

**2015-2019 Strategic Plan  
Adopted January 20, 2015**

**Goal One:** *Ensure that Vermont’s public education system operates within the framework of high expectations for every learner and ensure that there is equity in opportunity for all.*

The state of Vermont is a national and international leader in education. From exceptional teachers and visionary leadership to creative instruction and leading-edge assessment, Vermont enjoys a highly regarded educational system which serves as a model for other states and schools. Whether best schools, best places to raise a family or best social indicators, Vermont is found on virtually every top 10 list dealing with education or social well being.

Yet, despite these accolades, we have pressing questions and concerns about Vermont’s persistent achievement gap and the needs of students that are not being met.

- What resources are needed to close the achievement gap?
- How can spending and program decisions contribute to reducing the achievement gap?
- Are all schools meeting the Education Quality Standards?
- Do all students have a comparable “opportunity to learn”?

Initial Steps

Using available data, we will:

- Define the nature, extent and location of achievement, opportunity and financial gaps.
- Identify achievement and spending gaps and the locations where they appear to exist.
- Develop a system for the use of the Education Quality Standards (EQS) to access opportunities across schools and across the state.
- Explore areas such as access to coursework, personalized learning, the academic needs of students, time in the classrooms, facilities, teacher training and expertise, leadership and technology.
- Conduct and review research as well as take testimony from a large variety of stakeholders.
- Conduct a careful study of formula weights and whether they are too high, too low, or at the correct level, (poverty, max loss/gain, etc). The interaction of these revenues with expenditures will be examined. For example, schools with the highest poverty counts and aid are low spenders.
- Once barriers to equity in opportunity are empirically identified, we will create strategies to address the areas of defined need.

We believe that equity is a mutual responsibility of local districts along with the state and federal governments and sister agencies and partners. Therefore, for each area of need, the SBE will identify responsible agents to ensure accountability and follow-through.

**Goal Two:** *Ensure that the public education system is stable, efficient, and responsive to changes and ever-changing population needs, economic and 21st century issues.*

When measured by costs per pupil, the state is considered “high spending” by most observers. On one hand, the citizenry “sustains” this high level of spending with more than 90% of school budgets, on average, being approved on the first vote. Nevertheless, there are many calls on the public purse and it is incumbent on all levels of government to continuously strive for the wisest and most prudent use of available resources.

This requires examination and work in a number of areas:

- Rules – We will review the State Board of Education Manual of Rules and Practices and the Rulemaking process.
- Finance - In this area subject to various competing claims, we must first define the problems with greater precision and focus. We lack a full and comprehensive understanding of the reasons for the recent cost increases and the spending disparities in costs across the state. The state needs a “Report Card on School Finance” (similar to that produced in the 1990s), that identifies and analyzes school finance, over time, using the common set of national benchmarks. (Some of this is in the Picus report.) Cost-shifts, new federal and state mandates, and progressivity/regressivity of possible finance changes require exploration.
- Staffing - It is reported that Vermont has the most generous complement of teachers and staff in the nation. To date, available data is scattered and not comprehensive. Thus, it is difficult to understand the exact nature of staffing patterns. It is well established that favorable ratios are a key to high achievement on academic and social outcomes. Yet, practicality and efficiency issues are obvious. Part may be in special education needs, some may be in lags from declining enrollments, and part may be in new mandates from state and federal governments.

For “high-staffing” and “low staffing” schools, the causes and locations (geographic, type, subject area, level, etc.) are not well determined. Once the nature and causes of the staffing patterns are determined, we will seek remedies either in rulemaking or through the legislative process.

- Education Leaders - Anecdotally, we understand there is a shortage of educational leaders. We will analyze whether the situation is better or worse than our own history indicates and how our turn-over compares to the nation. The SBE will then examine implications for recruiting, training, job descriptions/ expectations, and conditions of practice.

### **Implementation Plan**

State law (16 V.S.A. §180) requires the State Board of Education (SBE) to develop and adopt a statewide strategic education plan, employing a public input process. The plan's goals are to strengthen coherence and consistency across the state, establish standards for student performance and assessment, and provide support for professional and curriculum development. Along with other items, the plan must include information on economic costs and educational benefits to be derived from the planned activities.

In this statutorily required five year update, the SBE focuses on two paramount concerns: *Equity of Opportunity*, and the *Efficiency and Stability* of the state's educational system. The recent adoption of the new Education Quality Standards addresses the comprehensive goals for education, and the required characteristics of the assessment and accountability system were defined by the SBE in August 2014. These elements are considered as integral parts of this plan.

This strategic plan is a working document that we will revisit regularly, in whole or in part, in order to incorporate new information, reexamine priorities, and develop synergy between the SBE and all stakeholders. A specific work plan will be developed to move the plan into action.

The SBE provided an opportunity for public input in the last months of 2014 and took these responses into consideration when further refining the strategic plan in January 2015. For each of these two goals, the SBE will:

1. Empirically define and identify the problems the state faces.
2. Explore potential solutions and create a series of white papers to share with stakeholders and collaborators.
3. Create and employ strategies to address the barriers. This will require working with the Agency, the legislature and other stakeholders.