

Using AOE Tools and Resources to Support Local-level Responses to Act 173

Purpose

Over the past several years, the Agency of Education (AOE) has generated [multiple tools and resources](#) that facilitate the local-level programmatic response to [Act 173](#). These include Vermont Multi-tiered System of Supports (VTmtss) Framework tools (ex: the VTmtss Systems Screener and Driver Diagram that support the state’s guidelines for tiered systems of support in the [VTmtss Field Guide 2019](#)), resources tied to Act 173 Systems Levers (ex: the 173 Systems Lever Sub-Framing Documents and *Making Connections with VTmtss* documents), and professional development opportunities that support the goals of Act 173, as represented in the 2017 District Management Group (DMG) report (ex: [DMG scheduling PD](#) and EQ Data Literacy PD Series).

But the AOE has received requests for guidance on how to best utilize these resources in concert: how an LEA should analyze its systemic needs in an Act 173 context, how to identify the PD that reflects those needs, and what supports are available from the AOE along the way. Additionally, people have asked how or if their response to Act 173 should be represented within their other continuous improvement work.

With that in mind, the AOE has created this document for school systems to use in their Act 173 response work. It includes:

- A recommended sequence for LEAs to follow when seeking to identify their Act 173-related needs, and when representing those needs within action planning.
- A recommended approach for LEAs to use when cross walking their identified needs with available Act 173 PD and supports.
- A description of how the AOE can help LEAs with this work, and how LEAs can request AOE assistance.

Systems Improvement in Alignment with the Goals of Act 173

In May 2018, Vermont passed Act 173. The purpose of the act is “to enhance the effectiveness, availability, and equity of services provided to all students who require additional support in Vermont’s schools.” This act changes the funding for special education from a reimbursement model to a census-based model, based on recommendations from the University of Vermont’s [Study of Vermont State Funding for Special Education](#).

The goals of Act 173 also reflect the five opportunities for improving services for students who need additional support, as described in the 2017 DMG report:

1. Ensure elementary Tier 1 core instruction meets the needs of most students.

Contact Information:

If you have questions about this document or would like additional information, please contact: Meg Porcella at meg.porcella@vermont.gov.

2. Provide additional instructional time outside core subjects aligned to the core instruction, to students who struggle, rather than providing interventions instead of core instruction.
3. Ensure students who struggle receive all instruction from highly skilled teachers.
4. Create or strengthen a systems-wide approach to supporting positive student behaviors based on expert support.
5. Provide students having more intensive support needs with specialized instruction from skilled and trained experts.

In 2019, the AOE published the [Act 173 Technical Guidance: Developing Systems to Support the Success of All Students](#). This document stated that the best approach to responding to Act 173, at the local level, would be for LEAs to assess and strengthen their four Act 173 Systems Levers: Education Support Teams (EST), Coordinated Curriculum, Local Comprehensive Assessment Systems (LCAS), and Needs-based Professional Learning (NBPL).

Act 173 as a PreK through 12 General Education Initiative

While the goals associated with Act 173 connect to Special Education, the systems and supports associated with responding to those goals—including ESTs, LCAS, Coordinated Curriculum, and NBPL—support all of a school system’s students, and are firmly rooted in general education. Act 173 goals are also not bound to any one grade band; the systems associated with supporting this work are PreK-12.

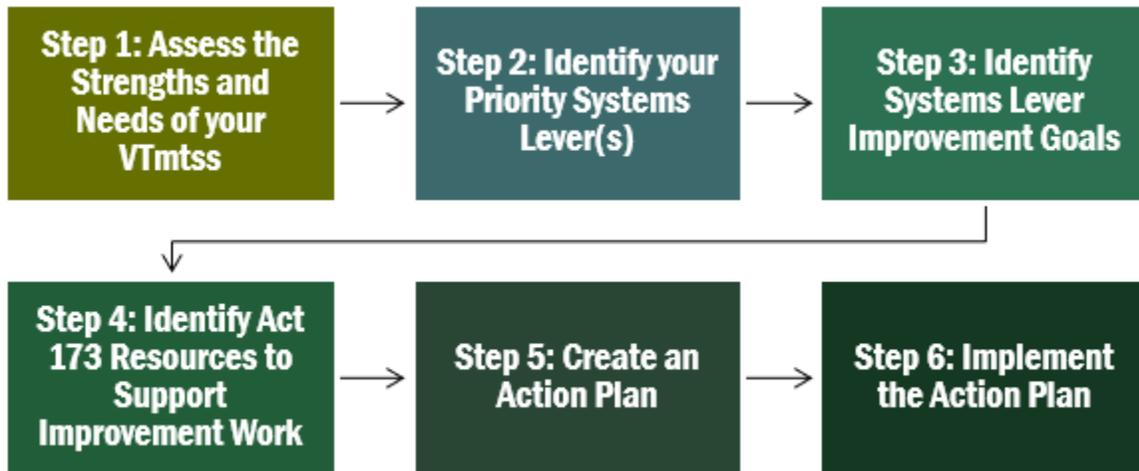
Students who receive special education services are also general education students first. The local-level policies and action plans that seek to benefit students who receive specialized supports need to be grounded in universal instruction, and in the systems and structures that support all of the students in a school system.

Because of this, the AOE strongly recommends that any needs assessment and improvement planning process associated with Act 173 incorporate representatives from both general and special education. The AOE also recommends that those conversations include early educators, and/or administrators who support PreK-12 systems.

Recommended Process

There is no one process to use for assessing and responding to an LEA or school’s Act 173 needs. But for school systems that are looking for an outline to refer to, the AOE offers the six-step process below. Educators who are familiar with the AOE’s [Comprehensive Needs Assessment \(CNA\) toolkit](#) may recognize similarities and common language between this process and the parts of a CNA. Leadership teams that have engaged in the CNA may find that they’ve already completed some of the process steps described below and should consider progress made within that work as a part of identifying where to step into the process described below.

For leadership teams responding to Act 173 for the first time, the AOE recommends starting at Step 1 with an assessment of the strengths of their systems.



Step 1: Assess the Strengths and Needs of your VTmtss

Use the VTmtss Systems Screener to assess the strengths and needs of your tiered system of supports. The [VTmtss Systems Screener](#) is an application-neutral tool that you can use to orient yourself to Act 173 systems improvement, and to take an early assessment of the strengths and areas of potential growth within your school system. Outcomes from your Systems Screener conversation will inform the rest of your Act 173 response process, including completion of your VTmtss Driver Diagram, and the selection of one or more Act 173 Systems Levers to focus in on in your systemic improvement efforts. More information about the Systems Screener, including process steps for completing it, can be found on the AOE website.

Please note that this step corresponds with the systems assessment component of the CNA process. If you have already completed this work within your CNA process, you may find that you're able to skip to Step 2 below.

Step 2: Identify your Priority Systems Lever(s)

Select one or more Act 173 Systems Levers—LCAS, Coordinated Curriculum, EST, and NBPL—to focus on, in your improvement work. This is technically a step that could be completed before completing the Systems Screener, or alongside your Systems Screener completion process. But if you are new to assessing your Act 173 needs, the AOE recommends identifying a lever or levers to focus on using one of two approaches:

1. Complete the Needs Assessment portion of the Making Connections documents for each of the Act 173 Systems Levers ([LCAS](#), [Coordinated Curriculum](#), [EST](#), [NBPD](#)). These documents provide a quantitative measure of how each of your levers are performing and give school systems “next steps” instructions (i.e., focus on this lever within your improvement work; contact the AOE for assistance, etc.) based on their needs assessment score. They also include best practices to measure your performance against, which can help school systems to identify specific areas of improvement, when action planning. which can help school systems to identify specific areas of improvement, when action planning.

School systems are encouraged to complete all four needs assessments, if possible. But if you have limited time, we recommend focusing first on the LCAS, then CC, EST, and NBPD documents, as the systems that are most foundational to achieving the goals of Act 173.

2. As an alternative to completing these needs assessments, you may find that your team's prior continuous improvement discussions may have led you to identify which of your systems lever or levers are in the most need of attention. These discussions may have happened as a part of completing your VTmtss Systems Screener, or as a function of your other recent improvement work.

While this approach will save you time, one of the advantages to completing the Needs Assessment is the identification of specific practices that your systems aren't currently supporting. It's helpful to be able to reference these when goal setting and improvement planning; if your conversations about your systems lever needs haven't included the identification of specific practices or strategies that you'd want to improve upon, we would recommend taking the time to complete the needs assessments.

Step 3: Identify Systems Lever Improvement Goals

Complete the VTmtss Driver Diagram to identify these improvement goals. The [VTmtss Driver Diagram](#) uses VTmtss Systems Screener results to help a team identify and pursue improvement goals for the 173 Systems lever(s) that they have decided to focus on. It guides an LEA in articulating its key change idea(s), along with potential action steps and milestones to reflect in their resulting continuous improvement planning work.

We recommend that LEAs have their VTmtss Driver Diagram conversations through the lens of their prioritized Systems Levers. The AOE has created a series of Act 173 *Making Connections with VTmtss* documents to help LEAs focus their conversations on their Systems Lever(s) of choice. Each *Making Connections with VTmtss* document addresses one systems lever, and articulates performance indicators, best practices, and relevant VTmtss Driver Diagram prompts that teams should use in their improvement conversations for that Lever. Find the [Making Connections with VTmtss documents](#) under "Additional 173 Tools and Resources."

Please note that this process step corresponds with driver diagram completion within the CNA process. If you have already completed this work within your CNA process, and you have considered the VTmtss Framework components in this work, you may find that you're able to skip ahead, although it's possible to complete a CNA driver diagram without discussing Act 173; LEAs need to use their best judgment in determining whether their existing CNA work has set them up to effectively respond to Act 173.

Step 4: Identify Act 173 Resources to Support Improvement Work

Crosswalk your Act 173 improvement needs and goals against the Act 173 Supports that have been provided by the AOE. Coming out of the completion of your VTmtss Driver Diagram, you will have identified some improvement goals associated with the systems lever or levers of your choice. But you may not know what resources are available to help you get there.

At this point, we would recommend that you consult the AOE's [Act 173 Guidance Documents](#) page for an evolving list of resources that you can use to support your action planning. Please note that many of these resources will support your work across multiple systems levers. Data training resources, for example, strongly connect to LCAS, but could also inform EST best practices re: progress monitoring. The EST Practice Profile clearly connects to EST but may also inform NBPL conversations relative to training specialists offering student supports. Your LEA is in the best position to determine which resources best connect to your needs, and to identify the application of those resources that will make the most sense for you.

Step 5: Create an Action Plan

In this step, the AOE recommends that LEAs use their VTmtss Driver Diagram outcomes, and identified Act 173 resources, and begin action planning. LEAs are encouraged to represent their Act 173 action plans within another existing plan—a Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP), for example, or a Special Education Monitoring Plan—as opposed to starting something new. Your team is in the best position to determine where, and how, to represent your planning.

Step 6: Implement the Action Plan

Implement and monitor your plan within a Plan Do Study Act (PDSA) cycle. At this point, our recommended process becomes less standardized, and is more about your LEA determining the best approach to implementing its Act 173 work. The AOE's CNA process documents may be a helpful point of reference as you examine your options and identify a course of action.

Technical Assistance

Although LEAs are free to engage in this process independently, the AOE's VTmtss Team has specialists available who can support your work, and who can help to facilitate your conversations. The AOE is also aware that school systems may be capable of facilitating these discussions on their own, but that they may not always have the bandwidth to make that happen.

Because of this, the AOE recommends that school systems reach out to the VTmtss Team for support completing this process if they:

- Have been identified as being eligible to receive Comprehensive Supports.
- Have a Local Special Education determination of Needs Intervention or Needs Substantial Intervention.
- Receive a score referring them to a VTmtss specialist when completing a needs assessment within a 173 Systems Lever *Making Connections with VTmtss* document.
- Meet none of the criteria above but are interested in having this process facilitated in partnership with the AOE.

Services provided by the VTmtss Team include:

- Collecting and analyzing your school or LEA's VTmtss Systems Screener data
- Facilitating the VTmtss Systems Screener
- Facilitating the VTmtss Driver Diagram and application of the *Making Connections with VTmtss* documents

- Helping you to connect your identified needs to Act 173-related resources, including EST resources
- Translating your VTmtss Driver Diagram results into an action plan

To request technical assistance support in this work, reach out to the VTmtss Team. The team has created a short, [online form](#) for technical assistance requests, and will follow up with you to discuss your needs upon receipt.

If you have questions about the VTmtss Framework tools or about the services available to you through the AOE, please reach out to Tracy Watterson, VTmtss Program Manager, at tracy.watterson@vermont.gov.