

Supporting Excellent Educators Section Summary

Executive Priorities

In addition to meeting the requirements of the Every Student Succeeds Act, the Supporting Excellent Educators section of the Vermont State Plan reflects the education reform priorities of Vermont's governor, Phil Scott, in his inaugural address. This section of the plan 1) prioritizes support for the most vulnerable students in the state; 2) prepares students to be members of a healthy and growing Vermont economy, and; 3) frames proposals that will be affordable to implement and maintain. Agency proposals' reflection of executive priorities are described below, and recur throughout this section of the plan.

1. This section of the Plan prioritizes support for the most vulnerable students in the state

The Supporting Excellent Educators section of the Plan outlines several decisions that work to ensure that Vermont's educators are well-prepared to support our most vulnerable youth. The existing licensure system is a check on an educator's preparation and continued professional learning to attempt to confirm entry to only those qualified to teach all students. Likewise, reviews of teacher education programs certify these institutions' commitment to high quality preparation. The AOE recently completed an educator equity plan, identifying where Vermont students are most likely to receive less effective teaching based on the student's demographic factors. We learned that students in rural high-poverty schools are more likely to be taught by teachers who have less experience, are less well-compensated, and are more likely to be teaching outside of their endorsement area. Finally, we are proposing a leadership academy in the state plan. This academy will work with school leaders in our lowest achieving schools to identify and implement strategies to reduce achievement gaps.

2. This section of the Plan prepares students to be members of a healthy and growing Vermont economy

While not a direct economic investment, ensuring a highly trained teaching faculty apprised of current innovative practice should translate into graduates who are more prepared for college and the workforce. That educators' professional learning is in concert with the Education Quality Standards means that students should be encouraged to be innovative in their thinking and demonstrate proficiency with skills needed for engaged citizenry.

3. This section of the Plan promotes proposals that will be affordable to implement and maintain

There are minimal alterations of current practice in this section. Licensing practice, professional learning investments, and the educator equity plan are existing commitments. The leadership academy is a new endeavor, but is fully integrated into the continuous improvement and accountability systems. In the 2016 legislative session passed funding for our teacher education accreditation system that is less expensive, more personalized, and

more familiar than corresponding national accreditation organizations. Such continuity should result in efficient implementation.

Within the Supporting Excellent Educators section of the draft Vermont State Plan, some elements represent a continuation of practice, and others represents an evolution in practice. The proposals contained in this section are categorized accordingly below, and are described in more detail in the plan itself.

Continuation of Practice:

- Educator licensure
- Teacher education accreditation
- Educator equity plan
- Approval of professional learning investments

Evolution in Practice:

- Development of a leadership academy for school leaders in schools receiving supports



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Supporting Excellent Educators

Educator Development, Retention, and Advancement

Educator Development, Retention, and Advancement Systems

i. Licensure

The Vermont Agency of Education (AOE) is proud of the relationship it has developed with the field to coordinate teacher licensing. Initial licensing is largely the result of alignment between the AOE and state-accredited teacher education programs. Licensing renewal involves collaboration between the AOE, the Vermont Standards Board for Professional Educators (VSBPE), and local and regional standards boards across the state. While this cooperation is essential to the quality and success of the licensure program, the responsibility for validation of educators' credentials rests solely with the AOE.

The AOE ensures that all teachers and paraprofessionals working in a program supported with funds under part 1111(g)(2)(J) meet applicable State certification and licensure requirements, including any requirements for certification obtained through alternative routes. Vermont will continue to follow the licensing pathways established and defined by VSBPE under Rule 5300. Educators can earn a license through a traditional educator preparation program, the NASDTEC Interstate Agreement, or alternate routes.

Current Licensing requirements reflect the importance of providing a quality education for all of Vermont's students. The Vermont Standards Board of Professional Educators has the statutory responsibility for the development of rules regarding the licensure of Vermont educators. In 2016, the VSBPE went through the Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules for revisions of current rules. This process includes stakeholder input/comment. The VSBPE will continue with rule revisions based on changing educational landscape and research on educator effectiveness. This dedication to reflecting current high quality practice affirms Vermont's commitment to the quality education of all students in the state and reflects a continuation of current practice.

ii. Teacher Education Programs

On behalf of VSBPE, the Vermont Agency of Education operates the Results Oriented Program Approval (ROPA) process to facilitate the recommendation of Level I licensure to Vermont-based educator preparation programs. Preparation programs must demonstrate that their candidates meet the requisite standards for professional practice and that the institution allocates sufficient resources and support to ensure the long-term success of the program. Among these standards is the educator preparation program requirement of demonstrating that candidates for licensure understand individual differences and diverse cultures, providing a variety of high-quality field experiences with a diverse population of students and educators, and recruiting, admitting, supporting, and retaining candidates, faculty, and cooperating teachers from diverse backgrounds.

These standards provide ROPA review teams with a mechanism to evaluate institutional commitment to preparing candidates to meet the needs of diverse learners and cultures, and to ensure that our most disadvantaged students have educational professionals who are trained to meet their personalized needs. Continued use of the ROPA standards and review process will constitute a continuation of practice. Improving preparation programs with a focus on addressing the needs of all students, including Historically Marginalized Students, and alignment with new federal regulations for Teacher Preparation, will ensure that all students are taught by qualified teachers according to accepted standards of practice.

The ROPA process is reviewed annually and revised based on changes in Vermont policy and practice, and new federal regulations for Teacher Preparation. This will largely be a continuation of current strategy, with the addition of an evaluation process beginning in 2017. Vermont will continue to use Title IIA funds to support part of the work of the pre-service education quality coordinator. This position works with the field to establish professional standards and competencies for all educational endorsement areas offered in the State, and works with the educator preparation programs in the state to align their coursework with these competencies. The position also aides in the five-year review of educator preparation programs. Through this position, we can align educator standards, student learning goals, and policy decisions, ensuring that graduates are familiar with state priorities and well-prepared to teach in Vermont schools.

The State is undertaking an evaluation of the ROPA process in 2017 to ensure it meets the new federal regulations on Teacher Preparation Issues (34 CFR part 612 and 34 CFR part 686). In the interim, the State proposes continuation of current practice to ensure that educator preparation programs remain dedicated to preparing candidates to meet the needs of all students.

iii. Educator Evaluation

Vermont has a two-tiered licensure system. Teachers earn an initial “Level I” license and can move to a “Level II” license after working under the Level I license for at least three years. Whether Level I or Level II, licensure renewal requires a set number of hours of professional learning consistent with both an educator’s specific endorsement area and the State’s general teaching and leadership standards.

State rules require that each Supervisory Union/Supervisory District implement a system of evaluation for educators. The structure of these evaluation systems is determined by local entities rather than following a state level evaluation tool. However, the AOE does use a rubric to assess the system employed by each SU/SD. In collaboration with stakeholders, the AOE developed the Teacher and Leader Evaluation Model Review Rubric in 2014, and piloted it in 2015 with volunteering SU/SDs. In 2016 the AOE required SU/SD submission of educator evaluation models. The AOE evaluated the models based on the rubric’s 9 criteria. Ratings of evaluation systems included: Ineffective, Developing, Effective and Highly Effective. SU/SD ratings are used as a data point during Integrated Field Reviews, and can potentially be identified as a finding for improvement or a commendation of excellent practice.

Vermont’s state motto is “Freedom and Unity”; our system for assessing educator evaluations systems is a reflection of that motto. The State supports SU/SDs in the development of

evaluation systems that reflect the unique culture of their school and surrounding community (freedom), while providing required components in teacher and principal evaluation systems to promote professional growth of the educator and the high quality learning opportunities for all students (unity). Every 3 years we will review our rubrics and update them to reflect changes in research and practice.

Support for Educators

Resources to Support State-level Strategies

i. Increasing student achievement

The Education Quality Standards are built on the premise of continuous improvement for all schools. It follows, then, that we should expect the same for our educators. As required by statute, four percent of the Title IIA monies will be used to fulfill the AOE's responsibility to provide proper and efficient administration and monitoring of the programs carried out under the Title. Vermont is fortunate to have an experienced Title IIA administrator who will continue to guide and support SU/SDs on how to most effectively use local funds, with evidence-based approaches to improving teacher effectiveness. To ensure that SU/SDs are developing, implementing, and evaluating investment plans that meet the academic and non-academic needs of all students, Vermont will utilize a continuous improvement planning cycle to provide differentiated technical assistance, progress monitoring, compliance review, and corrective action in support of evidence-based practice.

Consistent with our dedication to equity for all students, the State will employ SU/SD and SU-level funding to provide ongoing support for teachers on identifying and providing high quality instruction to students with specific learning needs. The supports will include, but not be limited to:

- Alignment of efforts to standards including the Vermont Professional Learning Standards, Education Quality Standards, and the Core Teaching and Leadership Standards for Vermont Educators.
- Collaborative (cross-agency) collection of data to inform continuous improvement, starting with a comprehensive needs assessment to determine the specific and contextual needs within an SU/SD. Data will be used to determine the most effective path to narrowing gaps in achievement.
- A determination of which evidence-based activities, strategies, and interventions are most likely to have a measurable impact on student achievement. Funding decisions will be determined by the SU/SD's identified needs, and the presence of evidence-based actionable plans likely to have a positive impact on student learning.
- Collection, analysis, and presentation of evidence to support requests for the continuation of funding of subsequent investments.
- Institution of a systemic process for the collection of evidentiary practices across the state to extend, expand, and refine state-wide use of the evidence-based levels
- Development of a state-wide Community of Practice (in alignment with other state-wide professional learning networks such as the VT-Professional Learning Network) to

support the dissemination of information about teaching strategies and interventions that are having a measurable impact on students.

ii. Improve the quality and increase the quantity of teachers, principals, and other school leaders

As provided by the statute, Vermont will reserve an additional three percent of Title IIA funds to provide high quality, professional learning for principals and other school leaders through the creation and implementation of a Vermont Leader's Professional Learning Academy/Institute. By supporting the use of robust and actionable data to provide professional learning for principals and other school leaders, the Vermont Agency of Education will build state-wide communities of practice to engage in high quality professional learning with clearly articulated and measurable outcomes.

The Academy will be aimed at improving student outcomes in low-performing schools. Consistent with research on the impact of highly effective school leaders on student performance, the Academy will aim to increase the capacity of school leaders to recruit, retain, and support effective educators. Specifically, the Academy will:

- Concentrate on improving the capacity of school leaders, primarily those leading schools identified for Comprehensive or Targeted improvement.
- Employ a curriculum informed by input from stakeholders (state accountability data and evidence collected from the Education Quality Review process) and aligned with Standards including Vermont's Professional Learning Standards, Education Quality Standards, and the Core Teaching and Leadership Standards for Vermont Educators.
- Develop outcome-oriented performance metrics that will be utilized to measure the impact of the professional learning in areas such as standards-based, data-driven, and differentiated instruction, equitable access to high quality instruction, cultural competence, subject and content-specific issues, and the effective leveraging of resources to address equity and excellence.
- Utilize the AOE Leadership Team model as the foundational forum for ongoing conversation and review of the initiative to support evidence gathering.
- Minimize duplication of effort by collaborating with other professional learning providers in the development and implementation stages of the professional learning.

Educator Equity

The AOE strongly supports the U.S. Department of Education's goal of ensuring that every student has equitable access to excellent educators, and welcomes this opportunity to outline our plan and rationale for advancing this mission. Our multi-faceted plan reflects outreach to the community and thoughtful deliberation about actions that will most likely enable our schools and districts to attain this important objective. Although our work will evolve over time, we believe that our theory of action and the targeted strategies we have included in the plan embody a solid approach to improving educator effectiveness.

Definitions

We use several terms to describe conditions which might contribute to inequities in the teaching force across the state. These terms are employed throughout the Educator Equity Report to investigate whether there are schools where students may be receiving less effective instruction based upon teacher characteristics.

- **Ineffective teacher**— Teachers who are teaching out-of-field on an emergency or temporary license
- **Out-of-field teacher**— An educator currently assigned to teach a subject and/or grade that is outside the field specified by their full license, or those who hold a provisional, apprentice, or emergency license for a placement where they have been assigned students.
- **Inexperienced teacher**— An educator in his or her first year of teaching.
- **Low-income student**— Students who participate in the Free and Reduced Price Lunch program.
- **Minority student**— Students who have identified with any race or ethnicity that is not white/Caucasian (e.g., African American, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, and Pacific Islander/Alaskan Native)

Rates and Disproportionalities

In Vermont, like other rural states, the expected patterns of disadvantage do not always appear readily, and the solutions which work in urban contexts are not easily transferable. In Vermont, instructional practices supporting low-income and minority students are not necessarily correlated to teaching strategies associated with low performance. Many of our schools with high percentages of minority students relative to state averages enjoy teachers with proportionally higher experience who are not teaching out-of-field. Only in schools that are both rural and poor do teaching characteristics associated with limited effectiveness begin to surface and, then, only marginally.

The educator characteristics Vermont is proposing to report are:

- Percentage of teachers in a school in their first year of teaching (experience indicator)
- Percentage of teachers in a school on a provisional or emergency license (out-of-field indicator)
- Percentage of teachers in a school new to their Supervisory Union/Supervisory District

These data are attempts to ensure that that disadvantaged students are not taught disproportionately by teachers on a provisional or emergency license or who are new to the profession or the school. Research suggests that new educators and those teaching outside of their endorsement area lead to less effective student outcomes. If these characteristics cluster around individual schools, that would be evidence of educator inequity. These are data already being collected at the State as part of the educator equity plan. Additionally, rule 2121.2 of the Education Quality Standards requires staff to be properly licensed and prepared for their teaching assignment.

Though the data suggest that educator equity and mobility is a limited challenge across the state, our goal is the reduction of disproportionate rates by ineffective, out-of-field, or

inexperienced teachers compared to non-low-income and non-minority students enrolled in schools not receiving funds under Title I, Part A.

Public Reporting

The State will report annually on progress toward addressing and eliminating equity gaps. Reporting will include posting a progress report on the AOE website, sending the link to all SU/SDs and stakeholders, and press releases to our major news media. Every two years AOE will formally update this plan based on new data, new analyses of root causes, and new strategies. Annually, AOE will replicate the analysis done for this study and report the findings to the field in order to insure that inequities are decreasing wherever they exist and to identify new inequities should they arise. More frequent updates to inform the plan, as well as strategic approaches to addressing implementation, will emerge through the recommendations of the Committee of Practitioners, as well.

Root Cause Analysis

In order to fully understand the factors contributing to potential disproportionality, we conducted a root-cause analysis that consisted of four steps:

1. **Identifying Relevant and Available Data:** In this step, we determined what data are available and relevant to identifying educator equity gaps and conducted an analysis of these data.
2. **Analyzing Data and Identifying Equity Gaps:** In this step, we identified the equity gaps resulting from our analysis in preparation for the root-cause analysis.
3. **Analyzing Root Causes:** In this step, we brainstormed a complete list of root causes behind our equity gaps and categorized them by theme.
4. **Mapping Strategies to Root Causes:** In this final step, we identified practical strategies to address our root causes.

To achieve our State’s teacher and leader equity objectives AOE is pursuing four key strategies that correspond to the root causes behind the problem:

1. Research
 - 1.1. We believed that the data and root-cause analysis called for more research of inexperienced teacher exposure to poor students, particularly those in rural and town settings. There is a lack of consensus regarding the nature of this disadvantage and the steps we would take to address the problem.
 - 1.2. With the assistance of the Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Lab, we conducted this research. While the data confirmed the anecdotal evidence that more rural and impoverished schools have greater numbers of inexperienced teachers and teacher mobility from more rural to more populated schools, the data also show that the magnitude of the trend is very small and in most all cases not statistically significant.
 - 1.3. This research examined mobility rates at the school and supervisory level.
 - 1.4. This research will be replicated in through the 2020 school year to see if the observed patterns persist or change.
2. Promoting Effective Hiring Practices
 - 2.1. Our stakeholders suggested further research on current hiring practices in rural and town settings to analyze how schools find a candidate who is a “good match” for the

more remote areas of Vermont. Best hiring practices will be highlighted for other high-turnover rural and town areas to utilize.

- 2.2. Stakeholders identified addressing limited housing and social amenities in rural towns and a perceived cultural “mismatch” between rural towns and newly hired teachers as essential hiring considerations.
 - 2.3. The State will collaborate with one Vermont teacher education program to tailor preparation experiences to fully prepare candidates for the opportunities and challenges that exist in rural communities. Results of the collaboration will be shared with all teacher education programs in 2020.
3. Improving Professional Opportunities
 - 3.1. Our stakeholders shared that teachers may leave rural and town settings due to a lack of accessible professional-learning opportunities. This shortage could lead teachers to feel professionally isolated or stagnant in their professional growth. In addition, teachers in rural and town settings who receive lower pay than higher density areas may leave to teach in schools where there is higher pay potential.
 - 3.2. Specifically, peer-to-peer networks for new teachers, access to institutes of higher education, and financial resources at the district level to support professional learning were all feared to be compromised in rural, impoverished districts.
 - 3.3. The state will collaborate with professional learning networks and institutes of higher education to catalyze opportunities for professional and peer learning. These results will be reported in 2019.
 4. Improving Working Conditions in High-Poverty Schools
 - 4.1. Our stakeholders suggested that new and early career teachers may find it too challenging to work in high-poverty schools where students’ and families’ social, financial, and academic needs are greater than in cities and suburbs where there are more resources for support. These teachers may “burn out” in high demand jobs and search for work in schools that are perceived as less challenging.
 - 4.2. Our initial analysis of the teacher mobility data suggests that challenging working conditions do not lead to significant retention challenges in most rural school districts.

While these strategies present interesting opportunities for further investigation, through the process of developing our educator equity plan we learned that rectifying most of the federally identified educator characteristics associated with low student performance—higher teacher pay and years in the classroom, for example—does not close student performance equity gaps alone. Many of our schools with the greatest number of historically marginalized students, also have faculties who are comparatively well compensated and experienced. Therefore, while the AOE remains dedicated to pursuing the strategies outlined above, we will only use minimal funds from our Title II, Part A allocation to pursue these strategies; instead, we will look to partnerships with our regional education lab, institutes of higher education, and local SU/SDs to amplify our financial investment.