

To: Senate Committee on Education
From: Paul Gambill, Community Engagement Lab
Re: H.106 - Community Schools
Date: April 4, 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on H.106 regarding the establishment of a grant program in support of Community Schools.

I am here representing the Community Engagement Lab, which uses creative projects to strengthen the community's role as a partner in learning with their schools. The Community Engagement Lab is also the managing partner of the Vermont Community Learning Network, which is a statewide coalition of education service providers working with multiple schools to support the systems change required for Act 77 to succeed and ultimately to increase the number of young people that thrive in postsecondary school, careers and life.

I mention the Vermont Community Learning Network because it is just one example of the work that is being advanced in Vermont that aligns closely with the goals and process of community schools.

The Vermont Community Learning Network is designed to catalyze the systems change mandated by Act 77, the Flexible Pathways Initiative, by achieving two key objectives:

1. A new view of the learning network that is necessary to connect students with community-centered learning opportunities and resources;
2. A coalition of service providers who will coordinate their efforts to design a cohesive system of support for educators, young people and community members to engage in more expanded learning opportunities.

The work of the Vermont Community Learning Network is closely aligned with the four pillars of community schools:

1. The partner coalition is providing **integrated support services**
2. **Family and community engagement** is being activated through creative community-engaged projects and new community-centered learning opportunities
3. A multi-stakeholder teams, including educators, principals, community members, and young people, are providing **collaborative leadership**
4. **More expanded learning opportunities** are being developed through community asset mapping, mentoring, and parent-to-parent liaison programs.

And this year, in partnership with the Tarrant Institute for Innovative Education at UVM, we will launch a multi-year research program to track the impact of this work on young people, their families and community members.

The work of the Vermont Community Learning Network is well on its way to providing a viable path to developing a community school program that builds on the strengths of Act 77, and which can be replicated across Vermont.

In acknowledgement of this work, and other coalitions of services providers and schools that are active in Vermont, and the relevance of Act 77 to success of any community school demonstration project in Vermont, we suggest the following two additions:

With respect to Section 3 (a) definitions. (B) expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities, which may include before-school, afterschool, weekend, and summer programs, that provide additional academic instruction, individualized academic support, enrichment activities, and learning opportunities that emphasize real-world learning and community problem-solving and that may include art, music, drama, creative writing, hands-on experience with engineering or science, tutoring and homework help, and recreational programs that enhance and are consistent with the school's curriculum;

We suggest adding the words **during school**, to recognize the importance of learning taking place anytime and anywhere--a key tenet of Act 77.

With respect to Section 3 (b) Funding authorization. The Secretary of Education is authorized to 17 provide annual funding of up to \$110,000.00 a year for a period of three years 18 for each recipient of the funding to use the funding as required under 19 subsection (d) of this section.

Per the model of the California Community Schools Partnership Program presented in earlier testimony, we suggest an adjustment to allow for a consortium of schools and service providers to receive funds:

There are two categories for LEAs to apply for funding:

- The Secretary of Education is authorized to provide annual funding of up to \$110,000.00 a year for a period of three years for each recipient of the funding to use the funding as required under 19 subsection (d) of this section.
- The Secretary of Education is authorized to provide annual funding of up \$75,000 for each recipient in a consortium of schools, not to exceed \$225,000 a year for a period of three years to use the funding as required under subsection (d) of this section.

Thank you for this opportunity to support the exciting vision of H.106. We look forward to seeing how this funding can support the building of demonstrations of effective community schools.