

Peter Antinozzi, Chairman of the Student Budget Advisory Committee for CVU  
Elora Buscher, Student Representative on the CVU School Board of Directors  
Thomas Daley, Student Representative for CVSD School District Board of Directors  
Peter Trombley, Representative from the Principal's Advisory Committee  
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Elora: (PLPs)

What is...how do these shape a student's education and prepare them for higher learning?

- Frameworks
  - PLP
    - State mandated for the class of 2020 and onward
  - Flexible Pathways
  - Nexus
  - Student HUBS
  - Graduation proficiency

Peter T: (Act 77, Proficiency based graduation)

- Act 77
  - What is Act 77
  - CVU's new graduation standards
  - Patience urged

Thomas: (Act 46/Budget Impacts);

- Scotts Budget proposal impacts
  - Act 46 Consolidation
    - Taxes already went down
  - Class sizes will increase
  - Destroy Act 77
  - Spend time cutting, not developing plans

Peter A: (Budget Impacts/Future steps);

- Plan goes back 6 years (budget and such)
- Future Steps
  - Survey
  - More research required
  - Definition of where the money goes for lower education
  - Less emphasis on UVM, More on state schools, JSC, CC, CCV
  - What does Scott want to do with Pre-K

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An odd contraption at first sight, this is a water pump. Gabriel Lourie-Wisbaum, a student in Natural Resources at CVU, wanted to produce renewable energy for his class project. This water pump is powered by human pedaling and is used in the CVU gardens; it spreads the message of sustainability in both food and energy, in addition to encouraging a healthy lifestyle. Students at CVU and around the state are taking ownership of their learning through innovative projects like Gabe's. Governor Scott's budget proposal will render Vermont schools void of amazing opportunities like these, dousing the fire that has sparked in the state's youth.

I'd like to speak about some of the numerous innovations and meaningful developments in education that have been occurring at CVU recently. Over the past couple years, there has been a strong gravitation towards personalized learning and a shift to focusing on the student as an individual. This movement towards more meaningful, individualized learning has been a major project of our current school president, Adam Bunting, and many students have benefitted enormously as a result. So, what is personalized learning? How do these programs better shape a student's education and prepare them for a future of higher learning?

All of the various individualized learning plans at CVU are grouped under a category called Frameworks. The Frameworks committee is responsible for the development and implementation of Personalized Learning Plans, which include programs such as student hubs and the Nexus program.

Personalized Learning Plans, or PLPs for short, originated out of the state mandate that students of the class of 2020 and onward each graduate with an individualized education. This entails a type of portfolio that accompanies the student throughout their four years of high school and includes elements such as standards based grading, proficiency-based graduation standards, and detailings of other projects they may have completed that count towards fulfilling graduation standards, including internships, year-end projects, independent studies, etc. Throughout high school, learning is continually showcased through events each year. These are called the Freshman Exhibitions, Sophomore Roundtables, Junior Defense, and Senior Revised Graduation Challenge.

Student hubs are proposed to be a place in the school where students can go and work on projects related to class work. Examples of hubs include sustainability, makerspace (design, building, engineering), and literacy (in the library, based on research and writing). Teachers would be assigned to a specific hub and would be able to assist students on projects that may or may not be an extension of class work and could give students a list of suggested projects to choose to work on as a class assignment. Ideally, the schedule will have time built in for students to work on said project, for example on late-start Wednesdays. Funding has been acquired through a grant for the Sustainability Hub, for which construction will begin next year. It will include a greenhouse, gardens, goats, and chickens.

The Nexus program was designed to provide students with time to pursue independent projects in a way not possible with the traditional schedule. Nexus is a way for students to pursue their passions and explore what interests them while still earning credits towards graduation, which is an overarching goal of the PLPs. The way the system works is that students have one Nexus day where they can do things such as take classes at UVM, pursue independent learning, and one day of regular classes. Students keep online blogs to document their learning and provide evidence showing they are meeting the standards. Nexus is currently in its first year running at CVU and has been a great success. Examples of research topics chosen by current Nexus students include Forensic Psychology, American Sign Language, Deaf Studies and Inclusive Theatre Arts, Building a Guitar (CAD design and wood shop work), Preparing to take the HB Exam (a national level exam about veterinary level horse anatomy and health), Astronomy, Cosmology, and Filmmaking and Cinematography.

Now that we've discussed what personalized learning is, the question remains why does it matter? What is the value of these programs? Individualized learning is important because it challenges students and results in the development of important life skills such as independence, communication, and time management, while motivating students to pursue higher learning by allowing them to explore their interests within the school system. Graduation standards have been refined and are now proficiency-based, with a focus on skills (i.e. creative and critical thinking) rather than a laundry list of required courses. The purpose of Personalized Learning Plans is to aid students in meeting these new graduation standards in a way that is meaningful and beneficial to them and their futures. Personalized learning is important because it promotes creativity, which is crucial given that a Lego Foundation study reports that students lose more than 90% of their creative capacity during their school years. Personalized learning is also important because it helps students discover what their interests are for the future, and 65% of today's grade-school children will end up in jobs that haven't been invented yet, and prepares them for an engaging career, as Gallup found that college grads who had opportunities to apply classroom learning to internships, jobs, or ambitious projects are twice as likely to be engaged in work later in life.

A major part of providing flexible learning experiences under Act 77 was the creation of proficiency based graduation standards. Though our new standards have not been finalized, we have been working to create a proficiency based graduation system that we feel best aligns with the mission of our school district, allows for flexible education, and provides students with the skills they need to both enroll in and graduate from college.

The CVSD mission is to create students who practice

- Clear and Effective Communication;
- Creative and Practical Problem Solving;
- Informed and Integrative Thinking;
- Self Direction; and
- Responsible and Involved Citizenship.

Under CVU's new graduation standards, a student's ability will be evaluated in each of these categories, throughout all four years of their education. Through these graduation requirements, we will

create not only good students, but also good citizens. The importance of doing so is twofold. First, creating such citizens helps build stronger communities on the state and local level by equipping students with the basic skills they need to function in and outside their jobs. Secondly, colleges are increasing their focus on students activities outside of academics; well-rounded students who show good citizenship are more desirable.

Through our Personalized Learning Plans and Hubs, we are creating the necessary support structure to promote the practicalization and personalization of learning at CVU. When students feel that their learning is not only directed by them, but is of great relevance to their future, they are more likely to feel engaged in their classes. The student culture in regards to education will be transformed into excitement... as opposed to disinterest.

One of the primary goals of proficiency based graduation is to create well-rounded students who can begin and complete higher education. We know that our state has low numbers in college enrollment, but we also know that, nationally, roughly 40% of students graduate college. This means we need to address both enrollment rates and dropout rates. By way of our new graduation standards, and the journey to a achieve them, students will be provided with the skills and educational experiences they need to graduate from college. It's important to remember that we are still teaching course-specific content, but it is being linked to broader understanding. Students will be graded in a different manner under proficiency based graduation standards. We will give students the opportunity to show their proficiency through a portfolio review. At this portfolio review they will use evidence and demonstrations to show their learning. This way we ensure that our students are constantly growing, throughout each course and each year.

The Flexible Pathways and PLP initiatives have been mandated by Act 77, and Governor Scott's proposal makes these systems unreachable. The full effects of Act 77 won't be seen until we look at the data from the class of 2020 entering and graduating from college. We urge patience moving forward with any budget proposal, and stress the importance of waiting to see the effectiveness of Act 77, for acting without accurate and relevant data is unwise, bordering on dangerous.

Governor Scott's proposed budget is poorly designed for it does not take into account previous legislative achievements, thousands of hours invested by school boards, and what education in Vermont actually means.

Our district and many others have already started the process of consolidation under Act 46. Governor Scott called for level funding school budgets in an attempt to lower Vermonters taxes; however, he does not seem to acknowledge the work already done by Act 46. In the Champlain Valley School District (CVSD), we have completed our first district-wide budget, which will lower taxes in four of the five towns in our district. Taxes in Williston went up solely due to an increase in the town's Common Level of Appraisal. In other words, school board consolidation prevented a greater tax spike. The rest of the district will experience significant decreases in taxes—taxes in Charlotte, for example, will decrease by 11%. It seems as if part of Governor Scott's ideal Vermont is already here for some of us, and complete implementation of Act 46 will make the dream a reality for us all.

Budgets have already been built for the coming school year; if school boards must restart this process, they will be rushed to make drastic, unnecessary cuts. Moreover, Governor Scott should realize that his own plans are the antithesis of his own goals. On his website, he claims “We will always keep in mind it’s about both cost and quality. Our focus will be on creating an affordable and sustainable system that allows communities to invest in classrooms and children.” His budget plan promises to do neither. In 2015, CVU was ranked 38<sup>th</sup> best public high school in the country by Best Colleges. We cut taxes with the help of Act 46 for our 2017-2018 budget, and have maintained high quality standards. Scott’s plan would force us to cut \$3.5 million district wide: too much. This is a 5.2% reduction in CVSD—between 30 and 40 eliminated positions—with \$3.5 million cut at CVU alone, on top of the \$1 million CVU cut last year in order to comply with the allowable growth percentage outlined in Act 46 (not a concern this year due to consolidation). A new budget system for the coming school year will require school boards rush making a budget, one that will require more time and will yield negative results. Level funding school budgets presses too hard: taxes have been cut, so there’s no need to cut opportunities.

To illustrate the harmful effects of Governor Scott’s plan for education, a troubling situation at CVU: our mathematics department. There are 13 sections of math class with more than 25 students, and 28 sections with 20-25 students. Students with an interest in math are not allowed to take AP Calculus and AP Statistics because we do not have the teaching capacity to handle such enrollment in mathematics—these classes are large enough already. Significant budget cuts will put extreme pressure on our already strained math department.

Governor Scott’s budget plan also promises to destroy the work we have done with Act 77. Scott’s plan being implemented is synonymous with Act 77 being overturned. School boards, principals, superintendents, and other administrative staff will have no time to discuss or plan future steps in creating flexible pathways for Vermont children: attention will be focused on salvaging what little we can from level funding and reductions in state spending on secondary education. All thoughts regarding the future of flexible pathways... gone for the foreseeable future. It will be extremely difficult to meet both Scott’s budget goals and the state’s vision for personalized learning.

A drastically new budget system most certainly cannot be implemented this year, next year, or the following year. We do not know how Act 77 is going to take shape until the class of 2020 graduates. Consolidation under Act 46 nicely positions schools to cut taxes prior to the 2020-2021 academic year. Once this year’s freshmen class graduates, the state can make an accurate evaluation of its education spending.

Making higher education more affordable and early education more accessible is not a new conversation. The ideas Governor Scott is proposing, and the way he is proposing to achieve them, is shockingly reminiscent of the Douglas administration. But the state has moved on; government has enacted many new policies concerning education in Vermont at all levels.

The budget proposal did not include specifics concerning state spending on pre-kindergarten programs. In order to understand where early education problems are in Vermont, we must examine

preschool enrollment numbers by town. The concentration of preschools across the state must also be examined. Whether new early education centers are built or current opportunities are expanded varies by case. Finances and time must also be considered: are children not participating in pre-K programs because their parents cannot afford the money or time for early education?

A large percentage of Vermont students complete high school, but a relatively low percentage of students who pursue higher education. Before we allocate funds to fix this problem, the state must know exactly why students are choosing not to continue their education after high school. Are students knowledgeable about college programs, but have financial concerns, or are they just unable to see themselves in college? Just how much are a student's future plans influenced by having family who attended college? The answers to these questions will come at no cost. Each year, Vermont high school seniors take the Senior Survey; questions regarding college plans can be added to this poll. We would be happy to help write them. Once a study has been conducted, state government can use funds to increase the number of Vermont students who pursue a college education.

Governor Scott has also expressed interest in encouraging Vermont students to attend Vermont colleges and universities. Regardless of study results, the answer is not to promote the University of Vermont. UVM is rapidly improving. The class of 2020 has the highest average high school GPA and SAT scores in UVM history. For Vermont students who are on the fence about attending college, UVM may seem overwhelming; instead, the state should promote smaller, less expensive Vermont schools such as Johnson State College, Champlain College, and Community College of Vermont.

We do not pretend to have all the answers, but when we are in the middle of achieving all the goals Governor Scott has asked for, we question the validity of cutting our ability to complete these goals. So although we don't have a complete solution, we know that this is not the way to do it. Thank you for your time, and if there is anything else any of us can do for you, please let us know.