

*A Proposal on*  
**Planning and Reporting**  
**By New York State School Districts**  
**For the Strategic Use of**  
**School Resources for School Improvement**

This report to the Governor and Legislature recommends that all existing school district planning and reporting requirements be replaced with a new system that would be phased in. In their place it proposes a new, comprehensive, streamlined system aligned with the expectations inherent in a results-oriented, standards-based education system. This report should be helpful in assessing school district planning and reporting requirements and their relation to improved student results. It will also guide the work of the Board of Regents and school officials to improve planning and reporting as a strategic tool that provides accountability for student success, consistent with federal requirements under the No Child Left Behind Act, and to promote systematic and continuous school improvement.

The New York State Education Department  
Office of School Operations and Management  
June 1, 2003

## Background

Subdivision 32 of section 305 of Education Law requires the Commissioner by June 1, 2003 to “complete a review of all applications, plans and reports required of school districts or boards of cooperative educational services by the department. This review shall be undertaken with a focus on streamlining all programmatic reporting requirements with the aim of eliminating or reducing excess reporting requirements and to determine the need for continued annual submission of such documents. Upon completion of such review, the commissioner shall submit his or her findings to the director of the budget, the chair of the assembly ways and means committee and the chair of the senate finance committee.”

The Department uses plans, applications and reports to fulfill its responsibility for oversight of pre-K-12 education. These plans and reports can be grouped under the following planning and reporting goals. For the purposes of this report, the term *planning and reporting* will be used to refer to the plans, applications and reports the State Education Department requires of New York State school districts and BOCES.

## Goals for Plans and Reports

- I. **School improvement and closing the gap.** To use resources to close the gap between actual and desired student achievement so that all students will exceed State learning standards
  - A. To foster continuous school improvement toward meeting State learning standards
  - B. To provide protections to ensure the successful education of historically disadvantaged groups of students
  - C. To stimulate and assess reforms that are intended to improve student achievement such as strengthening teaching in hard-to-staff schools or providing universal pre-kindergarten education
- II. **Use resources wisely.** To provide assurances that public resources are used in the public interest in a manner that fosters cost-effective use of resources and strategies to accomplish educational goals
- III. **Safe environment.** To provide a safe and secure environment that is conducive to learning
- IV. **Pupil health and safety.** To safeguard pupil health and safety.

## Success of an Earlier Era

A number of entities have the authority to require school districts to submit reports, applications and plans to the Department. These include:

- The federal government through laws that often distribute resources tied to specific program directions or are provided to ensure access to quality education by historically disadvantaged student groups such as students with disabilities.
- The State government through laws, including those that provide State Aid and grants to school districts, both for general operating purposes and for specific program initiatives.
- The Commissioner and Board of Regents through Commissioner's Regulations that have the full force of law and are used to implement State laws or promote Regents reforms deemed necessary to promote the successful attainment of State learning standards by all students.
- State Education Department guidelines that are promulgated to insure compliance with statutory and regulatory requirements.

These entities require school districts to complete more than 112 plans, applications and reports each year. Table 1 shows the number of plans, applications and reports that each entity requires. A detailed list of plans, applications and reports is shown in Appendix D. These requirements have been put in place over several decades with little regard for the combined planning and reporting system, the opportunities offered by technology, or the limits and changing role of the State workforce. Over these decades Department staff assumed the role of technical experts providing direct services to school districts in specialized areas. Planning and reporting requirements complemented this relationship between Department staff and school districts.

Table 2 shows the number of required reports, plans and applications for education focus areas. This system worked well for its time. It provided content specialists working in separate, relatively independent offices, but without the benefit of electronic systems of sharing information and work, with the information they needed to maintain their relationship with districts. These State Education experts were often limited to the quality and quantity of information they obtained through the reporting and planning system. Public education needs a new system of planning aligned with strategic goals and reporting that builds on current strengths and overcomes present limitations. New technology can enable schools to share critical data more easily and use it to improve student performance.

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*Table 1. Number of Plans, Applications and Reports  
Required Annually of New York State School Districts  
by Governmental Authority*

<b>Governmental Authority</b>	<b>Number</b>
Federal Statute	45
State Statute (with or without Commissioner's Regulation)	55
Commissioner's Regulation (without statutory mandate)	17
NYSED guideline or administrative rule	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>118*</b>

\* If a plan is required both by federal law and state law, it is counted twice as required by each level of government.

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*Table 2. The Number of Plans, Applications and  
Reports Required Annually of New York State School  
Districts by Content Area*

<b>Content Area</b>	<b>Number</b>
Adult and Continuing Education	6
BOCES	24
Career and Technical Education	7
Pupil Health, Safety & Support	6
School Improvement	29
School Libraries	1
Special Education	8
Educational Data	6
Teaching	4
Technology	3
State and Federal Aid	8
School Facilities	7
Child Nutrition	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>112</b>

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## Recasting Planning and Reporting in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

In recent years, several phenomena have changed the potential for planning and reporting to help schools, districts and the governmental agencies that regulate them:

- *The State's goals have changed.* While our broad goals have stayed the same as those reported on page 1, the details of what is possible have changed with increased analytic capacity, knowledge and expectations. We have moved from a two-tier system in which approximately 40 percent of students met challenging academic standards. We have entered into a standards-based education reform that focuses *all* students and the adults around them on learning.
- *Public accountability for education results* has become a reality. This has allowed the State and media to recognize the progress schools are making in achieving challenging State learning standards and to focus the educational community on sharing best practices. A standards-based education reform movement has placed an unprecedented pressure on the educational system for continuous school improvement. The State and federal governments require school districts to report disaggregated student results; meet yearly, attainable performance targets for schools not meeting any standard for any student subgroup; and comply with increasingly strict interventions.
- *The role of State Education Department staff members* has changed to one of strategic planner, broker and coordinator. It involves analyzing data that portray school and student needs and creating partnerships that motivate a variety of individuals within the State to solve our most difficult educational problems. It involves putting into place systems that will benefit schools and students rather than providing the services directly.
- *Economic pressures have increased the burden.* The State and nation have felt the impact of increased costs from the 2001 terrorist attacks, a declining stock market and recession as well as high increases in costs outside the control of districts such as energy costs and pension contributions. The State workforce has declined and strict spending controls have been put in place. The plans, reports and applications identified in Table 1 represent a significant amount of time and effort on the part of school officials. That is time and effort that could be better spent supporting student achievement.
- *Technology* is changing what is possible. There are opportunities for collecting data, sharing information, and viewing individual school improvement initiatives in a comprehensive fashion that are within our grasp with existing resources.

Existing planning and reporting requirements are burdensome to school districts and to State staff. The requirements are duplicative, and while staff is beginning to use technology to streamline procedures, this is often done on an *ad hoc*, rather than a comprehensive, basis. Current requirements do little to promote coordinated continuous school improvement, close the student achievement gap

or assure the public that they are getting the most out of education resources. This is what school officials tell the Department:

*Rising costs and decreased funding prohibit us from providing a quality education for our children. We need relief from mandates that do not directly impact student achievement and safety, and funding for those that do. (Karen Heffernan, Principal, Cincinnati Central School)*

*During the past several years, myriad reports have been mandated from districts to the New York State Education Department. This will only increase with the full implementation of the federal No Child Left Behind legislation. These reports are costly, time-consuming and often, unnecessary, redundant and pointless. **Simply put, they do nothing to improve student achievement** (original emphasis). On the contrary, they often take away time from instruction and support to students. (John G. Metallo, Superintendent of Schools, Middleburgh Central School District)*

We must examine what the State and federal government can do to help school districts accomplish our shared mission of leaving no child behind. A streamlined comprehensive and coordinated system of school district planning and reporting should be established with full consideration of available technology, staff capacity, accountability systems, and strategic goals.

### **A Blank Slate Approach: From Process to Results**

This report to the Governor and Legislature recommends that all existing planning and reporting requirements be replaced with a new approach, specifying the requirements of a comprehensive, streamlined system. The system should have at its core information on student assessment and use the minimum amount of additional data necessary to fulfill its purposes. Appendix A provides a summary of information that the Department collects on students and other basic educational data. The new reporting system should use comprehensive data collection, planning and reporting systems supported by technology to assure a results-oriented rather than a process-focused planning system.

Specific recommendations are the following:

1. Reduce the number of required plans (see Table 3 and Appendix B and C):
  - Conform State requirements to federal requirements, requesting waivers as needed.
  - Consolidate plans, reports and applications whenever possible, focusing planning and reporting on student results rather than the processes to achieve them.

- Collect data in a coordinated, enterprise-wide method designed to alleviate the burden on districts. Accelerate the migration of data collection from paper-based to electronic method.

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*Table 3. Proposed Change in the Number of Plans, Applications and Reports Required Annually of New York State School Districts by Content Area*

<b>Content Area</b>	<b>Current</b>	<b>Proposed</b>
School Improvement and Closing the Student Achievement Gap	<b>94</b>	<b>18</b>
Adult and Continuing Education	(6)	(1)
BOCES	(24)	(2)
Career and Technical Education	(7)	(1)
Pupil Health, Safety & Support	(6)	(3)
School Improvement	(29)	(1)
School Libraries	(1)	(0)*
Special Education	(8)	(7)
Educational Data	(6)	(2)
Teaching	(4)	(0)*
Technology	(3)	(0)*
Financial Reporting	<b>18</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>22</b>

\* Incorporate as a separate element in school improvement plan.

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2. Streamline and unify required reporting with an electronic submission system that eliminates redundancies, connects planning and reporting, and facilitates oversight. The system should have three components:
  - A uniform statewide data collection system that replaces all individual pre-K-12 student data collection taking place separately in the offices of EMSC, VESID and State Aid; this should build on the already-automated collection of data on State assessments, dropouts, graduation credentials earned, and information required for State and federal accountability.
  - Financial reporting, including the grants management process and linking it with budgeting information.
  - Program planning and reporting.

3. Match oversight with the degree of risk:

Link planning and reporting with the System of Accountability for Student Success and No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Districts doing well will have less oversight; districts doing poorly will have more.

- Require comprehensive planning for school improvement for districts not meeting the standards, separately addressing key areas such as those listed in Appendix A.
- Audit based on an assessment of the risk of student performance or financial failure.
- Build partnership agreements with selected school districts and BOCES for better use of required planning and reporting.

4. Ensure reporting requirements include data that can be used to identify best practices:

Share effective planning practices with school districts. This should:

- Include technical assistance on the use of data for planning;
- Involve BOCES and institutions of higher education in programs on the use of data for strategic planning for superintendents, business officials and teachers;
- Offer training on the use of data to school board members; and
- Use outside researchers for data analysis and evaluation.

5. Build support among stakeholders for a new system of school district planning and reporting:

Reach out to school districts and professional associations for input on this proposal following the response from the Governor and Legislature. Due to the large number of plans and reports and the many stakeholders that are concerned and involved, this process will involve extensive work, involvement and development for planning and reporting in the area of school improvement.

The following types of questions may help to engage educators and the public in identifying the characteristics of an effective school district planning and reporting system:

- What information is necessary to determine if educational investments are working?
- What information is needed to determine if a program is cost-effective?
- What information do I need in order to plan for improvement in my school?
- What information is needed to ensure continued improvement among our students that need the most help (e.g., limited English proficient, homeless, and migrant workers' children)?
- What information do I need to ensure the public that education resources are used in the public interest?
- What are the components of planning and reporting that act as catalysts for improved student achievement?
- In what specific instances do the data included in the school report card and the school accountability system fall short? Why?

## Appendix A

### **Data Collection and Reporting**

The Department has moved to unify its data collections systems and eliminate duplicate reporting. The Information and Reporting Services (IRS) unit collected individual records for all public school students who took State assessments in the 2001-02 school year. These records were collected through two systems. The Local Education Agency Program (LEAP) reporting system, implemented in the 1996-97 school year, collects performance on State assessments administered in the elementary and middle grades. The LEAP records include key demographic data on each student as well as test performance.

To complement LEAP, IRS implemented an individual student record system at the secondary school level beginning with the 2001-02 school year. The System for Tracking Educational Progress (STEP) software collects individual student records, including demographic, assessment, and program history information, for all students in grades 9 through 12. STEP will also substantially improve the quality of the data available to the Department for policy analysis by providing performance records for every student who is enrolled in grades 9-12.

STEP and LEAP have greatly expanded our capacity for data analyses. Using these records, we can address the vast majority of NCLB requirements. For example, STEP can be used to:

- Aggregate data by racial/ethnic group, disability, gender, income level, English proficiency, and migrant status;
- Determine adequate yearly progress in each subject and grade for each school and district;
- Calculate graduation and dropout rates;
- Calculate test participation rates; and
- Determine which students have participated in federal or State-funded programs, such as supplemental educational services under Title I or Title III programs, for purposes of program evaluation and federal reporting.

LEAP and STEP replace multiple paper reporting systems and allow districts to submit State assessment results, credentials earned, and dropout

reports in a unified, electronic system that meets many Department needs. STEP and LEAP are the cornerstones of a statewide data warehouse that will meet the Department's, districts' and the public's needs for student, teacher, and program data. The next step in the development of the data warehouse is the implementation of statewide unique student identifiers that will allow the tracking of students statewide from district to district. When completed, the data warehouse will house data for students from pre-K through continuing education and allow the Department to extract data as needed to satisfy the requirements of State aid, school accountability, and federal reporting under NCLB and IDEA, and to inform the Board of Regents policy decisions.

The 2003 STEP and LEAP Manuals list the data elements collected in these systems.

Appendix B  
**List of Proposed Plans, Applications and Reports  
 By New York State School Districts  
 For the Strategic Use of  
 School Resources for School Improvement**

*School District Comprehensive Plan*

	<b>Category</b>	<b>Proposed Plan, Application or Report</b>	<b>Includes</b>
<b>School Improvement and Closing the Gap</b>	School Improvement	School Improvement	Standards implementation School improvement and corrective action Early childhood programs LEP programs Technology Teaching Attendance improvement; extended day Academic intervention Shared decision making Alternative High School Preparation Program (High School Equivalency) Community learning centers/family literacy Student support Homeless children and youth Migrant education Magnet schools Education of gifted and talented Special education district plans
	BOCES	BOCES School improvement	BOCES plans and reports related to school improvement
		Career and Technical Education	
	Educational Data (PreK-12)	Student Level Data	Student Information System (including data on pupils with disabilities) Career and Technical Education Secondary Programs Survey for BOCES report card (pre-K-12)
		Basic Educational Data	Data on school programs (IMF) and school personnel (PMF). Gathers data required for receipt of federal funds Alternative education (enrollment, tuition and outcomes), professional development and technology services
	Adult and Continuing Education	Performance of Adult Education Students	National Reporting System Workforce Investment Act, Title II Employment Preparation Education Welfare Education Program Survey for BOCES report card (adult)
	Pupil Health, Safety and Support Services	Pupil Health	Safe and Drug Free Schools AED Implementation Survey

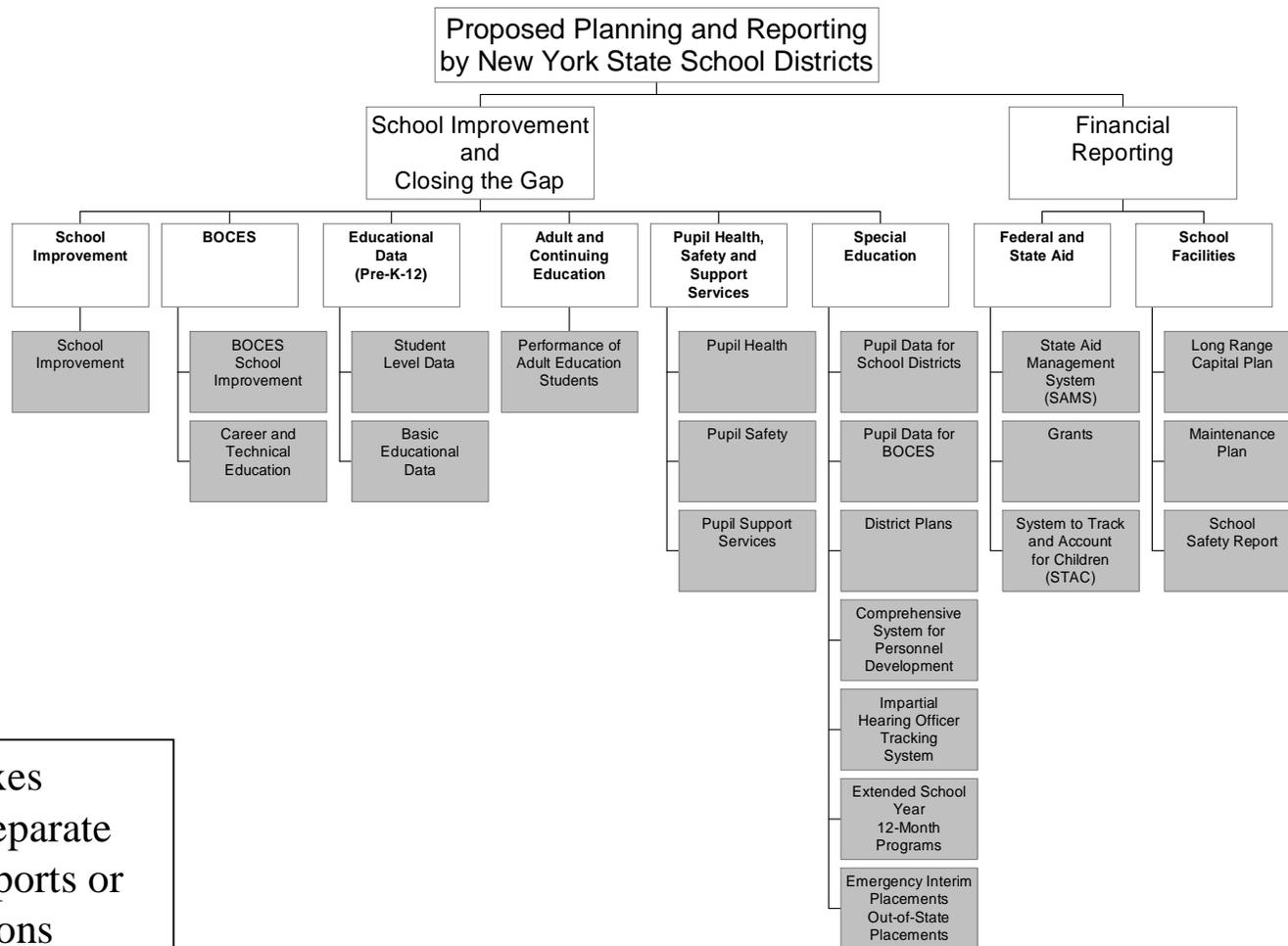
	<b>Category</b>	<b>Proposed Plan, Application or Report</b>	<b>Includes</b>
<b>School Improvement &amp; Closing the Gap (con't)</b>		Pupil Safety	Emergency Management Plan Gun Free Schools Report SAVE Implementation
		Pupil Support Services	Attendance Implementation
	Special Education	Pupil data for school districts	Meet federal requirements for monitoring students with disabilities
		Pupil data for BOCES	Meet federal requirements for monitoring students with disabilities
		District plans	Meets federal requirements for the evaluation of programs for students with disabilities
		Comprehensive System for Personnel Development	Meets federal requirements for data-driven strategic planning for professional development of special education personnel
		Impartial Hearing Officer Tracking System	
		Extended School Year for students with disabilities requiring 12-month programs	
	Emergency Interim Placements for out-of-state placements		
<b>Financial Reporting</b>	Federal and State Aid	State Aid Management System	Annual Financial Report (ST-3) BOCES Aid Claim Bus Purchases Transportation Facilities Other State Aid
		Grants	IDEA Flow Through Child Nutrition NCLB and other noncompetitive State and federal grants
		System to Track and Account for Children (STAC)	Reimbursement for the placement of students with disabilities in private special education schools and two State schools Payment of High Cost Public Excess Cost Aid Payment of aid for summer school programs for students with disabilities
	School Facilities	Long Range Capital Plan	Long range plan Five-year plan BOCES Space Plan

Maintenance Plan

Maintenance plan  
Annual Visual Inspection

School Safety Report

Asbestos      Hazard      Emergency  
Response Act  
Fire Safety Reports



Grey boxes denote separate plans, reports or applications