# 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 Sophie Zdatny**

**January 23, 2023**

**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 flexible pathway option for high school seniors across the state and enrollments are more in line with pre-pandemic trends at Castleton University, Northern Vermont University, and the VAST program at Vermont Tech. CCV has seen its highest levels of student participation to date for the 2022-2023 academic year. Increased access to CCV's program can be attributed to the generous philanthropic support from the Vermont Community Foundation, which enabled CCV to create an **Early College Plus** (now called Early College Certificate) program to provide more structured supports and defray costs for students who complete an Early College program resulting in a workforce-ready credential that is also on a pathway to an associate's or bachelor's degree.

2. While fall-to-spring continuation rates during the pandemic year (2020-2021) dropped slightly (88%), students in the most recent academic year (2021-2022) are again experiencing high levels of success, with a 95% fall-to-spring continuation rate. Similarly, while a lower proportion of Early College participants during the first pandemic year (2020-2021) continued for a second year of college (69%), the most recent cohort of participants (2021-2022) are again demonstrating high continuation rates (81%). Of these students continuing for a second year of college, 88 are first-generation college students.

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. Approximately half of all students participating in Early College at CCV had previously enrolled in dual enrollment or Fast Forward courses.

4. Representatives from the VSC are working 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. Current areas of focus include affordability challenges such as transportation and access to federal free/reduced lunch supports, and programmatic needs of male students.

## Enrollment in Early College & VAST Programs

| ACADEMIC YEAR 2022-2023 | *Early College* | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | CCV | CU | NVU | VTC | Total EC | VAST | Total |
| Fall 2022 | 198 | 54 | 37 | 0 | 289 | 62 | 351 |
| | | | | | | | |
| ACADEMIC YEAR 2021-2022 | *Early College* | | | | | | |
| | CCV | CU | NVU | VTC | Total EC | VAST | Total |
| Fall 2021 | 140 | 37 | 45 | 0 | 222 | 40 | 262 |
| Spring 2022 | 137 | 36 | 39 | 0 | 212 | 36 | 248 |
| **Full AY students** | 137 | 36 | 39 | 0 | 212 | 36 | 248 |
| Fall-Spring Continuation Rate | | | | | | | 95% |
| | | | | | | | |
| ACADEMIC YEAR 2020-2021 | *Early College* | | | | | | |
| | CCV | CU | NVU | VTC | Total EC | VAST | Total |
| Fall 2020 | 181 | 40 | 45 | 0 | 266 | 49 | 315 |
| Spring 2021 | 161 | 39 | 38 | 0 | 238 | 40 | 278 |
| **Full AY students** | 161 | 39 | 38 | 0 | 238 | 40 | 278 |
| Fall-Spring Continuation Rate | | | | | | | 88% |
| | | | | | | | |
| ACADEMIC YEAR 2019-2020 | *Early College* | | | | | | |
| | CCV | CU | NVU | VTC | Total EC | VAST | Total |
| Fall 2019 | 160 | 37 | 48 | 0 | 245 | 65 | 310 |
| Spring 2020 | 155 | 34 | 43 | 0 | 232 | 53 | 285 |
| **Full AY students** | 155 | 34 | 43 | 0 | 232 | 53 | 285 |
| Fall-Spring Continuation Rate | | | | | | | 92% |
| | | | | | | | |
| ACADEMIC YEAR 2018-2019 | *Early College* | | | | | | |
| | CCV | CU | NVU | VTC | Total EC | VAST | Total |
| Fall 2018 | 143 | 40 | 75 | 0 | 258 | 77 | 335 |
| Spring 2019 | 136 | 39 | 72 | 0 | 247 | 73 | 320 |
| **Full AY students** | 136 | 39 | 72 | 0 | 247 | 73 | 320 |
| Fall-Spring Continuation Rate | | | | | | | 96% |

# Continuation rate of Early College and VAST Students

| Fall 2022 | Class of 2021-2022 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | EC | VAST | Total | % |
| Returned to the VSCS | 63 | 20 | 83 | 32% |
| Attended other colleges | 113 | 15 | 128 | 49% |
| Total continuing | 176 | 35 | 211 | 81% |
| *of which:* | | | | |
| First-Generation Students | 80 | 8 | 88 | 34% |
| Not First-Generation | 88 | 26 | 114 | 44% |
| Unknown First-Generation Status | 8 | 1 | 9 | 3% |
| | | | | |
| Did not continue at any college | 46 | 5 | 51 | 19% |
| | | | | |
| Fall 2021 | Class of 2020-2021 | | | |
| | EC | VAST | Total | % |
| Returned to the VSCS | 70 | 15 | 85 | 27% |
| Attended other colleges | 113 | 20 | 133 | 42% |
| Total continuing | 183 | 35 | 218 | 69% |
| *of which:* | | | | |
| First-Generation Students | 87 | 11 | 98 | 31% |
| Not First-Generation | 93 | 22 | 115 | 37% |
| Unknown First-Generation Status | 3 | 2 | 5 | 2% |
| Did not continue at any college | 83 | 14 | 97 | 31% |
| | | | | |
| FALL 2020 | Class of 2019-2020 | | | |
| | EC | VAST | Total | % |
| Returned to the VSCS | 94 | 32 | 126 | 41% |
| Attended other colleges | 84 | 22 | 106 | 34% |
| Total continuing | 178 | 54 | 232 | 75% |
| *of which:* | | | | |
| First-Generation Students | 78 | 18 | 96 | 31% |
| Not First-Generation | 94 | 35 | 129 | 42% |
| Unknown First-Generation Status | 6 | 1 | 7 | 2% |
| | | | | |
| Did not continue at any college | 67 | 11 | 78 | 25% |

# Community College of Vermont: Free Degree Promise Through Early College

In early 2022, the J. Warren & Lois McClure Foundation announced the Free Degree Promise through the Early College program at CCV. Vermont's Early College program allows high school seniors to complete their last year of high school and their first year of college at the same time, 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. The program is opening doors for students across the state: last fall, CCV enrolled its largest Early College cohort yet, including greater numbers of low-income, first-generation, and BIPOC students.

Student Experiences
In high school, **McKinley Pfaff** had a good relationship with her guidance counselor, who encouraged her to try Early College at CCV-St. Albans—and she's glad she made the leap. "It was good for me," McKinley says. "It opened my eyes to more than just high school, and I started getting better grades and it was just a different experience and I'm really glad that I did Early College." The biggest benefit, she says, is that she had the chance to explore. "It was good to get a head start for me because I didn't know what I wanted to do yet…I'm very much a person who likes to be prepared, so I think it prepared me and really opened my eyes to what's out there." This year, McKinley is using the McClure Free Degree Promise to finish her health science degree, and she hopes to transfer to the radiology program at Vermont Tech. Simply put, she sees a college education as a ticket to job security. "I enjoy going to work more than anything," she says. "Getting past the school part and into the workforce is really my motivation…I stuck with the college route because I think it will help me get a job wherever I go."

**Dalya Almogalli** says "I want to be a travel nurse." She recalls that in her home country of Iraq, accessing healthcare was difficult, if not impossible. "That's not how it should be," she says. "Medical care is an important thing that a lot of people need. That's something that gives me passion to be a travel nurse—I want to help other countries." She is doing her Early College year at CCV-Winooski and learning valuable skills that will help her take her next steps. When she found out about the McClure Free Degree Promise program from her advisor, she knew she wanted to sign up. "I'm going to college for free, getting a free degree, and taking some of the nursing-required classes so when I transfer my credits it's already done. That's an opportunity I cannot waste." Dalya's goal, after her second year at CCV, is to enroll in the nursing program at UVM. And she believes that no matter where her path ultimately leads, Early College is giving her a strong start. "[It's] a privilege to continue my education for another year for free. Even if nursing didn't work out, you never know, I will still have my associate degree. I will still be able to work in hospitals, labs, and many other jobs."

**Aiden Robertson** has a very clear career goal: he wants to become a financial advisor. Aiden always planned on going to college after high school, and he's excited to finally be diving in. "Doing this was like 'alright, it's right now, it's no longer in the future. I get to jump right into college." He plans to stay at CCV next year to take advantage of the McClure Free Degree Promise and complete his degree in business. For Aiden, the program is a no-brainer, and he thinks it is for others too. "I feel like those two free years could definitely change a lot of people's lives, especially if they wanted to go to college but they just couldn't afford it." Aiden says he's been surprised by how much support he and his Early College cohort receive. "I feel like there's a lot of events for Early College students," he says, with the message from CCV staff that 'if you need anything, come talk to us.'

# Vermont State University: Increasing Flexible, Supportive Statewide Access to 100+ Programs

Faculty, staff, and leaders are working hard to bring together the best of Castleton University, Northern Vermont University, and Vermont Tech into Vermont State University starting July 1, 2023.  This work will have immediate benefit to Early College students who will be able to complete a full year of college coursework on any of Vermont State University's five distinct campuses: **Castleton, Johnson, Lyndon, Randolph, and Williston**.

The opportunities and supports for Early College students will include:

- Access to Vermont State University's **100+ programs via more flexible, hybrid and online course offerings**.

- A **dedicated faculty and student success staff advisor and embedded career development** from day one via Vermont State University's new advising model.

- Expansion of **specialty Early College experiences like the historical VAST program** at Vermont Tech that bring together and support students with focused interests in science, engineering, or the arts.

This work builds on the continued strong positive experiences of Early College and VAST students over the past year at the existing three institutions. Enrollment this fall is at historically high levels, with 153 students total participating in Fall 2022, up from 122 students in Fall 2021.  Student success is also strong, with a combined 91% fall to spring continuation rate for 2021-2022.

During the Early College interview process, the top three reasons students gave for pursuing the program were the ability to **get a head start on their college education through an affordable program**, the desire to have **more freedom of choice in their class options**, and the feeling of being ready for the next step beyond high school and **wanting a new challenge**.

A local high school guidance counselor, who works as an advocate for the program, stated that the Early College program offers students the unique opportunity to step outside the traditional high school experience and gain valuable college experience before graduating. This not only fosters personal growth and increases preparedness for the college process, but it also allows students to maintain their connection to their high school community. This is particularly important as it allows students who may have been unsure of their ability to succeed in college to come to realize that college is a viable option for them.