

ARP-ESSER State Set-Aside Benchmark Assessment Grant Application

I. Overview and Policy Context

The Vermont Agency of Education (AOE) invites supervisory unions/districts (SUs/SDs) to apply for the [American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Relief Fund](#) (ARP ESSER) State Set-Aside funding, totaling \$500,000, for the purpose of improving their benchmark assessment(s), one component of a high-quality Local Comprehensive Assessment System (LCAS).

Under Section 2001(f)(1) of the American Rescue Plan Act, States are required to describe how the SEA will use its set aside funds *on evidence-based interventions to address the academic impact of lost instructional time... and ensure that such interventions respond to students' academic, social, and emotional needs and address the disproportionate impact of the coronavirus on the student subgroups described in section 1111(b)(2)(B)(xi) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 6311(b)(2)(B)(xi)), students experiencing homelessness, and children and youth in foster care, including by providing additional support to local educational agencies to fully address such impacts.*

Vermont's Recovery goals include assessing and addressing the impact of the pandemic on students in two focus areas: 1) academics and 2) social and emotional wellness needs. Consistent with the State's primary education recovery strategy and goals, this funding opportunity focuses both on addressing the specific harms caused by the COVID-19 emergency and on improving the core functions of our schools and communities into the future by supporting LEAs in improving their LCAS, one of four system levers identified to realize the goals of Act 173.

This grant opportunity will focus on the academic component, specifically for English Language Arts and Mathematics, by providing funding to SU/SDs to improve their benchmark assessment(s) in one or more of the following ways:

1. Purchase a new benchmark assessment system(s) that includes Lexile and Quantile measures;
2. Extend the grade levels assessed in the current benchmark assessment system that provides Lexile and Quantile measures throughout K - 8 with the possibility of including high school; and/or
3. Fund participation in the [Educator Academy for Lexile and/or Quantile Frameworks](#).

Benchmark assessments are an essential component of a high-quality LCAS. A benchmark provides a point of reference against which a learner's level of proficiency can be measured. Benchmark assessments can be used at a variety of local levels including, but not limited to, classroom, grade, or school level. Benchmark assessments can inform policy, instructional planning, and decision-making at the classroom, school, and/or district level. While benchmark

assessments can be used as both screeners and interims, they should be used to collect data for future planning of instruction and curriculum, as well as communicating to learners their progress toward proficiency.

Benchmark assessments also support an asset-based approach to learning and assessment by identifying students' strengths that can then be used to bolster areas of need. This perspective is essential for achieving equity in educational systems. An asset-based approach demonstrates respect for the diversity of skills and knowledge that learners bring to the classroom and can increase student engagement and motivation to learn.

The AOE has included examples of Benchmark assessments in Appendix D that align with the Common Core State Standards as well as the expectations within the Education Quality Standards (EQS). These benchmark assessments also include Lexile and Quantile measures. Additional assessments that are not on this list may be considered as long as the assessment can report scores in Lexile or Quantile formats and meets quality criteria expectations. See Appendix D for this information.

In order to qualify for this grant opportunity, the [SY22-23 Universal Screener, Interim, or Benchmark Census](#) needs to be completed. The purpose of this survey is to gather information on the type(s) of assessments Supervisory Union/Districts are using to measure growth for English Language Arts, math, and Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) throughout the school year.

This competitive grant will be for FY23 (2022-2023 academic year) and FY24 (2023-2024 academic year). Applicants may apply for grants for up to \$25,000. Grant applications will be reviewed by the Agency of Education staff after the January 17, 2023 application deadline. Competitive grant awards will be announced to SU/SDs no later than January 25, 2023. Approved grants may be fully or partially funded. The final award will be determined by the reviewers.

Note: Since an assessment tool alone is not sufficient for improving student outcomes, the AOE is in the process of soliciting proposals that would provide wrap-around professional learning opportunities regarding the effective use of benchmark assessment data. This is part of the AOE's statewide responsibility for supporting the development of strong LCAS. Specifically, the successful contractor will provide supportive coaching and professional learning opportunities for kindergarten through grade eight educators focused on the effective use of benchmark assessment data and the implementation of evidence-based practices to improve outcomes for all learners. This work will take place both virtually and face-to-face.

II. Background and Evidence Base

[The Education Quality Standards](#) (EQS) as well as Vermont's previous School Quality Standards require that all SU/SDs have a LCAS in place. EQS 2123.2. Development and Implementation of LCAS states:

Each supervisory union shall develop, and each school shall implement, a Local Comprehensive Assessment System that employs a balance of assessment types, including but not limited to, teacher-or student-designed assessments, portfolios, performances, exhibitions, and projects, and provides data that informs decisions regarding instruction, professional learning, and educational resources and curriculum.

The Agency of Education (AOE) has identified four systems levers associated with effective Act 173 implementation: Education Support Teams (ESTs), Coordinated Curriculum, Local Comprehensive Assessment Systems (LCAS), and Needs-based Professional Development (NBPD). These systems levers reflect longstanding EQS requirements. The AOE believes that if school systems are effectively implementing these four systems levers, then they will have the systems in place to realize the goals of Act 173.

Within a Local Comprehensive Assessment System, benchmark assessments can be helpful in answering the following questions:

- What knowledge and skills are important to learn?
- How do curriculum and instruction need to be adjusted to meet student learning goals?
- How well are programs, curricula, or other resources helping students to achieve learning goals?
- Are students, classes, schools, and districts on course to demonstrate proficiency?

Benchmark assessments are assessments administered periodically throughout the school year, at specified times during a curriculum sequence, to evaluate students' knowledge and skills relative to an explicit set of longer-term learning goals. [The Benchmark Assessments for Improved Learning Policy Brief](#) from The Assessment and Accountability Comprehensive Center explains why benchmark assessments are an important component of a larger system. While annual state assessments provide a general indicator of how students are doing relative to annual learning standards, and while formative assessment is embedded in ongoing classroom instruction to inform immediate teaching and learning goals, benchmark assessments occupy a middle position strategically located and administered outside daily classroom use but inside the school and/or district curriculum. Often uniform in timing and content across classrooms and schools, benchmark assessment results can be aggregated at the classroom, grade, school, and district levels to school and district decision-makers, as well as to teachers. This interim indication of how well students are learning can fuel action, where needed, and accelerate progress toward annual goals (p. 2).

Additionally, a report by the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL), [Measuring How Benchmark Assessments Affect Student Achievement](#), warns, "Higher mathematics scores will come not because benchmarks exist but because of how the benchmark assessment data are used by a school's teachers and leaders (p. 8)." The report suggests that further research is needed in order to understand how benchmark data are used to inform instruction as well as interventions.

In [Making Benchmark Testing Work](#), the authors point out:

Many schools are developing assessment systems to monitor their students' progress toward state standards throughout the academic year. Educators in these schools wisely recognize that information from annual state tests is often too little, too late. State tests can be powerful motivators, communicating expectations and focusing curriculum and instruction. But they rarely provide the ongoing information that schools need to guide instructional programs and address the learning problems of students who might otherwise be left behind.

Benchmark assessments, therefore, are an essential component of an assessment system that provides timely data for making informed instructional decisions focused on improving outcomes for students.

III. Vermont Agency of Education Priorities and Requirements

This grant will fund projects that address learning loss due to lost instructional time by supporting the implementation of high-quality benchmark assessments to ensure that students' academic needs are being met and also address the disproportionate impact of the coronavirus on the student subgroups described in section 1111(b)(2)(B)(xi) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 6311(b)(2)(B)(xi)), students experiencing homelessness, and children and youth in foster care.

Project requirements include:

1. **Contact Information:** Name, address, phone number, and e-mail information for Lead Grant Contact, Partners, and Business Manager.
2. **Organizational Structure:** Provide a clear description and a plan for project structure to meet the grant expectations. Define roles and responsibilities for a leadership team that ideally includes representation by administrators, staff, and/or community members.
3. **Communication System:** Identify intended strategies for communication with and among the school(s), AOE staff, and any stakeholders.
4. **Project, Plan, Evidence, Timeline, and Benchmarks of Success:** Provide a clear description, an achievable plan, evidence basis, and timeline for this project, as well as specific indicators of project benchmarks. This plan and timeline must be developed for the time period between February 2023 and September 2024.
5. **Budget and Budget Justification:** Include a cost-effective budget and justification for line items that reflect the goals and priorities of this project. This budget and budget justification must be for the time period between February 2023 and September 2024.

IV. Project Award and Timeline

Grant awards will be announced January 25, 2023 and begin on the date that final signatures are executed and will expire on September 30, 2024 with the expectation that program objectives are met and all reporting and monitoring requirements are successfully fulfilled. Grantees are expected to provide a plan, timeline, and budget request for the identified grant activity period.

Timeline:

Grant Application Released: November 14, 2022

Application Deadline: January 17, 2023

Anticipated Grant Duration: February 1, 2023 or after upon execution of signed grant agreement – September 30, 2024

Number of Awards: Multiple awards are anticipated and are contingent upon available funding

VI. Application Requirements

The narrative sections of the application must be double-spaced, and the font must not be smaller than 12-point and shall not exceed 10 pages. Each application must contain the following sections:

A. Grant Narrative: (Please see Appendix A.)

Project Description and Justification:

1. A description of how the project will meet the Vermont Agency of Education Priorities:
 - a. Improving LCAS and outcomes for students through the inclusion of SU/SD benchmark assessments. Leadership teams may decide to:
 - i. Purchase a new benchmark assessment system(s) that includes Lexile and Quantile measures; and/or
 - ii. Extend the grade levels assessed in the current benchmark assessment system that provides Lexile and Quantile measures throughout K - 8 with the possibility of including high school.
 - iii. Fund participation in the Educator Academy for Lexile and/or Quantile Frameworks.
 - b. Ensuring that all students are provided equitable educational opportunities. Leadership teams will explain how they will:
 - i. Refine assessment systems to be responsive to the needs of all students.
 - ii. Use assessments to collect evidence of learning that informs the selection of evidence-based practices to meet students' needs.
 - iii. Review assessment data to determine if all students are receiving necessary supports.
2. Connections to Recovery and Continuous Improvement Plans that explain how leadership teams will review, select, and use benchmark assessment data.
3. Assurance that the [SY22-23 Universal Screener, Interim or Benchmark Census](#) has been completed.

Project Management

1. Clearly defined roles and responsibilities of participants, as well as the Leadership Team, that demonstrate the team has the capacity for managing the project, organizing the work, and meeting deadlines;
2. A lead grant contact is identified; and,
3. Strategies for communication with and among the school(s), AOE staff, and/or any stakeholders are clear.

B. Project Timeline and Benchmarks: (Please See Appendix B.)

1. A detailed description of the project timeline and benchmarks that includes:
 - a. A detailed description of goals, an achievable plan and timeline, and project benchmarks. This scope and sequence must be developed for the projected time period between February 2023 and September 2024. A project timeline with specific indicators of project success (benchmarks) at key points of the timeline;
 - b. A description of the measurements that will be used to determine success including clearly defined goals, numeric objectives, and specific outcomes; and
 - c. A plan for sustaining this work at the end of the funding period must be included.

C. Budget and Budget Justification: (Please see Appendix C.)

1. A detailed description of the budget as well as the budget justification that includes:
 - a. A project budget for anticipated funding up to \$25,000; and
 - b. A budget justification that is clearly tied to the scope and requirements of the project.

D. Contact Information:

1. Name, address, phone number, and e-mail information for Superintendent, Lead Grant Contact, and Business Manager.

VII. Application Submission and Review

- A. Submission:** Applicants must submit an electronic copy signed by an authorized institutional official to Pat Fitzsimmons at pat.fitzsimmons@vermont.gov at the Vermont Agency of Education on January 17, 2023. Electronic signatures will be accepted.

Any questions regarding this grant opportunity should be directed to Pat Fitzsimmons via email (pat.fitzsimmons@vermont.gov by January 9, 2023.)

Note: Applications without e-signatures: The completed cover page of this application will be converted into a DocuSign document which will then be routed to the current superintendent for signature to be maintained on file. Signatures indicate understanding and approval of the grant application submission.

B. Review Process: A review panel will evaluate the eligible applications in accordance with the required application components.

Criteria

Criteria	Points
<p>Grant Narrative (70 Points)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Project Description and Justification clearly state how benchmark processes will be improved in an SU/SD. (30 points) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purchase a new benchmark assessment system(s) that includes Lexile and Quantile measures; and/or • Extend the grade levels assessed in the current benchmark assessment system that provides Lexile and Quantile measures throughout K - 8 with the possibility of including high school • Fund participation in the Educator Academy for Lexile and/or Quantile Frameworks 2. Selected assessments are aligned to Common Core State Standards and report Lexile or Quantile measures. (20 Points) 3. Project outcomes and sustainability planning is evident. (20 Points) 	
<p>Budget and Budget Justification (30)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The budget and budget justification are aligned and will enable the Leadership Team to meet their goals. 2. The budget does not exceed \$25,000. 	

The Agency reserves the right to award in full or in part, to reject any and all applications in whole or in part, and to waive technical defects, irregularities or omissions if, in its judgement, the best interest of students would be served. After receiving the application, the Agency reserves the right not to award a grant, to negotiate specific grant amounts, and to select certain grantees regardless of points awarded as part of the process to meet federal requirements or State Board of Education priorities.

Applicants may be asked to clarify or rewrite certain aspects of their applications. Finalists may be asked to participate in an interview before funds are awarded. Applicants will be contacted if such information or actions are necessary.

VIII. Award Administration

- A. Notification of the Award:** The SU/SD designee will be notified of the status of their application within two weeks of the application deadline.
- B. Reporting Requirements:** The Leadership Team and/or SU/SD designee will provide mid and end of fiscal year updates for each year of the grant on progress to a designated staff person at the Agency of Education.
- C. Final Report to be submitted by September 30, 2024:** Project Evidence and Final Evaluation Plan: A detailed description of how the project goals were met, as well as any challenges that were encountered. Additionally, the final evaluation will include:
- An explanation of how partnerships functioned including strengths and challenges, if applicable; and
 - An explanation for how this work will be sustained.

Appendix A: Grant Narrative

Project Description and Justification:

Project Management:

Appendix B: Project Timeline/Benchmarks

Timeline	Goal/Purpose	Description of Activity and Participants	Deliverable/Product	Measurement, Benchmark of Success

Appendix C: Budget

Object Codes

Functions	(100) Stipends	(200) Benefits	(300) Professional and Technical Services (Consultants, Contracts)	(500) Other Purchased Services (Travel, Printing)	(600) Supplies (Books Periodicals) (Subscriptions, Licenses that are under the Capital Threshold)	(700) Technology Related Hardware	(700) Technology Related Software (Subscriptions, Licenses that are over the Capital Threshold)	(800) Miscellaneous Expenditures Dues and Fees	(900) Indirect Cost	Total
(2213) Instructional Staff Training										
(2230) Technology for Instruction										
(2240) Academic Student Assessment										
(2290) Other Support Services – Instructional Training										
(2495) Administration for Grants										
Total										

Budget Justification:

Appendix D: List of Approved Benchmark Assessments for Reading and Mathematics

Each of the assessments provided below report Lexile and/or Quantile measures and are aligned to the CCSS, the state of Vermont's adopted standards for ELA and Mathematics.

Product	Company	Subject Area(s)	Grades
Acadience® Reading (formerly DIBELS Next®)	Acadience Learning	Reading	K-6
aimsweb®Plus	Pearson	Reading Math	K-8
i-Ready Diagnostic	Curriculum Associates	Reading Math	K-12
HMH Inventory	Houghton Mifflin Harcourt	Reading Inventory® Math Inventory®	K-12
ISIP™ Assessment	Istation	ISIP™ Reading ISIP™ Math	K-8
MAP Suite	NWEA	MAP Growth® MAP Reading Fluency®	K-12 PK-5
MyPath®	Imagine Learning	Reading Math	K-12
Star Assessments	Renaissance Learning	Star Early Literacy® Star Reading® Star Math®	PK-3 K-12