

Vermont State Board of Education
Department of Education

Strategic Plan



June 30, 2004

Vermont State Board of Education

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Vermont Department of Education

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Mission

We provide leadership and support to help all Vermont students achieve excellence.

Vision

The State Board of Education and the Department of Education shall sustain a vision of high skills, creative thinking, and love of knowledge and learning for every student while ensuring student achievement in a safe and healthy learning environment.

The Vermont Department of Education does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, creed, marital status, sex, disability, age or sexual orientation in its programs or activities.

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Strategic Plan Summary

Strategic Plan Process

Section 180 of Title 16 requires the State Board of Education (Board) to “adopt through a public process a statewide strategic education plan to describe how the agency will help school boards to improve student performance.” In September and October 2003, at five public meetings, Board members worked with a facilitator to gather information – from educators, administrators, school board members and others across Vermont – about their expectations of the respective roles and responsibilities of the Board and the department in relation to schools and school districts.

On October 27, 2003, the Board and new commissioner Richard H. Cate, began to craft what they heard into a coherent working document, describing roles and responsibilities, and assigning them to the commissioner, the Board, or jointly. The Board continued this work at meetings over the next few months. The roles and responsibilities cover the following areas:

- Advocacy
- Licensing
- Budget
- Planning & Research-Based Decision Making
- Communications
- Policy
- Evaluation & Supervision

- Professional Development
- Fiscal Planning
- School Construction
- Legislation
- Standards, Assessment, Accountability & Technical Assistance

In January 2004, the Board and Commissioner Cate began to develop a strategic plan. At the same time, a group composed of the Board chair, the commissioner and eight department staff members was convened to help draft the plan. The group brought the results of their work to the Board each month to support and inform the Board’s strategic planning process. This process continued through May, and the Board adopted the Strategic Plan at its meeting on June 9, 2004. The five-year plan is expressed in the five goals listed below, which are based on the respective Board and department roles and responsibilities.

- I. Support high-quality, innovative instruction to improve student achievement
- II. Provide and promote high-quality educational leadership
- III. Promote safe and positive learning environments
- IV. Build department capacity to best support external needs
- V. Practice and promote effective use of all resources

2004-2005 State Board Focus Strategies

The Strategic Plan includes objectives and strategies that support each goal. Some of these are the responsibility of the commissioner and the department; others are the responsibility of the Board. During its June 2004 retreat, the Board reviewed all of the strategies and selected the following six to be included in its work plan for the 2004-05 fiscal year. The prefix designations (e.g. I.A.4.) refer to the goal, objective and strategy designations that appear in the Strategic Plan (e.g. Goal I, Objective A, Strategy 4). Each objective has indicators, which are measurable results that reflect the success of the objective. Several of the indicators are percentages, and therefore are expected to increase (▲) or decrease (▼) as a desired result. 2004-2005 Focus Strategies are **bold** in the document.

Focus Strategies

Continue support for the implementation of the *High Schools on the Move* principles as the statewide vision for secondary education (I.A.4.)

Develop a public school choice proposal by January 1, 2005, for submission to the Legislature (I.A.8.)

Adopt measurable School Quality Standards by June 30, 2005 (I.D.1.)

Ensure that State Board members receive appropriate professional development (II.A.1.)

Allocate resources and prioritize budget initiatives by October 19, 2004 (IV.B.3.)

Analyze the cost and quality of education in Vermont in comparison to national data and develop specific recommendations to contain costs while ensuring the quality of education, by June 30, 2005 (V.D.6.)

The State Board has instituted a plan of action to ensure that these strategies are implemented during FY 2004-05, ending June 30, 2005. At its annual retreat the Board will decide on priorities and plan for the next year.

While the Board is committed to the goals that are the foundation of the plan, it must be flexible. The Board intends to review the plan each year to ensure that it has completed the work it has committed to do and to update the strategies as necessary.

Goal I. Support high-quality, innovative instruction to improve student achievement

Objective A. All students achieving their full potential

Strategies

1. Promote a statewide coordinated system of early childhood education in collaboration with private providers and school districts
2. Collect and analyze data to identify linkages between high-quality early childhood education and student achievement
3. Promote professional development that helps teachers support the needs of all students
- 4. Support the implementation of High Schools on the Move principles as the statewide vision for secondary education**
5. Analyze performance data at all grade levels to improve instruction
6. Work with middle school personnel to meet the unique needs of adolescents
7. Continue engagement with elementary educators to improve student performance
- 8. State Board will develop a public school choice proposal for submission to the Legislature**

Indicators

- a. Percentage of kindergartners ready for school (Kindergarten Readiness Survey) ▲
- b. Percentage of schools ready for children (KRS) ▲
- c. Involvement with other agencies in the development and management of pre-K programs ▲
- d. Number of secondary schools implementing the principles of High Schools on the Move ▲
- e. Drop-out/Graduation rates ▼/ ▲
- f. Post-secondary attendance/continuation rates ▲
- g. Disaggregated results of statewide assessments ▲
- h. Proficiency of students eligible for free and reduced lunch compared to peers ▲
- i. Teachers trained to meet the range of student abilities, including gifted and talented ▲
- j. Passage of public school choice legislation, consistent with the State Board recommendation
- k. Percentage of students attending schools that provide opportunities to meet their needs ▲

Objective B. A statewide accountability system identifying student needs related to achievement

Strategies

1. Develop and produce grade level assessments based on the *Vermont Framework of Standards and Learning Opportunities* for grades 3-8 in English/Language Arts (ELA) and math
2. Develop and produce grade level assessments for one year of high school in ELA and math
3. Conduct annual Kindergarten Readiness Survey and analyze data
4. Develop and produce a science assessment for three different grade levels
5. Help school districts meet the requirements for completing an assessment plan
6. Develop English Language Proficiency Standards for English Language Learners

Indicators

- a. Existence and implementation of statewide accountability system
- b. Percentage of students assessed ▲
- c. Percentage of schools that identify individual student needs ▲
- d. Results of statewide assessments ▲
- e. Number of teachers trained in assessment practices in all areas of the *Framework* ▲

Objective C. A clear statewide definition of high-quality instruction

Strategies

1. Promote and use scientific research related to high-quality instruction
2. Publish and communicate research findings

Indicators

- a. Definition of high-quality instruction
- b. Use of research projects dedicated to high-quality instruction ▲

Objective D. All schools meeting or exceeding the School Quality Standards

Strategies

1. **Adopt measurable School Quality Standards**
2. Establish and support an efficient and effective process for implementing the School Quality Standards
3. Provide information and training to the field

Indicator

- a. Percentage of schools that meet or exceed standards ▲

Objective E. A sufficient number of well-prepared instructional and support staff for all schools

Strategies

1. Review and monitor all teacher preparation programs
2. Collaborate with other entities to prepare educators in shortage areas
3. Promote professional development and mentoring opportunities
4. Research high-quality alternative licensure routes to address endorsement-area shortages
5. Collaborate with other agencies on inservices
6. Conduct an early-exit survey of a sample of teachers to determine reasons for leaving

Indicators

- a. Percentage of vacancies by specific endorsement areas ▼
- b. Percentage of emergency licenses ▼
- c. Percentage of paraeducators with at least two years of post-secondary education ▲
- d. Percentage of National Board Certified teachers ▲
- e. Number of teacher preparation programs ▲
- f. Percentage of school districts offering mentoring programs ▲
- g. Number of teachers choosing alternative licensing routes ▲

Goal II. Provide and promote high-quality educational leadership

Objective A. State Board of Education members who are well prepared and effective

Strategies

1. Ensure members receive appropriate professional development
2. Evaluate State Board operations annually
3. Develop guidelines for Board operations
4. Develop criteria for self-assessment

Indicators

- a. New members attending NASBE orientation
- b. Outcomes of Board self-assessment ▲
- c. Percentage of Strategic Plan initiatives implemented ▲
- d. Participation in NASBE study groups and events ▲

Objective B. A Department of Education that provides effective leadership

Strategies

1. Develop future leaders for promotion within the department
2. Recruit leaders from the field to fill vacancies in the department
3. Establish an annual work plan that is aligned with the Strategic Plan
4. Ensure diversity and equity in department leaders reflect the greater staff population
5. Provide leadership in education at the national level

Indicators

- a. Percentage of staff rating the leadership climate favorable or higher on an internal survey ▲
- b. Percentage of management staff in work-related professional development programs ▲
- c. Percentage of general fund budget requests supported by the Administration and the Legislature ▲
- d. Percentage of commissioner's performance targets achieved ▲

Objective C. Well-prepared and effective administrators and school board members serving all schools

Strategies

1. Collect and analyze information about other governance structures that support effective management of schools
2. Work with others to develop and improve leadership preparation programs
3. Provide support for school leaders dealing with governance issues
4. Promote communication between State Board and local school boards
5. Work with schools to support and evaluate staff in the areas of collegiality among all staff and advocacy for all students

Indicators

- a. Average tenure of school administrators ▲
- b. Percentage of goals met on school action plans ▲
- c. Percentage of administrators in professional development programs ▲
- d. Percentage of school board members completing the Vermont School Boards Association training ▲
- e. Percentage of schools meeting or exceeding Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) targets ▲
- f. Drop-out rates ▼

Goal III. Promote safe and positive learning environments

Objective A. All schools supporting the needs of a diverse student and staff population

Strategies

1. Encourage recruitment and support of diverse school staff
2. Support professional development of school staff to gain understanding of and communication skills related to issues of diversity
3. Identify and promote practices and programs that support diversity

Indicators

- a. Number of reported harassment incidents ▼
- b. Demographic trends in staff
- c. Demographic trends of participants in educator-preparation programs

Objective B. All schools working with other organizations and parents to improve and maintain student well-being

Strategies

1. Examine and publish current data on child nutrition, physical fitness, and drug and alcohol use to precipitate conversation at the local level about student wellness
2. Work with schools to ensure that students have access to effective coordinated health programs
3. Promote strategies and activities that result in student leadership and positive social interactions
4. Create a parent advisory council to provide input to the commissioner

Indicators

- a. Reported drug- and/or alcohol-related use ▼
- b. Number of peer leadership programs ▲
- c. Number of physical fitness programs offered in schools ▲
- d. Youth Risk Behavior Survey results

Objective C. School facilities that provide a safe and productive learning environment

Strategies

1. Advocate for sufficient funding for school construction aid
2. Monitor the condition of school facilities through periodic review
3. Include facility conditions as a component of the revised School Quality Standards
4. Identify and compile school safety and environmental standards

Indicators

- a. Number of school facilities that are adequately maintained and meet safety requirements ▲
- b. Ratio of available state funding for school construction to requested amount ▲

Objective D. All schools with an effective comprehensive plan that addresses student behavior

Strategies

1. Analyze existing data to determine severity and frequency of harassment and bullying incidents
2. Use data to identify successful practices that may be replicated
3. Educate school personnel on existing laws related to conduct
4. Train school personnel in the most effective means of prevention and best practices for resolving conflict
5. Actively work with schools that have acute and/or chronic problems with student behavior

Indicators

- a. Number of schools that have a comprehensive plan ▲
- b. Number of harassment incidents reported ▼
- c. Number of weapon-related incidents reported ▼
- d. Creation of a definition of bullying
- e. Completion of study on bullying
- f. Percentage of schools providing training in prevention/conflict resolution ▲
- g. Youth Risk Behavior Survey results

Goal IV. Build department capacity to best support external needs

Objective A. A positive and effective working environment for all department employees

Strategies

1. Combine Berlin and Montpelier Department of Education locations
2. Provide safe and adequate working conditions for all employees
3. Improve employee orientation process

Indicators

- a. Results of internal survey ▲
- b. Single location for Department of Education offices

Objective B. A State Board of Education annual budget that adequately supports the Strategic Plan

Strategies

1. Review the current budgeting process
2. The State Board will review the annual budget in August
3. Allocate resources and prioritize budget initiatives
4. Recommend a final budget by the State Board's October meeting
5. Advocate for the budget with the Administration and the Legislature

Indicators

- a. Percentage of Strategic Plan strategies funded in the budget ▲
- b. Number of strategic plan strategies implemented ▲
- c. Balanced budget on department balance sheet
- d. Existence of a five-year financial and resource plan

Objective C. Department of Education staff that has the knowledge and skills to carry out its responsibilities

Strategies

1. Recruit and retain well-prepared and effective staff
2. Perform effective and meaningful annual evaluations
3. Offer mission-driven professional development to all staff
4. Work with other state policy makers in an effort to make salaries as competitive as possible

Indicators

- a. Percentage of staff participating in mission-driven professional development ▲
- b. Percentage of staff members indicating on internal survey they are adequately prepared to accomplish their jobs ▲
- c. Percentage of managers reporting that staff is adequately prepared to accomplish their jobs ▲
- d. Percentage of completed staff performance evaluations ▲

Objective D. A Department of Education communications strategy that supports the vision of the Board and department

Strategies

1. Clearly define and communicate department roles and responsibilities
2. Establish and share communications strategy with staff and external stakeholders
3. Develop and promote Web-based tools for communication with diverse audience with varied access to technology
4. Develop and sustain a well-informed, positive relationship with media

Indicators

- a. Percentage of individuals responding to the customer satisfaction survey ▲
- b. Results from customer satisfaction survey indicating visitors' understanding and use of Web site ▲
- c. Annual cost of publishing documents ▼
- d. Number of media reports accurately reflecting education issues ▲

Objective E. Vermont statutes and State Board regulations that enable improvements in our education system

Strategy

1. Review and revise Title 16 and other education-related statutes and State Board regulations

Indicator

- a. Publication of revised statutes and regulations

Objective F. A State Board of Education with clearly communicated roles and responsibilities

Strategies

1. Publish State Board of Education Roles and Responsibilities (See Page 19)
2. Review and update Roles and Responsibilities at least annually

Indicators

- a. Staff aware of the Roles and Responsibilities ▲
- b. Superintendents and school board members are aware of the Roles and Responsibilities ▲
- c. Public is aware of the Roles and Responsibilities ▲

Goal V. Practice and promote effective use of all resources

Objective A. A Department of Education with effective and efficient operations

Strategies

1. Create a unified and efficient electronic grant and contracting process
2. Improve the internal financial reporting system
3. Develop a budget management system for managers
4. Develop a system that allows staff to contribute ideas for making operations more effective and efficient

Indicators

- a. Results of internal survey ▲
- b. Staff awareness of grant processes ▲
- c. Grant processing cycle time ▼
- d. Balanced division budgets

Objective B. Department of Education resources that are aligned with the Mission and Goals

Strategies

1. Regularly review the mission and organization of the department
2. Communicate mission to department staff and others
3. Align each team's work plan with the mission
4. Establish and implement clear personnel policies

Indicators

- a. Alignment of job descriptions with actual duties ▲
- b. Results of internal survey ▲

Objective C. Technology that improves the efficiency and effectiveness of the department

Strategies

1. Expand the capacity to collect and report data electronically
2. Establish standards for technology skills and provide customized training to eliminate gaps
3. Develop a Best Practices guide for schools, districts and supervisory unions to help make data management and other technology decisions
4. Provide incentives for team-level high-end users in pertinent software
5. Expand the use of teleconferencing options
6. Implement statewide student information system

Indicators

- a. Use of teleconferences to reduce meeting costs ▲
- b. Percentage of technology-based innovations and resources implemented ▲
- c. Percentage of school districts submitting data electronically ▲
- d. Technology proficiency level of department staff ▲
- e. Fully operational student information system

Objective D. Cost-effective, high-quality delivery models for all students

Strategies

1. Poll the field for interest in creating a statewide calendar and common class time
2. Promote independent study, distance learning and common classes through technology
3. Revise existing and develop new benchmarks, reports and other indicators useful for assessing the efficiency of school districts
4. Revise school accounting handbook to establish consistent accounting of district revenues and expenditures statewide
5. Develop a Web-based survey to identify needs and contribute ideas for efficient and effective use of resources
6. **Analyze the cost and quality of education in Vermont in comparison to national data**
7. Develop specific recommendations to contain costs while ensuring the quality of education

Indicators

- a. Number of courses offered via teleconferencing (collaborative distance learning) ▲
- b. Number of independent study courses taught in secondary schools ▲
- c. Number of high school students participating in Advanced Placement/honors level courses ▲
- d. Development by the State Board of a concise set of recommendations regarding the cost and quality of education
- e. The cost of education in Vermont is comparable to the national average ▼
- f. The test scores of Vermont students on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) exams ▲

Roles & Responsibilities of the State Board of Education and the Commissioner of Education

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Vision, Mission, Goals

Commissioner Responsibility

- ▶ The commissioner will align the Department of Education's work with the Board and department's vision and mission.
- ▶ Work of the department will comply with state and federal laws.

Commissioner and Board Responsibility

- ▶ The Board and commissioner will ensure that their vision, mission, goals and work are focused on students.
- ▶ A strategic plan will be developed and revised as needed.

Advocacy

Commissioner and Board Responsibility

- ▶ The Board and the commissioner will advocate for the best possible educational opportunities for each student. Every decision will be weighed against the likely impact on students.
- ▶ The Board and the commissioner will aim to close the achievement gap among Vermont students and set the climate for focusing on students.
- ▶ The Board and the commissioner will institutionalize the focus on students' personal achievement – emphasizing that every student is important and capable of reaching her or his potential.

State Education Budget

State Board Responsibility

- ▶ The Board will ensure that the annual budget is adopted in accordance with applicable procedures of the Governor's Administration.
- ▶ In the budget process, the Board will comply with fiduciary responsibilities.

Commissioner Responsibility

- ▶ The commissioner will develop a budget based on specific assumptions and goals established by the Board.
- ▶ The budget will be developed in a timely manner, written clearly and will implement the Board's vision, mission, and goals.
- ▶ The budget will be developed in cooperation with the Governor's Administration after the Board has been informed of potential issues and has had an opportunity for consultation.
- ▶ The commissioner will develop and oversee a system for monitoring the department's budget.

Commissioner and Board Responsibility

- ▶ The Board and the commissioner will advocate for the state education budget with the Governor and Legislature.

Communications

State Board Responsibility

- ▶ Board members will communicate with external partners only with consensus and/or with authorization from the entire Board.

Commissioner Responsibility

- ▶ The commissioner will ensure that individual Board members and the full Board are appropriately informed in a timely fashion, and that communications are clear and concise.
- ▶ The commissioner will establish a clear process and system for communication with all stakeholders.
- ▶ Information will be based on valid and reliable data.

Commissioner and Board Responsibility

- ▶ Together with the commissioner, the Board will actively seek input from stakeholders, including parents.
- ▶ The Board and commissioner will be informed of current issues and how they affect students.
- ▶ The educational community will know and understand the Board's goals, policies and initiatives.
- ▶ Communications will establish a strong, positive image of the Board and the department working in concert.

Evaluation & Supervision

State Board Responsibility

- ▶ The Board will adopt policies to guide the evaluation and supervision of Department of Education staff, the commissioner and the Board.
- ▶ The Board will engage in a formal annual self-evaluation.
- ▶ The Board will ensure that the commissioner clearly understands its expectations in a written agreement.

Commissioner Responsibility

- ▶ The commissioner will ensure that every Department of Education staff member is evaluated at least annually.
- ▶ All evaluations will be based on clear roles, responsibilities and expectations.

Commissioner and Board Responsibility

- ▶ There will be an annual State of the State report for education made available to the Vermont community.

Fiscal Planning

Commissioner Responsibility

- ▶ The commissioner's fiscal planning efforts must consider long-term needs, and include resource assessment.

Legislation

State Board Responsibility

- 4 Board members will be seen as drivers of educational policy, and legislative efforts will focus on the best interests of students.
- 4 The Board will develop policies for the conduct of legislative activity.

Commissioner Responsibility

- 4 The commissioner will ensure that Board members maintain an awareness of federal legislation and are proactive in influencing new and proposed changes in federal legislation.

Commissioner and Board Responsibility

- 4 The Board and commissioner will be proactive in setting a legislative agenda for education.
- 4 The Board and commissioner will create a relationship with the legislature so the State Board is seen as a valuable resource with access to experts in educational matters.
- 4 The Board and commissioner will develop working relationships with Vermont's federal legislators.

Licensing

State Board Responsibility

- ▶ The State Board will adopt appropriate criteria for determining highly qualified teachers.
- ▶ They will appoint capable representatives to the Vermont Standards Board of Professional Educators and will provide direction to and evaluate the effectiveness of that board.

Commissioner Responsibility

- ▶ The commissioner will ensure that the licensing process leads to the employment of highly competent teachers and administrators in Vermont schools. The process must be efficient and accessible.

Commissioner and Board Responsibility

- ▶ Together with the Standards Board, the State Board and commissioner will ensure that regulations and procedures are focused on the best interests of students.
- ▶ The Board and the commissioner will ensure that appropriate standards and procedures for surrender, suspension and revocation of licenses are in place.
- ▶ Decisions will be based on reliable data.

Planning, Research-based Decision Making

Commissioner Responsibility

- ▶ The commissioner will ensure that the Department of Education and the Board have an effective Management Information System (MIS).
- ▶ The commissioner will ensure that research is focused and targeted, and that research and planning leads to continuous improvement in accomplishing the mission. The commissioner will ensure these responsibilities include assessment of resources. Planning and research should lead to greater efficiency and effectiveness. The commissioner will work in partnership with others. Planning must result in coordination of efforts and activities.

Commissioner and Board Responsibility

- ▶ The Board and the commissioner will ensure the processes and documents enable goals to be readily identifiable.
- ▶ The Board and the commissioner will ensure these processes will assist in identifying needs and actions, and will result in greater creativity. Issues will be clearly articulated and addressed.

Policy

Commissioner Responsibility

- ▶ The commissioner will ensure that policies are thoughtfully created and comprehensive. Policies will respond to federal requirements in a common sense manner.
- ▶ The commissioner will take steps to ensure that local districts understand the work of the department. He will ensure that effective working relationships exist between districts and the department and Board.

Commissioner and Board Responsibility

- ▶ The Board and the commissioner will work together to identify the need for policy and be proactive in policy development.
- ▶ The Board and the commissioner will be cognizant of the impact of policy on local school districts.
- ▶ The number of policies should be determined by absolute need. Policies must be visionary. Continued relevance must be reviewed, and there shall be accountability by those responsible for implementation.
- ▶ Policy development should include all interested parties: parents, students, school and Department of Education personnel, education associations, and others.
- ▶ Policies must be consistent and comply with state and federal law, and must be aligned with the vision, mission and focus on students.

Professional Development

State Board Responsibility

- ▶ Every new Board member will participate in a structured orientation process as called for in current policy.
- ▶ Board members will participate in professional development opportunities provided through a variety of sources, such as the National Association of State Boards of Education. Professional development will be considered “venture capital” and an “investment for the future.”

Commissioner Responsibility

- ▶ The commissioner will ensure that high-quality professional development is available to all Department of Education employees in accordance with contract requirements and systems needs.
- ▶ Professional development programs will be consistent with the Strategic Plan.

School Construction

State Board Responsibility

- ▶ The Board will ensure a priority list of school construction projects is submitted annually to the Legislature.
- ▶ The Board will advocate for adequate resources to fund the school facilities plan.

Commissioner Responsibility

- ▶ The commissioner will create a statewide facilities needs assessment and a planned sequence for school construction projects.
- ▶ All new construction and renovation projects will meet established criteria.
- ▶ The priority list of school construction projects will be monitored and will evolve over time.
- ▶ The statewide plan will consider the following: geographic and demographic needs of the state; health and safety requirements; functional facility design with a primary focus on students; current and future approaches for renewable energy and energy efficiency; design with innovation and awareness of future needs; and use of technology and alternative means of accessing instruction and learning opportunities.

Commissioner and Board Responsibility

- ▶ School construction projects will include the purpose and functions of schools as centers and resources for communities.
- ▶ There will be an established list of quality and technical criteria to guide the design and construction of new and renovated school facilities.

Standards, Assessment, Accountability & Technical Assistance

State Board Responsibility

- ▶ The Board will ensure its assessment result in improved instruction and learning. It will be relevant in time and measurement and be applicable to informed decisions and actions.
- ▶ The Board will ensure this work results in teaching to the standards and not teaching to the test. The Board aims to create a culture and environment of “developing schools” rather than “failing schools.” These efforts should focus on assessment and not favor high skills over the love of knowledge and creativity.

Commissioner Responsibility

- ▶ The commissioner will ensure that work in assessment is cost efficient and effective.
- ▶ The commissioner will ensure that there is clear, proactive communication with all stakeholders. Documents developed in these areas will use language clearly understood by parents and students.

Commissioner and Board Responsibility

- ▶ The Board and the commissioner will ensure that every student has substantially equivalent opportunities for learning.
- ▶ The Board and the commissioner will ensure consistency of standards among all schools. There will be clarity and understanding of what is and is not measurable.



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