

VTmtss Educational Equity Brief

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For information about this equity brief or to be added to the distribution list, please contact: Tracy Watterson at tracy.watterson@vermont.gov (802) 828-5012

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Your VTmtss Team

Tracy B. Watterson, M.Ed.
VTmtss Program Manager
Phone: (802) 828-5012
tracy.watterson@vermont.gov

Thomas Faris, M.Ed.
VTmtss Coordinator
Phone: (802) 828-5016
thomas.faris@vermont.gov

Nancy Hellen, M.A.
VTmtss Coordinator
Phone: (802) 828-5035
nancy.hellen@vermont.gov

Julia Scheier, M.A.
VTmtss Coordinator
Phone: (802) 828-5041
julia.scheier@vermont.gov

Caitlin Chisholm, M.A.
VTmtss Coordinator
Phone: (802) 828-5040
caitlin.chisholm@vermont.gov



Strengthening and Enhancing Educational Support Teams (EST)

Overview

Educational Support Teams (EST) are powerful tools to support the needs of all students – but there is often confusion about their role. Vermont schools are required to have a tiered system of academic and behavioral supports; the Agency of Education recommends [The VTmtss Framework](#) to fulfill this requirement. Per Vermont education law, updated in [Act 173](#), the tiered system must include an EST that enhances the entire educational system by supporting the academic, behavioral, social, and emotional needs of all students.

When a student has needs that exceed the school's current general education capacity, staff or families can refer to the EST. Dedicated teams meet to review the data and discuss whether a plan is needed. Plans should detail who is responsible for which actions on what timeline; the plan should include a schedule to review outcomes and modify, end, or continue as needed.

While there has been a statutory requirement for an EST (or IST) since 1989, misconceptions remain about their appropriate role in school systems. EST does not replace special education services, nor can it be required as a process before a special education evaluation. Instead, it supports students when the general education environment does not have the capacity to fit their needs. This could include the needs of students in special education for supports not related to their identified disability(s). Additionally, appropriate oversight within an SU/SD ensures equity of access across the schools, rather than solely relying on the resources of an individual school. The ultimate outcome of an EST is to provide not only efficiency of service to a single child but ensuring equitable access to supports for all students.

Vermont Trends

The [annual MTSS Survey Summary](#) provides an overview of statewide data related to EST. On average across Vermont, in the past school year, 7% of a school's student population had an initial EST referral. But, school to school, the percentage ranges from 0% to 70% of students, indicating that there is wide variety of interpretations for effective applications of EST. Of those students statewide, with an initial EST referral, an average of 71% were given EST plans. 13% of students statewide with an initial EST referral went on to become eligible for an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Utilizing the VTmtss Framework:

Below are just a few examples of how to apply The VTmtss Framework to your EST:

Component 1: Systemic and Comprehensive Approach

A systemic approach is essential to ensure that all students have an equitable educational experience, establish and monitor school culture and vision, and acquire and allocate resources. The function and practices of an EST may shift as school systems change, so be sure to be continually examining your current system for your context. Ideas include:

- Ensuring consistent practices across the SU or district to ensure equity
- Actively involve district staff to ensure coordination of practices and resources

Component 2: Effective Collaboration

A strong culture of collaboration will help ensure that there have been appropriate interventions before an EST referral and that the necessary people are involved in the EST process. Engaging family is crucial, as they likely have additional insights into the students' needs. Ways to enhance collaboration include:

- Inviting families to EST meetings and ensure their voice is heard; if they are unable to attend, make sure they receive regular updates
- Collaborating with community organizations to provide additional services
- Ensuring dedicated meeting times, facilitation roles, and standard functions for things such as agendas, taking minutes, and monitoring effective collaboration

Component 3: High-Quality Instruction and Intervention

It is essential for school systems to ensure that the general education classroom is conducive to the needs of all learners. School systems must consistently examine how the instruction and intervention ensures access and equity, provides a system of supports, is aligned and coordinated, and allows for responsive decision-making. Ideas include:

- Examining trends in EST referrals to understand common difficulties and then asking, "Do we have the expertise and resources to address these trends?"
- Ensuring EST teams have a wide-ranging toolbox of interventions/supports that consider the academic, behavior, social, and emotional well-being of the student

Component 4: Comprehensive and Balanced Assessment System

Clear and comprehensive data is essential to effectively monitor the progress of each student who is involved in the EST. Each EST is responsible for reporting to the Secretary of Education via the annual MTSS survey. Ideas include:

- Clarifying the process for identifying, assessing, analyzing, and interpreting data
- Routinely examine data to understand successes and areas of improvement for their EST model as well as the district assessment system

Component 5: Expertise

It is essential to have the right people on the EST to provide suggestions for ongoing professional learning and continuously improve the EST's functioning. Ideas include:

- Establishing a team that includes at least an administrator, interventionist, school psychologist, special educator, and families
- Utilizing information from the EST to help identify promising areas for staff development to expand expertise to ensure that all students make progress

VTmtss in Action:

To successfully implement The VTmtss Framework, school systems must employ a culture of continuous improvement to allow for decision-making for equity and excellence. It is vital to consistently examine your EST practices across schools to promote equity, especially as children move throughout schools in a district. EST can be a key lever to enhance your VTmtss Framework and is essential to successful implementation of Act 173.

EST as a Systems Tool

An ideal EST is not only about student deficits or needs; it also allows a school system to examine why student needs are not being met. A school system should utilize student data to question why the system isn't able to reflexively and proactively address all students' needs. As information accumulates over time, school systems can start to view patterns and make more informed decisions. A successful EST should benefit the whole system.

The VTmtss Framework utilizes the decision-making tool below to guide educators as they examine the strengths and weaknesses in their EST. The 5 bubbles on the outside represent each of the 5 Components in the updated [VTmtss Field Guide](#). To analyze your system, look at one of the bubbles and ask, "what are some strengths in our school related to this component that would positively affect the EST?" and "what are some weaknesses in our school related to this component that may be negatively affecting the EST?" For example, starting with "Collaborative Teams and Partnerships," strengths may include meeting consistently at the same time each month. An area of growth may be establishing a common place to store notes so that all can access the information and decisions after the meeting is over. After walking through each of the 5 Components and listing a few strengths and weakness for each, see if you can identify any patterns or low-hanging fruit that can be changed to improve your EST. For a more in-depth analysis of your school system or EST, refer to the [Reflection Tools](#) (pages 89-101) in the VTmtss Field Guide.



Chris Case, Director
Student Support Services
Phone: (802) 828-4377
chris.case@vermont.gov

Meg Porcella, Assistant
Director, Student Support
Services
Phone: (802) 828-4387
meg.porcella@vermont.gov

Share Your Best Practices and Supports Needed

The Agency of Education would like to gather information about current EST trends in Vermont schools and school districts. This will help the Agency to understand best practices and what support would be most valuable from the Agency. Please [fill out this poll](#) to offer your school's experiences or email materials or ideas to Tom Faris at Thomas.Faris@vermont.gov.

Ways the VTmtss Team Can Support You

Technical Assistance Request Form

Looking for technical assistance to support your school's VTmtss, including EST? Submit our short online [TA Request Form](#) and we will be in touch shortly.

MTSS Listserv

Contact Julia Scheier to join the MTSS mailing list and let us know how it can support your work.

VTmtss Office Hours

Join us for Office Hours on the first Wednesday of the month from 3-4 p.m. You may sign up to participate through the [Weekly Field Memo](#) or on our [website](#).

VTmtss Field Guide 2019

Explore the AOE's [recently revised guidelines for the field](#). This document supports SU/SDs and their schools in designing comprehensive systems that expand and improve a system of layered supports that can ensure equitable outcomes for all students.

Resources for Consideration

Course

- [The Data Wise Project](#)

Further Reading

- Sparks, D. (2013). [Strong teams, strong schools](#). Journal of Staff Development, 34(2), 28-30.
- Stetson & Associates (2015). [Finding Time for Collaboration and Using It Well](#).

VTmtss Field Guide Resources

- [Reflection Tools](#) (Introduction, Systemic and Comprehensive Approach, and Effective Collaboration)
- [Appendix A](#)
- [Digging Deeper](#) (Effective Collaboration)

VTmtss Webpage

- VTmtss Webpage: [EST page](#) and [EST Guidance](#) and [A Deeper Look](#)
- [AOE webpage for Act 173](#)
- [December Office Hour recording on EST](#)

*Check out our updated
website!*

<https://education.vermont.gov/student-support/vermont-multi-tiered-system-of-supports>