

Training and Technical Assistance on the Delivery of Special Education Services

Act 173 of 2018, Section 12

REPORT

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Report to the General Assembly

Submitted by

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Background

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Vermont Agency of Education (AOE)'s activities pursuant to [Act 173 of 2018](#), Section 12: Training and Technical Assistance on the Delivery of Special Education Services, beginning in SY18-19. Section 12 directs the AOE to undertake specific tasks furthering the programmatic goals outlined by the Act. First, the agency is to assist supervisory unions and school districts (SU/SDs) to expand and improve their delivery of services to students who require additional supports in accordance with the District Management Group (DMG) Report. Further, the AOE is directed to provide technical assistance with the goal of embedding best practices, as described in Act 173, for the delivery of special education services. Those best practices include:

1. ensuring core instruction meets most needs of most students;
2. providing additional instructional time outside core subjects to students who require additional support, rather than providing interventions instead of core instruction;
3. ensuring students who require additional support receive all instruction from highly skilled teachers;
4. creating or strengthening a systems-wide approach to supporting positive student behaviors based on expert support; and
5. providing specialized instruction from skilled and trained experts to students with more intensive needs.

History

Support to the field regarding the results of the DDMG's) 2017 report, [Expanding and Strengthening Best-practice Supports for Students Who Struggle](#), began immediately upon the release of the report. Request for Proposals around certain of the best-practices mentioned in the DMG report were in progress upon the passage of Act 173 of 2018. The subsequent contracts are outlined below. After both the release of the DMG Report and the passage of Act 173, leadership at the AOE shared a memo to Superintendents, Business Managers, and Special Education Directors on August 22, 2018. The purpose of that memo was to provide a "high-level summary" of Act 173 as well as "a preview of anticipated changes to Vermont's special education system." The memo describes that Act 173 directs the AOE to "provide training and technical assistance to assist supervisory unions in implementation of the opportunities identified in the DMG report" and that "\$200,000 of federal IDEA-B funds will be allocated to support technical assistance initiatives." At that time, several contracts were underway to support this effort. Each of these contracts, except the "Math for All Learners" contract were generated as part of the AOE's response to the DMG report and were in production before Act 173 was finalized:

- Early Literacy Services Plan (Early Literacy Blueprint)—Research Making Change (RMC) Research Corporation, April 16, 2018-April 15, 2019 **\$94,518**
- High-Leverage Practices for Academic instruction— American Institutes for Research (AIR), July 2018-June 30, 2019 **\$89,916**
- Math for All Learners— All Learners Network, August 2018-June 15, 2019 **\$99,999.99**
- Developing Effective Master Schedules—DMG, August 27, 2018-August 26, 2019 **\$78,000**

In December 2018, the AOE established the Act 173 Leads Team, comprised of division directors and other members of the AOE’s leadership. The mission of this team is to ensure agency-wide coherence in our provision of Leadership, Support, and Oversight consistent with [the AOE’s new purpose statement](#). In the spring of 2019, members of the AOE’s leadership team began to communicate the processes and plans that were being developed around the implications and goals of Act 173 to many of the State’s education associations and agencies including the Vermont Superintendents Association, Vermont Principals’ Association, Vermont Curriculum Leaders Association, and the Vermont Council of Special Education Administrators. These early presentations offered the AOE a forum for sharing the details of Act 173 as well as the AOE’s plan for providing support to the field. AOE leadership recognized that providing professional development (PD) opportunities that were not a part of SU/SD continuous improvement needs is not likely to affect the kind of changes to systems and teaching practices that are necessary to realize the goals of Act 173. The 173 Leads Team sought to develop a theory of action that would frame the AOE’s professional development plan, including the allocation of the IDEA-B funds.

Our Theory of Action

In August 2019, the Act 173 Leads Team finalized a theory of action and published [Act 173 Technical Guidance Summary Systems to Support Student Success](#). This guidance document explains the objectives of Act 173 and identifies the systemic components we believe are the minimum necessary for achieving the goals of Act 173. We refer to these components as “systems levers.” A systems lever is defined as an organizational structure among all schools in a district that can be used to quickly bring about the alignment of instructional support activities to enhance the effectiveness, availability and equity of services provided to students who require additional supports. The AOE has formulated the following theory of action for achieving the goals of Act 173. If each SU/SD Board ensures that:

- each school implements the district's written and delivered curriculum ([SBE Rule 2120.6. Curriculum Coordination](#)); and
- each SU/SD develops and implements a system of appropriate needs-based professional learning for all professional staff, including administrators and other staff involved in student instruction, with time for professional learning embedded into the school day ([SBE Rule 2121.3. Needs Based Professional Learning](#)); and
- each school administers assessments of student performance using methods developed by the State Board of Education, with students who are unable to participate in district or state assessments given an alternate assessment ([SBE Rule 2123.2. Development and Implementation of Local Comprehensive Assessment System](#)); and
- each school maintains an educational support team to engage in collaborative problem-solving to determine whether additional supports are needed for a student to make appropriate progress, and to monitor that progress ([16 V.S.A. § 2902. Tiered system of supports and educational support team](#));

then Vermont’s SU/SDs will enhance the effectiveness, availability and equity of services provided to all students who require additional support. These systems levers are grounded

both in the Education Quality Standards and the recommendations of the DMG report referenced above. These four foundational pieces constitute the content of the technical guidance the AOE is producing. Our plan for continued PD involves providing SU/SDs tools through which to identify strengths and areas of need specific to these four levers as well as providing technical assistance for strengthening their systems in order to achieve the policy objectives of Act 173.

Professional Development Plan

The 173 Leads Team’s mission is to ensure coherence around how we frame the leadership, support and oversight we will provide to the field around the goals established by Act 173. Coherence for support, including professional learning related to Act 173 involves standardizing the process for evaluating the needs of SU/SDs in achieving the goals of Act 173 and responding to those needs without duplicating efforts.

The AOE is developing technical guidelines around each of the above-mentioned systems levers as a part of our plan for supporting the use of the best-practices outlined in the Act. We are planning professional learning (PL) support around the above-mentioned elements by leveraging the technical assistance that is offered through the accountability plan established by Vermont’s ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act) State Plan. SU/SD and member schools that are eligible to receive comprehensive or equity supports based on the Annual Snapshot are being provided professional learning in the form of coaching from AOE staff. Currently, staff are deployed based on the needs identified through the Annual Snapshot results. The schools with the highest identified need are eligible to receive the most intensive support.

Another vehicle for providing PL comes from the Networked Improvement Communities (NICs). A NIC is collaborative research partnership focused on a common problem of practice that uses the principles of improvement science within networks of organizations to learn from varied implementation of new ideas across contexts. NICs are being deployed by the Education Quality Assurance (EQA) Team to provide specific support to schools receiving comprehensive supports. Additionally, the EQA coordinators have established NICs around multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) in secondary schools, early MTSS, and instructional coaching. These outcomes for the NICs are a part of the school’s continuous improvement process and as such are integral to supporting the goals of Act 173. Currently, the NICs are developed and facilitated by AOE staff.

Additionally, all SU/SDs, member schools, and independent schools have access to an array of supports ranging from guidance documents available on our web site to professional learning opportunities such as the ones listed above.

Technical Guidance and Next Steps

[Sec. E.502.1 of Act 72 of 2019](#) delayed the effective date of the rulemaking process of Act 173 by one year. While this delay has not changed the timing of our planned programmatic work, it will affect our ability to have certain outcome data. Currently, the various data sources such as the annual MTSS survey, Annual Snapshot, and Integrated Field Reviews provide information about activities happening at district and schools. Our goal is to support SU/SDs to measure

their needs against the implementation/installation of the four systems levers rather than the activities.

In order to support SU and school understanding of the strengths and challenges of their system's ability to meet the programmatic goals of Act 173, the AOE contracted with a vendor to create a Self-Assessment Tool (SAT) through which SUs can leverage/reconsider current continuous improvement efforts related to school's multi-tiered system of supports. SU/SDs will be able to use the SAT to support the identification and planning of specific improvement goals. The tool and technical assistance for its usage will be available to SUs and schools in time for the SY19-20 Continuous Improvement Plan delivery deadlines.

The AOE will continue to release technical guidance around the four systems levers and highlight the interdependence of these levers within an SU/SD's system. The Local Comprehensive Assessment System document was released on December 17, 2019. The document on Coordination of Curriculum will follow in late January, and the final of these technical guidance documents will be released in February. These and other major AOE deliverables can be found on the [AOE Policy Work Plan](#) Gantt chart.

While this session's legislative directives are unknown, we are continuing to provide specific guidance around four key systems levers needed to realize the goals of Act 173 and will continue to maintain our support to SU/SDs and schools in discovering their needs related to implementing the goals established by Act 173.