


## MEMORANDUM

TO: State Board of Education  
FROM: Daniel M. French, Secretary of Education   
SUBJECT: Update on State Report Card and Data Suppression  
DATE: May 19, 2021

---

We recently received some communication from a community member pertaining to the data suppression effects in our State Report Card so I thought I would provide an update to the Board on the status of our new State Report Card known as the Vermont Annual Snapshot (see <https://schoolsnapshot.vermont.gov/>). I am also enclosing a copy of the memo I wrote to the Board last year that covers much of the background information on this topic.

The suppression effects behind the Report Card are the result of several factors but primarily: 1) shifting the state accountability from the school to the district or supervisory union level under Vermont law, 2) the adoption of new accountability measures in the state's ESSA State Plan, 3) and the implementation of complex information systems including the new State Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) and the Report Card system itself.

Since #1 above is a function of state law, I will focus my comments on the other two variables. We have been contemplating modifications to our ESSA state plan. Like many states who were considering doing so, we were reluctant to pursue an amendment process in the context of an uncertain political dynamic in Washington as a result of the change in administration. The pandemic has also diverted our capacity for designing an amendment process, and our urgency to do so was diminished by Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) tests not being administered last year as a result of COVID-19, and similarly, we are likely to receive a waiver from accountability provisions of the testing this year.

In terms of our data systems, I have been skeptical about the scale and complexity of the new Vermont Annual Snapshot system since my appointment as Secretary in 2018. I reserved any judgment of the system, however, until data could actually be visualized in it. That occurred for the first time in June 2019. To address my concerns over the scale of the system, I shutdown the development of some aspects of the model (e.g., school climate survey) until we could get a better handle on the areas where we were already collecting data.

Concerns around issues such as data suppression get to the complexity of the system. We have relied significantly on a vendor to manage the system. To make modifications to its underlying data model would require vendor support as well. I have not been interested in making further investments in the system until we settle issues related to the ESSA State Plan; the Plan should

describe our approach to accountability and the Report Card should visualize it. As I concluded last year, the suppression effects are not anomalies. We confirmed the system is operating as designed.

Meanwhile, even during the pandemic, we continue to develop a simpler interface to share education data with the public. That interface is the Vermont Education Dashboard (see <https://education.vermont.gov/data-and-reporting/vermont-education-dashboard>). We designed this interface, and fully control the data arrangements it visualizes. This type of interface might ultimately be able to replace our Report Card system, but we would need the accountability model as described by our ESSA State Plan to be revised first.