

Report on Act 77 of 2013

16 VSA §4011(e) Reports

REPORT April 7, 2015	Annual Report on the Early College Program to the House and Senate Committees on Education
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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 on a college campus. Early college participants within the Vermont State College (VSC) system include the Vermont Academy of Science and Technology (VAST) at Vermont Technical College (VTC), and early college programs at the four other Vermont State Colleges. 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.”

Early College Findings:

The early college program began in Fall 2014. All five VSC members were approved by the Agency of Education to offer programs. Participation levels were capped at 18 for each of the three four-year colleges and the Community College of Vermont (CCV) offered the program with no cap on participation. VTC continued to offer its VAST program within its cap of 60 students. Table 1 shows overall participation in early college across the VSC system this academic year.

Table 1

	Community College of Vermont	Vermont Technical College VAST	Castleton State College	Johnson State College	Lyndon State College
Fall, 2014	56	48	6	20	8
Spring, 2015	53	43	4	19	8

The following table provides a list of participating high schools for the first year of the program.

Table 2

High School	
Arlington Memorial HS	Mt. Abraham UHS
BFA-Fairfax	Mt. Anthony UHS
BFA-St. Albans	Mt. Mansfield UHS
Brattleboro HS	North Country UHS
Burlington HS	Northfield HS
Cabot	Otter Valley UHS
Champlain Valley UHS	People's Academy
Concord	Poultney HS
Craftsbury Academy	Proctor HS
Enosburg Falls HS	Randolph HS
Fair Haven UHS	Richford HS
Granville Central Sr HS	Rivendell Academy
Hartford HS	Rutland HS
Harwood UHS	Sharon Academy
Hazen UHS	South Burlington HS
Home School Programs	Spaulding HS
Lamoille UHS	Springfield HS
Leland and Grey UHS	U32 HS
Mill River UHS	Vergennes UHS
Milton HS	West Rutland HS
Missisquoi Valley UHS	Williamstown HS
	Winooski HS

Castleton State College, Johnson State College, Lyndon State College Findings:

Formal evaluation of the program is in its early stages, as initial postsecondary enrollment and degree completion outcomes will be evaluated on an ongoing basis beginning with measures of one-year retention in Fall 2015. Early qualitative reports from faculty indicated that students are doing well academically and are demonstrating comparable success to regular students. First to second semester continuation rates for early college students (95%) exceeds continuation rates for traditional college freshmen.

Strong demand for the program at Johnson State College from a wide range of high schools led to a recommendation to remove the individual-college cap of 18 students and share a single enrollment cap as a system. Act 77 legislation specifies that early college programs offered by

the Community College of Vermont shall not have enrollment limits and that the VAST program enrollments be limited to 60 students; currently this policy is appropriate for both institutions.

Resources for books and on-campus meals have been an issue reported anecdotally by students at Johnson. Overall, transportation has been biggest challenge to participation in the program and student success, in one instance creating difficulties significant enough that one student traveling a long distance wasn't able to complete the fall semester successfully.

Act 77 anticipates that students will have personalized learning plans (PLPs) that include early college enrollment as a condition of acceptance by the college; in practice in this first year, early college applicants worked with their high school guidance counselors to identify any coursework necessary for successful completion of high school graduation standards and these plans were then implemented by early college program staff on each campus. Formal evaluation of this component of Act 77 will therefore depend on subsequent implementation of PLPs for all students.

Community College of Vermont (CCV) Early College Findings:

The Community College of Vermont admitted 56 students to the program beginning in fall 2014. They are a diverse group, with 26 high schools from around the state as well as home schooled students represented. Students are attending 11 of CCV's 12 academic centers and have the opportunity to experience online courses as well.

The program provides a challenging experience, where students enroll full-time in college level courses for their senior year. Students are in class for approximately 12–15 hours per week and can expect to complete 30–40 hours of school work outside of the classroom. These requirements are demanding for any new college student, and for this reason, CCV is careful to provide high school students with an academic advisor at the college who can work closely with the high schools to ensure appropriate course selection, guidance, and resources for Early College students to be successful.

In addition to the advising provided to students, a specially designed admissions process for early college applicants at CCV resulted in positive outcomes for students in their first semester. Their fall to spring retention rate was 96%, with 54 students successfully continuing in the program in the spring 2015 semester. Of the 54 students currently in the program, the average grade point average for the fall semester was 3.45 (B+/A-) and the average number of credits earned was 14.4. A full-time course load at CCV is 4 courses per semester, which is between 12-15 credits, and the credit load and success represented by early college students exceeds the average first-semester freshman at CCV.

Vermont Academy of Science and Technology (VAST) Findings:

As the state's original early college program, VAST has been approved as a tuition-free program for Vermont students by the Vermont State Legislature since 1988. VAST will graduate its 26th class at the end of Spring 2015. This year, 43 students will graduate from 35 different towns. Forty-eight students began the program in Fall 2014, but one student moved out of state, one chose to return to their high school, one graduated early, and two did not maintain the required 2.0 GPA to participate. Of the 43 expected graduates, 100% are planning to continue their college educations.

Early College Program Success:

In enacting S. 77, the Legislature supported access to early college for students accepted into the program as an important pathway to post-secondary education. In the first year of the early college program, students have accessed college learning experiences. VAST continues to offer a rich learning experience and to boost college aspirations for these science and technology-focused students. Growing interest in these programs is reflected in the number of student inquiries at VSC and early deposits for Fall 2015.

Overall, early college students are motivated, excited and ready for college, and as one applicant stated, "As a current junior, I feel that I am ready for the Early College Program and the challenge it brings. I am prepared to take on four to five college classes because I have proved through my schoolwork and other activities that I am an independent, capable and self-motivated student. I am passionate about learning and this program provides a perfect opportunity to broaden my horizons in terms of education."