Act 28 Literacy Council Data Presentation

Questions and Answers Follow-Up

Purpose

This document was developed by the Agency of Education (AOE) to support the Advisory Council on Literacy in performing their duties as defined in Act 28 of 2021. What follows are a list of questions from the Council sent to the AOE after the October data presentation -- grouped for organizational purposes -- and their responses. Groupings are not exact and there may be overlap and/or repetition.

Definition of Literacy

Question (Q) 1: How does AOE define literacy?

Answer (A) 1: Act 28 of 2021 defines its purpose as "to continue the ongoing work to improve literacy for all students in the State [...]" and refers to "methods of teaching literacy in the five key areas of literacy instruction, as identified by the National Reading Panel." These five areas are phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, and reading comprehension. While these five areas constitute foundational reading skills and contribute to the definition of literacy, they do not constitute a complete definition of literacy for an individual over time. In the Agency's *Defining Literacy – A Brief Discussion* we describe how the definition of literacy changes over time to reflect the increasing complexity of what it means to be a literate individual at different developmental stages. There are multiple definitions of literacy, many of which go beyond the ability to read. The National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE) defines literacy as "the practices of engaging—creating, consuming, and critiquing–with all kinds of multimodal texts" (NCTE, 2018). As referenced in Act 28, the five key components of literacy instruction provide the foundation for movement along the literacy continuum over time.

Q2: Why are the SBAC ELA scores not an accurate measure of literacy?

A2: The SBAC ELA scores reflect standards for English Language Arts, which include reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language. While components of literacy are embedded within English Language Arts, the two constructs are not the same. In the Agency's *Literacy and SBAC – Executive Summary* document, the AOE shares four important insights:

1. SBAC was developed as a summative assessment of those Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The CCSS has emphasized career and college readiness skills generally and the standards for English Language Arts take an integrated approach that includes reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language. Thus, the statewide

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summative assessment of (ELA) proficiency assesses more than the five key areas of literacy instruction outlined in Act 28.

2. Literacy, or being literate, is not solely proficiency in the five skill areas defined by the National Reading Panel (phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, and reading comprehension) but requires an individual to minimally develop those skills to develop literacy.

3. Assessment of literacy requires more than examining student performance on one assessment -- let alone one type of assessment -- that measures performance on literacy tasks.

4. SBAC measures more than a student's ability to read and write. SBAC claims for reading, writing, listening and speaking, and research and inquiry are broad statements that describe intended outcomes for students in each area of literacy.

Reading Proficiency

Q3: How does the State assess reading proficiency?

A3: Reading is assessed through the Smarter Balanced ELA assessment. Reading is one of four claims (or subdomains) of the overall ELA content area. More about the Reading claim of the Smarter Balanced ELA assessment can be found in the Assessment Blueprint.

Q4: What should we be using to measure individual and cohort reading proficiency?

A4: There is not an easy answer to both components of this question without additional clarification. Regarding "cohort reading proficiency" – the team would need additional information to answer this question appropriately. Do you mean tracking individual student growth at the state level over time? If so, that presents challenges and concerns that result in unwanted effects. For instance, this model tends to exclude groups of students – particularly the most marginalized (such as mobile, homeless, etc. populations).

Regarding measuring individual student proficiency, the answer to this question is not a recommendation for one tool. Our State Board Rule Series 2000 – Education Quality Standards 2123.2 describes the expectation that each supervisory union *shall develop, and each school shall implement, a local comprehensive assessment system that:*

a. *assesses the standards approved by the State Board of Education;*
b. *employs **a balance of assessment types**, including but not limited to, teacher-or student-designed assessments, portfolios, performances, exhibitions and projects;*
c. *includes both formative and summative assessments;*
d. *enables decisions to be made about student progression and graduation, including measuring proficiency-based learning;*
e. *informs the development of Personalized Learning Plans and student support;*
f. *provides data that informs decisions regarding instruction, professional learning, and educational resources and curriculum; and*
g. *reflects strategies and goals outlined in the district's Continuous Improvement Plan.*

In the Agency's [Strengthening and Streamlining Local Comprehensive Assessment Systems](#),

- The system should contain information that describes the types and purposes of assessments, the methods of ensuring validity, reliability and fidelity, the decision-making processes used to inform instruction, and the logistics of using assessments effectively
- School districts and/or supervisory unions can use the concept of a balanced assessment system to identify and organize the assessments they use by purpose…If the system appears out of balance, adjustments should be made. The specific tools and processes may differ across districts and schools, but a trustworthy system is comprehensive enough to address all purposes and to capture the full range of critical components within the academic or behavioral domain (p.27).
- Different types of assessments can be used for more than one purpose and, generally, no one piece of assessment information can fulfill all purposes. Assessments should be inclusive of all students to the extent possible, which means that some students may require accommodations to access the assessment.

These documents recognize that there are multiple assessment tools that could be used at the local level to assess reading proficiency, and that summative assessments of reading are just one snapshot at one point in time.

Below we have provided links to State documents that provide overviews of assessments related to English Language Arts:

- [Strengthening and Streamlining Local Comprehensive Assessment Systems](#) - This resource was created in 2017 to provide guidelines and resources to help educators in supervisory unions and districts develop a streamlined, balanced local comprehensive assessment system for all students. On pages 19 – 25 the reader will find an overview of assessments of skills related to literacy and assessment of strengths and limitations of those assessments. This is not an exhaustive list.
- [A Blueprint for Early Literacy](#) excerpt - "Smarter Balanced ELA data are only available starting in third grade – they do not describe student literacy outcomes in PreK-2nd grade. Therefore, any data on student literacy learning that can be gathered locally are critical. The most useful student data are those that describe literacy learning across all aspects of literacy (including the set of code-based and meaning based skills discussed in Section 2). These data may or may not be available through local assessment practices. This leads to several critical questions: Are any local assessment tools in use (or able to be adopted) that can provide detailed data on PreK through third grade students' literacy learning? Is there a system in place to collect these data, analyze them, and provide them in ways that can effectively guide programmatic and instructional planning?" As an example of sample tools that can and are used at the local level that pertain to the question posed above see below (this is not an exhaustive list):

- o This [2020-21 Early Reading Assessment Guidance](#) developed by Student Achievement Partners outlines three specific areas of literacy, foundational skills, fluency, and knowledge, that warrant strategic assessment in the coming year.
  - o [Qualitative Reading Inventory – 6 (Leslie and Caldwell)](#)
  - o [Running Records](#)
  - o [Yopp-Singer Test of Phoneme Segmentation](#)
  - o [Concepts of Print Assessment](#)
  - o [Words Their Way Spelling Inventory](#) (Bear, et al.)
  - o [Free or Very Low Cost Early Literacy Assessments With Diagnostic Value and Demonstrated Reliability and Validity](#) (Duke, et al.)
- [Framework for Vermont's Early Childhood Comprehensive Assessment System](#) - Vermont created an Early Childhood Assessment System Taskforce to evaluate and create a framework of currently utilized assessments and initiatives that support early childhood assessment and screening, as well as an initial plan for implementation of a statewide early childhood comprehensive assessment system for Vermont. A description of assessment categories and types (e.g., diagnostic, etc.) and examples of those assessments used in the state begins on page 8. *(NOTE: This group represented a myriad of cross sector and interagency professionals including: the Vermont Agency of Education, Vermont Agency of Human Services, Vermont Department of Health, University of Vermont, Vermont Birth to Five, Building Bright Futures, Head Start, and independent education consultants throughout the State.)*
- The Agency's [Early Childhood Education Assessment webpage](#) provides additional information on Teaching Strategies Gold, Classroom Assessment Scoring System, and the Ready for Kindergarten Survey.

Assessment Data Trends

Q5: How have Vermont's NAEP scores trended over time?

A5: The [NAEP Data Explorer](#) (NDE) (accessible on the [National Center for Education Statistics](#) website) provides anyone access to this tool to visualize NAEP data over multiple years. It is customizable with useful filters to answer any combination of questions.

Q6: What does [analyzing] SBAC and NAEP data side-by-side tell us about overall trends in ELA?

A6: Each assessment offers different insights. The strength of the NAEP assessment is that it allows us to compare Vermont to the national average. What we learn is that with some student groups (e.g., English Learners) Vermont performs better than the national average, while with other student groups (e.g., Students with Disabilities) Vermont performs below the national average. A strength of the Smarter Balanced assessment is its ability to allow us to monitor achievement gaps by student group. What we have learned is that, with all claims (sub-

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domains) of the ELA assessment, large achievement gaps exist between historically marginalized group (HMG) populations compared to their counterparts.

Historically Marginalized Student Groups

Q7: Do we see similar outcomes for students with NAEP (7 points below the national average) and SBAC scores for students with learning disabilities?

A7: With both assessments we see large achievement gaps between students with disabilities and their counterparts. It should be noted that NAEP results for students with disabilities need to be interpreted within the context of the assessment. Specifically, NAEP offers very few accommodations so many students with disabilities are unable to participate in the assessment.

Q8: The SBAC and NAEP assessments create clutter, which makes it difficult to see pockets of success at the lower levels of proficiency. Can we uncover granular data to help teachers define programs for historically marginalized students and evaluate how best to help them?

A8: If we are understanding the question correctly, we interpret this as a question pertaining to how teachers can use both summative and local assessment data (that may include all types of assessments) to inform instruction.

Pertaining to the Smarter Balanced state summative assessments – educators can use the Lexile Framework to inform instruction. The Lexile Framework for Reading uses Lexile measures to help educators and parents find reading materials at each student's unique reading level, engaging students in learning by ensuring they comprehend their reading materials and monitoring their progress over time. Educators can use Lexile measures to personalize student learning, differentiate their instruction, and better communicate with parents. Smarter Balanced score reports for students provide Lexile measures.

There are two kinds of Lexile measures: Lexile reader measures and Lexile text measures. Lexile reader measures describe how strong a student's reading is. Lexile text measures describe how difficult, or complex, a text like a book or magazine article is. Educators can enter student information into the Lexile and Quantile Hub, a statewide resource as part of our partnership with MetaMetrics announced in 2019, and access a suite of instructional and planning materials. instructional and planning materials.

Pertaining to local assessment use, and consistent with EQS 2123.2 and Strengthening and Streamlining Local Comprehensive Assessment Systems, there are a number of assessments and assessment types that can provide insight into individual student learning needs and proficiency. Additionally, educators can reference tools such as the Early Readers Accelerator Guide, which speaks to the importance of culturally relevant content to support culturally sustaining learning communities.

Q9: Can the historically marginalized category be further broken down in SBAC scores? Are we able to take a finer tooth comb when viewing the data to see more granular data and average scores for the various segments represented by HM?

A9: These data exist and are available in spreadsheet form. However, if the question is whether these data and analyses can be made available in the format presented to the Council in October (i.e., digestible and accessible) this would take some time and staff bandwidth currently deployed elsewhere.

Benchmarks and Other Assessments

Q10: Does the AOE collect any information about what benchmark assessments for early literacy that schools are using?

A10: [Teaching Strategies GOLD® (TSGOLD)](#) is used to assess children from birth through kindergarten. Extensive field tests have shown it to be both valid and reliable. Teaching Strategies Gold has been adopted as the progress monitoring tool for Universal PreK. Schools supplement with benchmark assessments of their choice.

Q11: Will the AOE consider OTHER assessments or incorporate district-based assessments in addition to NAEP and SBAC?

A11: There are currently no plans in place for additional district requirements. However, the AOE engages in ongoing research and evaluation of different, existent and new assessment tools and programs generally in an effort to best meet the needs of Vermont students, schools, and communities.

Q12: Is there a way to triangulate ELL testing (WIDA Access for ELLs) or assessments teachers deliver in classrooms, such as running records, Fountas and Pinnell, Lexia, STAR/Renaissance assessments?

A12: The English Language Proficiency assessment was not designed to be used alongside the Smarter Balanced ELA or NAEP assessments to measure literacy. Putting aside that less than 2% of students in Vermont take the ELP assessment, measuring progress towards English language proficiency for a non-native speaker has a different set of trajectories and challenges than with other ELA/literacy assessments. Students who take the ELP assessment likely will face challenges on the Smarter Balanced assessment that are related to access rather than performance.

Early Learning

Q13: How can we ensure alignment with the VELS and the literacy CC state standards in K-grade 3?

A13: The Vermont Early Learning Standards <u>are</u> the Common Core State Standards for Grades K through 3. The Vermont Early Learning Standards for Language Development include six elements: Receptive Language, Expressive Language, Social Rules of Language, Dual Language Learners, Speaking & Listening, and Language. The latter two are taken directly from the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts. The relevant indicators of the 2015 Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework, Ages Birth to Five are aligned with these Vermont Early Learning Standards.

Q14: How can we use PreK data to inform instruction upon entry into kindergarten?

A14: All prequalified Universal PreK programs in private, public, Head Start, Family Homes, etc. settings, are required to use Teaching Strategies GOLD as their formative assessment. Data is collected via Checkpoints twice a year. There is also the opportunity to run various TSGOLD reports that can give kindergarten teachers more information. Because the Teaching Strategies GOLD Objectives are aligned with the Vermont Early Learning Standards (CCSS grades K-3), Kindergarten teachers can review the child's learning trajectory and use the information to inform assessment and instruction upon entering Kindergarten.

Q15: **How does the "Get Ready for Kindergarten Survey" (R4K!S) data collected at the start of kindergarten compare to the Teaching Strategies Gold (TSGOLD) data collected at the end of Prekindergarten? Are these tools providing enough information to inform instruction?**

A15: The R4K!S is not a direct assessment of students; rather it relies on the teacher's accumulated observational knowledge of the child developed during the first few weeks of kindergarten. It is helpful to look at the R4K!S data year to year (longitudinally) for trends, but it is not currently used to inform instruction due to time lags between entering and receiving back R4K!S data at the local level. This is an area that the AOE is currently examining. Once the final submission is made, SU/SDs can request the raw data and analyze themselves.

The TSGOLD is a formative assessment specifically designed to monitor student progress from birth through Grade 3. These data can inform instruction regularly. However, not all Universal Pre-K providers submit this information to Kindergarten educators and not all Kindergarten educators request or know to request it.

Q16: What should VT require for curriculum, instruction, and assessment in Prekindergarten across the mixed delivery model?

A16: All Universal PreK programs sign assurances that their curriculum is aligned with the Vermont Early Learning Standards (VELS). What defines Vermont Universal Prekindergarten Education is the implementation of high-quality, effective instruction by licensed educators who use evidence-based practices within intentionally designed early learning environments. Early educators align curriculum with the Vermont Early Learning Standards while adapting experiences to support the full participation of every child to realize their full potential and promote successful outcomes. The VELS provides a roadmap for intentional teaching by describing in detail goals for the knowledge and skills children will gain through the early childhood years.

Literacy Across the Continuum

Q17: How will we prepare teachers to continue to teach literacy to struggling readers beyond 3rd grade?

A17: This question has far-reaching implications that can impact different stages of an educator's career continuum and the organizational operation of school systems. For this reason, it requires a coordinated and collaborative approach. It is also important that we continue to be informed by existing frameworks and reports such as the [Blueprint for Early Literacy Comprehensive System of Services, PreK Through Third Grade](#) (henceforth referred to

as the Blueprint) and the 2018 report [Expanding and Strengthening Best-Practice Supports for Students who Struggle](#) (prepared by the District Management Group and referred to henceforth as DMG report). Below, we have provided an overview of current initiatives underway, selected excerpts from critical state reports, and resources that provide recommendations that should inform the State's efforts to support two critical career phases of educators that impact student learning outcomes: teacher preparation and program completion (developing and new educators) and teacher support, retention, and promotion (practicing educators). It is important to note that what is described below requires systems-level change and implementation.

Teacher Preparation/Program Completion:

- The Vermont Agency of Education (AOE) [Blueprint for Early Literacy Comprehensive System of Services, PreK Through Third Grade](#) outlines evidence-based practices that support the state's literacy efforts. To support the implementation of the Blueprint, AOE has requested the Region 1 Comprehensive Center (R1CC) explore how educators are prepared in K-3 literacy instruction in early childhood, early childhood special education, and elementary education courses. The project includes a process for reviewing course syllabi (core/required courses for elementary, early childhood, and early childhood special education onl**y) for evidence-based literacy strategies.** *NOTE: [The Region 1 Comprehensive Center](#) at the [American Institutes for Research](#) (AIR) builds the capacity of state education agencies (SEAs), local education agencies, and schools to improve instructional quality, address achievement and equity gaps, and improve outcomes for all students on state-identified priority initiatives. Region 1 staff bring substantial technical assistance and content expertise in designing, developing, and implementing strategies to support educational improvement.*

- The 2018 report [Expanding and Strengthening Best-Practice Supports for Students who Struggle](#)
    - Page 12:
        - "Of all the factors that drive student performance over which education systems have control, teacher quality is by far the most important... Investing in the effectiveness of core instruction is critical for students in general education and students with disabilities as any investments in the quality of primary instruction benefits all students."
    - Page 27:
        - "Just as the content expertise of the general education classroom teacher is critical to high quality instruction in the regular classroom, it is essential that students who receive extra time and extra help receive support from a staff with strong pedagogical content knowledge of the subjects they are teaching and have extensive training and aptitude. For students who struggle to read, research indicates that the subject-specific

training of the instructor has significant bearing on the student's likelihood of achieving grade-level mastery."

Teacher Support:

- The 2018 report [Expanding and Strengthening Best-Practice Supports for Students who Struggle](#)
  - Page 12:
    - "Of all the factors that drive student performance over which education systems have control, teacher quality is by far the most important. Even for students with mild-to-moderate disabilities, who receive some of their academic support from special education teachers, the majority of their instruction time is typically from a general education teacher. Investing in the effectiveness of core instruction is critical for students in general education and students with disabilities as any investments in the quality of primary instruction benefits all students. In fact, on a national basis, the states with the highest-achieving students with disabilities tend to be those who also have the highest achievement for general education."
    - "Coaching is a high-leverage way to support teachers in becoming more effective teachers and meeting the needs of their students. The effectiveness of instructional coaching stems largely from its ability to be highly customized, which can create faster and deeper insights for teachers about what can work in their classroom. Research has demonstrated that while coaching is not required for teachers to learn a new skill, it dramatically increases the likelihood that teachers will actually use the newly gained skill in the classroom. Further research has established a link between reading gains and intensive coaching programs that are implemented effectively by targeted staff."
  - Page 27:
    - "Just as the content expertise of the general education classroom teacher is critical to high quality instruction in the regular classroom, it is essential that students who receive extra time and extra help receive support from a staff with strong pedagogical content knowledge of the subjects they are teaching and have extensive training and aptitude. For students who struggle to read, research indicates that the subject-specific training of the instructor has significant bearing on the student's likelihood of achieving grade-level mastery."
  - Page 34:
    - "It is a more effective intervention to provide extra time with teachers who are highly-skilled in the teaching of reading than in-class support

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from paraprofessionals, who generally do not have extensive training in the teaching of reading. Further, students who are receiving support from a paraprofessional in the classroom may experience less time and attention from content-strong teachers. It is not uncommon for a general education teacher to assume that students with additional adult support are 'taken care of,' and instead focus their attention on those who have no additional adult support."

- ▪ "Just as the content expertise of the instructor is vital for the success of all students who struggle at the elementary level, this is true at the secondary level as well…Given the greater complexity of the subject matter at the secondary level, it can be difficult for staff without subject matter expertise to explain key concepts, to reteach material using two or three different approaches or interpret underlying misconceptions from students based on their incorrect answers."

- • The [Blueprint for Early Literacy Comprehensive System of Services, PreK Through Third Grade](#) – beginning at the bottom of page 16 the Blueprint delineates a set of best practices that include but are not limited to developing:
  - o A culture of continuous growth and improvement, for staff as well as students
  - o A culture that builds expertise … "by examining roles and responsibilities, thoughtfully planning ways to address gaps through thoughtful hiring and evaluation practices, securing embedded school level support, and providing high-quality professional learning."

- • Additional Resources:
  - o [Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices](#) (WWC). A snapshot of recommendations is summarized below and a checklist for carrying out these recommendations can be found on pages 9-10. An annotated resource can be made available for further reference.
    - ▪ Three recommendations with strongest evidence:
      - • provide explicit vocabulary instruction;
      - • provide direct and explicit comprehension strategy instruction; and
      - • make available intensive and individualized interventions for struggling readers that can be provided by trained specialist.
    - ▪ Two recommendations with "moderate" evidence:
      - • provide opportunities for extended discussion of text meaning and interpretation; and
      - • increase student motivation and engagement in literacy learning.
  - o National Council of Teachers of English (2018, July 17). *[A call to action: What we know about adolescent literacy](#)*.
    - ▪ Defining Literacy - Research Excerpt (emphasis added):

- "Literacy encompasses much more than reading and includes writing, and a variety of social and intellectual practices, including digital and interdisciplinary literacies. Literacy learning is an ongoing and non-hierarchical process in which each academic content area poses its own literacy approaches and challenges. *In addition to content-area literacies, adolescents rely on out-of-school literacies in their identity development. Part of the belief system underlying this statement is that students often have literacy skills that are not made evident in the classroom and teachers must make special efforts to include them* (Morgan, 1997)."