

Report on Act 77 of 2013

16 VSA §947

**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

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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 Colleges System (VSCS) include the Vermont Academy of Science and Technology (VAST) at Vermont Technical College (VTC), and early college programs at the three other Vermont State Colleges: Castleton University, the Community College of Vermont, and Northern Vermont University. 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. Enrollments at the Community College of Vermont and Castleton University grew in Fall 2020 and are modestly lower at Northern Vermont University this year. The VAST program at Vermont Technical College saw a drop in enrollment from the 2018-2019 peak enrollment year.
2. Students continue to experience high levels of success, with a 92% fall-to-spring continuation rate for the 2019-2020 class, and a 75% continuation rate to a second year of college, a rate comparable to prior cohorts despite the pandemic. 96 students who continued to a second year of college in Fall 2020 were first-generation college students.
3. The VSCS continues to work closely with VSAC, the Agency of Education, and other partners to address equity in Early College participation rates for low-income students. For example, due to federal guidelines, students in Early College are not eligible for the Free and Reduced Lunch program. Other participation barriers include transportation and scheduling around work and other commitments, which can be mitigated through the use of well-supported online learning options. The success of Early College students this fall in new forms of online and remote synchronous learning environments is a strong indicator to the VSCS and its partners that future solutions to improve the equity in Early College participation should focus on online and other remote learning strategies that support Vermont’s most rural students within their communities and originating high schools.

Early College Student Experiences in the Pandemic

CCV and Castleton served all students online this fall, while Vermont Tech and Northern Vermont University also provided in-person learning experiences. As has been the case since the inception of the Early College program in the VSCS, Early College students were intentionally supported with additional dedicated advising and orientations as well as regular first-year programming for all college students.

That said, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted and destabilized some students. Many bore responsibility for financially supporting their families while simultaneously grieving for family members' lost livelihoods, illnesses, or lost lives. Several had to make the decision between academics and supporting their family financially and emotionally. For the majority who succeeded, it has been a semester of shifting priorities, focusing on academics, and making tremendous sacrifices.

In Their Own Words

“My highlights were just getting a lot of quality time with my teammates who have become some of my closest friends. The small community here at Lyndon has made COVID easier for sure. Everyone has been so welcoming since day one! Although we have had lots of restrictions due to COVID, we have been able to make our own fun, and it was a great semester!!!”

“I had a lot of support on campus. No matter what I was struggling with I found someone to help. My classes were all great, mine were mostly in-person which I was really thankful for. Even though some were on zoom I was able to do well in all my classes and my professors were all very understanding as long as we communicated. My schedule was pretty busy with all my classes and basketball, but was manageable for sure.”

“It was a really good experience overall, like I really enjoyed having to be able to do both in person and online. All of my professors were super helpful and patient.”

Continuation rate of Early College and VAST Students

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%
<i>of which:</i>				
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%
FALL 2019	Class of 2018-2019			
	EC	VAST	Total	%
Returned to the VSCS	103	29	132	39%
Attended other colleges	99	35	134	40%
Total continuing	202	64	266	79%
<i>of which:</i>				
First-Generation Students	85	21	106	32%
Not First-Generation	109	41	150	45%
Unknown First-Generation Status	8	2	10	3%
Did not continue at any college	56	13	69	21%
FALL 2018	Class of 2017-2018			
	EC	VAST	Total	%
Returned to the VSCS	64	33	97	40%
Attended other colleges	64	17	81	33%
Total continuing	128	50	178	73%
<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%
Did not continue at any college	58	7	65	27%
FALL 2017	Class of 2016-2017			
	EC	VAST	Total	%
Returned to the VSCS	74	30	104	43%
Attended other colleges	58	20	78	32%
Total continuing	132	50	182	75%
<i>of which:</i>				
First-Generation Students	64	18	82	34%
Not First-Generation	54	30	84	35%
Unknown First-Generation Status	14	2	16	7%
Did not continue at any college	36	12	48	20%