

## **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 Jeb Spaulding**

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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 college. Early college participants within the Vermont State Colleges System (VSCS) 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:** Early College programs in the VSCS, expanding from the original VAST program, began in Fall 2014 and are now in their fifth year, with additional growth from 243 students in Fall 2017 to 335 students in Fall 2018. This report provides analysis of the outcomes of students participating during 2017-2018, the fourth year of the program.

1. **Providing statewide access and diverse opportunities.** The VSCS Early College and VAST programs provide access to students statewide, with participation by students in every county in a diverse array of opportunities, including residential options at all campuses, rigorous sciences coursework in VAST, and a flexible blend of in-person and online courses at CCV.
2. **Serving first generation students.** Act 77’s related dual enrollment program serves as a critical “on-ramp” to support Early College participation for first-generation students who may question whether college is really for “someone like me.” Approximately 50% of all Early College students at CCV participate first in dual enrollment. Overall, 41% of all Early College/VAST students enrolled in Fall 2018 were identified as first-generation. This most recent group of Early College/VAST participants included 83 first-generation students who continued on for a second year of college.
3. **Improving student success within the program; challenges for continuation.** Overall college continuation rates continue to be higher (73% for 2017-2018 Early College/VAST participants) than the statewide average of 60% as reported by the Agency of Education.<sup>1</sup> With more students participating in the program and colleges strengthening their partnerships and programming to support them, it is encouraging to see the success rate as measured by fall-spring continuation steadily increasing (95% of students in AY2017-2018 completed a full Early College year, compared to 91% in AY2015-2016). However, the rate of continuation to a second year of college is lower for the most recent cohort, at only 73%, compared to the prior cohort rate of 79%. We will continue to monitor continuation rates closely to better understand the issues. Given the qualitative feedback from participants and school counselors about interest in Early College/VAST as an opportunity to complete a full year tuition-free, we suspect that increasing affordability challenges may be driving this trend.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://education.vermont.gov/documents/data-postsecondary-enrollment-data>

## Enrollment in Early College & VAST Program

### ACADEMIC YEAR 2018-2019

#### Early College

	CCV	CU	NVU	VTC	Total EC	VAST	Total
Fall 2018	143	40	75	0	258	77	335

### ACADEMIC YEAR 2017-2018

#### Early College

	CCV	CU	JSC	LSC	VTC	Total EC	VAST	Total
Fall 2017	131	19	31	4	2	187	56	243
Spring 2018	127	19	26	3	0	175	55	230
<b>Full AY students</b>	127	19	26	3	0	175	55	230
Fall-Spring Continuation Rate								95%

### ACADEMIC YEAR 2016-2017

#### Early College

	CCV	CU	JSC	LSC	VTC	Total EC	VAST	Total
Fall 2016	112	18	31	7	0	168	62	230
Spring 2017	106	16	28	7	0	157	58	215
<b>Full AY students</b>	106	16	28	7	0	157	58	215
Fall-Spring Continuation Rate								93%

### ACADEMIC YEAR 2015-2016

#### Early College

	CCV	CU	JSC	LSC	VTC	Total EC	VAST	Total
Fall 2015	69	12	34	5	0	120	51	171
Spring 2016	60	10	31	5	0	106	50	156
<b>Full AY students</b>	60	10	31	5	0	106	50	156
Fall-Spring Continuation Rate								91%

## Continuation Rate of EC & VAST Students

<b>Early College/VAST Participants 2017- 2018</b>				
<b>Continuation in Fall 2018</b>	<b>EC</b>	<b>VAST</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
Returned to the VSCS	64	33	97	40%
Attended other colleges	64	17	81	33%
<b>Total continuing</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>73%</b>
<i>of which:</i>				
First-Generation Students	58	25	83	34%
Not First-Generation	68	22	90	37%
Unknown First-Generation Status	2	3	5	2%
<b>Did not continue at any college</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>27%</b>
<b>Class of 2016-2017</b>				
<b>FALL 2017</b>	<b>EC</b>	<b>VAST</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
Returned to the VSCS	74	30	104	45%
Attended other colleges	58	20	78	34%
<b>Total continuing</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>79%</b>
<i>of which:</i>				
First-Generation Students	64	18	82	36%
Not First-Generation	54	30	84	37%
Unknown First-Generation Status	14	2	16	7%
<b>Did not continue at any college</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>21%</b>
<b>Class of 2015-2016</b>				
<b>FALL 2016</b>	<b>EC</b>	<b>VAST</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% Total</b>
Returned to the VSCS	48	27	75	46%
Attended other VT colleges	12	10	22	13%
Attended out-of-state college	28	12	40	24%
<b>Total continuing</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>84%</b>
<i>of which:</i>				
First-Generation Students	32	14	46	28%
Not First-Generation	40	34	74	45%
Unknown First-Generation Status	16	1	17	10%
<b>Did not continue at any college</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>16%</b>

**EC & VAST Program Students  
by VT County of Residence - Fall 2018**

	EC	VAST	TOTAL
Addison	8	4	12
Bennington	9	0	9
Caledonia	14	0	14
Chittenden	30	17	47
Essex	4	1	5
Franklin	31	4	35
Grand Isle	4	3	7
Lamoille	24	3	27
Orange	10	15	25
Orleans	21	4	25
Rutland	40	3	43
Washington	44	10	54
Windham	12	2	14
Windsor	7	10	17
<b>Total In-State</b>	<b>258</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>334</b>
Out-of-State	0	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>258</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>335</b>
% First-Generation	43%	32%	41%

## Community College of Vermont

The Early College program at the Community College of Vermont has maintained consistent growth over the last 5 years. In fall 2016, 112 students enrolled; in fall 2017 this number increased to 131, and in fall 2018 the cohort grew to 144 students. This year's class of 18-19 represents 44 high schools with students attending 11 of CCV's 12 academic centers. The largest participation rates are in Montpelier, Winooski and St. Albans.

Last year's fall 2017 cohort represented 42 high schools, with the largest participation rates in CCV centers in Montpelier, Winooski and Brattleboro. Schools with the highest number of students attending were from Spaulding High School (11) and Colchester High School (8). Other cohorts of at least 6 students came from Bellows Falls, Brattleboro, Essex, Harwood, South Burlington and U32. The overall course success rate for last year's cohort was 87% and 95% of students were retained from the fall to spring semester.

CCV maintains strong outreach and partnership activities throughout the state. The College's academic centers have relationships with local schools and community centers to ensure programs are accessible by all Vermont students. CCV's focus continues to be ensuring that at risk populations, including 1<sup>st</sup> generation and low-income students can take advantage of Early College and other opportunities provided through Flexible Pathways. **Of the 17-18 CCV early college cohort, 47 students identified as free and reduced lunch eligible and 61 were first generation.** In the coming year, the College will continue working with partners to increase awareness and accessibility to the Early College program.

To support student success, CCV offers orientations, advising, learning labs, career counseling, library and other resources to all students. Research and our own experience show that first year students are more likely to persist and succeed in college when they develop strong social connections with peers, college faculty and staff in their first semester. CCV developed Early College orientations and events in several larger academic centers. These activities increased students' ability to advocate for themselves, utilize college resources, and create study groups that support their learning. This year, the College is creating models that can be expanded to smaller centers to bring together cohorts of high school students, help them build relationships with faculty and staff, develop strong peer networks, and build connections that will help them persist during challenging times throughout the semester.

Early College provides an important opportunity to learn to navigate a post-secondary environment and develop college success skills while maintaining connections to high school. Joshua Huffman attended CCV's Early College program in Montpelier as a first generation student and graduated from Randolph Union High school. While in the program, Josh presented to a group of juniors at RUHS to discuss his early college year, and he was the speaker at his graduation where he spoke about the value of his time at CCV. After a very successful year in Early College, he received the Catamount Commitment (free tuition and fees for Pell Eligible students) and is attending UVM, where he made the Dean's

List and is also a member of Top Cat, the oldest men's a capella group at the University. In addition, Josh is currently practicing for the Lyric Theaters production of Mama Mia. Josh shared his experience about the program, saying,

*“Early College at CCV really helped prepare me for my transition to UVM. It is because of Early College at CCV that I am academically successful here at UVM--from the faculty and staff at CCV, to the courses and the students. I had to make a choice whether I wanted to go back to my high school or attend Early College and I am entirely happy with my decision to apply and attend Early College. I would not change my decision if I had to do it all over again.”*

Paige Perkins, another CCV Early College completer who is now enrolled in Vermont Tech's nursing program, says her schedule at CCV was flexible, which allowed her to balance all of the activities in her busy life. While she was in Early College, Paiger also played soccer, basketball, and softball for Blue Mountain Union High School. She was a member of the school chorus and kept her part-time job as a cashier at Shaw's Supermarket.

At CCV Paige had the chance to focus her studies toward her goal of becoming a nurse. Early College played a major role in getting her ready for Vermont Tech, where she's now excelling. She still works her part-time job and plays on the women's soccer team. Paige often returns to Blue Mountain Union to talk to students about Early College. “I tell them that I think they're underestimating the experience they'll have when they go to CCV.” She says she's glad she took the opportunity to be part of a new community. She also notes the financial advantages of Early College:

*“If you want to save a whole year of tuition, then that's the best bet.” As a state-funded program, Early College is offered tuition free. Over the course of an associate or bachelor's degree, that can translate to thousands of dollars saved.”*

## Northern Vermont University

At the Johnson campus, 72 students applied and 54 enrolled for the Fall 2018 semester, representing **18 different high schools**. 18 students are living in the residence halls, while 36 commute to campus. On the Lyndon campus, 21 students are now enrolled.

Reflections from our newest Early College students on their experiences this fall include:

“I like that help for Early College students is always offered, easy to ask for and actually helpful, but also that it is not forced on students who have things together.”

“The best part of the Early College Program for me has been taking interesting classes and feeling like I'm actually accomplishing something. I'm seventeen and I've already got one semester of college under my belt, which feels great and reduces a lot of stress.”

“Early college is really affordable but I wish it was even more affordable for kids who have parents who are struggling and can't help pay the bills.”

“I am very happy that I have participated in the early college program. I have made many friends and met so many new people and have learned so much and have grown as a person.”

“This program is an awesome opportunity for me to get an associate's degree for half the cost.”

“For me, I really needed a fresh start and the early college program allowed me to get that new beginning.”



## Castleton University

The Early College program at Castleton University continues to thrive. We enrolled 40 new students in the fall semester of 2018. This year's class represents 20 different high schools and 1 home-school program from 8 counties around the state. 93% of the students finished the first semester in good academic standing, but even more impressive than this is that 38% qualified for the Dean's List with a cumulative GPA of 3.5/4.0 or higher. Many of these students plan to remain enrolled at Castleton in the future and will be awarded substantial merit scholarships for their accomplishments. Our students are taking full advantage of the Castleton community both in the classroom and through extra-curricular activities. We are seeing a shift from a mostly commuter student population to a more balanced population of residential students and commuters. With the addition of two new academies for the fall of 2019 (Vermont Academy of Fine and Performing Arts and the Castleton STEAM Academy), we anticipate another strong year of early college student enrollment.

## Vermont Tech

“My parents knew that I had zero intention of attending college, but told me to look into it anyways. It looked like a pretty nice school, something I begrudgingly told my parents. There was a ski hill, a farm, a sugarhouse, and plenty of land that you could walk around on, which was something that I really needed. Slowly, the idea of going to college became less and less of a definite no, and more of a maybe. I talked to Mallory, and she told me of all the great experiences she had at VTC...talking to her made me decide to apply. I knew that there was nowhere else where I could get a full year of college entirely free. My life goals of building a tiny house after school, having manageable amounts of debt, being able to go on adventures, and moving out West have all been centered around my success in the VAST program. Vermont Tech is the first school I have attended where I genuinely feel like I belong. It has become my home and is a place where I feel connected with my peers and teachers. It is a school that has made me realize what I am being taught is knowledge I need to reach my life goals. This is where I know I need to be, I have no Plan B.

Our daughter was interested in VAST and early college because she had completed all of the courses she could at the high school level and needed to step beyond the HS walls to further her education. Early college was the easiest option – but it was soon apparent that she wanted/needed something more. VAST became the option that felt right to our family. As parents, we felt comfortable with her attending full-time college coursework at the age of 16 as long as she was in the VAST program. Our daughter felt like she was in control of her education and her future at an earlier age. It was win/win for both of us...For a child that knows what they want for their future – the academic push that VAST offered exceeded our expectations and allowed our daughter to get a jump on her dream.

At first I was super nervous about starting college a year early and leaving my home school. Although I did not have a choice whether or not to stay at Chelsea Public School, I am happy that I applied for the VAST program. It was the best decision I have ever made for school. It is super exciting for me that I was able to come to VTC declared as an equine major and being able to complete my senior year in high school as freshman in college. I do not regret my decision of enrolling at VTC a year early. I think the VAST program is a great opportunity for students to be able to push themselves to their fullest and enjoy every minute of it. Yes it was hard sometimes, but it certainly isn't impossible. I am excited to finish my remaining college years and Vermont Technical College.

A good friend of mine has older sisters who attended the VAST program and ever since I was in middle school and first heard about this program, I knew it was something I wanted to pursue. Maybe at that time I was so set on this idea because being a college student early sounded exciting and "cool." Once I reached high school I kept this goal circling in my mind and pushed myself to achieve personal greatness with everything I had worked for. I kept my grades at an A-level which overall helped strengthen my knowledge, but also helped me reach my goal and enroll into early college...Attending Vermont Technical College is an opportunity that I hope many students continue to consider in the upcoming years. The program is strong and sets the students on a path to a future full of creativity and success.