

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 SY2018-19.

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 agency 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.

When Act 173 was introduced to Vermont, the AOE began working to respond to it and support its implementation through an internal workgroup that became the Act 173 Leads Team. The Act 173 Leads Team's mission is to ensure coherence around AOE's framing of the leadership, support and oversight we provide to the field pertaining to the goals established by Act 173.

In August 2019, the Act 173 Leads Team finalized a theory of action and published [Act 173 Technical Guidance Documents on Developing Systems to Support Student Success](#). This guidance document explains the objectives of Act 173 as well as the systemic components we believe are the minimum ones 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 four systemic elements are:

1. Educational Support Teams
2. Coordinated Curriculum
3. Local Comprehensive Assessment Systems
4. Needs-Based Professional Development

Leadership

In preparation for the adoption of both the Special Education Finance (series 1300) and the updated Special Education Rules (series 2360), the AOE's Special Education team began exploring lessons learned from other states that had eliminated the discrepancy model and

planning for the scope and sequence of the information the AOE would need to provide around the changes to the Special Education rules. In May 2021, both the 1300 and updated 2360 series rules were adopted by the Vermont State Board of Education. The rule changes are set to take effect on July 1, 2022. In July 2021, the AOE's Special Education team began to promote the professional and technical assistance that would be provided from August 2021 through May 2022. The topics of the informational sessions are focused on the changes to the Special Education rules and include the following:

1. Specific Learning Disability Eligibility Determination
2. Adverse Effect
3. Functional Skills
4. Individual Education Plan (IEP) Goal Writing
5. Parent Input
6. Special Education Definition Clarification

We are also providing informational sessions on these Early Childhood Special Education rule changes:

1. Least Restrictive Environment for children aged 3 through 5
2. IEP Content

For each of the above topics, the AOE will be developing a pre-recorded webinar, posting rule change guidance including tools, templates, checklists, and links to resources, as well as hosting live, virtual Office Hours. The Special Education team developed a web page dedicated to the [Special Education Rule Changes](#) where the webinar recordings, supporting materials, and schedule of upcoming topics is listed.

Support

Beginning in September 2021, [the Setting the Stage: Laying the Foundation for Special Education Rule Changes to Support Act 173](#) was shared and posted to the Special Education Rule Changes webpage. The Setting the Stage resources were followed in October 2021 with information around how [Special Education, VT Multi-tiered System of Supports \(VTmtss\), and Early MTSS](#) can support Local Education Agencies (LEA) mtssmeet federal and state requirements for Special Education.

The first two months were dedicated to the systems-level considerations each LEA (SU/SD) need to understand in order to be effective in supporting the specific rule changes. In November the training sessions were dedicated to the changes to the Parent Input, Special Education Definition, and IEP Goal Writing. The December 2021 training focused on the rule changes to Functional Skills and Functional Performance.

The January 2022 training will focus on the rule changes around Adverse Effect and Identifying Specific Learning Disability (SLD) Without the Discrepancy Model. In addition to the specific rule changes, the Special Education, VTmtss, and Early Learning teams will be providing opportunities for networking and providing needs-based materials and resources. Additionally, AOE staff members from the Early Learning team will conduct trainings on Least Restrictive Environment and IEP content. AOE staff will revisit and expand upon these training topics

throughout the spring, and will work with LEAs/regions on preparing for implementation July 1, 2022.

In addition to the specific Special Education Rule Changes professional learning offering, the AOE is continuing to support the goals of Act 173 through a continuation of the following:

- **Action Planning with the VTmtss Framework**—[Tools and processes](#) for SU/SD teams to examine strengths and needs relative to the priority systemic features of Act 173 and local continuous improvement plans.
- **VTEd Learns Network Powered by Edmodo**—Statewide platform for networking, communication, and professional learning.
- **AOE Levels of Support**—Three general categories describing the features of AOE support:
 - **Universal Technical Guidance:** Online or digital tools and resources that expand on the performance indicators and best practices associated with each systems lever. These are shared through various methods such as listservs and the Weekly Field Memo and are posted on the AOE’s website. The VTEd Learns Network powered by Edmodo is another vehicle for these universal supports.
 - **Investments:** Professional learning, coaching, and/or technical assistance provided to SU/SDs/schools through local investments. Consolidated Federal Program funds, Secondary School Reform grant funds, and/or Building Effective Supports for Teaching (BEST)-Act 230 are examples of how the AOE supports professional learning through local investments.
 - **Application or Invitation:** These are supports that are being provided through limited grant funding or through an effort that targets school systems that meet a set of specific qualifications. Networked Improvement Communities (NIC), participation in the State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP), and/or Project AWARE are examples of this type of professional learning support.

The report from 2020 identified several “Next Steps” that were implemented over this past year. Namely among them is a contract with the District Management Group (DMG) around creating and implementing effective master schedules for elementary schools. This two-year contract provides every school the ability to utilize the DMSchedules software, receive professional learning, and personalized coaching from members of the District Management Group. The DMG established a dedicated [web site](#) with resources as well as information for accessing the scheduling software.

Oversight

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the AOE’s Act 173 internal leads team coordinated with key AOE personnel across all divisions to create a logic model and assessment plan. The logic model includes applicable data collection sources, outcomes, and performance indicators. The logic model/assessment plan is a component of the systemic coherence building happening internally. The [Act 173 Guidance Documents and Tools](#) are organized by the system-level elements, or systems levers. They are Coordinated Curriculum, Educational Support Teams, Local Comprehensive Assessment Systems, and Needs-based Professional Development.

AOE staff are revising required special education forms to reflect rule changes so all relevant documents are in compliance in advance of July 1, 2022. The AOE Special Education team is updating its program monitoring system to incorporate new elements of the law.

Next Steps

The AOE will release two technical manuals identified in the 1300 series Special Education Fiscal Rules: Documenting Maintenance of Effort and Use and Accounting of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part B Entitlement Grants. The AOE will provide informational sessions to accompany the technical manuals.

The AOE will release additional guidance and provide related supports to school systems to help them in improving their MTSS intervention models. Anticipated resources include a needs assessment for school systems to use when assessing the strengths of their intervention system, and a compilation of existing resources from national technical assistance providers that will support educators in selecting appropriate, evidence-based interventions, and in monitoring student progress.

The AOE will continue to develop and release guidance on the fiscal implications of Act 173 and will support schools in navigating any related Act 173 fiscal challenges as well as maintain its support to SU/SDs and schools in discovering their needs related to implementing the goals established by Act 173.