for academic learning. Teams working with students identified as "B" or "C" level communicators should be providing opportunities for learning at and above the perceived level of their current abilities. They should also be actively involved in the pursuit of appropriate AT supports.

## **Conditions**

Conditions for the entry points define the supports, materials, or contexts that are necessary to demonstrate the target skill as expected. They also may expand with definitions associated with the entry point behaviors. The Conditions are to be considered essential to the demonstration of the entry point, identifying what a student at that particular level of symbolic development would require to be successful. Be sure to include the content of the Conditions statements in the data collection tasks and products.

## **Behavior Performance Options**

The entry points were written for students with a wide range of abilities and communication skills. The verbs selected are meant to preserve the integrity of the GE, while also allowing students with different methods of communicating to demonstrate the target skills. Terms such as "identify", "select", "locate", "indicate" etc. are used to represent some signal from the student that communicates their intended response. Students can generally use any response that matches the GE expectation, the task, and their abilities.

When an entry point indicates a more specific motor response, such as "place", "show", "take" etc., these too can be interpreted relative to the student's physical abilities. If the particular response mode is not possible for the student, the SET should determine a suitable replacement that is within the student's capabilities. It is important that the assessment measure the student's content area skills, without the interference of communication challenges.

By definition, the different symbolic levels indicate that students use varying forms of symbols to communicate. At the upper end, students may use the most abstract form of symbol, which is speech. They may also use text, sign or line drawings at this level. Slightly more "iconic", or easily related to the item it represents, are photos and parts of objects. Actual objects in context may be the most reliable form of symbol for students at the pre-symbolic level and early concrete symbolic. For the purposes of the VTAAP, the use of "word" is meant to represent the form of communication which is most appropriate for the student. Unless otherwise indicated (by the phrase "words in text form"), "words" can be represented by line drawings, photos, signs, parts of objects or objects. It is recommended that words in these forms be paired with the text version to provide opportunities to learn that form as well.

For students who are pre-symbolic (level C), the entry points are written to support the development of a more consistent signal (communication) system and to enhance receptive vocabulary. There is an emphasis on matching, “indicating” (signaling, or other intentional response), or otherwise responding to the context in a way that indicates *learning*. If it can be demonstrated that the student is responding to a situation differently over time due to consistent routines, structure and input, then that is documentation of learning. Initially it may be necessary to look for these changes on a very small scale, i.e., Does the student show a reduction or increase of activity associated with the initiation of the routine? Do they look towards the target materials? Do they show anticipatory reactions when they know they are close to a significant event?

## **Criteria**

Since there is no separate generalization score, the strength of learning must be demonstrated within the assessment target. *As a general rule, the emphasis of all the entry points is the strength of learning of the concepts, skills and knowledge.* Teams can expect endline scoring to reflect this focus on demonstration of learning that is enduring and meaningful, not just an isolated performance task. *The use of supports and applications of skills across contexts, materials and content are presumed criteria for all GE entry points, at all levels.*

## **Entry Points and Instruction**

As a group, the grade-level entry points represent the entire range of reading, math and science academic concepts. Any reading or math-related task will cover one or more domains, and a single activity often can incorporate multiple entry points, since the set is complementary. This makes the instructional planning process easier, as activities naturally lend themselves to integrating more than one program element (e.g. entry point). The SET is encouraged to combine target skills across content areas, for example, addressing use of informational texts with the math book, using math concepts for data collection, and investigating science concepts through literature.

See the document *Supports During Testing* on the VTAAP website for a description of supports that might be used during instruction.

## **Assistive Technology (AT)**

The phrase “use of AT support” is used in many of the scoring descriptions. This term is meant to represent any visual, structural, contextual, or assistive technology support that can be used across performance tasks. The supports should foster generalization of skills across tasks. The inferences about a student’s learning can be strongly enhanced with the demonstration of the student’s use of structures that can support the replication of the performance across different content and contexts. Some examples of these types of supports include: story map, timeline, diagrams, sequencing boxes, information key, ruler with “start” and “end” cues to help align with item; chart showing tools (text or picture) and units of measurement; picture showing how/where to place thermometer etc.

As a general rule, students taking the VTAAP are expected to require the use of “teacher-free” supports to achieve their assessment targets. The use of appropriate assistive technology supports and tools allows students to address more complex skills. It is important to select the supports carefully, to ensure that it enhances learning as opposed to replacing it. The SET will need to provide information about the format and use of the supports as part of the endline report of achievement.

### **Grade-Level General Education Curriculum (GLGEC)**

Although GLGEC is an overall requirement of VTAAP assessment tasks, in some cases it also is a critical differentiating factor between entry points at different grade levels. The use of the GLGEC may be the only way to show changes of expectations across grades for some entry points. Missing or unclearly delineated GLGEC connections on these entry points may result in a reduced score for alignment and significantly affect the strand score.