

Vermont House Committee on Education

Testimony of: Rebecca Tatistcheff, Ed. D, Principal, Cabot School

Act 67 - Community Schools

Good afternoon. Thank you for having me, my name is Rebecca Tatistcheff, I am the principal at Cabot School. Thank you for continuing to hear about the work of Community Schools. I want to begin by noting that I am glad you're hearing from a range of experiences. Cabot's context, like the other schools here today, is unique to our community and needs. Six years ago, Cabot began to codify its long-time ethos of project-based and personalized learning. As a community school, we see our unique pk-12 context as a leverage for building intergenerational, inter-age connections that deepen students' work as change-makers and resources in their community. The last time I spoke with you was two years ago in the Spring of 2022. At that time we had just begun to implement an after school program and our Seniors were beginning to engage in their internship work. Since that time we have expanded and created more sustainability in that space. Today, I am going to talk specifically about afterschool programming, Senior X (our senior internship work), and the challenges for our future sustainability.

Prior to March 2022, Cabot had not had an afterschool program for at least 10 years (that figure comes from a graduate at the time who noted that afterschool had not existed in his 13 years at the school). Now, we have an afterschool program that serves as a work-based learning experience rooted in student leadership and voice. Community members act as club facilitators, Vermont After School and Up for Learning provide facilitator training for middle and high schoolers who work in the program and approximately 75% of students in grades 1-6 have been enrolled in afterschool at some point in the past two and a half years. Students engage in pottery, culinary arts, music, crafting, robotics and more. For a community of just 1500 people to be offer this range of enrichment that is multi-age and free is remarkable.

Each trimester our middle and high school facilitators reflect on their learning. Last spring, one student noted, "I learned and practiced how to create programs for the kids. We did not follow through with the programming like we should have, but I think the ideas we had were good. I think we should try again next year." This fall and spring, students have been meeting during the school day to practice their facilitation skills and are now taking on the leadership and planning role for time before and after clubs. To see an 8th grader rolling down a hill with a first or second grader as they cheer each other on, is one of my great joys as a school leader. To watch high school students leading student to and from robotics as they chat about their lego creations is truly inspiring. And to see a high school student with the mentor they met as a co-facilitator sharing their future plans means that our model of intergenerational work is being successful.

Cabot is too small for percentages to have much meaning. Stories matter in community schools. Individualized and personalized experiences shape the paths of our young people. Senior X, our internship program speaks to this. When we began this work, I imagined a catalog of offerings that

students would simply choose from year to year. It quickly became apparent that was naive on my part. Over the past three years, our Community Schools Coordinator, in collaboration with our high school teaching team has developed a personalized course curriculum that asks each student to pursue a project they are passionate about. There have been 18 students participating in these projects over the past three years (that is almost all of our graduates). Here are some highlights:

A student is learning robotics, animation, and coding skills at White Mountain Science Inc., They will be creating lessons and related resources that to lead an afterschool club in the spring participants.

A student is learning tree climbing techniques from Vermont Urban and Community Forestry Program and working on getting Cabot recognized as a Tree Campus K-12 by the Arbor Day Foundation.

A student worked with Vermont Adaptive Ski and Sports at Bolton Valley. They gave a talk about his experience at the Cabot town library, with the goal of encouraging others to become involved with adaptive sports. That has shaped their trajectory in higher education.

A student worked with Cabot's volunteer emergency ambulance service and earned their American Red Cross instructor certification. They then taught a four-hour Red Cross class on Adult and Pediatric CPR/First Aid/AED, allowing nine Cabot School staff members to get certified.

Another student completed an internship at a Health Center, where she shadowed various health professionals and completed tasks that didn't involve patient care (e.g. preparing exam rooms). Their final project was a cookbook of healthy, budget-friendly recipes. She distributed samples and recipe cards at a local nonprofit that works to end hunger. The book also includes tips on making prepared foods more nutritious and eating well with diabetes.

I hope these few descriptions give you an idea of the kind of work 18 of our students (again, the vast majority of our graduates) have engaged in that impacts their future planning, learning, and our small community in positive ways.

I am proud of the incredible work we have done as a PreK-12 community over the past several years. We have built a robust afterschool program that enriches students' learning and provides a work-based learning and leadership experience for our middle and high school students. We have coordinated and aligned our curriculum and thematic projects so our educators and students can focus on deeper learning and worry less about reinventing the wheel every year. We have shifted our literacy practices to better align with the science of reading while also ensuring students are engaged in work that is deep and meaningful. Every Cabot senior is engaged in Senior X internships that are driven by their passions: engineering, big engine repair and maintenance; social work, computer science, technical art

and design to name a few. And when we engage students' passions they persist in their learning, even when it gets hard. Our high school program is highlighted as a model for project-based learning, flexible pathways, and proficiency-based assessment. Visitors comment on the depth of student learning and the invaluable skills in collaboration, communication, creativity, problem solving, and life-long learning.

The work of being a community school is never done. To sustain and deepen this work takes time and sustainable funding. Cabot like many rural communities continues to face the challenges of an aging infrastructure and fiscal sustainability. Like other communities, Cabot needs help to navigate these challenging times. I would call on you to help communities like Cabot navigate the tension between innovation and adequate funding. I would urge you to incentivize innovation through Act 67 by providing a clear fiscal roadmap forward for schools and communities like ours to deepen and sustain our work.