

Vermont ESSA State Plan Overview

This document summarizes Vermont’s proposed plan to implement the new federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which was signed into law in 2016 and replaces the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The plan describes how Vermont will use federal dollars to advance the goals of equity and continuous improvement of learning and schools. In this plan, the Vermont Agency of Education (VTAOE) has created a guiding document that will help us to achieve Governor Scott’s goals:

- 1) prioritize support for the most vulnerable students in the state;
- 2) prepare students to be members of a healthy and growing Vermont economy, and;
- 3) develop reform solutions that will be affordable to implement and maintain

The VTAOE has taken great care in this plan to adhere to and advance Vermont’s own goals for student learning, as outlined in our Vermont Education Quality Standards (EQS). This focus ensures that our plan for implementing ESSA is truly a Vermont plan, reflecting Vermont goals and the broad input of Vermont stakeholders.

In 2014, the Vermont Education Quality Standards (EQS) were adopted after extensive public input. These standards outline an ambitious vision for personalization of learning and an emphasis on demonstrated student proficiency-- not seat time-- as the measure of student progress through school. EQS also outline a model for state accountability, including robust site-based reviews of school quality, for the purpose of supporting continuous improvement of teaching and learning. Since 2014, the VTAOE has been supporting implementation of EQS statewide.

Education Quality Standards

In the spring of 2014, the Vermont State Board of Education adopted EQS. EQS articulates Vermont’s education priorities, and paints a holistic picture of education quality by describing expectations for all schools in terms of (1) academic performance, (2) personalized learning for all students, (3) safe and healthy schools, (4) quality educators, and (5) efficient financial operations. Combined, these five domains provide a definition of quality that reflects Vermont’s educational values and prepares students for career, college, and civic engagement. Furthermore, articulating these five domains provides school systems with a benchmark to judge both their strengths and areas in need of improvement.

Continuous Improvement

One of EQS’s core standards is an expectation that all school systems will engage in continuous improvement. Continuous improvement requires all school systems to identify local needs based on data, select a plan for addressing those needs, pilot interventions, review the efficacy of these interventions, and guide future practice. EQS provides common expectations across all schools in the state. VTAOE will provide school systems support in identifying their relative efficacy across EQS, but the determination for how each school system will best address identified needs is largely a local decision.

Education Quality Reviews

To assist school systems in completing a robust needs assessment and to help communities understand performance relative to shared goals, The VTAOE has designed a two-part Education Quality Review (EQR) process to assess each school system and its member schools’ ability to meet EQS.

1. Annual Snapshot

Every year the VTAOE will present an online “Annual Snapshot” of quantitative data that speak to the quality of our school systems; this snapshot will also serve to meet the ESSA requirement for a “school report card.” The Annual Snapshot will present multiple performance indicators for each of the five EQS

domains. This data will enable schools and their communities to reflect on performance and progress in each of the domains: (1) academic performance, (2) personalized learning for all students, (3) safe and healthy schools, (4) quality educators, and (5) efficient financial operations. These indicators have been selected directly from EQS in relation to core values that support effective outcomes for students. By design, the indicators aligned to the academic proficiency domain in our State plan meet the accountability requirements under ESSA for our federal plan, and thus will be used to identify schools that will qualify for additional comprehensive or targeted supports using federal funds. This is an example of using federal dollars to advance our state goals.

2. Integrated Field Review

Every three years, under the leadership of the VTAOE, all Supervisory Unions/Supervisory Districts will engage in a largely qualitative Integrated Field Review. This process will involve a site visit by a review team consisting of peers (and sometimes students) from other schools systems and staff from the VTAOE. This visit will include school observations, stakeholder interviews (including of students and community members), and reviews of state and local data related to local goals, as well as the mechanisms by which local schools are attempting to achieve these goals. Feedback based on visits will inform local improvement efforts and build local capacity to make strategic decisions that improve outcomes. Each visit will culminate in a report which identifies commendations and recommendations with respect to the system's practices in each of the five EQS domains. Although the review team will be looking for evidence of a Supervisory Unions/Supervisory District's efficacy in meeting each EQS domain, unlike the Annual Snapshot, the questions and evidence will be unique to each district, reflecting their local needs and emphases. While determination of ESSA supports will not be contingent on the outcome of an IFR, the data collected through the review remains essential in informing the content and focus of the local needs assessment.

Local Stakeholder Input

Each system is required to conduct a needs assessment with respect to the standards and goals articulated in Vermont's Education Quality Standards. This needs assessment will draw data gathered through the Annual Snapshot and Integrated Field Review, and must be completed with stakeholder engagement at the local level. These stakeholders include teachers, students, families, and community advocates. This broad local engagement in the needs assessment ensures that goals for improvement and strategies for addressing needs reflect local context and are responsive to local priorities.

Continuous Improvement Plan

As a result of data gleaned through *Education Quality Reviews* and stakeholder input, all school systems create a Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP) to address and implement their identified needs. The CIP outlines the steps the school system intends to take to improve their performance. For example, a school might opt to provide targeted professional development to teachers or another may focus on more effectively meeting the needs of a subgroup of students, such as boys who live in poverty. A continuous improvement framework includes an on-going cycle of implementing an intervention, evaluating the impact of that intervention, and determining next steps based on the impact. In all of these steps, the VT AOE will work with schools to provide technical assistance. However, the nature of the technical assistance is tiered based on the need and performance of local schools.

Tiered School System Supports

Some school systems need additional support. Those school systems with schools scoring in the bottom five percent of all Title I schools¹ in the state on the academic performance portion of the *Annual Snapshot* are eligible for Comprehensive Support under ESSA. These supports include additional federal funding and closer coordination with the VT AOE in development and implementation of the needs assessment

¹ Schools that receive additional federal dollars to support students living in poverty.

and Continuous Improvement Plan. In addition, under the Supporting Excellent Educators section of the plan, schools needing the most support would be eligible for a proposed “leadership academy,” focused on developing the leadership capacity to transform and improve systems. This leadership academy will be paid for with federal dollars. If a school were to remain eligible for Comprehensive Support over time, the VTAOE would provide even closer coordination, support, and oversight in the implementation of the CIP.

Schools that demonstrate substantial performance gaps between their historically marginalized and historically advantaged student populations also need greater supports. These schools will be eligible for Targeted Supports under ESSA including closer coordination with the VTAOE in the development and oversight and monitoring of their CIPs to gauge their success in narrowing performance gaps. Some of these schools may include schools that appear high performing on average, but demonstrate substantial gaps in performance between students overall and students in vulnerable groups, such as students living in poverty and students with disabilities.

While a focus on continuous improvement maintains the accountability goals as required under ESSA, this focus also challenges ALL schools to invest in the professional capital necessary to transform local systems. We understand that all schools have strengths and needs.

We have worked to develop an accountability plan that reflects and is responsive to the diversity of our schools and communities. At the same time, our plan holds all schools accountable for continuously reviewing the quality of opportunities they provide and for continuously improving the learning experience of each individual child. Dedication to this continuous improvement philosophy enables the VTAOE to acknowledge school systems for what they do well and to elevate and share effective practices statewide, even as it focuses local attention on identified needs. Those schools requiring more support to achieve ambitious goals for their students will receive that support, but all schools share the common goal and common responsibility for achieving the Education Quality Standards while continually looking for ways to help every student succeed.