Update on Act 67 of 2021
A Vermont Community Schools Pilot

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What and Why of Community Schools

Community Schools are not programs. Rather, they are a fundamental rethinking of how to deliver public education.

As a model, **Community Schools align to Vermont's student-centered approach to learning** and its existing statutory and regulatory framework to support proficiency-based, personalized learning and flexible pathways to graduation.

Fundamentally, **Community Schools seek to close equity gaps.**

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VT Community Schools – A Value Statement

*==Every child should be provided with an equitable education,== as defined by the Agency of Education as access to the resources, opportunities, and educational rigor they need at the right moment in their education, whatever their race, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, language, disability, family background, or family income may be. Every child should be able to grow up with the opportunity to achieve their dreams and contribute to the well-being of society. ==**Our public schools must be designed and equipped to fully deliver on that promise.**==*

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Modeling Community School Values at the SEA

To support the goals and value statement of Act 67, the AOE had to position itself within the developing Vermont Community School model as a participant who would influence implementation efforts.

Designing for Equity and Sustainability

- Foster Community

- Establish a Supportive Accountability Approach

- Develop an Ethical Framework for Evaluation

Fostering Community – Pillar Talk

- Established quarterly cohort meetings every year to develop community, where leadership teams from each project can identify shared successes, opportunities and challenges, engage in collaborative problem solving, inform state-level work, and develop as a community a shared understanding of community schools in the Vermont context.

- Launched a bimonthly Community School Coordinator Learning Series where CSCs are invited to participate in professional learning followed by an unstructured opportunity to connect, problem solve, share, and receive technical assistance.

- AOE Interdisciplinary team meetings every six weeks to advise, problem-solving, and identify connections and opportunities for coherence and state-level innovations

Supportive Accountability

- Developed personalized reflection tool for each project organized by pillars, strategies and activities to support documenting progress toward 3-year goals and capturing successes and new learning

- Established quarterly check-in meetings with each Act 67 Lead Team to problem-solve and identify resources, supports, and connections

- Conducted end-of-year empathy interviews with each Act 67 Lead Team to capture lived experience (as individuals and school team)

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An Ethical Framework for Evaluation

Established Research Practice Partnership between the AOE and UVM in 2021

- Supports and advances state goals to foster community, supportive accountability, and resource development and identification

- Research methodology offers an ethical framework for evaluating implementation and effectiveness of Act 67

- Partners (AOE, UVM, Community Schools) codesign and test solutions in a long-term, collaborative, and iterative processes.

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Attributes of the Vermont CS RPP

- Partnership development -- interactional not transactional

- State-supported and locally informed

- Earned relational trust among all RPP stakeholders

- Participatory research and evaluation methods: CBPR & YPAR

- Mixed methods --> multiple data sources, multiple voices.

- Focus on *PROCESS implementation*… resist <u>urge/pressure</u> to study "outcomes" of early CS implementation

Guiding Research Questions

1) What are the experiences of new community school sites in implementing key organizational structures of the community school model? (Fehrer, 2016).

2) How has the funding support from the Vermont community school Act enabled awardees to create and implement community school vision?

2A) How are community schools integrating existing school-based systems of support and academic enrichment with new priority areas surfaced from the community school needs assessment and prioritization?

3) What are the preliminary outcomes of CS implementation in Vermont CS schools supported through the Vermont community School Act?

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Informed by CS Literature

	Emerging	**Maturing**	**Transforming**
Characteristics *what you would see in a CS at this stage*	• Champions for community school call for the strategy and have developed an implementation team • School community members are oriented to the strategy • Setting priorities for implementation identified • Desire to use data collaboratively for whole school transformation • Data is shared with champions; new data interests and needs are identified • Common understanding of community assets and needs (A&N) • New systems and approaches to schooling are emerging (ie. whole school approach to restorative practices)	• New youth, family, and community members are identified as leaders in the school and structures to promote community voice, reflection, and partnerships are developed • Shared governance is visible • Shared vision and goals are set for the CS based on A&N • Data analysis begins and committees try practices such as "plan, do, study, act" • New systems and approaches to schooling are codified in this phase • Moving from outputs to outcomes • Gaps have been identified and resources are connected to opportunities • Community school has many feedback loops • Alignment between budget and CS priorities	• Community leadership structures formalized, co-led, and co-created; all community members, families, youth, and partners involved in processes • Policies support CS sustainability & community voice • All structures engage in continuous improvement • Community school guides other schools and systems to enact CS strategy • Affinity groups for youth and staff support equity work • Plans exist for transition and orientation of new community members
Processes/Structures/Tasks *what CS constituents would do at this stage*	**Develop or start with an existing group of families, youth, teachers, administrators, and community partners to enact the following implementation functions:** • Conduct an assets and needs assessment • Utilize power analysis to determine which constituents to engage as champions • School based data review • Orient all school community members to the strategy • Community asset mapping to identify potential partners **Additional tasks during this phase:** • Hire a Community School Coordinator • Develop or utilize an existing ISS team using data (such as chronic absence) to begin connecting students to supports • Develop youth and family leadership structures	**Group responsible for Implementation will:** • Support co-constructed initiatives based on Assets & Needs assessment • Formalize partnerships with a written agreement, such as a MOU or shared use agreement for space and data sharing and management. • Develop clear CS vision and goals and share with larger community **Additional tasks during this phase:** • Structures in place to align classroom instruction with community & extended opportunities • Build/identify designated room specifically for families/guardians • CSC and other CS staff members are sustained through diverse funding sources	**Group responsible for implementation will:** • Lead participatory budgeting process or practice budget transparency • Codify policies for sustainability with equity focus • Coordinate advocacy efforts **Additional tasks during this phase:** • Family and youth advocate for policy and address systemic inequities • Youth and community led initiatives, such as; conferences/town halls, YPAR projects occur annually • Piloted initiatives evolve into new "way of doing school" • All community members involved in community school continuous improvement
Measures/Benchmarks *what to measure at each stage*	• Chronic absence • Program attendance • Enrollment • Discipline • Service use • Student & Family engagement • Youth feedback/voice (ie. Hope Survey)	• School climate surveys • Student and staff retention • Staff turnover • Academic growth • Return on investment (ROI)	• Graduation rates • Post-secondary enrollment • Deeper learning & deep listening • Workforce development • Economic development • Micro credentials & Certificates for teachers/staff/partners

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Data Sources

Annual Empathy Interviews

- Community School Coordinators, Principals, Superintendents

Quarterly Check In Documents

- 4 quarterly check in documents/yr

Grant Application/Renewals

Existing Education/School Health Data

- SLDS/Education Dashboard
- YRBSS/BRFSS
- School Health Profiles

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Getting to Year One Insights

Center Qualitative and Anecdotal Data:

- Empathy Interviews and Document Review

Transcript Coding to Theme Development

- Defined by Community School Pillars, Act 67, and community context
- Collaborative approach of the relational and research perspectives
- Code examples: *Integrated Student Supports, Family Engagement, Cohort Leadership Characteristics, Implementation Readiness, etc.*

Evaluation Planning – Identification of Metrics, Logic Model Creation

- Developing Local Logic Models
- Roll up to State Model

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Developing an Initial Portrait
Code Frequency - Act 67 Year 1 Interview
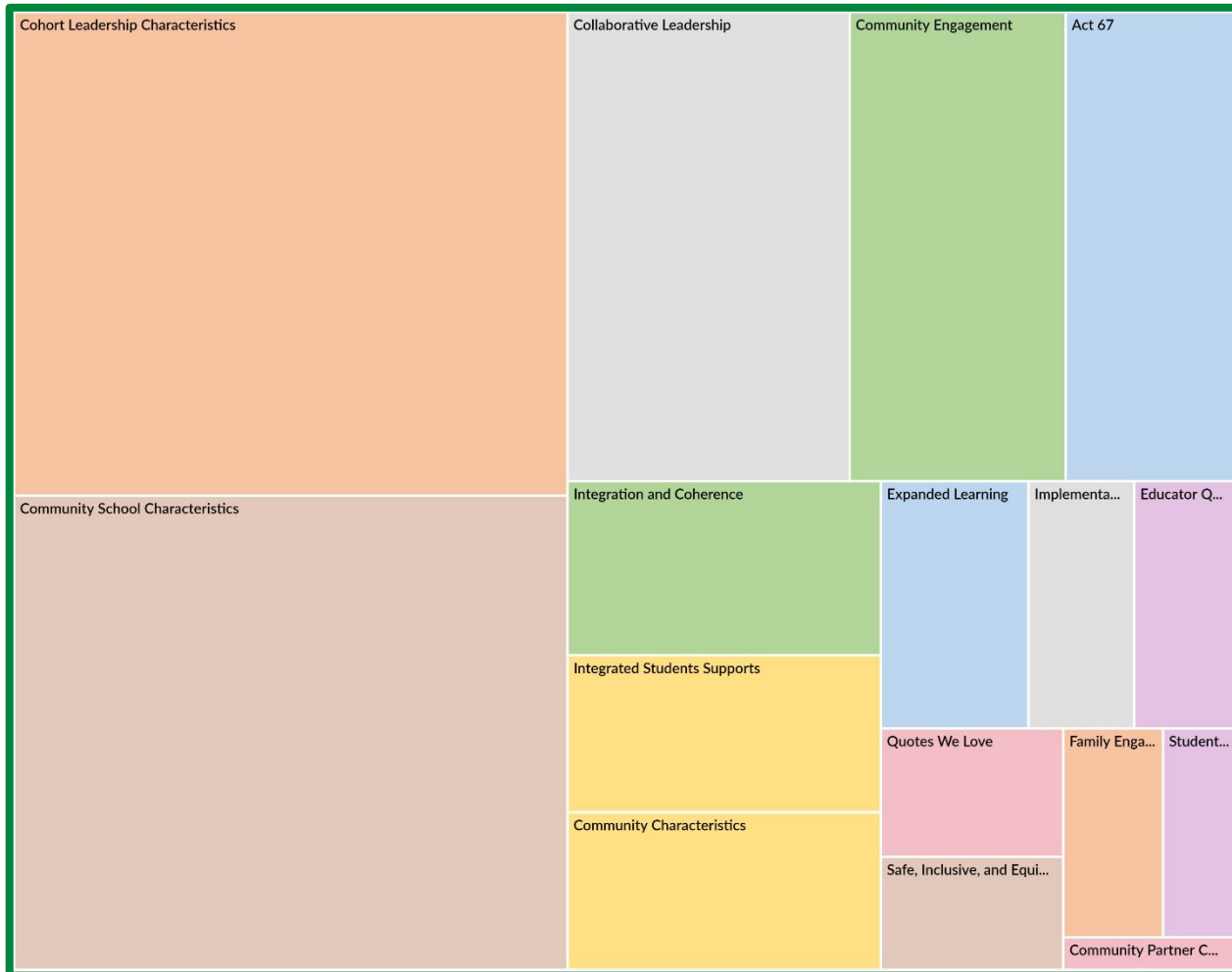
Larger boxes indicate higher number of code use.

Cohort Leadership Characteristics

Community School Characteristics

Collaborative Leadership

Community Engagement

Act 67

Integration and Coherence

Integrated Students Supports

Community Characteristics

Expanded Learning

Implementa...

Educator Q...

Quotes We Love

Family Enga...

Student...

Safe, Inclusive, and Equi...

Community Partner C...

Prevalent Codes

Cohort Leadership Characteristics
- Unique characteristics of VT Act 67 grantees that surface unrelated to other codes; Qualities, circumstances of individuals implementing CS approach; Long-game perspective; Equitability, Sustainability, Empathy.

Community School Characteristics
- Community-based services offered; Community organizations operating in and/or with schools; Coordinator duties, roles, responsibilities; Three-year goals/expectations; Training or facilitation of CS approach; Messaging and advocacy around CS.

Collaborative Leadership
- Professional learning opportunities; Interprofessional collaboration; Demonstrated use of MTSS (structure focused; overlap with other school policies or programs); Shared decision making; Data informed; Visionary.

Cohort Leadership Characteristics

"…It's about networks of connections […] I very much feel like if we're going to recover and heal in the world right now, it is about localizing and building networks of connection that are really rooted in kind of community and democratic ideals. And so, I think for me, […] the Community Schools work really allows us to name and embody that well. There are the five pillars but there's also sort of an ethos or philosophy, or a kind of […] deeper commitment to the ways in which people are in relationship to each other."

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Community School Characteristics

"There's a social circle, the community, and there's a personal or spiritual or intrinsic circle, the student, and those are the three partners […] I think we've […] made attempts to have the social community one. And it's been lovely, and we took more on as schools with the social community, with mental health and even […] physical health and food, and even more so in the pandemic. I think what this grant does for me is really lock in that circle, that community circle beyond just the parent partner. So, I believe the partnership of whole education is the educators, the parents, community, and the student always putting the student in the center and that those circles move."

Collaborative Leadership

"We have systems in place that will help. So, we use the global best practices as our self-study tool in the leadership team and then that got distributed out through the different departments in grade level teams at the school. So that we understood sort of where we were, how we assessed ourselves and what are some concrete steps we might take to improve this. And then we were able to examine which of those steps had... which ones we controlled the best lever on to do and it was a way of building consensus and building a shared vision and then being able to move forward."

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Emerging Themes and Observations

We're a community school, everything that happens here is a school function.

Leadership - Community School Mind-Set

Characteristics, work processes, and leadership styles all emerged in dialogue and shaped the methods schools applied to implement CS.

The values and approach that key leaders took to implementing, discussing, and supporting school staff in thinking about CS influenced the experiences over year one of implementation.

Setting and sustaining vision and tone; encouraging big picture/out-of-the-box thinking.

LITERACY IN COMMUNITY EQUITY - NECESSARY QUALITIES

Adapted from: Magyer & Provenzano (2020): Community School Leadership: Identifying Qualities Necessary for Developing and Supporting Equity-Centered Principals

Asset-based Perspective
Growth mind-set
Operates with an equity lens
Appreciates the key role of parents

Understand Community History
Present and active in the neighborhood and broader community
Culturally responsive leader

Leverage Community Assets
Builds collaborative, trusting relationship with community school coordinator/director
Collaborates, shares leadership, and substantively involves stakeholders in decision-making

Navigate Community Power Structure
Present and active in the neighborhood and in the broader community

Advocate for School and Community Equity
Courageous (e.g., challenges administration, questions policies, engages in difficult conversations)
Promotes collective responsibility for all children and families
Belief that schools belong to the community
Able to navigate systems change work

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Communicating Vision

Community Schools at their best start to decenter school and recenter [the] kind of the networks of relationships around young people that helps them feel [like] learners.

Community School is the center of a community that the community has pride in, and as the outcomes for the students improve then the community is also bolstered. And if the community is flourishing and thriving, then the students will. So a Community School doesn't believe in artificial separation of their students [...] I believe a Community School is a fully integrated, an important piece of the community that reflects the Community's hopes, dreams and pride, and likewise [...] the school has to be proud of its community and integrated with it. So that's how I see it.

Integrative Thinking; Adaptive Leadership; Responsive Design

VT Act 67 Community Schools

Personal Characteristics

"I think our process was, you know, throw everything at the chalkboard...like really narrowing it down and trying to find out what's doable and what's gonna have the most impact...you know mentoring program, access to food, access to healthcare. Like, that's what we need to do and have that through the lens of MTSS because it can't be an aside because if it becomes an aside, it becomes a privilege, you know, and we want to eliminate privilege as a mechanism to access services. We want our services to be ubiquitously available to all all members of our Community."

Attitudes & Dispositions

"...it's about networks of connections and kind of creating small... I I very much feel like if we're gonna recover and heal in the world right now, it is about localizing and building networks of connection that are really rooted in kind of community and democratic ideals. And so I think for me, the Community Schools work really allows us to name and embody that."

"And while schools play an important institutional roll they are not... I think Community Schools at its best starts to decenter school and re-center kind of the networks of relationships around young people that helps them feel like learners."

Behaviors

"...if we thought of last year as like this big picture, how are we engaging in leadership structures that are collaborative, how are we setting up the systems and structures and that big picture curriculum and building capacity around that, to how do we think about working with young people with young people in front of us and their families. That shifts us a little bit this year into thinking about our restorative practice work, thinking about neurodivergence and trauma informed work in the class, in classrooms and in our community building, our family engagement..."

A lot of inequity has been highlighted by the pandemic. How can these resources be brought to reeducate ourselves about what our community needs in order to thrive, what our students need in order to thrive, and how can we reallocate to meet those needs...that's a million things, a lot of different directions, but it is all connected [for] me now.

"The Community School is really kind of the pinnacle of where we're at when we're talking about deep learning. I feel like the impact that we can have through a Community School is greater than any other model of education that I've experienced, I feel. The only effective way to do school is to do it in partnership and collaboration with community partners in a reciprocal way. So not just we are tapping into our communities to get their resources to benefit us, but the role of schools needs to be in the act of knowing everyone in that community, both our community that supports the school and the school itself. So, I feel the power of the Community School is to transform not just education, but also how we do community and do it together and the reciprocal relationship."

Developing Coherence; Strategic Narratives

Cohort leaders consistently use CS as a unifying narrative to articulate and advance existing strategic plans and source for creative problem solving.

The funding, it didn't necessarily change... it allowed me not to have to say no to things. And that, in a time when like, there's lots of uncertainty and lots of change and lots of feelings. Where? What's the role of school? It allowed us to keep going with initiatives in a really unique way.

I keep the five pillars on my wall next to me because, you know, in every conversation, there's a way that a combination of the pillars can be brought to resolve, a concern that comes up, you know.

Engaged Leadership; Collaborative Practices

Cohort leaders engaged in frequent and open conversations with school staff, CS coordinators, and community partners to determine what might work best for students and families in the moment.

Intentional dialogue and collaboration around blending or braiding together existing programs or processes (MTSS) and the professionals responsible for administering.

Significant dialogue around community-based partnerships and services being offered; Each cohort member prioritized the ongoing and anticipated work with community partners, engaging with the community, and focusing on ways to bring local connections, opportunities, and experiences into their schools.

Preparing for the Future
Now What?

So, we're seeing parents and family members coming back to school communities wanting to be in the school and wanting to be connected.

I've been in the grant funded nonprofit world for my whole career, and I have never seen a grant that appreciated the importance of the connection between providing socially relevant and focused basic needs support alongside all of those things that we say we [want to] do all the time about bringing community members in, about, you know, having inclusive governance. You cannot do those things in a rural community with such a high level of poverty as we have without providing those basic supports around things like transportation and clothing and food and all of those things that make it possible for people to be fully engaged in, you know, systemic work. No, I've never seen any funding source that kind of seems to understand the connection between these things like the Community Schools Grant has allowed for.

What Help Would Look Like at the Federal Level?

- **Leverage/replicate the 21CCLC Nita M. Lowey model for Full-Service Community School grant program to support:**

  – **Efficiency and predictability** – allocations to SEAs to run competitive grant program and identify connections across existing state and federal programs to support

  – **Coherence and reduce initiative fatigue** – which will also address real-time and extended concerns about educator workforce shortages and unintended inequities that arise through short-term pilots and "innovation zones" which helps

  – **Scaling community school implementation --** cohorts and communities can grow and can learn from one another and an SEA can staff and support appropriately which requires

  – **Avenues for small and rural districts and schools to compete** – (which is hard to do if you're a school that has a shared principal or a nurse once a week) which can be supported by

  – **FSCS grant allocations to states/SEAs**

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Developing State Level Strategies for Sustainability

Predictable funding to support capacity building grants and scaling Community School development across the state

- Aligns with and can advances our goals for students within our student-centered education regulation and initiatives (e.g., Act 77, Act 173, Act 1, Act 28, EQS, etc.)

Appropriately resourcing state-level supports for sustaining Community Schools

– Multi-million-dollar grant programs require dedicated staffing

– Sustainable, **anchoring organization structure for equitable** and transformative research and evaluation. Unique partnership between SEA and University

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