



219 North Main Street, Suite 402
Barre, VT 05641 (p) 802-479-1030 | (f) 802-479-1835

Vermont Continues to Push Forward with Vermont State Plan for Every Student Succeeds Act

Haley Dover, Public Information Officer

Beginning next fall, Vermont will be operating under a new state and federal system for assessing school quality.

While President Trump recently put a pause on regulations related to the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the Vermont Agency of Education still plans to submit the state plan to the U.S. Department of Education in the spring as our state plan is based more on the statute than the proposed regulations. This will allow us to continue implementation of the State Education Quality Reviews.

“Even if the federal aspect of our Vermont plan is delayed as the new federal administration gets its feet, we expect schools to always be focused on teaching students well and broadly,” Secretary of Education Rebecca Holcombe said. “There may be changes to some of the details, but we will always strive to teach kids well. Regardless of what happens in D.C. we are plowing ahead.”

Staff at the Vermont Agency of Education have created a state plan that considers the implications for continuous improvement, school accountability, school effectiveness, educator quality, and coordination of federal grants. The Agency is currently collecting public input before the federal plan is sent for review this spring.

ESSA is a major federal funding source for public schools. The law provides additional funding to schools with large concentrations of students in poverty and asks schools to demonstrate that all students, regardless of race, class, or English language proficiency, are succeeding. While federal funding comprises less than 10 percent of the average school budget, collectively, ESSA will bring in about \$60 million dollars to Vermont schools annually.

“Any national law will have ways in which it does and doesn’t work in all states. In writing our response, Vermonters have supported the Agency in developing a plan that reflects our State Education Quality Standards and keeps our local interests at the forefront of decision making,” Deputy Secretary Amy Fowler said.

The Vermont state plan has five distinct sections: how schools will be held accountable for the performance of all students; how the AOE sought and incorporated public input into the creation of the plan; how the AOE works with supervisory unions and districts to create, approve, and monitor comprehensive improvement plans from a continuous improvement perspective; a plan to ensure the quality of our educators; and how Vermont will use federal funds to support all students.

The AOE has identified eight indicators of a school’s academic success. Schools will receive information about how well the students they serve perform on the various indicators. Schools that score in the bottom five percent of all schools in the state will receive comprehensive improvement supports. While all Vermont schools create an evidence-based plan for how they will improve schoolwide performance, schools receiving comprehensive supports will get additional funds to create and implement their plans.

“The genesis of the law is to right historic wrongs in terms of school funding for our most vulnerable students,” Project Manager Chris Case said. “We will be looking not only at overall school performance, but also the performance of identified subgroups based on race/ethnicity, class and English language proficiency.”

Schools with large and persistent achievement gaps between historically marginalized students and more advantaged students will become a focus for improvement. Through their planning process schools will identify strategies to narrow the gap while ensuring the continued success of more advantaged students.

The Agency created several tools to collect public input, including a survey, longer narrated, and short videos to provide an overview of each section of the plan.

“Irrespective of your perception of your expertise, we ask for your input,” Education Project Manager Patrick Halladay said. “You don’t need to comment on the entire plan either. Instead, you can select the sections that are most relevant or important to you.”

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