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Agency of Education Submits Vermont State Plan to U.S. Department of Education

State Plan responds to the Federal Every Student Succeeds Act

Barre, VT. – The Vermont Agency of Education today submitted the Vermont State Plan for implementation of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The Agency of Education developed this plan over the past year with the help of over 2,000 stakeholders across sectors and from every county in the state.

With this plan, Vermont is using federal dollars to help our communities better understand how well their schools are serving their children. The plan will provide communities with the tools and feedback to improve educational practices and student outcomes

In addition, the federal plan will provide a little extra support for communities where children—because of poverty, bias or disability – need a little more support and effort on our part in order to thrive. When these children are supported well, learning is improved for all, said Secretary of Education Rebecca Holcombe.

ESSA funds constitute up to 6.5 percent of local spending in our highest poverty districts, and just over 3 percent of total funds spent on education statewide. ESSA funds also pay for all our state and federal accountability and school improvement initiatives.

In Vermont, we believe that if schools teach well and children are engaged and supported, young people will thrive—not just on tests, but more importantly, in their communities and in the economic life of the state. We know that students who can't read, write, do mathematics and think critically have few options in a 21st century economy. The measures that we use in the State accountability system are intended to give us a broad overview of school performance, but we know that local measures of student performance and experience are also critical for understanding if students are meeting the expectations for proficiency their communities hold for them.

“The plan will help the AOE direct federal dollars and support to communities where we can make the biggest difference for the children who need it most,” Secretary Holcombe said. “Just as importantly, this plan pushes our higher performing schools to seek better ways to engage and challenge all of our students to take risks and pursue interests in depth.”

The Agency could not have done this work without the very specific and strong input of so many stakeholders, who made sure the plan is a Vermont plan first and foremost.

“When I share Vermont’s response to ESSA with other states, I hear often that people can see that our plan has worked hard to make it first about what Vermont needs and less about compliance to federal law,” said Amy Fowler, Deputy Secretary of Education. “I’m proud that we’ve been able to showcase what we think is important about learning.”

To determine how well schools are serving our children, Vermont will use Education Quality Reviews to provide information about how school systems are performing with respect to academic proficiency, personalized learning, safety and health, high-quality staffing, and financial efficiencies.

For the purposes of federal accountability, Vermont will use a subset of our Vermont measures related to academic the academic proficiency.

About ESSA

ESSA was signed into law in December 2015, and is the latest reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, a civil rights law. This legislation seeks to reduce equity gaps for historically marginalized students by identifying gaps where they occur and targeting dollars and support to local efforts to close those gaps. ESSA replaces No Child Left Behind, which rewarded schools that taught narrowly to high stakes tests.

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Executive Summary for the Vermont State Plan

Accountability

Over the past three years, the educational landscape of Vermont has changed substantially. Through multiple pieces of policy and legislation that emphasize personalized learning, proficiency-based frameworks, and the need for consistency in the availability of educational services and supports, Vermont schools are reconsidering how, what, and where students learn and teachers teach. These changes in Vermont have been driven by equity concerns: concerns about eliminating equity gaps across traditionally underserved student groups in the state, and about providing equitable access, statewide, to a shared baseline of educational services and supports.

In this way, Vermont is uniquely positioned to make the most of the opportunities presented through the Federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). While some elements of ESSA stand in contrast to Vermont policy, most echo and emphasize commitments that the state has already made. We have not only articulated a commitment to supporting equity in our state's education system, but we have policies in place that provide a foundation for the realization of that goal.

Prominent examples of those Vermont policies — Act 77 (the Flexible Pathways Initiative), and the Education Quality Standards (EQS) and Education Quality Reviews (EQRs) — are described below.

In June 2013, the Vermont legislature passed Act 77, outlining the state's Flexible Pathways Initiative. This Act required schools to create Personalized Learning Plans for all students in grades 7-12, and to offer opportunities for learning that fell outside of a traditional school setting. The equitable offering and promotion of those opportunities have been proposed in this State Plan as school performance measures, emphasizing both Vermont's commitment to this Act, and its alignment with the equity-driven goals of ESSA.

In April of 2014, the Vermont State Board of Education released EQS, which describes what Vermont schools are expected to provide to all students. These standards prioritize the importance of a well-rounded education that prepares our youth to fully participate in the civic and economic future of the state. These standards call on the Vermont Agency of Education (AOE), in partnership with school communities, to engage in reviews of the quality of educational endeavors, and to engage in continuous improvement efforts, with an eye towards increasing equitable outcomes for students historically underserved in education. To that end, the AOE engaged with stakeholders to create EQRs, which include both quantitative and qualitative data collections that school systems use to identify strengths and opportunities for growth.

The quantitative component is addressed through five categories of performance measures: 1) academic proficiency, 2) personalization, 3) safe, healthy schools, 4) high quality staffing and 5) financial efficiencies. Data derived from these measures frame the Integrated Field Review

component of EQRs; site-based continuous improvement conversations which are currently in their fourth pilot phase.

In 2017, Vermont Governor Phil Scott described his goals for Vermont education reform, going forward. Those goals — to 1) prioritize support for the most vulnerable students in the state; 2) prepare students to be members of a healthy and growing Vermont economy; and 3) develop reform solutions that will be affordable to implement and maintain — are well represented in this draft accountability proposal. Supporting vulnerable students (also referred to in the draft Plan as “Historically Marginalized Students”) has been prioritized throughout this section, with vulnerable student performance guiding school accountability determinations. Multiple accountability performance measures — including measures tied to post-secondary outcomes — support developing students as members of a thriving Vermont economy. And the affordability of these proposals was evaluated throughout the past year as a part of the Plan development process.

Continuous Improvement

Executive Priorities

In addition to meeting the requirements of the Every Student Succeeds Act, the Continuous Improvement section of the Vermont State Plan reflects the education reform priorities of Vermont's governor, Phil Scott. This section of the plan 1) prioritizes support for the most vulnerable students in the state; 2) prepares students to be members of a healthy and growing Vermont economy; and 3) frames proposals that will be affordable to implement and maintain. AOE proposals' reflection of executive priorities are described below, and recur throughout this section of the plan.

1. This section of the Plan prioritizes support for the most vulnerable students in the state.
2. The Continuous Improvement section of the Plan outlines how schools will be found eligible for Comprehensive and Targeted Supports, and describes the types of supports those schools will receive. These decisions will be based in part on how well a school is serving its most vulnerable students. State and federal resources will be provided with the goal of supporting all of that schools' students, with an emphasis on supporting the vulnerable student population(s) that are being underserved. Schools and Supervisory Unions/Supervisory Districts will be required to outline their strategies for supporting these students through their Continuous Improvement Plans, and for iteratively evaluating the efficacy of that work.
3. This section of the Plan describes resources devoted to helping students to become members of a healthy and growing Vermont economy.
4. The Continuous Improvement section of the Plan outlines approaches to supporting all of the state's schools, Supervisory Unions/Supervisory Districts, and students. For schools serving secondary students, this includes examining school performance against multiple measures that correlate to economic strength, including graduation rate, student performance on college and career-ready assessments, and post-secondary outcomes for graduates.
5. This section of the Plan promotes proposals that will be affordable to implement and maintain.
6. As this section of the plan was developed, the affordability of AOE proposals (also described using the terms "efficiency" and "possibility") were central to the AOE's decision-making process. As a result, the proposals described in this section largely represent a continuation of practice, or a shift of existing resources from one set of current practices to a new set with an equivalent cost.
7. Within the Continuous Improvement section of the draft Vermont State Plan, some elements represent a continuation of practice, and others represent an evolution in practice. The proposals contained in this section are categorized accordingly below, and are described in more detail in the plan itself.

Continuation of Practice:

- CFP application submission, review, and approval processes
- Development and use of EQS-mandated Continuous Improvement Plans

Evolution in Practice:

- Finding schools eligible to receive Comprehensive and Targeted Supports
- Need-based differentiation of supports for schools
- Revised processes for review, approval, and monitoring of Continuous Improvement Plans

Supporting Excellent Educators

Executive Priorities

In addition to meeting the requirements of the Every Student Succeeds Act, the Supporting Excellent Educators section of the Vermont State Plan reflects the priorities of Vermont's governor, Phil Scott. This section of the plan 1) prioritizes support for the most vulnerable students in the state; 2) prepares students to be members of a healthy and growing Vermont economy; and 3) frames proposals that will be affordable to implement and maintain. AOE proposals' reflection of executive priorities are described below, and recur throughout this section of the plan.

1. This section of the Plan prioritizes support for the most vulnerable students in the state

The Supporting Excellent Educators section of the Plan outlines several decisions that work to ensure that Vermont's educators are well-prepared to support our most vulnerable youth. The existing licensure system ensures that educators are prepared to teach Vermont's students, and that they continue to receive the professional learning to meet Vermont's high standards of educator quality. Likewise, reviews of teacher education programs certify Higher Education institutions' commitment to high quality preparation. The AOE recently completed an educator equity plan, identifying where Vermont students are most likely to receive less effective teaching based on the student's demographic factors. We learned that students in rural high-poverty schools are more likely to be taught by teachers who have less experience, are less well-compensated, and are more likely to be teaching outside of their endorsement area. Finally, we are proposing a leadership academy in the state plan. This academy will work with school leaders in our lowest-achieving schools to identify and implement strategies to reduce achievement gaps.

2. This section of the Plan prepares students to be members of a healthy and growing Vermont economy

While not a direct economic investment, ensuring a highly-trained teaching faculty apprised of current innovative practice should translate into graduates who are more prepared for college and the workforce. Designing professional learning in concert with EQS means that students will be encouraged to be innovative in their thinking, and will demonstrate proficiency in skills required of an engaged citizenry.

3. This section of the Plan promotes proposals that will be affordable to implement and maintain

There are minimal alterations of current practice in this section. Licensing practice, professional learning investments, and the educator equity plan are existing commitments. The leadership academy is a new endeavor, but is fully integrated into the continuous improvement and accountability systems. The 2016 legislative session passed funding for our teacher education accreditation system that is less expensive, more personalized, and more Vermont-friendly than corresponding

national accreditation organizations. This continuity in practice should help ensure that the effective implementation of these initiatives continues.

The proposals contained in this section are categorized below by whether they represent a continuation of, or an evolution in practice. All proposals are described in more detail in the plan itself.

Continuation of Practice:

- Educator licensure
- Teacher education accreditation
- Educator equity plan
- Approval of professional learning investments

Evolution in Practice:

- Development of a leadership academy for school leaders in schools receiving supports

Supporting All Students

Executive Priorities

In addition to meeting the requirements of the ESSA, the Supporting All Students section of the Vermont State Plan reflects the priorities of Vermont's governor, Phil Scott. This section of the plan 1) prioritizes support for the most vulnerable students in the state; 2) prepares students to be members of a healthy and growing Vermont economy; and 3) frames proposals that will be affordable to implement and maintain. AOE proposals' reflection of executive priorities are described below, and recur throughout this section of the plan.

1. This section of the Plan prioritizes support for the most vulnerable students in the state

The Supporting All Students section of the Plan outlines how the AOE will work with schools to leverage federal funds to support Vermont's most vulnerable students. At its core, ESSA is a civil rights bill intended to provide equity of opportunity for students who have been historically marginalized. Included in this section of the plan are the processes for identifying and supporting all students, with a focus on students experiencing homelessness, migratory students, and English learners who are often recent immigrants to Vermont. The AOE will support and monitor schools' efforts to make sure that vulnerable students have an understanding of and access to the full spectrum of opportunities that are available to them.

2. This section of the Plan prepares students to be members of a healthy and growing Vermont economy

One challenge facing Vermont is stagnant population growth, especially for people under the age of 40. Having sufficient human capital to power the Vermont economy for the next generations is a serious concern. The student populations targeted through the Supporting All Students section of the Plan represent a real growth opportunity for the Vermont economy over the coming decades. We want to ensure that these students receive a high quality education now so that they can better contribute to a vibrant and innovative economy in the future.

3. This section of the Plan promotes proposals that will be affordable to implement and maintain

The affordability of AOE proposals (also described using the terms "efficiency" and "possibility") were central to the AOE's decision-making process. With a few exceptions, this section of the plan represents a recommitment to current practice. The decisions proposed in this section will be generally familiar to schools. In those places where the plan outlines new initiatives, the recommendations streamline current practice, reduce redundancies, and create consistency across the state.

4. Community collaboration will help ensure the delivery of high-quality supports to migrant, homeless, and English learning students. Therefore, allying with existing

community organizations is written explicitly into the plan throughout the Supporting All Students section.

The proposals contained in this section are categorized below by whether they represent a continuation of or an evolution in practice. All proposals are described in more detail in the plan itself.

Continuation of Practice:

- Identification, access, and supports for migratory students
- Identification, access, and supports for students experiencing homelessness
- Title I school-wide waiver application for schools not meeting the 40% poverty threshold
- Decisions consistent with the Education Quality Standards and Act 77

Evolution in Practice:

- Use of a common screener across the state to identify students eligible for English learner supports (change in assessment, but not process)
- Use of updated assessment to measure student English language proficiency to exit English learner supports (change in assessment, but not process)
- Use of state set-aside to create a single position to coordinate applications, technical assistance, and monitoring for Title IV student support and enrichment grants

ESSA Vermont State Plan

In addition to meeting the requirements of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the Vermont State Plan reflects the education priorities of Vermont to 1) prioritize support for the most vulnerable Vermont students; 2) prepare students to be members of a growing Vermont economy, and; 3) frame proposals that will be affordable to implement and maintain.

Continuous Improvement

The Agency of Education will provide support and guidelines for school systems to continuously improve their educational practices and student outcomes. The expected benefits of continuous improvement include:

- Local systems will identify Education Quality Standards (EQS)-aligned goals
- Data-informed decision making in all areas of education
- Alignment of state and federal resources
- Support for our most vulnerable students

Measuring School Quality

Vermont has developed Education Quality Reviews to assess a school's success in meeting Vermont's Education Quality Standards. To ensure school quality, Vermont will evaluate the following **five components** in all of our public schools:



Academic Achievement

This component meets ESSA accountability requirements and includes multiple EQS curriculum content areas. The below measures will be used to assess academic achievement.

Content Standards

How well are students performing in English language arts, mathematics, science and physical education?

English Language Proficiency

How well are English Learners gaining English proficiency?

Graduation Rate

Are students staying in school until they graduate?

College and Career Readiness

How well did seniors perform on career and college ready assessments? Are alumni pursuing a career and college ready outcomes?

Summative Ratings

All Vermont public schools will be assessed through multiple measures. The school or school system will receive a rating. These ratings will aggregate into a rating for each component:



bulls-eye



on-target



near target



off-target

These will help schools and communities identify areas of strength and areas for growth. The ratings will also help focus continuous improvement efforts and tailor Agency support for those that qualify for Comprehensive and Targeted Supports.

