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## Reorganization of the Agency of Education

### Overview

#### How We Got Here

In 2024, the Listen and Learn Tour offered an opportunity for the Agency to rethink how to meet the evolving needs of the Vermont education system. As we heard from educators, students, education leaders and Agency staff, it became clear that we needed to consider realigning our work to meet pressing needs from the field as well as evolving state education priorities. Many Listen and Learn participants, as well as Agency staff, offered ideas about how to restructure Agency teams to leverage state-level expertise and to ensure the most effective, accessible supports for educators and districts.

While engaged in public outreach through the Listen and Learn Tour, the Agency was also conducting an internal evaluation of our processes and systems in preparation for Vermont's federal monitoring visit by the U.S. Department of Education. The federal monitoring visit was an opportunity to reflect on our strengths and weaknesses in relation to federal compliance requirements and best practices. The findings from the monitoring visit reinforced the need to strengthen the state's accountability framework, improve intra-agency coordination, and better evaluate the equity and rigor of our education system.

As we began developing a new strategic plan, these ideas were further explored and validated through data analysis. The Agency began to launch initiatives to support our key priorities to improve academic excellence, expand college and career readiness, promote safe and healthy schools, increase operational effectiveness and improve special education and differentiated support for all students. We also considered what we learned from the 2025 legislative session, which brought new requirements and opportunities to strengthen equity, quality, and accountability across the education system. As we prepare for these new and upcoming changes, we have a unique opportunity to redesign the elements of our work that are no longer serving the education system in the most effective ways. Through this redesign, we can also expect to strengthen those parts of our system that are working well and to elevate new ideas that can make us even stronger.

This new structure was developed with significant input from the Agency leadership team, inclusive of division directors, team leads, and subject matter experts from across the Agency. It reflects a strengths-based approach to reorganization by leveraging each employee's talent and expertise, as



well as a multi-phased approach to ensure a smooth and productive transition that is considerate of core job duties and projects through the transition.

These changes are also taking place concurrently with growing uncertainty at the federal level. While ongoing challenges with federal funding are not a driving factor for reorganizing the Agency, our proactive planning has enabled us to react nimbly and responsibly to recent decisions at the federal level. Structural changes will be useful in preventing disruptions to key programs and protecting Agency personnel in the future.

## **Description of the New Structure**

To meet the evolving needs of the Vermont education system, the Agency is adapting its organizational structure to these priority areas. Currently, the Secretary of Education and the Deputy Secretary oversee eight separate divisions: Federal Education Support Programs, Education Quality, Student Support Services, Student Pathways Division, Data Management and Analysis Division, Legal, Finance, and Policy and Communications. Going forward, the Secretary of Education, the Deputy Secretary, Chief Academic Officer, and the Director of Strategy and Accountability will oversee five areas aligned to the Agency's Strategic Plan:

- Academics will include divisions focused on instruction and learning, education programs, and special education. Together, these divisions will provide intentional, strategic supports to ensure high-quality instruction and equitable access to high-quality curriculum for all students from cradle-to-career.
- Strategy and Accountability will oversee assessment and accountability, strategic initiative management and education program approvals. This work will provide Agency-wide support across all content areas grounded in strong accountability mechanisms that are focused on continuous improvement. Until a Division Chief is hired, these job responsibilities will be shared across the Secretary, Deputy, and Chief Academic Officer.
- Operations will strengthen Agency supports for both Agency and district systems and business processes, and will provide a renewed emphasis on coordinated, integrated supports for Safe and Healthy Schools.
- Policy and Communications will continue to support the Agency with coordinated communications practices and policy experts.
- Legal will continue to support compliance with state and federal education law, coordinate with the Attorney General's Office, and oversee investigations and administrative complaints.

## **Leadership**

The organizational changes are designed to promote tighter coordination across leadership at all levels, fostering deeper collaboration, resource sharing, knowledge transfer, and streamlined support and training for the field.

The Secretary's Executive Cabinet will meet weekly to set and monitor weekly high-priority deliverables, ensure appropriate resource allocation to deliver on tasks, and address urgent needs as they emerge.

The Executive Cabinet will include:

- Deputy Secretary/Chief Operations Officer
- Chief Academic Officer
- Chief of Strategy & Accountability
- Legal Counsel
- Chief Financial Officer
- Deputy Chief of Assessment, Accountability, and Continuous Improvement
- Deputy Chief of Instruction and Learning
- Director of Policy & Communications

The Secretary's Extended Cabinet will meet monthly to monitor progress on Agency-wide strategic goals, make mid-course corrections as needed, and share best practices and lessons learned relative to each content area. The Extended Cabinet represents leadership across the Agency's functional areas, reflecting the full portfolio of work responsibilities.

The Extended Cabinet will include:

- State Director of Education Programs
- State Director of Instruction
- State Director of Prekindergarten
- State Director of Career & Technical Education
- State Director of Workforce Development
- State Director of Adult Education and Literacy
- State Director of Safe & Healthy Schools
- State Director of Data, Management and Analysis
- State Director of Grants Management
- Deputy Chief Financial Officer
- State Director of Strategic Initiatives
- State Director of Assessment
- State Director of Accountability
- State Director of Child Nutrition Programs

The Agency encourages team members to lead from every seat and offers a range of opportunities to help shape major initiatives and inform the direction. Monthly all staff meetings are organized to promote idea sharing, reflection, and planning that builds on the strengths and insights of the entire Agency.

# Core Processes and Priorities by Division

## Academics Area

### Curriculum and Instruction

The Curriculum and Instruction Division will provide leadership, oversight, and support in standards-aligned curriculum coordination and selection; evidence-based, differentiated, and personalized instructional practices for all; and standards, laws, and rules (e.g., EQS, DQS, ESSA, VSA, etc.). The Curriculum and Instruction Division will also perform intensive collaboration and support for school improvement and cross-collaboration on strategic plan items. Priority projects include recommending statewide graduation requirements, ensuring access to high quality instructional materials, and increasing training on the use of evidence-based instructional practices (e.g., Read Vermont).

### Special Education

The Vermont Agency of Education's Special Education Division operates under the broader framework of the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) general supervision system, as required under Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act. The Division fulfills its mandate through an integrated approach focused on improving educational results and functional outcomes for all students with disabilities. The Special Education Integrated Monitoring Team serves a core function of the state's general supervision system by conducting compliance reviews, site visits, and managing corrective actions to ensure LEAs follow federal and state laws. The Special Education Technical Assistance & Professional Development Team builds the capacity of LEAs by serving as a central hub for information, providing customized assistance, and delivering professional development on topics like legislation and effective instructional strategies. The Policy and Compliance Team acts as the legal and policy expert, ensuring that all educational entities, including private schools and the Department of Corrections, follow special education rules.

### Education Programs

The Education Programs Division supports a cradle-to-career approach by aligning expertise and oversight of early childhood education, extended learning, flexible pathways, career and technical education and adult education to promote a coherent, high-quality continuum of learning. The Education Programs Division provides coordinated support to achieve the state's goals of universal pre-kindergarten, universal afterschool, flexible pathways, industry aligned career and technical education, and adult learning. Priorities include expanding access to pre-kindergarten, increasing academic and enrichment opportunities through out-of-school time, ensuring consistent rigor across flexible pathway programs, expanding and modernizing career and technical education, and developing tools to support and evaluate learning progress and readiness at critical transition points.

## **School Improvement**

The School Improvement Team provides support to identified schools in clarifying and prioritizing school improvement needs, setting improvement goals, choosing appropriate improvement strategies, budgeting resources strategically to accomplish strategies and meet goals, and evaluating effectiveness of strategies in relation to goals. The division approves and monitors implementation of Continuous Improvement Plans (CIP) for identified schools; approves School Improvement (1003) grant applications; oversees and manages final school identifications (CSI, TSI, etc.); and facilitates provision of technical assistance to identified schools. Priorities center on strategies to improve data-driven planning, progress monitoring, and coordination with the Curriculum & Instruction Division to support effective implementation of high-yield practices.

## **Operations Area**

### **Grants Management**

The Grants Management Division will serve as the Agency's central hub for the administration, oversight, and accountability of federal and state education grants. This division is designed to ensure that resources flow efficiently and transparently to school districts and other recipients, while safeguarding compliance with state and federal requirements. The Division will operate through three integrated units—Grants Administration, Grants Management System Operations, and Fiscal & Regulatory Compliance. Together, these units will provide end-to-end support for the life cycle of every grant: from pre-award risk assessment and allocation through application review, reimbursement, monitoring, and final closeout.

### **Child Nutrition**

The Child Nutrition Division supports and oversees the operation of the federal child nutrition programs in Vermont schools, childcares, summer programs, adult day centers, and charitable food sites. This division's work ensures that Vermont learners have the nutrition needed to maximize their education potential. Priority projects include expanding access to summer and after school meals, providing robust support to field on financial management, food service management company oversight, and operational efficiencies, along with meeting all federal requirements regarding oversight/monitoring, reporting, and technical assistance. This division is also responsible for coordinating support of nutrition needs for Vermonters during emergency/disaster situations.

### **Finance**

The Finance Division administers Vermont's regular education funding; supports critical business office functions, including payroll and contracting; collects and analyzes school expenditure and school staff data for policy-makers; reports various school fiscal and non-fiscal data required by federal law; and provides the calculations for the distribution of federal money to school districts. In addition, the division is responsible for the

development of the annual Agency budget. The larger division is made up of the Business Office, School Finance and Special Education Finance team. These teams will be focused on major initiatives related to education transformation, modernization of key business office processes and the integration of programmatic and fiscal functions to support Agency and state education priorities.

### **Data Management and Analysis**

The Data Management & Analysis Division (DMAD) is the main body responsible for collecting, managing and analyzing specific types of data from schools, supervisory unions, and districts that are required by federal and state law. Data on student enrollment numbers and background characteristics, and student performance, to name a few of the types of data collected, are used to fulfill AOE reporting obligations. Such data are also used to calculate and designate funding, ensure statutory compliance, and support state-level decision-making. DMAD will continue to focus on improving the quality and usability of the data it collects, supporting data-driven decision making as a key priority for the Agency. In addition, DMAD is focused on data governance implementation, modernizing data systems and supporting districts to standardize and improve their data reporting.

### **Safe and Healthy Schools**

The Safe and Healthy Schools Division will develop and implement a strategic plan for improving chronic absenteeism in Vermont schools; strengthen and/or maintain quality school facilities; support efficient school facilities consolidation; ensure rigorous implementation and use of school BTA teams; support statewide and Agency emergency response; monitor and support LEAs with various environmental health requirements and recommendations; and support rigorous and effective prevention, reporting, and response for HHB complaints.

## **Strategy & Accountability Area**

### **Strategy & Education Transformation**

The Strategy & Education Transformation Division is responsible for driving the Agency's strategic priorities and ensuring alignment across all areas of work. The Division provides internal oversight of the Agency's strategic plan, serving as an internal consultant to monitor progress, strengthen cross-functional coordination, and support achievement of organizational goals. Priorities include strategic contract management and budgeting to maximize limited resources. In addition, the Division leads efforts to identify and solve complex academic and operational challenges that arise through Vermont's education transformation and supports effective district and board planning.

## **Accountability**

The Accountability Division will evaluate and coordinate responses to LEA needs in relation to differentiated SEA support; lead the design, implementation, and continuous refinement of the state's education accountability system that aligns federal requirements (e.g., ESSA) and state statutes and regulations and supports continuous improvement; ensure compliance with all ESSA accountability requirements; oversee ESSA State Plan and waiver requests; ensure understanding and engagement of LEA and independent school stakeholders in all accountability work; and manage communications related to funding and policy changes in federal programs.

## **Assessment**

The Assessment Division will ensure Vermont's state assessments are aligned to state standards and designed to meet the highest standards of technical and psychometric quality; ensure that state and national assessments in Vermont are administered equitably, securely, and with fidelity to all students in compliance with state and federal regulations and the standards for testing; and analyze and report assessment and accountability data aligned to state and federal regulations, Vermont's school accountability system, psychometric standards of rigor, and best practices regarding reporting.

## **Education Approvals**

The Education Approvals Division oversees educator licensure; approval of independent schools, therapeutic schools, educator preparation programs and higher education institutions; home study enrollment; and coordinates with the Vermont Department of Labor and universities on talent development pipelines to address education workforce challenges. This division will ensure that Vermont maintains a robust approval process for all learning environments to promote consistency, quality, and partnership with local providers.

## **Legal**

The Legal Team provides services for several investigatory, appeals, document management and review processes as well as general legal advice to members of the Agency and the broader administration. The team is responsible for managing the special education dispute resolution system, which includes IEP facilitation services, mediation, investigation and resolution of administrative complaints and the IDEA due process case load. Through licensed educator investigation and discipline procedures, the team ensures that Vermont's teachers are held to high professional standards as a condition of professional licensure. The team's public records service coordinates the Agency's obligations under the Vermont Public Records Act and maintains the Agency's records retention schedule. The Legal Team is responsible for contract review, administrative rulemaking support, appeals of district residency decisions, legislative

drafting, and coordination with the Attorney General regarding litigation to which the State is a party.

## **Policy and Communications**

The Policy and Communications Division will oversee Agency-wide communications planning, media relations, digital communications, web development and editing, branding, style standards, and document production. The Policy and Communications Division will provide tailored communications support to individual divisions across the Agency and ensure that the Agency website and all publications meet accessibility standards. The Policy and Communications Division will also lead the Agency's legislative and policy work, including overseeing policy development, conducting legislative relations, providing testimony and other legislative deliverables, and broadly monitoring the legislative and policymaking process. The Policy and Communications Division will also provide direct communications support to the Secretary.