

**Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE)
Assessment and Accountability in the Fifty States: 1999-2000**

VERMONT

*This profile was verified by the staff of the Vermont Department of Education in July 2000.
All information is current as of that date.*

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State Assessment System (1999-2000 school year)

1. *Provide a brief overview and history of the assessment system as the context.*

Until two years ago, the state did not have a mandatory state assessment system. However, the implementation of the Equal Educational Opportunity Act of 1997 required the administration of state assessments in mathematics, English language arts, early reading, science, and history and social science. The state uses the **New Standards Reference Exams** in English language arts and mathematics. The state also uses the grade two Developmental Reading Assessment and student portfolios in mathematics and writing in its comprehensive assessment system. Although not in place for 1999-2000, the state is working on the development of social studies and science assessments as well. A proposal for a state level science assessment was approved by the State Board of Education (SBE) in July, 2000.

2. *What are the characteristics of the state assessment system, including:*

- *Name of Assessment Instrument(s) or Program(s)*

Vermont Comprehensive Assessment System

- *Grade Levels and Subjects Tested*

Components of the Vermont Comprehensive Assessment System:

- Student Portfolios: writing (grades 5, 8) and math (grades 4, 8, 10) – a stratified random sample of all students is centrally scored with the Vermont Rubrics; districts are encouraged and supported to score all portfolios locally
- Vermont Developmental Reading Assessment – Grade 2
- New Standards Reference Exam in math – Grades 4, 8, 10
- New Standards Reference Exam in English/language arts – Grades 4, 8, 10

- *Norm or Criterion Referenced:* All of the assessments are criterion-referenced

- *Matrix or Census Testing*
Census, except for the student portfolios that use a stratified random sample

- *Item Types*
 1. Student Portfolios
 - Writing:** The portfolio is entirely based on written essays. Six different types of essays are submitted in the portfolio to address the six communication standards. These essays are intended to comprise each student’s best efforts in these six areas. They are collected over at least one year, but may include work over two years.
 - Math:** The math portfolio is a compilation of the student's best problem-solving work on assigned, complex tasks. Mathematics problem solving and communication proficiency are determined by rating six areas for grades 4 and 8. Mathematics problem solving and communication proficiency are determined by rating five areas for grade 10.
 2. Vermont Developmental Reading Assessment
 - The DRA is a standards-based reading assessment administered individually to each second-grade student. The student reads a short book and retells the story in his or her own words. Using uniform methods and guidelines, teachers score the student's oral reading for accuracy and the retelling for comprehension. Students must show real understanding of the text, not simply pronounce the words.
 3. New Standards Reference Exam in math:
 - 20 multiple-choice questions (all taken from the SAT 9)
 - 5 problem solving constructed response questions
 - 19 short answer questions
 4. New Standards Reference Exam in English/language arts
 - 37 multiple choice questions (26 taken from the SAT 9)
 - 5 constructed response (2 long response and 3 short answer)

- *Time of Testing (specific month(s) or testing window)*
 - Student Portfolios in writing and math are collected in alternate year cycles; writing portfolios were collected in 1998-99 and math portfolios in 1999-2000.
 - The Vermont Developmental Reading Assessment is administered in May.
 - The New Standards Reference Exams in math and English language arts are administered from the end of March through the beginning of April.

- *High School Exit Exam:* No such assessment existed in the state for 1999-2000

- *Other Assessments:* None
- *Transitional or Final Assessment System:* Transitional (science and history to be added)

3. *Who designed and produced the assessment(s) used by the state?*

The New Standards Reference Exams were designed by the New Standards Project and by Vermont teachers. A majority of the multiple-choice questions on the assessments were taken from the SAT9 by Harcourt Brace. The open-response questions were designed by teachers. The Vermont DRA was adapted from the original Developmental Reading Assessment published by Celebration Press. Extensive modification of the assessment, for statewide assessment purposes, was undertaken by the Vermont Department of Education, the University of Vermont and the Northeast and Islands Regional Lab at Brown University. The portfolio system was “home grown” in Vermont and started as a pilot in 1990. The state came up with its own rubrics, making revisions to the rubrics over the years.

4. *What are the state requirements for local assessments, including the types of assessments and their use in areas such as reporting and accountability, as well as Title I adequate yearly progress? What grade levels and subjects are tested?*

Local districts collect the materials for student portfolios for the grades outlined by the state, and they are scored locally. This is mandated for Title I schools. However, all schools, including non-Title I schools, are “strongly recommended” to use the student portfolios locally, use norm-referenced standardized tests in ELA and math in grades 5, 9, and 11 and to use locally developed selected assessments to address state standards. All schools must have a comprehensive local assessment plan that addresses other grades and other disciplines (standards) not addressed by state assessments by 2001 and fully implement it by 2005 (Vermont School Quality Standards.)

5. *Is the state assessment system aligned with the state standards? Are there plans for alignment, and if so, how will the assessment and standards become aligned?*

All of the state mandated assessments have been aligned with *Vermont's Framework of Standards and Learning Opportunities*.

6. *What is the state's approach for ensuring alignment and what evidence of that alignment is provided?*

The standards and the New Standards Reference Exams have been judged by the state to have a “one-to-one” match; the standards and the assessments were developed in conjunction. The state continues to work on this issue. The Vermont DRA “exactly matches” two of the state’s basic reading communication standards.

7. *How are the data included in the state assessment system used?*

The data are used in school action planning as well as for reporting and will be used in the school accountability system.

8. *Are there changes planned for the state assessment system (proposed or enacted and to be implemented)? If so, what do these plans include? Why are these changes being made and what is the timeline? Are there implications for the state reporting or accountability systems (Title I or in general)?*

A Vermont Science Assessment and a Vermont History & Social Science Assessment are in different stages of development. The Vermont Science Assessment has been administered in the past, but was not used for 1999-2000. It included multiple-choice questions, and questions to which the students respond in writing or with diagrams to show their scientific knowledge or understanding of a concept. The state did not receive successful proposals for a new version of the assessment after distributing an RFP for administration this year, and is looking to other state science assessment models in developing a new assessment. A proposal for a new science assessment was approved by the State Board in July 2000; it will be piloted during the 2000-2001 year and fully administered the following year. A revision of the history and social studies standards stopped the production of the assessment for this subject while in process.

As approved by the SBE in July 2000, starting in school year 2000-2001, one or more local assessments may be selected by schools for accountability purposes, including the Vermont Mathematics and Writing Portfolios, and a commercially published norm-referenced test, which includes at least mathematics and reading. Schools may select other local assessments in the future. Schools will also have the option to add local assessments in the future if they have been included in the list approved by the State Board. The Board may approve such assessments if they meet validity and reliability criteria established by the Technical Advisory Panel. New options may take effect only in the first year of a four-year accountability period, and must remain in place during the entire four years. If local options are added, the State Board will determine their individual and combined maximum weight (in relation to state assessments) in the Baseline and Change Indexes of the new Student Accountability System Based on Student Performance.

9. *What have been the major issues and challenges in the area of state assessment? Explain.*

The cost efficiency of a small state developing and sustaining its own assessments.

Inclusion Policies for Assessment

1. *What exclusions are made in the current state assessment for students with disabilities? LEP? Who makes the decision about exclusion of a particular child? Does the state collect data or in other ways monitor the number and types of students excluded?*

All students in public schools are to be assessed appropriately. Decisions for students are made on an individual basis, with the IEP team or other appropriate team (504, LEP or Educational Support Team). Each school must account for the assessment of 100 percent of its students. Most students are expected to participate in the general state assessment without any special arrangements, particularly if the assessment has been designed to allow for a variety of "student styles." The majority of students with special assessment needs can participate in the general statewide assessment through the use of reasonable assessment accommodations indicated by the student's IEP, Section 504 plan, or Educational Support Team plan. An assessment accommodation is reasonable if it facilitates participation and

does not invalidate the assessment. For very few students (2% or less), participation in the general statewide assessment may not be appropriate. Students who cannot take the regular assessments, even with appropriate accommodations, can be included in statewide assessments through the alternative assessment system (which is on the SBE's agenda in July 2000) which includes adapted, modified and lifeskills assessments.

2. *What accommodations and/or modifications are made on the current state assessment for students with disabilities? LEP?*

<u>Accommodation Types</u>	<u>NSRE: English</u>	<u>NSRE: Math</u>	<u>Vermont DRA</u>
Alternative Presentation Formats			
• Read/translate the directions (NOT paraphrase)	Yes	Yes	n/a
• Read/translate the reading passages/text	No	Yes	No
• Read/translate the questions/prompts	Yes	Yes	n/a
• Read/translate the answer choices	Yes	Yes	n/a
• Braille version	Yes	No	Yes
• Large-print version	Yes	Yes	Yes
• Closed Circuit TV	Yes	Yes	Yes
• Out of Level Test	No	No	n/a
Alternative Response Formats			
• Scribe	Yes, except for independent writing section and long response to long reading passage section	Yes	n/a
• Computer or Braille typewriter	Yes, except neither a grammar nor a spelling checker may be used	Yes	n/a
Alternative Settings			
• Individualized administration/ separate location	Yes	Yes	Yes
• Study carrels	Yes	Yes	Yes
• Preferential Seating	Yes	Yes	Yes
Assistive Personnel			
• Readers and Scribes (see above)			
• Individual Proctors	Yes	Yes	Yes

Assistive Devices

• Calculators, abacus	n/a	Yes	n/a
• Spelling and grammar checkers	No	Yes	n/a
• Manipulatives	n/a	Yes	n/a

Additional Time

• Divide the test into smaller sections	Yes, except independent writing section	Yes	Yes, except a Level must be completed in one sitting
• Give longer time	Regular administration for each assessment.		

Additional structure

• Sequence prompt cards	Yes	Yes	Yes
• Solution maps	n/a	Yes	n/a
• Pre-conferencing or Task/Behavior Prompting	Yes	Yes	Yes

Alternate Assessments Grade 2 Grade 4 Grade 8 Grade 10

Modified Assessment

• Modified version of regular assessment	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
• Teacher designed assessment	n/a	Yes	Yes	Yes

Adapted Assessment

• Teacher designed assessment	n/a	Yes	Yes	Yes
• Read entire NSRE English exam to student	n/a	No	No	No
• Read entire NSRE math exam to student	n/a	Yes	Yes	Yes

Lifeskills Assessment

• Teacher designed assessment	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
• Pilot version of state Lifeskills Assessment	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Proposed Components of a Lifeskills Assessment (for spring 2000 - not required)

1. Should be designed for students working on a functional/life skills curriculum clearly not addressed by the general assessment.
2. Should assess the Vermont Standards referenced in the student's IEP goals and objectives.
3. Should be based on a continuous progress model.
4. Should document progress through multiple measures collected as a "body of evidence." Body of evidence can include, but is not limited to, any of the following:
 - IEP assessments,

- Portfolios of student work,
- Observations,
- Parent, Teacher or Student Interviews,
- Curriculum-based Measures,
- Adaptive Behavior Scales,
- Audio or Video Tapes,
- Developmental Skills Inventories,
- Out-of-level tests, or
- Other Tests.

5. Body of evidence assessments DO NOT need to be new assessments but should be reviewed (at a minimum) whenever general assessments occur at the student's grade/age level.

3. *Does the state provide assessments in languages other than English? If so, describe. In what grades and subjects?*

The NSRE Mathematics assessment is provided in Spanish in all grades tested; no other assessments have Spanish versions available.

4. *Does the state provide alternative assessments for students with disabilities? If so, describe. For which students and in which subjects and at what ages?*

Students who are unable to participate in district or state assessments must be given an alternate assessment. In accordance with federal law, the State Board must also develop, adopt and implement by July 1, 2000, an alternate assessment system to assist schools to meet this requirement. A proposed system of alternative assessment for Vermont was approved by the SBE in July 2000 and student data will be collected during the 2000-2001 school year as part of that system.

5. *Does the state have a goal for the inclusion of students with disabilities and/or LEP students on the statewide tests? Does the state use any strategies to encourage the inclusion of students with disabilities? LEP students?*

The state expectation is that students will fall into the following participation categories:

- General Assessment: 85-90%
- General Assessment with Accommodations: 5-10%
- Alternative Assessment: <2%

6. *Are changes planned for the inclusion of SWD and LEP students in the state assessment system (proposed or enacted and to be implemented)? If so, what do these plans include? Why are these changes being made and what is the timeline? Are there implications for the state reporting or accountability systems (Title I or in general)?*

To meet federal and state requirements, the State Board has approved and the state will administer an alternate assessment system.

Performance Standards

1. *How many and what performance levels has the state established for its assessments?*

The performance levels on the New Standards Reference Exams are the following:

- Achieved the Standard with Honors (Exceeded the standard)
- Achieved the Standard (Met the standard)
- Nearly Achieved the Standard
- Below the Standard
- Little Evidence of Achievement.

The specific cut scores vary for each form of the assessments in math and English.

These performance levels apply to all but the student portfolios. Results from the **Mathematics Problem Solving and Communication Portfolio** are reported as the distribution of individual scores received in the six areas on a scale of 1 (novice level) to 3 or 4 (sophisticated level) depending on the area tested. The **writing portfolio** scores are on a similar scale of 1 to 5. However, a standard setting process for portfolios is currently underway.

The **New Standards Reference Exam in English Language Arts** measures and reports on the percentages of students meeting a performance level (standard) in four areas:

- (1) Reading: Basic Understanding: Students must demonstrate the ability to comprehend a variety of materials of varying length and complexity.
- (2) Reading: Analysis and Interpretation: Students must demonstrate the ability to analyze and interpret what they read in the process of becoming critical readers.
- (3) Writing Effectiveness: Students must demonstrate the ability to write effectively in a variety of formats for a variety of purposes, audiences, and contexts.
- (4) Writing Conventions: Students must demonstrate control of the conventions (usage, spelling and punctuation) of the English language according to current standards of correctness.

The **New Standards Reference Exam in Mathematics** measures and reports on the percentages of students meeting a performance level (standard) in three areas:

- (1) Concepts: Showing that the student understands mathematical processes and ideas.
- (2) Skills: Showing that the student can perform the mathematical routine or technique correctly.
- (3) Problem Solving: Showing that the student can choose and apply appropriate skills and concepts, and reason mathematically. Students solve increasingly complex situations by formulating, implementing and drawing conclusions from the problem's solution.

2. *Has the state set acceptable levels or targets for schools, districts or the state on tests, drop-out rates or other measures (e.g. 70% of students in Maryland pass the MSPAP)?*

The performance targets that were used in the state transitional accountability system and the Title I system during the 1998-1999 and 1999-2000 school years included:

- First Review Basic Skills Target: 60% of more of students Meet or Exceed the Standard

- First Review Analytical Skills Target: 50% or more of students Meet or Exceed the Standard
- Second Review Basic Skills Target: 30% or fewer students in Below the Standard or Little Evidence
- Second Review Analytical Skills Target: 30% or fewer students in Below the Standard or Little Evidence

The First Review looks at the percentage of students who score in the top two performance levels. The Second Review looks at those students who score in the bottom two performance levels. A school has been identified for technical assistance if it does not meet 50% or more of its targets in both Basic and Analytical Skills in either the first or second review. For a complete description of this process, see the accountability section.

However, the State Board of Education approved the final rules for the **Accountability System Based on Student Performance** on July 18, 2000 for the 2000-2001 school year. These rules describe a system based on an eight-year goal for all schools and biennial performance targets for each school. Specifically, the State Board of Education has established a goal for student performance – *that all students in a school (on average) will achieve the standard by school year 2007-2008*. Achieving the standard is defined as scoring at the “achieve the standard” performance level on the state assessments, and similar performance levels on non-standards-based assessments.

To meet the Goal each school needs a minimum **index** of 500 points on the Change Index.

- 600 points: all students in the school achieve the standard with honors;
- 500 points: all students in the school, on average, achieve the standard;
- 300 points: all students in the school, on average, nearly achieve the standard;
- 100 points: all students in the school, on average, are below the standard;
- 0 points: all students in the school show little evidence of achieving the standard.

3. *How are these performance standards calculated? What data are included in the calculations, and at what proportions (e.g. assessment results 60%, dropout and attendance rates 40%). How are the calculations made? What is the final unit of analysis for reporting school and district achievement levels (e.g. performance index, grade, category)?*

Under both the new and transitional systems, only the Vermont DRA, New Standards Reference Exams and optional portfolios or norm-referenced tests are used. Under the new system for 2000-2001, results from these assessments will be combined to produce index scores that are calculated and will be reported on the 0-600 scale. Two key index scores are the **Baseline** and **Change** Indexes. These index scores describe the change in student performance across all state assessments, every two years, using four **cohorts** of data (i.e. four years of testing 8th graders on the NSRE English/language arts assessment). The Baseline Index reflects student performance in the first two years of an accountability cycle, while the Change Index reflects student performance in the last two years of an accountability cycle. Both indexes are calculated in exactly the same way and must contain the same elements (i.e. the same assessment measures must be used during all four years of an accountability cycle in order for Baseline and Change scores to be valid).

A third index – the **Status Index** – describes a school’s performance at a specific point in time, starting with assessment results from 2001 and 2002. The calculation of the Status Index is based on the last two years of state assessment data in each Accountability Cycle.

The scores from state assessments given at a school are included in the calculation of the indexes. These can change over time. For Cycle 1 they are:

Basic Skills

Vermont Developmental Reading Assessment, Grade 2

Mathematical Skills, Grades 4, 8 & 10

Reading: Basic Understanding, Grades 4, 8 & 10

Writing Conventions, Grades 4, 8 & 10

Analytic Skills

Mathematical Concepts, Grades 4, 8 & 10

Mathematical Problem Solving, Grades 4, 8 & 10

Reading: Analysis & Interpretation, Grades 4, 8 & 10

Writing Effectiveness, Grades 4, 8 & 10

Points will be assigned for each student’s performance in either the regular or alternate assessments in relation to the performance levels. The results for alternate assessments are included in the appropriate content area and the grade level in which the student is enrolled.

Assignment of Point Values for Assessment Performance Levels	
Achieved the Standard with Honors	600 points
Achieved the Standard	500 points
Nearly Achieved the Standard	300 points
Below the Standard	100 points
Little or No Evidence of Achievement	0 points

Points are aggregated into an index for one element as follows:

1. Multiply the number of students at each performance level with the corresponding number of accountability index points, sum the points and then divide the points by the number of students. For example:

• Achieved the Standard with Honors:	3 students x 600 =	1,800
• Achieved the Standard:	117 students x 500 =	58,500
• Nearly Achieved the Standard:	105 students x 300 =	31,500
• Below the Standard:	73 students x 100 =	7,300
• <u>Little Evidence of Achievement:</u>	<u>7 students x 0 =</u>	<u>0</u>
TOTAL	305 students	$\frac{99,100}{305} = 324.9$ Index

2. After an index is calculated for each element, the elements are combined into a Basic Skills Index and an Analytical Skills Index by adding together the total number of student points in each index and dividing by the total number of elements in each index. The two indexes are then combined in the same way to create an overall Baseline or Change Index.
3. To gauge progress against the overall goal, a **Growth Target** is calculated every two years. The Growth Target represents the amount of growth (improvement) the school

must make during an accountability cycle in order to reach the 500-point goal by school year 2007-08.

4. A Growth Score will also be calculated for each accountability cycle. The **Growth Score** is the percentage of the Growth Target achieved during each four-year accountability cycle.

For Accountability Cycle 1, the **Status Index** is identical to the Change Index and is calculated with the same method. The accountability reports will include all Index scores, Growth Targets, and Growth Scores for a school. The school will also receive an official notice on its progress toward the eight-year goal.

Some schools will be identified for **mandatory technical assistance** based on their Indexes and/or Growth Scores. For Accountability Cycle 1, schools will be identified for Mandatory Technical Assistance (Fall, 2002) if they are below 300 points on the Status Index or greater than or equal to 300 points and less than 325 points on the Status Index and have a Growth Score of less than 50%.

4. *Are all students, schools and districts included in these performance calculations? If not, who is excluded?*

Under the transitional system, students who have taken the full New Standards Reference Exams (all three days) have been included. Those missing part of the exam or taking an alternative assessment are not included. Under the new **Accountability System Based on Student Performance** for 2000-2001, schools are to account for all students. Students not included are those with medical excuses, family emergency or student crisis, and students who enroll in the school on or after the first day of testing. In addition, if, as a result of a suspension or expulsion, a student is not available to take a complete assessment, the student will not be included in accountability results, as described in the Accountability Operations Manual.

The State Board shall include results of alternate assessments in the accountability system for eligible students with Individual Education Plans, 504 Plans, or limited English proficiency, when such assessments are developed and when they meet accepted technical standards. Any student who does not take an assessment, including alternate assessments, without an approved exemption or excuse, shall be assigned the point value (0) for the lowest performance level, Little or No Evidence of Achieving the Standard.

5. *Are changes planned for the state performance standards (proposed or enacted and to be implemented)? If so, what do these plans include? Why are these changes being made and what is the timeline? Are there implications for the state reporting or accountability systems (Title I or in general)?*

The new rules for Vermont's School Accountability System Based on Student Performance will be implemented for the 2000-2001 school year.

6. *What proportion of schools and/or districts fail to meet acceptable levels on performance targets?*

Districts which include more than one school are not included in the calculation of performance targets. However, 39 schools out of 319 schools in the state were identified to receive technical assistance by transitional criteria (that were in place for two school years) after the 1999 assessment data were collected.

Reporting Performance Data

1. *Describe the characteristics of the state performance data reporting system (by whom, what data, who is the audience) for each of the following levels:*

- *Student reports*

Individual student reports from the state for the Vermont DRA list the performance level at which the student achieved. School data is more complete from the Vermont DRA as they are responsible for scoring the assessment.

The NSRE student reports also list the performance level at which the student achieved, and offers a comparison between that student and the achievement of other students in the same grade in the school, district and state. Due to the use of SAT9 items on these assessments, Harcourt-Brace generates an “estimated SAT9 percentile score” for the English and math sections.

- *School and District reports*

Public reporting is an important aspect of Vermont’s School Accountability System and student performance results are presented in a variety of ways:

a) **School and district reports:** Schools receive data aggregated to the school and supervisory union level. These reports include distribution of performance across the five performance levels and other information useful for local planning.

b) **The Vermont School Report** is published annually by the Vermont Department of Education. The current report is a compilation of "indicators" about Vermont public schools. The indicators are divided into six sections:

- (1) *General School and Program Information:* general school information, total school enrollment, attendance rate, retention rate, class size, student: teacher ratio, percent special education, technical education completers, dropout rate, home study, technology, and arts education
- (2) *Staff Information:* personnel, teacher contract information, etc.
- (3) *Community Social Indicators:* level of education, food assistance, etc.
- (4) *Financial Resources:* adjusted gross income, median income, etc.
- (5) *Financial Expenditures:* current expenditure percentages, gross education dollars, tuition and fees to other districts in the state, K-12 town special education expenditures
- (6) *Student Performance:* on the state assessments as well as SAT, AP results, and post-secondary aspirations. The reports list the percentage of students in the highest two performance levels on the NSRE.

The Vermont School Report was first released in February, 1996, and was modified and updated during the last two years by an advisory group made up of superintendents, principals and business managers, as well as representation from the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), Principals Association (VPA), School Boards Association (VSBA),

Vermont Business Roundtable, Department of Education, Superintendents Association (VSA), Vermont Institute for Science, Math and Technology (VISMT), Vermont Student Assistance Corporation (VSAC) and the National Education Association (VT-NEA).

c) **Yearly press conferences:** These press conferences include the release of state level scores, school-by-school performance, and any research conducted by the state to identify best practices. (See attachment for sample press conference packets.)

d) **The School Improvement Support Guide**, which presents school-level performance graphically and allows users to address key questions about performance on state level assessments, went on line in January 2000. Areas addressed include: the percentage of students meeting or exceeding standards; percentage of students in the lowest two performance levels; distribution of scores across performance levels; data disaggregated by gender; performance compared with any other school; performance compared with similar schools demographically; improvement in performance over time; and decrease of percentage of students in the two lowest performance levels.

e) **Local School Report:** Every Vermont school is required by law to report to its community state on local performance data, as well as data on the health and well being of its students.

f) **Newspaper Insert:** State level performance data, as well as other information about the assessment system and accountability system, are included in this widely distributed insert.

g) **State Board Budget Book:** Each year, a section of the State Board Budget Book is devoted to performance data on four goals: Vermont children entering school ready to learn; Vermont students meeting or exceeding standards; Vermont students being prepared to make informed positive choices about their health, safety and the well being of others; and Vermont students being prepared for success beyond high school.

- *State reports:* See above

2. *How are the data distributed? When during the year (month or time period after assessment)? To whom (students, teachers, parents, the media, the community)?*

Reports are distributed directly to the schools and are produced for the most part by Harcourt Brace. The state reviews the reports, however, before they are distributed. The community and media can review school achievement scores through the state Internet site, and parents and students receive individual student reports. Similar reports have been created and distributed annually in the state, starting in February, 1996. Websites are updated as new data is available.

3. *At what level(s) are data disaggregated (state, district and school levels)? For what groups are disaggregated data reported (see Internet sites for state, district and school level report cards)?*

Data at the school level are disaggregated and reported by gender, ethnicity and students receiving free or reduced lunch. Due to the fact that 44% of the state's elementary schools have fewer than 10 students in a cohort group, the state has determined that if any disaggregated group has less than five students, the data are not reported for that subgroup.

4. *Does trend data exist from the state assessments (example: Texas State Assessment data is available from “1996-97 on”).*

1997-98 was the first year of mandatory participation in the Vermont Comprehensive Assessment system. 1995-96 and 1996-97 data come from voluntary participation. Due to low participation at the high school level during the voluntary assessments, only 4th and 8th grade data are shown from 1995-96 and 1996-97. Schools at grades 4 and 8 will have their fourth year of trend data and high schools their third year with the release of the 1999-2000 assessment results. At the present time, statewide data in mathematics and writing portfolios are available in alternate years.

5. *How are the results of students with disabilities and limited English proficiency reported? Are they included in the aggregate scores reported to the public, or disaggregated by group?*

All those students who successfully complete the NSRE are reported in the aggregate. Pilot reports on 1999 data disaggregated by the categories required by Title I were provided as part of the Title I Performance Report. The 2000 data will be disaggregated by the categories required by Title I. Alignment of Migrant and LEP databases with the student demographic data base is ongoing to improve the accuracy and completeness of the disaggregated data. An annual report on special education also provides data disaggregated by disabilities.

6. *What are the state’s requirements for the use of data in school and district improvement planning?*

An **action plan** must be developed and implemented in each public school. Vermont considers this a cornerstone of its accountability system. The plan is to be designed to improve the performance of all students enrolled in the school, based on state and local performance data. If a school district comprises more than one school building, a combined plan for some or all the buildings may be developed. The plan must be developed using student performance data obtained from state and local assessments and other information related to student performance which may include, but is not limited to:

- dropout and retention rates,
- attendance,
- course enrollment patterns and
- graduation rates.

7. *Are changes planned for performance reporting (proposed or enacted and to be implemented)? If so, what do these plans include? Why are these changes being made and what is the timeline? Are there implications for the accountability system (Title I or in general)?*

Under the new accountability system, accountability results will be issued every two years beginning in fall 2002 and will include, at minimum, the following elements:

- Status Index (state assessments only)
- Basic and Analytical Skills for the Status Index
- Change Index (state assessments only for Cycle 1; includes local assessments beginning in Cycle 2)

- Growth Score (percentage of Growth Target achieved)
- Accountability decisions (i.e., whether a school is identified for mandatory technical assistance)
- Percentage of students who did not participate in the state assessments (beginning in Cycle 2, percentage of students participating in alternate assessments).

8. *What have been the major issues and challenges in the area of performance standards and reporting? Explain.*

Until 1997, the state did not have a mandatory state assessment system, and so the SDE has had to work with schools on what is required to administer a state assessment.

State Accountability System (1999-2000 school year)

1. *Provide a brief overview and history of the accountability system as the context.*

The 1997 **Equal Educational Opportunity Act** (Act 60) requires the State Board of Education to review and implement school quality standards and to measure student performance, building on previous school improvement initiatives. Student achievement will be a primary factor in the state's judgment of the quality of a school. The other significant factor is whether schools are meeting Vermont's School Quality Standards. During transitional years (1997-98 and 1998-99), schools submitted assurances and progress reports on their implementation of School Quality Standards. A transitional accountability system for student performance was implemented during the school years 1997-98 and 1998-99, to identify schools that were provided technical assistance.

Act 60 requires that the Commissioner, every two years, will evaluate each school to determine if students are being provided a “substantially equal educational opportunity” to that provided in other schools, and whether schools are making sufficient progress on standards-based state and optional local assessments. If a school is not making sufficient progress in student performance or not meeting the School Quality Standards, the SBE must provide technical assistance and support to schools to improve student performance.

2. *What are the characteristics of the state accountability system? Organize the response into the following subsections:*

- *Student Accountability/Rewards and Sanctions*

Effective July 1, 1998, a student meets high school graduation requirements if the student successfully completes the following courses of instruction:

- four years of English language arts,
- five years combined of science and mathematics,
- three years of history and the social sciences,
- one year of the arts,
- one and one-half years of physical education; and
- the student meets any additional local graduation requirements.

Effective June 2002, a student meets the requirements for graduation if:

- the student successfully completes at least 20 Carnegie units, including at minimum the following courses of instruction:
- four years of English language arts,
- three years of science,
- three years of mathematics,
- three years of history and the social sciences,
- one year of the arts,
- one and one-half years of physical education; and
- the student meets any additional local graduation requirements.

Effective September 2001, Vermont high schools must have a standards-based graduation requirement in place. The class of 2005 must meet these local standards-based graduation requirements. Effective June 2005, a student meets the requirements for graduation if, at the election of each secondary school board:

(1) the student demonstrates that he or she has attained or exceeded the standards contained in the Framework or comparable standards as measured by results on performance-based assessments, plus any additional requirements established by the school board; or

(2) the student successfully completes at least 20 Carnegie units, including at minimum the following courses of instruction aligned with the Framework or comparable standards:

- four years of English language arts,
- three years of science,
- three years of mathematics,
- three years of history and the social sciences,
- one year of the arts,
- one and one-half years of physical education; and any additional requirements established by the school board that demonstrate that the student has attained or exceeded the Framework or comparable standards or other requirements set by the board; or

(3) any combination of 1 and 2 above that demonstrates that the student has attained or exceeded the Framework or comparable standards.

- *School Accountability/Rewards and Sanctions*

The **Transitional System for Measuring Improvement in Student Performance** that was used for the 1998-1999 and 1999-2000 school years will be replaced by the new system approved by the SBE on July 19, 2000. Under the transitional system, the State Board of Education annually adopted and implemented a statistical model to identify schools in need of technical assistance, based upon student performance assessment results. The model specified numerical criteria to identify schools in need of technical assistance. The Commissioner applied this statistical model on or before January 1, in both the 1998-1999 and 1999-2000 school years, to calculate each school's standing in relation to the criteria for needing technical assistance and notified each school in writing of the calculation.

Specifically, the criteria for determining a school's need for technical assistance in 1999-2000 included:

- the Vermont DRA
- the New Standards Reference Exams in Math
- the New Standards Reference Exams in English/language arts,

- Norm reference assessments (*locally determined option*), and
- student portfolios (*locally determined option*).

These assessments were further broken down into Basic Skills and Analytical Skills Indicators:

Basic Skills Indicators: Vermont DRA: Grade 2
 Reading for Basic Understanding on the NSRE:
 Grades 4, 8, 10
 Writing conventions on the NSRE: Grades 4, 8, 10
 Math skills on the NSRE: Grades 4, 8, 10

Analytical Writing Indicators: Reading Analysis and Interpretation on the NSRE:
 Grades 4, 8, 10
 Writing effectiveness on the NSRE: Grades 4, 8, 10
 Math problem solving on the NSRE: Grades 4, 8, 10
 Math concepts on the NSRE: Grades 4, 8, 10.

The First Review looked at the percentage of students who scored in the top two performance levels. The Second Review looked at those students who scored in the bottom two performance levels.

The performance targets used in the state transitional accountability system and the Title I system included:

- First Review Basic Skills Target: 60% of more of students Meet or Exceed the Standard
- First Review Analytical Skills Target: 50% or more of students Meet or Exceed the Standard
- Second Review Basic Skills Target: 30% or fewer students in Below the Standard or Little Evidence
- Second Review Analytical Skills Target: 30% or fewer students in Below the Standard or Little Evidence.

Each school in the state has also been required to meet (effective January 1999) the following mandated **School Quality Standards**:

An **action plan** must be developed and implemented in each public school. The plan is to be designed to improve the performance of all students enrolled in the school. If a school district comprises more than one school building, a combined plan for some or all the buildings may be developed. The plan is to reflect the different needs of individual schools and be developed with the involvement of school board members, teachers, administrators, parents and other community members. The plan must be developed using student performance data obtained from state and local assessments and other information related to student performance which may include, but is not limited to:

- Dropout, attendance and retention rates,
- course enrollment patterns and
- graduation rates.

The school board must approve the plan, and the plan must at least contain:

- (a) Goals and objectives for improved student learning, and
- (b) Educational strategies and activities specifically designed to achieve these goals, including professional development of administrative and instructional staff.

The plan will be reviewed at least annually for its effectiveness toward meeting the stated goals and revised as necessary based upon current student performance data.

Each school must also administer “assessments of student performance...consistent with the **Vermont Comprehensive Assessment System.**” Each school must also “make continual and steady progress” in developing a **local comprehensive assessment system:**

- that includes the state-level assessments,
- is aligned with the Framework or comparable standards, and
- is consistent with the Vermont Comprehensive Assessment System adopted by the State Board of Education in November 1996.

A school’s comprehensive assessment system must be able to yield results that enable it to:

- (1) make decisions about instruction, professional development, and educational resources and curriculum, and

- (2) report to the public on student performance measures and progress in, as appropriate, early reading, English language arts, mathematics, science, history and social sciences.

These systems are to be in place by September 1, 2001.

Each school must also **report student performance results** to the community at least annually in a format selected by the school board. The report must include:

- (a) Information indicating progress toward meeting student performance standards from the most recent measures taken,
- (b) Information about the health and social well-being of children in the school district,
- (c) Information indicating progress toward meeting the annual goals of the action plan,
- (d) Any other statistical information about the school or community that the school board deems necessary to place the student performance results in context,
- (e) Information about early reading instruction provided under 16 V.S.A. §2903 (c),
- (f) Early care and educational opportunities available to children,
- (g) Community support available to children,
- (h) A description of how the school ensures that each student receives appropriate career counseling and program information regarding education and apprenticeship program offerings at technical centers, and
- (i) If the school is a secondary school, data describing student participation in technical education, regional job opportunities and the number of graduates from the previous year who have entered post-secondary education, the military, and the job market.

Each school must also develop and implement a school-wide system of **needs-based professional development** for all professional staff including administrators and other staff involved in student instruction, including paraprofessionals. The professional development system should be meant to enhance the skills and abilities of staff to improve student performance in relation to the Framework or comparable standards.

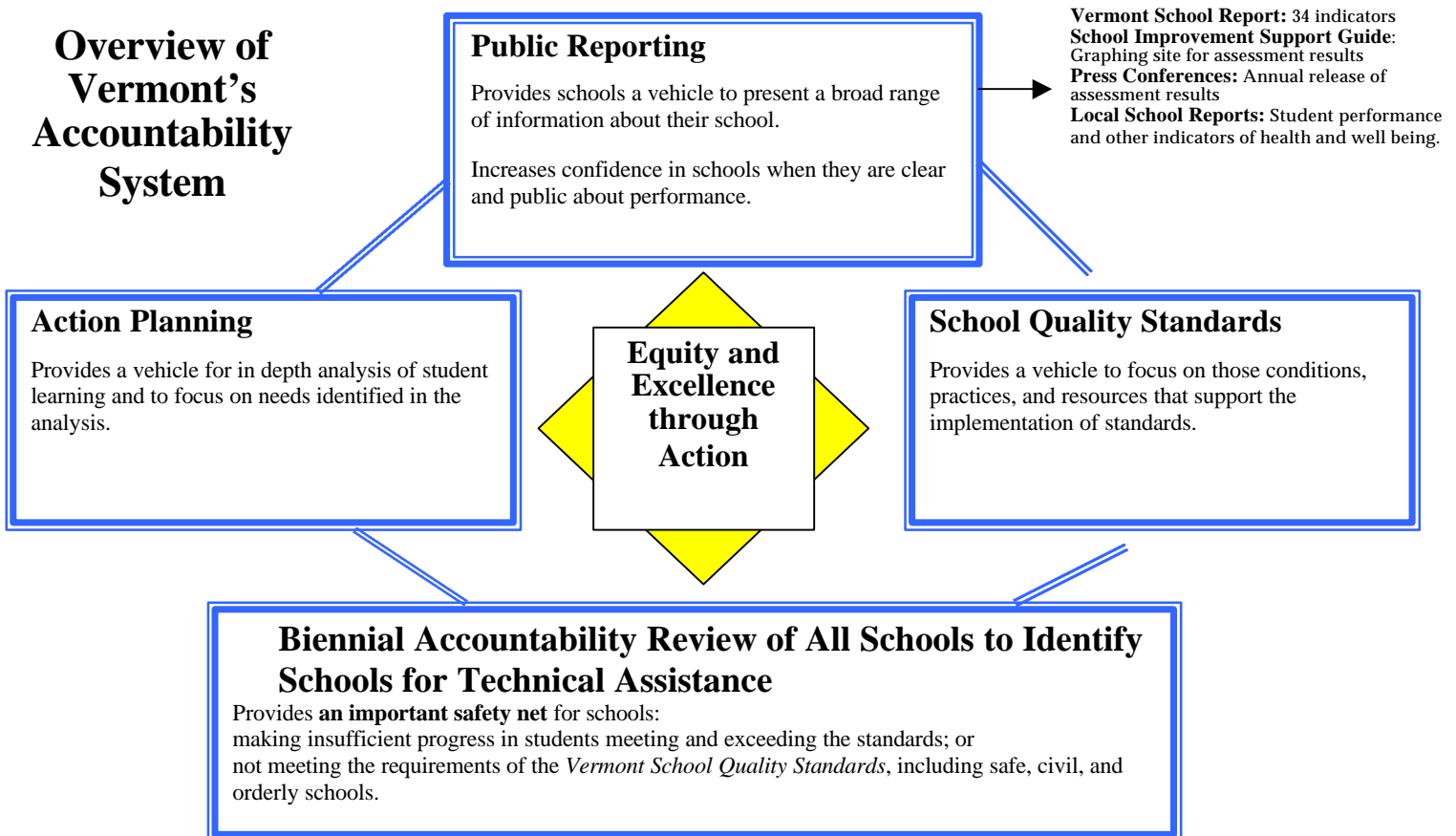
Each school must develop and implement **staff evaluation programs** and policies to advance student learning. For beginning teachers, either in their first two years of teaching or their first two years of teaching in a particular school, a building level administrator shall

provide intensive support, regular supervision and periodic evaluation. Evaluation shall be provided periodically for all staff beyond any initial two-year period.

In addition to these requirements:

- schools with grades 9-12 must offer access to technical education programs
 - schools must ensure that students receive educational and other services in accordance with state and federal entitlements
- and all schools must:
- foster and provide credible leadership
 - employ licensed and endorsed staff
 - ensure average grade K-3 class sizes of fewer than 20 students, average grade 4-8 class sizes of fewer than 25 students per teacher, and total class rolls of no more than 100 in English and 150 in other disciplines at the secondary level
 - ensure that schools employ sufficient and qualified library media specialists and special education staff, and
 - maximize the effectiveness of staff
 - provide a comprehensive system of support for students
 - provide school counselors and health services, and
 - participate in “interagency teams”

Under the newly approved **School Accountability System Based on Student Performance**, a new school indexing model will be added to the School Quality Standards described previously.



The state has set a new goal: *By the fall of 2008, every Vermont school will have all students, on average, achieving the standards.* Under the new system and in accordance with Act 60, the State Board of Education approved a system for ensuring continuous improvement in student performance on:

- 1) statewide assessments in early reading, English language arts, mathematics, science and history and social sciences and, to the extent practicable, other local assessments;
- 2) other indicators, such as, but not limited to, dropout and retention rates, attendance, course enrollment patterns and graduation rates;

as well as for ensuring continuous improvement in the school quality standards and identifying schools in need of technical assistance or other interventions. The Vermont state assessments that will be used to measure school performance for accountability purposes (Vermont Developmental Reading Assessment, Grade 2; New Standards Reference Examinations in Mathematics and English Language Arts, Grades 4, 8, and 10); and Science.

To achieve their goal by 2008, the state divided the accountability system into four cycles with intermediate growth targets every two years. The growth targets will be based on how far a school is from the state goal. There will be four accountability periods, including the following school years:

- Accountability Cycle 1: 1997-1998 – 2000-2001
- Accountability Cycle 2: 1999-2000 – 2002-2003
- Accountability Cycle 3: 2001-2002 – 2004-2005
- Accountability Cycle 4: 2003-2004 – 2006-2007.

The first two years of an accountability cycle shall be Baseline years. Results from those years serve as the basis for comparison with the last two years of an accountability cycle, which are the Change years. In Cycle 1, accountability determinations shall be based on assessment results from the two years ending in 2002, compared with the two years ending in 2000. Every two years thereafter, assessment results from two Baseline years shall be compared with the results from two Change years.

In order for the Commissioner to identify schools for mandatory technical assistance and to determine whether schools are making sufficient progress to meet the policy goal, the following academic performance levels were established and apply to all assessments, including alternate assessments, represented by the corresponding point scale:

- 600 points: all students in the school achieve the standard with honors;
- 500 points: all students in the school, on average, achieve the standard;
- 300 points: all students in the school, on average, nearly achieve the standard;
- 100 points: all students in the school, on average, are below the standard;
- 0 points: all students in the school show little evidence of achieving the standard.

Schools' assessment results shall be calculated for accountability purposes using the above performance levels and their corresponding points. Accountability reports shall show results from the assessments based on schools' grade configurations (*see performance standards*).

For Accountability Cycle 2, each selected local assessment shall count 10 percent in a school's Baseline and Change Indexes. For local assessment options approved by the State Board for Cycles 3 and 4 the Board shall determine their combined maximum weight and may determine

other criteria (e.g., subject matter and applicable grades) for application in the Baseline and Change Indexes.

If a school selects no local assessments for accountability purposes in any cycle, state assessments shall account for 100 percent of the results in its Baseline and Change Indexes. In analyzing schools' accountability for student performance in relation to the standards the State Board of Education may add other student performance measures to the accountability system. These uniformly applied measures may include, but are not limited to, attendance, dropout rates, suspensions and expulsions, graduation and Advanced Placement rates, and community service. Such measures may be considered and given appropriate weight by the Board if it determines that they are valid for accountability purposes, including the criterion that such measures are capable of showing change over time. Any additional measures adopted by the Board shall take effect at the beginning of a four-year accountability cycle.

Accountability Indexes

The Commissioner shall calculate state and, if applicable, local assessment indexes to determine whether to identify schools for mandatory technical assistance. Each of the following indexes shall be calculated for each school every two years, using the point scale. Calculations shall begin with assessment results from two school years, 2000-2001—2001-2002, except for the Baseline Index which shall first be calculated using results from two school years, 1998-1999, 1999-2000.

An index shall lead to a two-year calculation which assigns points corresponding to five assessment performance levels for each element of an assessment, such as Reading: Basic Understanding, and shall show the average performance of the students in the school on that element. Indexes shall be combined for all elements of one assessment, such as English Language Arts, and shall show the average performance of the students in the school on the assessment. Indexes shall be combined for more than one assessment, and shall show the average performance of the students in the school on those assessments.

Indexes are as follows:

A. The **Status Index** shall combine results from the elements of the state assessments. It shall show the average performance of all students in a school on state assessments for the last two years of an accountability cycle.

B. The **Local Assessment Index** shall combine results from one or more optional local assessments. It shall show the average performance of all students in the school on those assessments.

C. The **Baseline Index** shall combine results from the elements of state assessments and from any local assessments. It shall show the average performance of all the students in the school on those assessments for the first two years of an accountability cycle.

D. The **Change Index** shall combine results from the elements of state assessments and from any local assessments. It shall show the average performance of all the students in the school on those assessments for the last two years of an accountability period.

Growth Targets

When statewide accountability results are complete for any Baseline Index, the Commissioner shall notify each school of its Change Index Growth Target for that accountability cycle. The target shall be the difference between the school's Baseline Index and the State Board's goal of 500 on the performance level point scale, divided by the number of accountability cycles remaining through school year 2007-2008. The number of periods shall decrease by one every two years. The Accountability Operations Manual shall contain an explanation and examples of how Growth Targets are determined.

The principal or superintendent may appeal in writing to the Commissioner of Education a disagreement concerning a school's Baseline Index and/or its Growth Target at the end of the first two years in any accountability cycle, stating the basis for its appeal. The Commissioner's determination may be appealed to the State Board, which shall affirm or modify the Commissioner's determination.

Growth Scores

In any accountability period, a school's Growth Score, which shall be expressed as a percentage, shall be determined by dividing its actual growth, from its Baseline Index to its Change Index, by its Growth Target.

Report of Results

The Commissioner shall issue a public report of accountability results, from the Status and Change Indexes, not later than December 1st in years 2002, 2004, 2006, and 2008. The report shall include statewide results in relation to the Board's policy statement in Rule 2512. The report shall include for each school: Status Index, separating Basic and Analytical Skills; Change Index; Growth Score; identification for mandatory technical assistance; and the percentage and number of students in each school who took all forms of alternate assessments.

The Commissioner shall provide to individual schools accountability reports on all their results and their accountability status.

- *District Accountability/Rewards and Sanctions*

The state does not have an accountability system for districts or "supervisory unions" based on standards or assessment results because the operative statutes and regulations are focused on schools. Districts are one partner in supporting school improvement efforts in schools that have been identified for technical assistance.

3. *What methods of measuring progress are used in the state accountability system?*

The new student accountability system based on student performance establishes both absolute targets under which very low performing schools are provided technical assistance as well as growth targets for longer-term school improvement.

4. *Are all students included in calculating the measures of progress? If not, who is excluded (probe on inclusion of SWD and LEP students)?*

The goal of the Accountability System Based on Student Performance is to include all students. Students not included are those with medical excuses, family emergency or student crisis, and students who enroll in the school on or after the first day of testing. In addition, if,

as a result of a suspension or expulsion, a student is not available to take a complete assessment, the student will not be included in accountability results.

5. *How do the general state accountability system and the system of accountability for Title I schools compare? Are they the same, or different? How?*

The transitional system for the identification of schools in need of technical assistance was used for both state and federal (Title I) accountability. The new accountability system finalized in July 2000 will also be used for both state and federal (Title I) accountability.

6. *Are subgroup performance results used as an indicator in the calculation of state accountability measures? If so, how? To identify schools or districts in need of improvement? For recognition and rewards?*

No, subgroup performance is not included as an indicator in accountability system.

7. *Are charter and/or non-public schools included in the accountability system? If so, how?*

The state does not have any charter schools and non-public schools are not included in the accountability legislation. Five private academies at the high school level, however, approximately 90 percent of whose student bodies are comprised of students paying tuition with public funds, are required to administer state assessments and to report the results of those students' assessments.

8. *Are changes planned for the state accountability system (proposed or enacted and to be implemented)? If so, what do these plans include? Why are these changes being made and what is the timeline?*

The interim School Quality Standards state that by September 1, 2000, the State Board of Education will establish a system for ensuring continuous improvement in student performance on:

- statewide assessments in early reading, English language arts, mathematics, science and history and social sciences and, to the extent practicable, other local assessments;
- other indicators, such as, but not limited to, dropout and retention rates, attendance, course enrollment patterns and graduation rates;

as well as for ensuring continuous improvement in meeting the School Quality Standards and identifying schools in need of technical assistance or other interventions. In compliance with this requirement, the SBE, in January 2000, initiated for public comment proposed rules for Vermont's School Accountability System Based on Student Performance.

For the 2000-2001 school year, the new accountability system described above will replace the transitional system. During August 2000, the Technical Advisory Panel (TAP) will meet and establish criteria for the inclusion of **local assessments** in accountability. For Cycle 2, pending the results of this review, schools may include data from three locally implemented, administered, and/or scored assessments that most schools have had the opportunity to use: writing portfolios, math portfolios, and commercial norm-referenced tests (NRTs).

The criteria established by the TAP will be used to evaluate other local assessments for inclusion in accountability in Cycles 3 and 4.

Details of the process and timeline for submitting a local assessment for consideration as part of a school's accountability determination in Cycle 3 will be announced no later than January 2001.

Accountability Cycle 3 begins in Fall 2002. Any school wishing to include a specific assessment as part of the local assessments will need to submit the required information to the Department by October 2001. The Department will facilitate a review that will include members of the TAP, district curriculum coordinators, subject matter specialists and/or other appropriate personnel. The criteria established by the TAP will be used for reviewing other local assessments for inclusion in Accountability Cycle 3.

The review group will provide the Commissioner a list of local assessments recommended for inclusion in Accountability Cycle 3. The Commissioner will make the final determination and notify schools that submitted assessments, as well as making the list of approved assessments public in Winter 2001.

Schools that submitted assessments that were not approved for inclusion will receive feedback from the review panel to inform the future development and consideration of the assessment.

All schools will be given an opportunity until March 2002 to select local assessments for inclusion in Accountability Cycle 3. All schools must declare their local assessments at the beginning of each Accountability Cycle even if the school is using exactly the same local assessments as in the previous Cycle.

A similar time frame and process will occur prior to Accountability Cycle 4.

9. *What have been the major issues and challenges in the area of accountability? Explain.*

The challenge continues to be the approval and implementation of the new accountability system for the state based on student performance. An additional responsibility is to develop the rules for determining whether schools are meeting the School Quality Standards, effective, with Board approval, July 2001.

Identifying and Assisting Low Performing Schools and Districts

1. *How are schools and districts identified as low performing? Using what criteria? Do the identification processes and/or criteria differ for Title I and non-Title I schools?*

Under the transitional system, a school has been identified for technical assistance if it does not meet 50% or more of its targets in both Basic and Analytical Skills in either the first or second review. For a complete description of this process, see the accountability section.

If a school decides to use **local portfolios** as part of the system, schools are identified for technical assistance if in the first review fewer than 50% of students are “successful” on the portfolio as a whole; “successful” is defined as scoring at or above a 2 out of 3 or a 3 out of 4, depending on the number of areas tested. **Norm referenced test** results from grades 5, 9, and 11 in math and English are used in the second review. Schools using this assessment may be identified if 25% of the students are performing in the bottom quartile.

However, effective September 1, 2000, if the Commissioner finds that a school needs technical assistance because it is not in substantial compliance with the school quality standards or has not made continuous improvement in student performance, the Commissioner will forward such findings to the State Board of Education, with recommended actions. A copy of the recommendations will be sent to the school board along with notice of the board’s procedural rights. In the review for school year 2000-2001, the Commissioner will also consider the progress being made by the school in the alignment of curriculum, instruction, assessment and policies to the Framework or comparable standards. Beginning in September 2001, schools not making progress in the alignment of curriculum, instruction, assessment and policies to the Framework will be included in the review. The State Board of Education may, after opportunity for hearing, affirm, reverse or modify the Commissioner’s findings or recommended actions.

The State Board of Education may contract for an **independent external audit** to determine the effectiveness of the State Board’s system for ensuring:

- continuous improvement in student performance;
- continuous improvement in school quality
- identification of schools in need of technical assistance or other interventions.

The first audit will be conducted in the 2002-2003 school year and every four years thereafter.

Although the state also identified numerous **school quality standards**, non-compliance with those standards has not, as of 1999-2000, been a way for schools to be identified by the state except in extreme cases. The state is still working on how the school quality standards will fit into the larger state strategy for accountability and assistance.

The new **Accountability System Based on Student Performance** for 2000-2001 will be used to identify those schools making insufficient progress in reaching the State Board Goal. Identified schools are provided technical assistance for two years and, if identified a second consecutive time, the Commissioner may recommend additional technical assistance or take other actions.

- 1) A school will be identified if its performance on state assessments is very low.

2) A second way a school may be identified is if its performance on state and local (optional) assessments is low and it has made insufficient improvement.

Accountability results and decisions will be published every two years, beginning in fall 2002.

If the school does not show improvement after two years, the Commissioner of Education may also recommend that other actions be taken, including adjusting supervisory union boundaries, providing that students enroll in other schools, or assuming administrative control of the school to the extent necessary to correct deficiencies. To help the Commissioner make a recommendation for continued technical assistance or other actions, a thorough analysis of the school's overall performance will be conducted.

The first Accountability Cycle under the proposed accountability rules will include the four school years, 1999-2002. Schools will be identified under the final system for the first time in the fall of 2002. Because no local assessment data can be included until Cycle 2, there will be an additional review of all identified schools to focus on any compelling evidence from local data that might refute the identification.

A review process for School Quality Standards will be developed by July 2001 that will also be applied in the fall of 2002.

Identification of Schools for Mandatory Technical Assistance: Cycles 1 and 2

Before a school is identified to receive mandatory technical assistance the Commissioner shall provide an opportunity for the school to review accountability results for completeness and accuracy. The Commissioner shall identify a school to receive mandatory technical assistance in Accountability Cycles 1 and 2 if:

- its Status Index on all state assessments is below 300 for Cycle 1 and below 325 for Cycle 2;
- at the end of Accountability Cycle 1, its Status Index is greater than or equal to 300 and less than 325 and, based on the comparison of its Baseline and Change Indexes, its Growth Score is less than 50 percent of its Growth Target; or
- at the end of Accountability Cycle 2, its Status Index is greater than or equal to 325 and less than 350 and its Growth Score is less than 50 percent of its Growth Target.

Not later than September 1, 2005 and September 1, 2007, the State Board shall set Status Index identification points for Accountability Cycles 3 and 4 respectively. The Commissioner shall apply the points to identify schools for mandatory technical assistance in those two cycles. Not later than September 1, 2005 and September 1, 2007, the State Board shall set:

- (i) Status Index identification points, and
- (ii) Growth Scores which schools are expected to meet in Accountability Cycles 3 and 4 respectively. The Commissioner shall apply the points in those two cycles.

Before identifying a school that would otherwise be identified to receive mandatory technical assistance, the Commissioner shall notify the school of the opportunity to provide other local data that offer compelling evidence that student performance is improving and that its action plan is effective. The Commissioner shall decide, based on the strength of the local action

plan and the additional local data, whether to identify the school to receive technical assistance.

In any accountability cycle, the Commissioner shall notify the superintendent and principal of any school which is not identified to receive mandatory technical assistance, but which is meeting less than 100 percent of its Growth Target, that it may not meet its required growth by the year 2007-2008. The superintendent shall inform the school board chair for the school of this notice.

Small Schools Review

Schools with fewer than 30 unique students in either two-year accountability cycle shall be identified for mandatory technical assistance only after a review of the school's implementation of the School Quality Standards. The Commissioner shall make the decision whether to identify the school to receive mandatory technical assistance based on the student performance data and the review.

Commissioner's Review of Schools that are Identified a Second, Consecutive Time

If the school does not meet the requirements for exiting technical assistance after two years, the Commissioner of Education may recommend continued technical assistance or that other actions be taken. These include adjusting supervisory union boundaries, providing that students enroll in other schools, or assuming administrative control of the school to the extent necessary to correct deficiencies. Before other actions can be taken a thorough analysis of the school's overall performance will be conducted. A report of the findings of this review must be presented to the Commissioner.

The Commissioner must enter into this process when a school:

- has been identified for and received two years of mandatory technical assistance during an accountability cycle; and
- has failed to exit mandatory technical assistance at the end of a subsequent accountability cycle. Fails to exit means that the school did not meet the required Status Index and/or Growth Scores set by the state Board of Education for that accountability cycle.

State Board Role: The state Board of Education may accept, reject, or modify the recommendation presented by the Commissioner.

The Department will establish the process for the Commissioner's Review of School Quality Standards. Note that this review will include extensive information drawn from the in-depth experience of those providing technical assistance at the school, as well as other information beyond the assessment information.

2. *Does the district or the state decide whether a school is low performing? If the district is involved in the process, how much discretion do they have?*

On or before July 1, 1999 and 2000, each superintendent provides a report to the Commissioner on the compliance of each school within his or her jurisdiction as to the requirements outlined in the transitional School Quality Standards. The Commissioner then determines whether the school is in substantial compliance with the standards. The Commissioner notifies in writing each school of its status with respect to compliance with the

standards and whether technical assistance will be provided. In 1999, no school was identified in this process of School Quality Standards, although schools were identified as needing technical assistance based in assessment results (*see #4 on the next page*).

3. *What types of assistance are provided to these schools and districts by the state?*

Under the new system, schools would first be identified for technical assistance in the fall of 2002. If the Commissioner determines that a school is in need of mandatory technical assistance, he or she shall take one or more of the following actions:

1. assist in analyzing student performance data and determining areas of needed improvement;
2. assist in developing an action plan to improve student performance based upon the analysis of data, with specific attention to the school's poverty, special education, and limited English proficiency rates;
3. assist in identifying and securing resources to advance the implementation of the action plan, such as grants and linkages with professional development organizations;
4. intensify monitoring of school progress in improving student performance;
5. make available information about the resources contained in the clearinghouse; or
6. provide any other assistance the Commissioner determines is appropriate under the circumstances.

A school which, in Cycle 1, has been identified to receive mandatory technical assistance, shall no longer be subject to such assistance in Cycle 2 if it reaches the required Status Index point and if it meets at least 50 percent of its Growth Target. Under the new accountability system, if the school fails to make sufficient progress by the end of the following accountability cycle, the Commissioner shall recommend to the State Board one or more of the following actions

- continue technical assistance;
- adjust supervisory union boundaries or responsibilities of the superintendency;
- assume administrative control of the school only to the extent necessary to correct deficiencies, or
- close the school and require that the school district pay tuition to another public school or an approved independent school pursuant to chapter 21 of Title 16 of the Vermont Statutes Annotated.

Before recommending any of the actions described in (2) – (4) above, the Commissioner shall conduct a thorough analysis of the school's overall performance.

Within this accountability system, the Commissioner may also offer technical assistance to schools notified which may not meet their required growth target by school year 2007 – 2008. If the Commissioner offers such assistance, he or she shall give priority to those schools which had been receiving mandatory technical assistance, which are no longer subject to technical assistance in a subsequent accountability cycle, and which did not meet 100 percent of their Growth Targets.

4. *Who provides the state assistance?*

Along with the state department staff, institutions of high education in the state and other organizations such as the Vermont Institute of Science, Math, and Technology (VISMT)

provide assistance to schools. The state also has a school improvement team with four school improvement coordinators who are responsible for working with the 39 schools that have been identified for technical assistance based on 1999 assessment results. Department staff work as liaisons with schools to help with the analysis of data and the composition of action plans. Supervisory unions also provide support and assistance.

5. *Does support to Title I and all low performing schools and districts differ? Is support generally provided for all schools and districts, or are services specifically designed to help those that are low performing?*

The assistance is the same. The statewide system of support for Title I schools is part of the School Improvement Team. In addition, federal program staff are available to assist schools, districts and school improvement coordinators in maximizing the use of federal resources to support school improvement.

6. *Has the state established a set of criteria and/or a process for getting schools and districts out of low performing status? If so, what do they include?*

During the transition period, because it is a brief period of years, there are no requirements for leaving low performance status. Under the new system, a school which, in Cycle 1, has been identified to receive mandatory technical assistance, shall no longer be subject to such assistance in Cycle 2 if it reaches the required Status Index point and if it meets at least 50 percent of its Growth Target.

7. *Once a school or district is identified as low performing, what types of plans must it prepare? Who are they submitted to once completed? How do they differ from other planning documents?*

The action planning process continues and is refined in identified schools. The difference between other plans and those of identified schools is that the quality and effectiveness of the plans in identified schools are closely monitored.

8. *Are changes planned for the state system of identifying and assisting low performing schools or districts (proposed or enacted and to be implemented)? If so, what do these plans include? Why are these changes being made and what is the timeline?*

The state will be in the process of implementing the new accountability system in the state starting September 1, 2000. Under the new system, schools would first be identified for technical assistance in the fall of 2002.

If the Commissioner determines that a school is in need of mandatory technical assistance, he or she shall take one or more of the following actions:

1. assist in analyzing student performance data and determining areas of needed improvement;
2. assist in developing an action plan to improve student performance based upon the analysis of data, with specific attention to the school's poverty, special education, and limited English proficiency rates;
3. assist in identifying and securing resources to advance the implementation of the action plan, such as grants and linkages with professional development organizations;
4. intensify monitoring of school progress in improving student performance;

5. make available information about the resources contained in the clearinghouse; or
6. provide any other assistance the Commissioner determines is appropriate under the circumstances.

Title I and Adequate Yearly Progress

1. *What criteria are included in the definition of adequate yearly progress for schools and districts under Title I?*

As is the case for the general state system, the criteria for determining a school's need for technical assistance are the same for all Vermont schools, under both the transitional and new accountability systems. These assessments include:

- the Vermont DRA
- the New Standards Reference Exams in Math and English/language arts, and
- Norm referenced and/or student portfolios as a locally determined option.

2. *What are the definitions of adequate yearly progress for schools and districts?*

Due to the alignment of the transitional Title I and non-Title I systems, the expectations for adequate performance on an annual basis were the same as the system described previously. The performance targets used in the state transitional accountability system and the Title I system included:

- First Review Basic Skills Target: 60% or more of students Meet or Exceed the Standard
- First Review Analytical Skills Target: 50% or more of students Meet or Exceed the Standard
- Second Review Basic Skills Target: 30% or fewer students in Below the Standard or Little Evidence
- Second Review Analytical Skills Target: 30% or fewer students in Below the Standard or Little Evidence

A school had been identified for technical assistance if it does not meet 50% or more of its targets in both Basic and Analytical Skills in either the first or second review. Therefore, a school that does meet 50% or more of its targets has made **adequate yearly progress**.

As stated earlier, if a school decided to use *local portfolios* as part of the system, schools were identified for technical assistance if in the first review fewer than 50% of students were "successful" on the portfolio as a whole; "successful" was defined as scoring at or above a 2 out of 3 or a 3 out of 4, depending on the number of areas tested. *Norm referenced test* results from grades 5, 9, and 11 in math and English were used in the second review. Schools using this assessment may have been identified if 25% of the students are performing in the bottom quartile.

Under the new accountability system, there will also be alignment between the Title I and general state accountability systems (*see accountability section for a specific description*).

3. *What is the process for identifying those schools and districts that are not making adequate yearly progress under Title I? Does the district or the state make this determination for schools? If the districts play a role, does the state provide guidance on local criteria?*

The state determines whether or not adequate yearly progress has been made through the process defined above.

4. *What are the criteria and processes for identifying schools and districts in need of improvement under Title I? What plans must be prepared? How can a school or district get out of Program Improvement? Does the district or the state make this determination for schools?*

Adequate yearly progress and schools in need of improvement have not been defined in the state for districts or “supervisory unions.” The transitional Second Review looks at those students who score in the bottom two performance levels. A school has been identified for technical assistance if it does not meet 50% or more of its targets in both Basic and Analytical Skills in either the first or second review. School so identified for two consecutive years are Title I schools in need of improvement.

Under the new accountability system, there will also be alignment between the Title I and general state accountability systems (see accountability section for a specific description). A school which, in Cycle 1, has been identified to receive mandatory technical assistance, shall no longer be subject to such assistance in Cycle 2 if it reaches the required the Status Index point and if it meets at least 50 percent of its Growth Target.

5. *What types of assistance are provided to those in need of improvement under Title I?*

See *Identifying and Assisting Low Performing Schools and Districts* above.

6. *Who provides the assistance?*

See *Identifying and Assisting Low Performing Schools and Districts* above.

7. *Have waivers played a role in this process?*

Vermont is an Ed Flex state; waivers from the US DOE have not played a role in the state.

8. *Are there future plans for the state system for schools or districts receiving Title I funding or for the definition of adequate yearly progress? If so, what do these plans include? Why are these changes being made and what is the timeline?*

Title I systems will change along with the new accountability system proposed for the state.

9. *Is there alignment between Title I and non-Title I systems for adequate yearly progress?*

Yes, they are in alignment under the transitional system, and will be in the final system.

10. *What have been the major issues and challenges in the area of Title I? Explain.*

The major issue at this point is implementation of the new state accountability system that will be aligned for all Title I and non-Title I schools.

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