



Addison Northwest

SCHOOL DISTRICT

ADDISON | FERRISBURGH | PANTON | VERGENNES | WALTHAM

House Ed Testimony
Act 67/ Community Schools
April 27, 2022

My name is Sheila Soule, and I am the Superintendent of the Addison Northwest School District. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about Act 67 and the Community Schools Grant we have received for the Vergennes Union Elementary School this year. The Community School Act of 2021 states that:

Every child should be provided with an equitable education, as defined by the Agency of Education as access to the resources, opportunities, and educational rigor they need at the right moment in their education, whatever their race, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, language, disability, family background, or family income may be. Every child should be able to grow up with the opportunity to achieve their dreams and contribute to the well-being of society. Our public schools must be designed and equipped to fully deliver on that promise.

This vision resonates with the Addison Northwest School district and aligns completely with our overarching goal of fulfilling the promise of equity and access for the young people of our community. Fundamentally, we believe that the community schools model is a strategy that orients and activates everyone toward the common purpose of wrapping around the most vulnerable of our learners by improving the systems and structures for all students. Our schools have long embraced the philosophy behind *The Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child* model and the increasing roles that community agencies and families play in improving childhood health and development.

Vergennes Union Elementary School is a recipient of a *Community Schools* grant award totaling \$238,000 in year one of what we anticipate will be a three-year grant period. In addition to improving educational outcomes for our learners, this grant will allow us to further our efforts to support our student's social-emotional health, increase access to health services, and increase family engagement through mentoring, and other youth/adult programming. Though VUES is a recipient of this grant all schools in ANWSD will benefit as we are combining resources from other sources and expanding partnerships that will ensure benefit for all students.

Specifically, our strategies align with the five pillars of the Community Schools Model. Currently, we are focused on expanding access to mental and other health services, launching a student mentoring program, improving outdoor learning spaces and community gardens to increase collaboration and improve food security in the community, improving multi-tiered systems of supports for learners, and increasing teacher and community learning opportunities with a focus on anti-racism and the development of anti-bias curriculum. We believe these are among the best opportunities we have been able to provide for our students, staff, and community.

However, without access to these funds we would be unable to engage in any of these strategies. We are in the middle of a steep decline in student enrollment that has had a significant impact on our budget. The changes in how weights are applied will further impact our capacity to fund anything but the basics for our students. We will

be faced with many tough decisions in our future at a time when we are experiencing significant increases in student referrals for Special Education, increased need for mental health services, and other necessities. Thank you for your continued support of the Community Schools model in Vermont Schools. Any investment you can make in growing this model will help schools adapt as funding becomes more limited. This approach ensures that educators, caregivers, and community members can continue to work together to ensure the mental health and well-being of our students can remain our top priority.

Thank you.