

NEEDS-BASED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN SCHOOL DISTRICT SYSTEMS

ACT 173 TECHNICAL GUIDANCE

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Introduction

This document is designed to provide additional technical assistance and guidance for needs-based professional development. This is the fourth of a series of four supporting guidance documents the Vermont Agency of Education (AOE) has developed to provide supplemental information to the Education Quality Standards (EQS) rules and practices as they pertain to the change in practices necessary to implement Act 173 of 2018.

In a document entitled [Developing Systems to Support the Success of All Students](#) released on August 26, 2019, the AOE identified four areas of focused activity for school districts and supervisory unions (SU/SDs) under Act 173:

- [Educational Support Teams \(ESTs\)](#);
- [Local Comprehensive Assessment System](#);
- [Coordinated Curriculum](#); and
- Needs-based Professional Development.

When taken together, the goal of these guidance documents is to build coherence among educational stakeholders about the work involved to successfully implement [Act 173](#). As a result of COVID-19 and school closure, collective coherence and focus will be essential as we shift our work to identifying, supporting and scaling best practices across an educational system that needs to be responsive and adaptive to a constantly changing world.

How to Read Guidance Documents

All supporting technical guidance documents in this series follow a similar structure. Section one will contain a definition of the focus area so there is clarity about how it is situated in the current regulatory and practice context. Section two will describe why the focus area is a major systems lever for the successful implementation of Act 173. Systems lever is defined as an organizational structure that can be used to quickly bring about the alignment of instructional support activities to enhance the effectiveness, availability, and equity of services provided to students who require additional supports among all schools in a district. Section three will describe how to implement the focus area in the context of a school district system. This is an important consideration, since Supervisory Unions/Districts (SU/SDs) policies emanating from the state have pointed to centralizing key instructional systems at the SU/SD level. Section four will outline how the AOE plans to provide leadership, support, and oversight relative to the focus area in the coming months. Additionally, a Resources section will be appended to these guidance documents to provide an easy reference to related technical concepts.

When reading these documents, it is important to consider how they intersect, support, and build from one another. For instance, an effective local comprehensive assessment system (LCAS) will inform the development of a strong, standards-based coordinated curriculum, and in turn, will provide clear information to support needs-based professional learning. Whenever possible, we will seek to draw attention to these intersections for your consideration.

Section One: Needs-based Professional Learning in the Context of Current Regulation and Practice

This section defines needs-based professional learning and its basis in statute and rule.

What is Needs-based Professional Learning?

As defined in [VT Education Quality Standards \(EQS\)](#) “needs-based professional learning” means staff learning based upon needs identified through an examination of student performance and organizational and instructional data in alignment with the school's Continuous Improvement Plan or with programmatic supports resulting from monitoring findings. EQS Section 2121.3 states:

Each supervisory union shall:

1. develop and implement a system of appropriate needs-based professional learning for all professional staff, including administrators and other staff involved in student instruction, as required in [16 V.S.A. §26a\(a\)\(5\)](#).
2. embed time for professional learning into the school day.
3. align professional learning system with its staff evaluation, supervision, and mentoring policies, Continuous Improvement Plan, as well as SU/SD goals.
4. provide new staff members with appropriate opportunities for professional learning.

Why is Needs-based Professional Development So Important?

“In response to the pandemic, both the focus of what teachers and school leaders do and how they do it will continue to change in the 2020-2021 school year. Additionally, the traditional structures in which educators learn must be adapted to support remote learning. The magnitude of the changes brought on by the pandemic requires leaders to pay close attention to supporting educators’ own social-emotional health and learning. Professional learning that accelerates all students’ learning must support educators in building new knowledge and skills while ensuring their own sense of self-efficacy.” [Restart & Recovery: Considerations for Teaching and Learning: Academics](#), Appendix H (CCSSO)

“In education, research has shown that teaching quality and school leadership are the most important factors in raising student achievement. For teachers and school and district leaders to be as effective as possible, they continually expand their knowledge and skills to implement the best educational practices. Educators learn to help students learn at the highest levels.” [Why Professional Development Matters](#), (Learning Forward)

As noted in the [VTmtss Field Guide](#), Principle 9: Ongoing professional learning for all members of the school community is needed to build capacity and sustain progress. When all staff participate in common professional learning each member of the staff is better prepared to contribute to the school’s goals for improved student outcomes; resulting in consistency of expectations and practices; collective efficacy.

What Does It Look Like When Needs-based Professional Development Is Done Well?

The Vermont Standards Board for Professional Educators (VSBPE) chose to include the following [Learning Forward](#) Learning Communities standards for professional learning in [A Vision for Teaching, Leading and Learning](#) due to the increasing importance of professional growth and reflection. Beyond the Learning Communities standards, Learning Forward identifies additional domains relevant to professional learning:

Learning Communities: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students occurs within learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment.

Leadership: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning.

Resources: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for educator learning.

Data: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students uses a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning.

Learning Designs: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students integrates theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes.

Implementation: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students applies research on change and sustains support for implementation of professional learning for long-term change.

Outcomes: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards.

When intentionally selecting and evaluating professional development attention should be given to:

- data from all staff evaluations when identifying and planning professional development offerings (EQS 2121.3),
- data that supports professional development opportunities for all staff differentiated to reflect educator voice, expertise, and role as appropriate,
- culture, processes, and structures of the system (e.g., racial justice, progress monitoring, teaming),
- SU and school continuous improvement goals, and
- impact on instructional practices, social emotional learning, behavior, and the organization; did investments result in educators gaining needed skills to improve outcomes for all students?

Section Two: Needs-based Professional development as a Major Systems Lever for Act 173

The purpose of Act 173 of 2018 is to enhance the effectiveness, availability, and equity of services provided to all students who require additional support in Vermont's schools.

Act 173 also directs the AOE to undertake specific tasks furthering the programmatic goals outlined in the Act. The Agency is required to assist supervisory unions to expand and improve their delivery of services to students who require additional supports. Furthermore, the AOE is directed to provide technical assistance with the goal of fostering best practices, as described in Act 173, for the delivery of services provided to all students who require additional supports in Vermont's schools.

Those best practices include:

1. ensuring core instruction meets most needs of most students;
2. providing additional instructional time outside core subjects to students who require additional support, rather than providing interventions instead of core instruction;
3. ensuring students who require additional support receive all instruction from highly skilled teachers;
4. creating and strengthening a systems-wide approach to supporting positive student behaviors based on expert support; and
5. providing specialized instruction from skilled and trained experts to students with more intensive needs.

“In a school culture that builds expertise, learning happens continuously for everybody. All professionals and staff take responsibility for keeping up with current research and developments in their field(s) and are supported in doing so. Most learning opportunities occur intentionally, as teachers and administrators engage in their daily work and share their experiences and insights with each other. Leadership ensures sufficient infrastructure to support educators learning together with and from experts from inside or outside the school.”
([VTmtss Field Guide](#), p. 55)

Examples of outcomes associated with each focus area are listed below. In future guidance documents, the AOE will articulate performance indicators associated with each outcome; these outcomes and their related performance indicators, across all four focus areas, will be the criteria that the AOE uses when determining the efficacy of Vermont's Act 173 implementation efforts.

Needs-based professional development supports the other levers of Act 173 and is necessary for sustainable implementation. For example, staff may need professional development to:

- design and implement a coordinated curriculum,
- understand various assessment tools and practices to create a robust local comprehensive assessment system, and

- expand and improve its Educational Support Team’s ability to collaborate effectively with families and community partners using data to make social emotional, behavior, and academic instruction and intervention decisions.

Section Three: Implementation of Needs-based Professional Development in Supervisory Districts/Unions

The AOE recommends the following performance indicators for needs-based professional development that demonstrates the four attributes described in Section One:

Professional development is appropriately inclusive when it:

- Is informed by student performance, organization, and instructional data.
- Considers the resources needed to expand its expertise to ensure all students make progress.
- Addresses inequities that disproportionately disadvantage historically marginalized populations and strengthens systems.
- Documents processes for staff professional development plans.
- Demonstrates evidence of structural support and design to ensure all staff can participate/engage in the professional development.
- Is embedded in the school day.
- Is provided to the entire staff and differentiated by role and experience (when appropriate).

Professional development is coordinated at the SU/SD level when:

- SU/SD sponsored professional development is aligned to Continuous Improvement Plan goals.
- All staff professional development plans are aligned with SU/SD goals and priorities.
- Leadership ensure infrastructures are in place to support the professional development.
- Leadership intentionally schedules time to plan professional development.
- The need for systemic responses to individual student needs is present in Continuous Improvement Plan goals.

Professional development is evaluated for intended impact:

- SU/SD professional development is determined through student academic performance as well as organizational efficacy data.
- All staff professional development plans are informed by individual staff needs to address student outcome data.
- All staff evaluations include professional development plan goals and related investments.
- SU/SD professional development advances the understanding and participation in systems-level thinking for all staff members.

Staff voice is present in professional development identification:

- All staff professional development plans demonstrate an understanding of how their work is relevant to the entire education system.
- All staff professional development plans demonstrate goals for personal professional growth in alignment to SU/SD goals.

Section Four: AOE Leadership, Support and Oversight

The following represents AOE-provided supports to SU/SDs for identifying and providing professional learning: using data to identify a need, integrating needs within a system, and documenting professional learning within a continuous improvement framework. [Act 173 Technical Guidance: Developing Systems to Support the Success of All Students](#), pp. 7-8.

Leadership:

- L1. The AOE will outline models of effective needs-based professional learning through the [Expertise](#) component (pp. 53-58) of the VTmtss Framework.
- L2. The AOE's Education Quality Assurance team is supporting the expansion of the [Networked Improvement Community](#) (NIC) as one effective model.

Support:

- S1. The following teams will continue to provide guidance and resources specific to needs-based professional learning:
 - a. [Consolidated Federal Programs](#)
 - b. [Vermont Multi-Tiered System of Supports \(VTmtss\)](#)
 - c. [Education Quality Assurance](#)
- S2. The AOE has identified existing resources and is developing additional resources for supporting needs-based professional learning.

Oversight:

- O1. The AOE is in the process of identifying metrics for evaluating the State's response to Act 173.
- O2. The AOE is currently developing a formal assurance mechanism as a part of our accountability system/Education Quality Reviews.
- O3. The AOE has compiled lists of professional learning providers to support both the VTmtss Framework and Educational Equity.

Resources

For further information from the Agency of Education about professional development standards reference the pages below:

- [A Vision for Teaching, Leading, and Learning: Core Teaching and Leadership Standards for Vermont Educators](#)
- [Coaching as Professional Learning: Guidelines for Implementing Effective Coaching Systems](#)
- Professional Learning [web page](#)
- [Vermont Multi-Tiered System of Supports \(VTmtss\);](#)
- [VTmtss Field Guide](#)
 - Expertise Component pp. 53-58
 - Expertise Reflection Tool pp. 98-99
 - Appendix A pp. 102-104