

1 TO THE HONORABLE SENATE:

2 The Committee on Education to which was referred House Bill No. 106
3 entitled “An act relating to equitable access to a high-quality education through
4 community schools” respectfully reports that it has considered the same and
5 recommends that the Senate propose to the House that the bill be amended by
6 striking out all after the enacting clause and inserting in lieu thereof the
7 following:

8 Sec. 1. SHORT TITLE

9 This act shall be called the “Community Schools Act.”

10 Sec. 2. FINDINGS AND PURPOSE

11 (a) Findings. The General Assembly finds that:

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

20 (2) According to the National Center for Education Statistics, more than
21 half of the nation’s schoolchildren live in low-income households, meaning

1 they qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, a percentage that has risen steadily
2 in recent decades. According to the Vermont Agency of Education, an average
3 of 38 percent of students across all supervisory unions during the 2019–2020
4 school year qualified for free or reduced-price lunch. As a result, some
5 schoolchildren face more challenges than others in succeeding in school and in
6 life. Recognizing that students need fresh and nutritional foods to enable them
7 to focus on their education and that many students come to school hungry,
8 providing universal school meals offered at no cost to students or their families
9 advances the goals that community school programs seek to achieve.

10 (3) Community schools facilitate the coordination of comprehensive
11 programs and services that are carefully selected to meet the unique needs of
12 students and families and build on the assets they bring to their schools and
13 communities. Community schools combine challenging and culturally
14 inclusive learning opportunities with the academic and social supports every
15 student needs to reach their potential.

16 (4) According to research reports from the Learning Policy Institute, the
17 four key pillars of the community schools approach, which are integrated
18 student supports, expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities,
19 active family and community engagement, and collaborative leadership and
20 practices, promote conditions and practices found in high-quality schools as
21 well as address out-of-school barriers to learning. Research additionally

1 supports the necessity of safe, inclusive, and equitable learning environments
2 to reinforce student success and well-being. These elements do not function
3 independently, but are instead part of a unified and interconnected approach.

4 (5) This research also shows that community school interventions can
5 result in improvements in a variety of student and family outcomes, including
6 attendance, academic achievement, reducing systemic racial and economic
7 injustices and inequities, and high school graduation rates, and can meet the
8 Every Student Succeeds Act standard of “evidence-based” approaches to
9 support schools identified for comprehensive and targeted support and
10 intervention.

11 (6) Research also shows that these programs offer a strong return on
12 investment. According to impact studies, each dollar invested in a community
13 coordinator position returns approximately \$7.00 in net benefits to the school
14 (Return on Investment of a Community School Coordinator: A Case Study;
15 APEX and Community School Partnership; 2019). Every dollar invested in
16 programs and support (including medical, dental, and social services;
17 after-school and summer enrichment; parent engagement; and early childhood
18 services) can yield up to \$15.00 in return (Community Schools as an Effective
19 School Improvement Strategy: A Review of the Evidence; Anna Maier, Julia
20 Daniel, Jeannie Oakes, and Livia Lam; 2017).

1 (7) According to the Learning Policy Institute, “establishing community
2 schools” is one of 10 recommended strategies for restarting and rethinking the
3 role of public education in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Community
4 schools serve as resource hubs that provide a broad range of easily accessed,
5 well-coordinated supports and services that help students and families with
6 increasingly complex needs. These schools, at their core, are about investing
7 in children, through quality teaching; challenging, engaging and culturally
8 responsive curricula; wrap around supports; safe, just, and equitable school
9 climate; strong ties to family and community; and a clear focus on student
10 achievement and well-being.

11 (8) Community schools are important centers for building community
12 connection and resilience. When learning extends beyond the walls of the
13 school through active engagement with community partners as with place-
14 based learning, relationships expand and deepen, community strengths are
15 highlighted, and opportunities for building vitality surface through shared
16 learning.

17 (9) Community schools have been established in many states and
18 settings, from New York City to Chicago and Los Angeles. But the approach
19 has also been successful in rural communities. In McDowell County, West
20 Virginia (population 22,000), community schools are part of a public-private
21 partnership, a collaboration between state government, nonprofit agencies,

1 businesses, and philanthropic foundations, that aims to “make educational
2 improvement the route to a brighter economic future.” The national nonprofit
3 Rural School and Community Trust is an active advocate for expanding this
4 model in rural areas, calling the relationship between good schools and
5 thriving communities “crucial.” In Vermont, a growing number of schools are
6 implementing or exploring the model, from Molly Stark Elementary in
7 Bennington, which offers school-based health services, extended hours,
8 summer school, and family learning activities, to the school-based health
9 center in Winooski.

10 (10) Recognizing that literacy proficiency is a foundational learning
11 skill, community schools can advance the State goal of improving literacy for
12 all students in the State. Achieving this goal will require a multiyear and
13 multidimensional effort requiring continued focus by the General Assembly,
14 the Administration, and school leaders, and community schools are an
15 important component of that effort.

16 (b) Purpose. This act provides funding for the implementation of
17 community school programs that provide students with equitable access to a
18 high-quality education and creates the Task Force on Universal School Lunch.

19 Sec. 3. COMMUNITY SCHOOLS; FUNDING

20 (a) Definitions. As used in this section:

21 (1) “Community school coordinator” means a person who:

1 (A) is a full-time or part-time staff member serving in an eligible
2 school or in a school district or supervisory union with an eligible school and
3 appointed in accordance with Vermont law; and

4 (B) is responsible for the identification, implementation, and
5 coordination of community school programs, subject to the operational and
6 reporting structure of the community school coordinator’s employer.

7 (2) “Community school programs” mean programs offered at a public
8 elementary or secondary school that includes all five of the following:

9 (A) Integrated student supports, which address out-of-school barriers
10 to learning through partnerships with social and health service agencies and
11 providers, coordinated by a community school coordinator, which may include
12 access to services such as medical, dental, vision care, and mental health
13 services or access to counselors to assist with housing, transportation,
14 nutrition, immigration, or criminal justice issues, and include what young
15 people bring with them to the classroom and the ways that schools and
16 communities working together can enhance and embrace the knowledge and
17 capacity that students and families can offer their schools. This could include
18 educational strategies like universal design for learning, recognition and
19 respect for cultural and linguistic diversity, and practices that focus on building
20 and supporting relationships such as restorative practices.

1 (B) Expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities, which
2 may include before-school, afterschool, weekend, and summer programs, that
3 provide additional academic instruction, individualized academic support,
4 enrichment activities, and learning opportunities that emphasize real-world
5 learning and community problem-solving and that may include art, music,
6 drama, creative writing, hands-on experience with engineering or science,
7 tutoring and homework help, and recreational programs that enhance and are
8 consistent with the school’s curriculum.

9 (C) Active family and community engagement, which brings
10 students’ families and the community into the school as partners in children’s
11 education and makes the school a community hub, where all students and their
12 families feel a sense of belonging and engagement. This shall include broad
13 student and community participation, with a diversity of income, race, gender,
14 newcomer status, language, and ability represented in the design,
15 implementation, and evaluation of all activities, that is embraced by the leaders
16 and decision-makers in schools and communities. This also provides adults
17 with a facility to access educational opportunities they want, which shall
18 include access to evidence-based literacy instruction and may include
19 coordinating services with outside providers to offer English as a second
20 language classes, green card or citizenship preparation, computer skills, art,
21 financial literacy, career counseling, job skills training, services for substance

1 misuse, and other programs that bring community members into the building
2 for meetings or events.

3 (D) Collaborative leadership and practices, which build a culture of
4 professional learning, collective trust, and shared responsibility using strategies
5 that shall, at a minimum, leverage the multitiered system of supports and
6 include a community school coordinator and an integrated school and
7 community leadership team that include youth and family representatives, and
8 may include other leadership or governance teams; teacher learning
9 communities; and other staff to manage the multiple, complex, joint work of
10 school and community organizations.

11 (E) Safe, inclusive, and equitable learning environments.

12 (3) “Eligible recipient” means either a school district with an eligible
13 school or supervisory union with an eligible school.

14 (4) “Eligible school” means a public elementary or secondary school
15 that:

16 (A) is in the highest 25 percent of Vermont public schools for student
17 eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch under the Richard B. Russell
18 National School Lunch Act, 42 U.S.C. § 1751 et seq. [list tbd from AOE]; or

19 (B) has been identified for comprehensive [or/and] equity support
20 and intervention under Section 1111(c)(4)(D) of the Elementary and Secondary
21 Education Act of 1965 or otherwise identified by the State as in need of

1 additional support [15-20 schools qualify for comprehensive supports; 150+
2 schools qualify for equity supports].

3 (5) “Site-based leadership team” means an interdisciplinary, school-
4 based leadership team that includes the school principal, the community school
5 coordinator, teachers, other school employees, students, families, community
6 partners, nonprofit organizations, unions, and neighboring community
7 residents that guides collaborative planning, implementation, and oversight of
8 the community school program.

9 (b) Funding authorization. The Secretary of Education is authorized to
10 provide annual funding of up to \$110,000.00 a year for a period of three years
11 for each recipient of the funding to use the funding as required under
12 subsection (d) of this section.

13 (c) Funding administration.

14 (1) Subject to subdivision (2) of this subsection, the Secretary of
15 Education shall determine, using the Agency of Education’s equity lens tool,
16 which eligible recipients shall receive funding and the amount of funding, and
17 the Secretary shall provide the funding on or before September 1 of each of
18 2021, 2022, and 2023 to recipients. The Secretary may deny or reduce second-
19 and third-year funding if the Secretary finds that the recipient has made
20 insufficient progress towards developing and implementing community school
21 programs. In determining which eligible recipients shall receive funding, the

1 Secretary shall take into account relative need, based on the extent to which
2 community school program services are needed and the extent to which the
3 eligible recipient seeks to offer them.

4 (2) In determining which eligible recipients shall receive funding and
5 the amount of funding and to advance the principles for Vermont’s trauma-
6 informed system of care under 33 V.S.A. § 3401, the Secretary of Education
7 shall collaborate with the Director of Trauma Prevention and Resilience
8 Development and the Vermont Child and Family Trauma Work Group.

9 (3) The Agency of Education shall inform all eligible recipients of the
10 availability of funding under this act and, for those eligible recipients most in
11 need of this funding, shall educate these eligible recipients on community
12 school programs and their benefits. The Agency of Education shall also advise
13 all eligible recipients of other sources of funding that may be available to
14 advance the purpose of this act.

15 (d) Use of funding.

16 (1) A recipient of funding under this act shall use the funding to:

17 (A) if a needs and assets assessment has not been conducted within
18 the prior three years that substantially conforms with the requirements in this
19 subdivision, then, in collaboration with the site-based leadership team, conduct
20 a needs and assets assessment that includes:

1 (i) where available, and where applicable, student demographic,
2 academic achievement, and school climate data, disaggregated by major
3 demographic groups, including race, ethnicity, English language proficiency,
4 students with individualized education plans, and students eligible for free or
5 reduced-price lunch status;

6 (ii) access to and need for integrated student supports;

7 (iii) access to and need for expanded and enriched learning time
8 and opportunities;

9 (iv) school funding information, including federal, State, local,
10 and private education funding and per-pupil spending, based on actual salaries
11 of personnel assigned to the eligible school;

12 (v) information on the number, qualifications, and stability of
13 school staff, including the number and percentage of fully certified teachers
14 and rates of teacher turnover; and

15 (vi) active family and community engagement information,
16 including:

17 (I) family and community needs based on surveys, information
18 from public meetings, or information gathered by other means;

19 (II) measures of family and community engagement in the
20 eligible schools, including volunteering in schools, attendance at back-to-
21 school nights, and parent-teacher conferences;

1 (III) efforts to provide culturally and linguistically relevant
2 communication between schools and families; and

3 (IV) access to and need for family and community engagement
4 activities;

5 (B) hire a community school coordinator to, in collaboration with the
6 site-based leadership team, develop and implement community school
7 programs or designate a community school coordinator from existing
8 personnel and, in collaboration with the site-based leadership team, augment
9 work already being performed to develop and implement community school
10 programs; and

11 (C) if the recipient has not fully implemented positive behavioral
12 integrated supports under 16 V.S.A. § 2902, provide professional development
13 to staff on positive behavioral integrated supports and implement those
14 supports.

15 (2) A recipient of funding under this act may use the funding to, in
16 collaboration with the site-based leadership team, develop and implement a
17 plan to improve literacy outcomes, and objectively assess those outcomes.

18 (3) If a needs and assets assessment has not been conducted under
19 subdivision (1)(A) of this subsection within the prior three years, the first year
20 of funding shall be used to conduct the needs and assets assessment of the
21 school to determine what is necessary to develop community school programs

1 and an action plan to implement community school programs. During the
2 second and third years of the funding, the community school coordinator shall,
3 in collaboration with the site-based leadership team, oversee the
4 implementation of community school programs.

5 (e) Evaluation.

6 (1) At the end of each year of funding, each recipient shall undergo an
7 evaluation designed by the Agency of Education using its equity lens tool.

8 (2) On or before each of December 15, 2022 and 2024, the Agency of
9 Education shall report to the General Assembly and the Governor on the
10 impact of the funding under this act. The report shall be made publicly
11 available on the Agency of Education’s website.

12 (f) Ability to operate as a community school. Any school district or school,
13 regardless of whether it receives a grant award under this act, may function as
14 a community school and may provide parity for pre-school children in
15 partnership with prequalified private providers as defined under subdivision
16 (a)(3) of 16 V.S.A. § 829 (prekindergarten education).

17 Sec. 4. APPROPRIATION OF FUNDS

18 (a) The Secretary of Education shall use \$3,399,000.00 of the amount
19 allocated to the Agency of Education from the American Rescue Plan Act of
20 2021 pursuant to Section 2001(f)(1), 2021, Pub. L. No. 117-2 for the funding

1 under this act on or before September 1 of each of 2021, 2022, and 2023 under
2 Sec. 3 of this act.

3 (b) The Agency of Education may set aside:

4 (1) not more than one percent of the funds appropriated under
5 subsection (a) of this section for each of fiscal years 2022, 2023, and 2024 for
6 informational and technical assistance, such as the availability and use of
7 funding for eligible recipients as defined under Sec. 3 of this act; and

8 (2) not more than two percent of the funds appropriated under
9 subsection (a) of this section for each of fiscal years 2022, 2023, and 2024 for
10 the evaluations required under Sec. 3 of this act.

11 Sec. 5. TASK FORCE ON UNIVERSAL SCHOOL LUNCH; REPORT

12 (a) Creation. There is created the Task Force on Universal School Lunch.
13 The Task Force shall make recommendations on how, not later than the 2026–
14 2027 school year, to achieve the goal of providing universal school lunch for
15 all public school students at no cost to the students or their families.

16 (b) Membership. The Task Force shall be composed of the:

17 (1) Secretary of Education or designee;

18 (2) Secretary of Human Services or designee; and

19 (3) Secretary of Agriculture or designee.

20 (c) Powers and duties. The Task Force shall make recommendations on
21 how, not later than the 2026–2027 school year, to achieve the goal of providing

1 universal school lunch for all public school students at no cost to the students
2 or their families and shall perform the following tasks:

3 (1) recommend funding sources for universal school lunch;

4 (2) recommend what data should be collected by local education
5 agencies, school districts, and schools to qualify for federal funds based on
6 student poverty, the means by which the data should be collected, the
7 frequency of collection, and how this data should be reported to the Agency of
8 Education and the frequency of this reporting;

9 (3) consider how other states offer and fund universal school meals at no
10 cost to students or their families; and

11 (4) meet with Vermont’s federal delegation to discuss what changes
12 could be made to federal law and regulations to more readily facilitate
13 universal school meals.

14 (d) Collaboration. In performing its duties under this section, the Task
15 Force shall collaborate with Hunger Free Vermont, the School Nutrition
16 Association of Vermont, the Vermont Superintendents Association, the
17 Vermont School Boards Association, the Vermont Council of Special
18 Education Administrators, the Vermont Principals’ Association, and the
19 Vermont-National Education Association.

20 (e) Report. On or before January 15, 2022, the Task Force shall submit a
21 written report to the House and Senate Committees on Education and on

1 Appropriations, the House Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, and the
2 Senate Committee on Agriculture with its findings and any recommendations
3 for legislative action.

4 (f) Meetings.

5 (1) The Secretary of Education shall call the first meeting of the Task
6 Force to occur on or before October 10, 2021.

7 (2) The Task Force shall select a chair from among its members at the
8 first meeting.

9 (3) A majority of the membership shall constitute a quorum.

10 (4) The Task Force shall meet not more than eight times.

11 (5) The Task Force shall expire on January 16, 2022.

12 (g) Assistance. The Task Force shall have the administrative, technical,
13 and legal assistance of the Agency of Education.

14 Sec. 6. EFFECTIVE DATE

15 This act shall take effect on passage.

16

17

18 (Committee vote: _____)

19

20

Senator _____

21

FOR THE COMMITTEE