
MEMORANDUM

TO: Superintendents, Principals, Independent Heads of School, District Test Administrators

FROM: Heather A. Bouchey, Ph.D., Interim Secretary of Education

SUBJECT: Update on Vermont Comprehensive Assessment Rollout

DATE: May 4, 2023

Purpose

This memo serves as an update for Vermont education system leadership on the implementation of Vermont's new Comprehensive Assessment Program (VTCAP).

Status Update

First, I am profoundly grateful for the hard work you and your staff have committed to the adoption of this new platform, and the efforts you have made to ensure that testing in your district is as smooth as possible. You have been excellent partners, helping us quickly identify and solve problems as they arise.

As I noted previously, many of the challenges experienced are due to the delays in the IT contracting process, which gave us a shorter runway for rolling out and testing the new system than originally contemplated. As with any new system, we will continue to identify bugs as we go along. Your willingness to test and provide quick feedback when problems arise has mitigated many issues. We are already seeing a marked decrease in challenges and concerns as we move through the testing window.

In terms of where we stand, there are a few updates to report:

- Over 26,000 of roughly 90,000 tests have been completed as of May 3, 2023.
- Most technical problems have involved Google Chromebooks.
- We continue to meet daily with Cognia to address issues and concerns as they arise.
- We continue to meet weekly with the field to hear feedback directly from you and your teams and provide updates.

We deeply appreciate your hard work, patience, and collaboration. Your thoughts, ideas, and feedback are very valuable, and your engagement with us has greatly helped address issues and ensure that rollout and test administration goes more smoothly.



Assessment Outcomes

While most efforts are rightly focused on test administration and overcoming challenges related to that essential activity, we are hearing some concerns about potential impacts of the rollout on the validity of test results, or even concerns about the new assessment more generally.

These assessments are closely aligned with Vermont standards and meet or exceed all psychometric standards for state summative assessments. We have read communications that purport otherwise, in particular about the Grade 9 English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics assessments. I can state unequivocally that these claims are false. Further, we have seen nothing to undermine our confidence in the assessment results, but we are carefully monitoring results to ensure there are no systemic, statewide, or even regional patterns that indicate bias or inaccuracy of the assessment results.

That said, statewide assessment results are an important part of our assessment landscape in Vermont, but they are only one part. Vermont does not use state summative assessments for individual decision-making about students or educators. State assessments are just one tool in our collective toolbox; it is therefore important that you also focus on your Local Comprehensive Assessment Systems (LCAS) and other measurements of student proficiency. The new summative assessments will provide us important data to be sure, but it will just be one set of data, providing us a snapshot of student success, within a larger system dedicated to the success of all Vermont learners.

We all have a collective duty to our school communities, and Vermonters generally, to ensure confidence in Vermont's education system. I recognize that opinions about summative standardized assessments differ, and it might be tempting to raise questions about assessment in light of the current technical challenges. We need to remember however, that these assessments do have a place in, and are a federally required aspect of, Vermont's system for understanding student progress.

In closing, I ask you to maintain focus on the rollout of these tests and continue to provide us the implementation feedback that is critical to ensure continued improvement of the system. We will, as we do every year, monitor the data closely to ensure that results are valid and reliable. We will also provide template communication materials for districts and schools to use in advance of assessment results going public.

I anticipate that, going forward, our annual assessments will continue smoothly, and we will realize many of the benefits that led to us choosing Cognia as our assessment vendor. I am grateful for your continued assistance and partnership.