

Small Schools Grants Under 16 V.S.A. § 4015, Effective July 1, 2019: Academic Excellence and Operational Efficiency Metrics

16 V.S.A. § 4015

Eligible school district means a school district that:

- (A) Operates at least one school with an average grade size of 20 or fewer; and
- (B) Has been determined by the State Board, on an annual basis to be eligible due to either:
 - (i) the lengthy driving times or inhospitable travel routes between the school and the nearest school in which there is capacity; or
 - (ii) the academic excellence and operational efficiency of the school, which shall be based upon consideration of:
 - (I) the school's measurable success in providing a variety of high-quality educational opportunities that meet or exceed the educational quality standards adopted by the State Board pursuant to section 165 of this title;
 - (II) the percentage of students from economically deprived backgrounds, as identified pursuant to subsection 4010(d) of this title, and those students' measurable success in achieving positive outcomes;
 - (III) the school's high student-to-staff ratios; and
 - (IV) the district's participation in a merger study and submission of a merger report to the State Board pursuant to chapter 11 of this title or otherwise.

Academic Excellence Criteria, I-II:

There are 3 issues for the Board to discuss.

1. How much data can be missing due to data suppression before you cannot make a decision?
2. Do you wish to use a 4-level classification or 2-level classification system?
3. Do you wish to see the data for each assessment separately or together?

Board Discussion:

1. The Board should determine what percent of suppressed data is too much to render a determination regarding quality.

- a. Ex. A K-6 school expects data in 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th grade for both ELA and math for a total of 8 measures.
 - i. If 1 grade level is smaller than 11, the school would have 75% of the measures.
 - ii. If 2 grade levels are smaller than 11, the school would have 50% of the measures.
 - iii. If 3 grade levels are smaller than 11, the school would have 25% of the measures.

Table 1: Distribution of Possible Small School Grant Applicants by Reportable Data (2017)

Percent of Measures that are Too Small to Share	Percent of Schools for All Students	Percent of Schools for FRL Eligible Students
0%	19%	
17%	14%	
25%	7%	
33%	12%	
50%	10%	2%
58%	2%	
75%	2%	
83%	10%	2%
100%	24%	95%

All Students

- 19% of applicant schools have reportable data for “all students group” in all cases.
- 24% of applicant schools have reportable data for “all students group” in no cases.

Free and Reduced Lunch Eligible Students

- 0% of applicant schools have reportable data for “FRL group” in all cases.
- 95% of applicant schools have reportable data for “FRL group” in no cases.

AOE Recommendations:

- Use data for a multi-year data to increase available data.
- Disqualify schools that have less than 50% of the data available.
- Inform the legislature that we are not able to review performance for disaggregated groups due to suppression.

Board Discussion:

2. The Board should determine how to evaluate the available data to determine what is “good enough.” This definition should be used for both the All student and student groups that are disaggregated.

Table 2: Classify by performance levels used in ESSA for All Student

	Off Target	Near Target	On Target	Bull’s Eye
	1-1.88	1.89-2.75	2.76-3.65	3.66-5
ELA	9%	34%	34%	22%
Math	13%	50%	22%	16%
Combined	6%	55%	26%	13%

Table 3: Classify by either above or below standard used in ESSA for All Student

	Below Standard	Above Standard
	1-2.75	2.76-5.00
ELA	43%	57%
Math	63%	37%
Combined	61%	39%

- The Board should determine how to evaluate the available data to examine performance on two measures.

Table 4: Comparison of Performance Levels in Math and ELA for All Student

	Math Level 1	Math Level 2	Math Level 3	Math Level 4
ELA Level 1	6%	3%		
ELA Level 2	6%	25%	3%	
ELA Level 3		16%	16%	3%
ELA Level 4		6%	3%	13%

Notes:

- 60% of schools have the same level of performance in Math and ELA.
- Only 6% of schools have a 2 level difference in performance

Table 5: Comparison of above or below standard in Math and ELA used in ESSA for All Student

	Math Below	Math Above
ELA Below	41%	3%
ELA Above	22%	34%

Notes:

- 75% of schools have the same binary performance in Math and ELA.
- When a school has a difference in performance, they most frequently perform better in ELA

AOE Recommendations:

- Use Table 5 to determine which schools do and don't qualify as performing well enough to qualify for the grant.
- If a school is performing below on both Math and ELA it is excluded from grant eligibility.

Operational Efficiency Criteria, III-IV:

There are 3 issues for the Board to discuss.

- What do you wish to include in the "staff" category for student-to-staff ratios?
- What standard will the applicant schools be measured against to determine whether they have "high" student-to-staff ratios?
- Do you wish to accept a report pursuant to Act 49, Sections 3 and 4 for an existing district in a three-by-one or a two-by-two-by-one as a "merger study and submission of a merger report?"

Board discussion:

- The Board should determine which categories of staff will be included for the calculation of ratios and whether to include a pro-rated count of supervisory union staff.

Example: Exclude any/all of the following:

- preschool/PreK teachers
- enterprise operations
- community services operations
- facilities construction
- food service
- maintenance and security
- student transportation

TABLE 6: EXAMPLE	SCHOOL	% OF SU	SU
ENROLLMENT	43.00	7.5%	570
STAFF	9.10		144.40
SU STUDENT/STAFF RATIO			3.95
SCHOOL SHARE OF SU STUDENT/STAFF RATIO	0.30		
EFFECTIVE SCHOOL STAFF	9.40		
EFFECTIVE SCHOOL STUDENT/STAFF RATIO	4.57		

AOE Recommendations:

- Exclude staff in categories listed above, and pro-rate supervisory union employees based on the applicant districts' enrollment, as demonstrated in Table 6.

Board discussion:

2. The Board should evaluate whether it makes more sense to use a single cut-off ratio or range above the statewide average student-to-staff ratio, with districts falling below that point being excluded.

AOE Recommendations:

- One often cited goal for student-to-staff ratios is 5:1. The current statewide average is 4.25:1. The board should use a cut-off number, that is slightly higher than the current statewide average, such as 4.3:1.

Board discussion:

3. The Board should decide whether an existing, unmerged district in a three-by-one or in a two-by-two-by one structure meets the requirement to complete a merger study and submission of a merger report pursuant to Title 16 Chapter 11.