

Issue Date: November 1, 2024

Requirements and Recommendations on Screening Notification for Parents and Guardians

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to outline requirements and provide recommendations on the substance and form of parent and guardian notification required by [Act 139](#) (16 V.S.A. § 2907). More specifically, this document provides:

- [Act 139 Background Information](#)
- [Recommendations and Requirements](#)
- [Template Notification Letter](#)
- [Sample Notification Letter](#)
- [Additional Support and Resources](#)

Act 139 Background Information

Act 139 of 2024 is the state's most comprehensive literacy legislation to date and represents an important opportunity for Vermont students and educators. Act 139 recognizes that the most effective literacy practices in the early grades are explicit and systematic instruction on code-based and comprehension-based reading skills and needs-based support. The legislation aims to increase literacy achievement for all students by focusing on early identification for students struggling with reading, student supports, strengthening educator preparation programs, and ensuring parents and guardians are informed of their child's progress.

Act 139 requires that schools notify parents or guardians when a student's performance on a reading screener is "significantly below relevant benchmarks as determined by the screener's guidelines for age-level or grade-level typical development in specific literacy skills." Schools are also required to notify parents or guardians about "the school's response" to the screening results. Act 139 directs the Agency of Education (AOE) to provide SU/SDs and independent schools eligible to receive public tuition with guidance about the form and substance of the notification letters. This document specifically addresses parent or guardian notification when screening indicates that a student is performing significantly below benchmark.

The AOE will issue guidance on or before January 15, 2025 which will cover universal screeners based on technical adequacy, attention to linguistic diversity, administrative usability, and valid measures of the developmental skills in early literacy, including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The Agency is working to provide information about screening as soon as possible and is committed to supporting education leaders and educators in the implementation process (see [additional support and resources section below](#)).



Recommendations and Requirements

This section outlines requirements and recommendations about parent or guardian notification. Vermont schools value their relationships with families and caregivers. Regular communication engenders trust, belonging, and wellbeing. Parent or guardian notification letters are intended to build relationships, promote partnerships, and ensure two-way dialogues about their children’s progress in schools and the school’s response.

Notification Requirements

Use of the following requirements in screening notification will create clear communication and statutory compliance while ensuring consistent literacy practices in schools across the state.

- **Recipients of Notification:** Act 139 requires schools to notify parents or guardians when a student’s screening assessment indicates that they are “significantly below benchmark.” Schools must consult their screener’s assessment manual to determine if student scores fall into this category. Screeners define “significantly below benchmark” using a variety of terminology. Examples of terminology commonly used to indicate scores that are significantly below benchmark include:
 - Well Below Benchmark
 - Below Basic
 - High Risk
 - Needs Intensive Intervention
 - Urgent Intervention
 - At Risk
- **Information Included in Notification:** It is critical for parent or guardian notification to include the following information to meet Act 139 requirements, and to ensure that parents or guardians have a clear understanding of actions being taken to support their child:
 - Date of screening
 - Specific name of screener and link where parents or guardians can learn more about the screener
- **Screening results** that indicate the student is significantly below benchmark. You may use language such as expected level with parents and guardians as it is simpler to understand.
 - School’s response to screening results that indicate that a student is significantly below benchmark must include actions being taken to support students who are significantly below benchmark through general education via differentiated or supplementary instruction that is explicit, systematic, and evidence-based
 - Ongoing progress monitoring
- **Form of Notification:** The parent or guardian notification should be in written format and delivered by email and regular mail. The AOE will translate the template letter below in Vermont’s most frequently spoken languages and provide a brief parent

video. However, it is ultimately the district's responsibility to ensure that the notifications are accessible to parents or guardians in their district.

- **Contact for Additional Information:** Information about where parents or guardians can direct questions.
- **Timeline for Notification:** The Act requires parent or guardian notification 30 calendar days following a student screening result that is significantly below relevant benchmarks.
 - The AOE recognizes that many schools have already begun screening for the 2024-2025 school year and that the statutory timeline for AOE issuing notification recommendations on the substance and form of parent or guardian notifications does not align with all school screening timelines.
- Schools who have completed annual screening will have 30 calendar days beginning on November 2, 2024, to issue notification letters. No further screening or notification is required by Act 139.
- If your school conducts screening multiple times a year, you are only required by law to issue a parent/guardian notification once in the 2024-2025 school year. However, as part of your ongoing communication with parents and guardians, you are encouraged to keep them informed of their child's reading progress.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are best practices in the use of screening tools and the development of partnerships with parents and guardians. Incorporation of these recommendations will promote consistency of literacy practices at schools across Vermont.

- **Additional Communication:** Consider offering additional options for conversations between parents and guardians and appropriate school staff (this may include, but not be limited to teachers, literacy specialists, interventionists, and principals). Examples for these conversations include teacher conferences, educational support team meetings, in-person meetings, and phone calls.
- **Additional Information about the Screening Data:** If available, you may include a screener report intended for parents or guardians. You may consider:
 - Naming and defining the specific subtests and skills screened, as outlined in the screening manual, in parent-friendly language.
 - Including text that discusses the areas in which the student is significantly below benchmark and any strengths indicated by the screening results.
- **Notify All Parents:** Consider sharing screening results with parents or guardians of all K-3 students who are screened, especially those who are below benchmark but not significantly below. In addition, notification of parents of students who are not below benchmark promotes partnership and two-way communication.
- **Response to Screening:** If established at the time of notification, consider including:
 - Information about the curriculum, group size, and frequency and duration of additional instructional support.

- Details about additional assessments that will be (or have been) conducted and what they will help the school understand about the child's needs.
- **Linguistically Diverse Student Consideration:** Acknowledgement that this screening was done in English and does not take into account language or literacy skills in languages other than English.
- **Tone of Notification:** Choose language that promotes partnerships with families and avoids language that is overly complex or legalistic.
- **Ongoing Parent or Guardian Communication:** Consider including information about how you will keep parents or guardians apprised of student progress on an ongoing basis.
- **Parent or Guardian Resources:** Consider including resources where parents or guardians can learn more about how children learn to read and how they might support reading at home.
- **Frequency of Screening:** Given the complexity and number of reading skills that need to be acquired in K-3, screening three times a year is recommended. If schools screen more than once a year, they may send notifications each time a screening is administered.

Template Notification Letter

The AOE is providing the following parent or guardian notification letter template. Schools will need to customize the template to reflect local screening and supplemental processes.

[Supervisory Union/Supervisory District/School Letterhead]

Date:

Dear _____,

This letter is to share information about how your child is doing in reading. As a parent or guardian, you are an important partner in your child's education. The reading skills developed from kindergarten through third grade are essential for fostering a lifelong love of reading and ensuring future success in school and life.

It is important to know early if a child needs extra help with reading so we can give them additional support. At [school/ district name] we check each child's reading skills [x times] a year in grades K-3.

On [date], [school] checked your child's reading skills using [assessment name]. The results show that your child could use extra support in reading. Here are your child's results:

The results indicate that your child has strong skills in [insert specific skills if measured by and reflected in screening data]. It also shows that your child is significantly below expected level and needs help in the following areas: [list areas that need support].

To help your child, we will be taking the following steps: [insert information about the instructional response, for example:]

- [Additional assessments to better understand the child's needs]
- [Provide details about the frequency, duration, and type of supplemental instruction the student will receive]
- [The area of focus, such as phonemic awareness, being worked on and how many times per week.]
- [If there is currently a learning plan in place, note that instruction will be provided in accordance with that plan with continued focus on skills identified as needing support.]

We will keep you updated on your child's progress. [you may mention ways to connect, such as at teacher conferences or scheduling a phone call or meeting].

We are committed to giving every child the reading instruction they need to become strong readers. If you would like to learn more about how children learn to read or find ways to help at home, please see the attached resources. Thank you for letting us work

with your child and being a part of their reading journey. If you have any questions about your child’s reading or their results, please contact their teacher [or insert the most appropriate school contact].

Sincerely,

[Principal Name and Contact Information]

[Teacher Name and Contact Information]

Parent or Guardian Resources Attachment

The following resources are provided if you are interested in learning more about how children learn to read and how you might encourage reading at home.

- [Reading 101 Video Learning Modules](#) from Reading Rockets
- [Colorín Colorado](#)’s early literacy resources in English and Spanish
- [Parent Resource Hub](#) from the University of Florida Literacy Institute

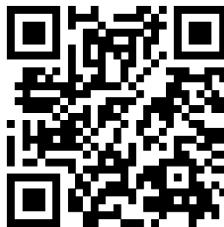
Reading to your children and talking about books fosters a love of reading and broadens their vocabulary and world knowledge. You can access the following resources with a library card in most Vermont communities:

- [Hoopla](#)
- [Libby](#)

We understand that every family has different routines, situations, and abilities. We are here to support your reading journey in a way that works best for you. Here are some websites that offer free access to audiobooks that you and your child can listen to and talk about.

- [Unite for Literacy](#)
- [LibriVox](#)

Visit the Agency of Education website for an alternate way to access these links:



Sample Notification Letter

Date:

Dear _____,

This letter is to share information about how your child is doing in reading. As a parent or guardian, you are an important partner in your child's education. The reading skills developed from kindergarten through third grade are essential for fostering a lifelong love of reading and ensuring future success in school and life. This letter is to share information about how your child is doing in reading.

It's important to know early if a child needs extra help with reading so that we can give them the support they need. Early intervention is crucial to closing reading gaps. At , Vermont School District #1 we check students' reading skills three times a year for grades K-3.

On December 10, 2024, we checked your child's reading skills using Star Early Literacy. The results show that your child could use extra support in reading. Here are your child's results:

The results indicate that your child has a strong vocabulary, which will help their listening and reading comprehension. However, the results suggest that your child is significantly below expected levels and would benefit from additional instruction in two key areas: phonemic awareness, which involves separating and blending the sounds in words, and phonics, which involves connecting sounds in words to the letter or letters that represent those sounds.

To help your child, we will be administering more detailed assessments to understand more their specific needs and to establish a plan for how to help them improve these skills. We will share updates with you on your child's progress every [fill in timeframe] and look forward to discussing their progress with you [fill in additional opportunity for discussion].

We are committed to giving every child the reading instruction they need to become strong readers. If you are interested in learning more about how children learn to read or to encourage reading at home, please see the attached resources. We appreciate the opportunity to work with your child and your partnership. If you have any questions about your child's reading or would like more details about their results or next steps, please contact their teacher.

Sincerely,

[Principal Name and Contact Information]

[Teacher Name and Contact Information]

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Additional Support and Resources

The AOE is committed to supporting educators as they complete student screening, issue parent or guardian notification letters, and educate students with explicit, systematic, and evidence-based instruction. Below are upcoming sessions designed to support Vermont educators and leaders in these processes. Please sign up following the hyperlinks below.

- **November 7th from 3:30- 4:30:** [Question and Answer](#) session about screening and notification that will spotlight experiences from Vermont leaders on screening and parent and guardian notification.
- **November 13th from 3:30-5:30:** AOE will launch a [monthly professional workshop series](#) held the second Wednesday of every month that will include a variety of topics about literacy development. These sessions are designed for educators and leaders who serve students in PK-12 and beyond. [Register today](#) and join the first session November 13th “Overview of Explicit, Systematic, and Evidence based Literacy Practices”. The December session will cover Comprehension and January session will cover literacy assessments.
- **Before November 8th:** The AOE will release details about the Job-embedded coaching qualification process. The coaching, offered through Read Vermont through a contract with the Stern Center, will emphasize non-evaluative coaching to drive instructional change and build capacity with evidence-based literacy practices in K-3 classrooms for up to 100 Vermont educators and 40 school and district leaders. Together, coaches, educators, and leaders will set evidence-based goals and implement strategies to achieve them.
- **November 18th from 3:30-4:30:** [Overview and open office hours](#) for educators and administrators to learn more about the coaching opportunity. A question-and-answer document will be posted afterwards.

Additional Resources:

- Act 139 [Frequently Asked Questions About Screening and Notification](#) for detailed information regarding distribution timing.
- [Family Engagement Networking Series](#) to support your partnerships with families.
- A translation of the template letter in Vermont’s most frequently spoken languages and a brief parent video will be provided by the end of November, 2024.

Questions

Please reach out to Emily Lesh, AOE Literacy Project Manager with any questions at Emily.Lesh@Vermont.Gov and Aoe.Literacy@Vermont.Gov.