

Report on Act 77 of 2013

16 VSA §4011(e) Reports

**Annual Report on Early College Programs
in the Vermont State Colleges System
to the House and Senate Committees on Education**

Submitted by Chancellor Elizabeth Mauch

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Early College Report to Legislature

Legislation: Act 77 of 2013 An Act Relating to Encouraging Flexible Pathways to Secondary School Completion

Summary of Legislation: This act creates a Flexible Pathways Initiative within the Agency of Education to expand opportunities for secondary students to complete high school and achieve postsecondary readiness. Among other programs, the act provides the opportunity for students to complete 12th grade entirely at a postsecondary institution. For the purposes of this report, the act specifically amends 16 VSA §4011(a) to require any postsecondary institution receiving funds for early college to “report to the House and Senate Committees on Education annually in January regarding the early college program, including data relating to the levels of participation, the success of the program in achieving the stated goals of the program to enhance secondary students’ education experiences and prepare them for success in college and beyond, and the specific outcomes for participating students relating to programmatic goals.”

Summary of Findings

1. Early College continues to be an important, successful flexible pathway option for high school seniors across the state. Enrollments and success rates are high, with a total of 370 students participating this fall. For the past two post-pandemic years, 95% of students who began Early College in the fall semester successfully continued in the program in the spring. Students participating in Early College within the VSC system also have high continuation rates to a second year of postsecondary education and many of them (88 this fall) are first-generation college-going students. Notable also this fall is the highest-ever percentage of students continuing their education for a second year within the VSC system (41% of the 351 students served by the VSC system’s programs in 2022-2023).
2. This fall, the Community College of Vermont has seen its highest levels of student participation to date, a 70% increase since the spring 2022 announcement of the Free Degree Promise program for students in Vermont high school classes of 2023-2026. The program, established with generous philanthropic support from the J. Warren & Lois McClure Foundation in partnership with the Vermont Community Foundation, offers a free CCV associate degree to students who complete Early College and continue for a second year at CCV. The Free Degree Promise program covers tuition and fees after any federal and state financial aid, and it provides enhanced career and education advising as well as stipends to help with books, transportation, and other costs associated with going to college. This fall students from 90% of Vermont’s high schools enrolled in Early College at CCV.
3. Act 77’s Dual Enrollment Program and the Fast Forward program supported at Career and Technical Education Centers continues to serve as a critical ‘on ramp’ for students to gain skills and confidence to participate in Early College, particularly those students who may not begin high school with strong postsecondary aspirations and preparation. At CCV, 48% of its current 234 Early College students had previously enrolled in dual enrollment or CTE Fast Forward courses.
4. Representatives from the VSC continue to work with a cross-agency group inclusive of VSAC, the Agency of Education, and the Vermont Virtual Learning Collaborative to investigate and address barriers to Early College participation by underserved populations.

Vermont High School Students Enrolled in Flexible Pathways Early College Programs

	Community College of Vermont	Vermont State University*	VSC System Total
ACADEMIC YEAR 2023-2024			
Fall 2023	234	136	370
ACADEMIC YEAR 2022-2023			
Fall 2022	198	153	351
Spring 2023	190	144	334
Full AY students	190	144	334
<i>Fall-Spring Continuation Rate</i>			95%
ACADEMIC YEAR 2021-2022			
Fall 2021	140	122	262
Spring 2022	137	111	248
Full AY students	137	111	248
<i>Fall-Spring Continuation Rate</i>			95%
ACADEMIC YEAR 2020-2021			
Fall 2020	181	134	315
Spring 2021	161	117	278
Full AY students	161	117	278
<i>Fall-Spring Continuation Rate</i>			88%
ACADEMIC YEAR 2019-2020			
Fall 2019	160	150	310
Spring 2020	155	130	285
Full AY students	155	130	285
<i>Fall-Spring Continuation Rate</i>			92%

*Vermont State University data represent Early College and VAST program students across all campuses and before Fall 2023, its legacy institutions (Castleton University, Northern Vermont University-Johnson and -Lyndon, and Vermont Technical College in Randolph and Williston).

Continuation rates of VSC System Early College Students

Early College Year 2022-2023 Cohort Total	351	% Total Cohort
Returned to the VSC System	143	41%
Attended other colleges (VT and out-of-state)	128	36%
Total continuing in Fall 2023	271	77%
<i>of which:</i>		
First-Generation Students	88	25%
Not First-Generation	174	50%
Unknown First-Generation Status	9	3%
Did not continue at any college after EC year	80	23%
Early College Year 2021-2022 Cohort Total	262	% Total Cohort
Returned to the VSC System	83	32%
Attended other colleges (VT and out-of-state)	128	49%
Total continuing in Fall 2022	211	81%
<i>of which:</i>		
First-Generation Students	88	34%
Not First-Generation	114	44%
Unknown First-Generation Status	9	3%
Did not continue at any college after EC year	51	19%
Early College Year 2020-2021 Cohort Total	315	% Total Cohort
Returned to the VSC System	85	27%
Attended other colleges (VT and out-of-state)	133	42%
Total continuing in Fall 2021	218	69%
<i>of which:</i>		
First-Generation Students	98	31%
Not First-Generation	115	37%
Unknown First-Generation Status	5	2%
Did not continue at any college	97	31%



Reducing Barriers and Supporting Degree Completion

In 2023, CCV joined the McClure Foundation, VSAC, the Vermont AOE and other partners in a year-long initiative through The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to build and expand pathways to degree completion for high school students. The Accelerate ED initiative allows programs from multiple states to share resources, data, insights, and pathways to help at risk students earn an associate degree within a year of high school graduation. Through this initiative, we are working with schools, families, students, and other organizations to reduce barriers and increase access and awareness of Early College and the Free Degree Promise with a focus on young males, BIPOC, low-income, and first-generation students.

CCV is currently serving the year-two cohort of Free Degree Promise-eligible students. The Free Degree Promise is funded by the J. Warren & Lois McClure Foundation and allows high school seniors in graduating classes of 2023-2026 to complete their last year of high school and their first year of college at CCV, tuition-free. The Free Degree Promise builds on Early College to give students who continue at CCV the chance to earn an associate degree at no cost, with additional stipends to help with transportation, books, food, and other expenses. An associate degree opens the door to lifelong opportunities, and the Free Degree Promise provides a pathway for students to complete a CCV degree debt free. [Free Degree Promise - Go to College \(gotocollegevt.org\)](https://gotocollegevt.org)

The promise of a free degree, along with strong partnerships with high schools and technical centers, has helped CCV's Early College program grow. CCV enrolled an Early College class of 198 students in fall 2022, and of those students, 70 matriculated at CCV in fall 2023 through the Free Degree Promise. In fall 2023, CCV welcomed an incoming class of 234 Early College students, 178 of whom expressed intent to continue as Free Degree students next year. This year's 2023-2024 Early College cohort includes 113 students who are first generation students and 109 who are low income. Over the last two years of Early College at CCV, students came from all 14 Vermont Counties, with 63 high schools represented in the class of 2022-2023 and 67 in the class of 2023-2024.

A Good Investment for Vermont and Vermonters

Education after high school is a good investment that leads to vibrant, attractive, and more diverse communities for all. Expanding Early College and providing a pathway to degree completion ensures more Vermont students attain an associate degree, which will fuel local economies, grow a skilled workforce, and sustain local communities.

Anna Noonan, President & CEO, Central Vermont Medical Center:

“Programs like these enable Vermonters to reach their full potential by supporting them in taking an important step towards advancing their education and embracing lifelong careers in fields like healthcare. We at CVMC know firsthand that CCV is an innovative partner in supporting career development. This opportunity is a game changer for first-generation students and for employers alike.”

Chelsea Tatro, Promise student on track to graduate in 2024 with an A.S. in Behavioral Science:

“I graduated from Essex HS in 2023... I graduated with my first year of college through the Early College program and then I found out about [the Free Degree Promise] and I immediately said yes because it is such a wonderful opportunity for anyone to get a free associate degree. It allows people to go into life debt-free, which is something that many people struggle with for the rest of their life...”

I am also a first-generation college student. Both of my parents did not go to college, and only one of my grandparents went to college, and it means a lot [to] my parents for me to be here. [...] For my parents to see their only child succeed in education and to have an associate degree by the age of 18 ... means so much.

I also come from a lower-middle-class family and this experience has meant so much that I am able to get an education without having to worry about the cost, without having to worry about what my life would be like. Because college is very expensive, so this is a wonderful opportunity for everyone to do.

I highly recommend anyone that wishes to do this opportunity.... My life has been forever changed because of the McClure Foundation's [Free Degree Promise.]

And I thank everyone for helping me on my journey. Especially I thank my high school counselor and I thank my counselor here [at CCV]."

Blake Clark, 2023 Promise Graduate with a degree in business:

Blake graduated from Williamstown High School and remained on baseball & basketball teams while in Early College. "[The opportunity to get a free degree] drives me to get better grades. I have more motivation." Speaking about his decision to enroll in Early College at the Community College of Vermont (CCV) for his senior year, "I was ready to push myself, to take my learning to the next level." Blake plans to become a certified electrician and follow in his father's footsteps of owning his own business.



Why Students Participate

Of 150+ interviews conducted with Early College and VAST applicants during the admissions process, many students shared that early college would help start them on the path to their future:

- Many individuals are considering or planning to attend college to pursue degrees in fields such as business, engineering, psychology, nursing, art, and more.
- Some are exploring different paths within college, such as internships, studying abroad, or pursuing advanced degrees and feel Early College or VAST make these more achievable.

Many students are motivated to start their college experience early by a combination of factors, including a desire for academic challenge, alignment with career goals, the financial incentive, peer and family influence, a need for change, specific curriculum interests, flexibility, positive remote learning experiences, and guidance counselor recommendations. The Early College and VAST Programs are seen as a pathway to a more engaging and focused educational experience, providing a head start on college and future careers.

Strong Academic Achievement

Of the students who participated in VTSU's Early College programs last year:

- 14 students earned a 4.0 GPA
- 45 students earned a 3.6 or higher GPA

All students who earned a cumulative GPA of a 2.5 or higher earn a \$2,000 VTSU Better Together Scholarship to remain at Vermont State. Last year, 80 of VTSU's Early College students were eligible to receive this merit award.

Student Perspectives

“While I really miss my friends at my high school, I have still been able to be active with them in extracurricular activities. I am still involved in NHS (National Honors Society), and I was elected President of the Rutland High School Key Club. I have also made friends and new connections at Castleton during my Early College year.”

“Early College prepared me to apply to multiple universities with confidence and gain admission to my dream school. With the help of my Student Success Advisor, I was able to gain admission to a school in Colorado to study Equine Studies transferring 3 semesters worth of credit.”