



*Keeping equity at the center of Vermont's community school design and implementation.*

To: Chair Campion, Vice Chair Gulick, and Senate Committee on Education Members  
From: Vermont Community Schools Coalition  
Date: March 1, 2024  
RE: Community Schools Sustainable Funding

The Vermont Community Schools Coalition (VCSC) is writing in support of ongoing sustainable funding of Act 67 community schools. As background, Voices for Vermont's Children and Public Assets Institute established VCSC in 2021 to advance equity in community schools legislation. Our members include education policy analysts, children's policy advocates, organizers, Vermont's rural education collaborative, educators, and youth advocates. In 2021, we proposed equity language and advocated for the inclusion of a fifth pillar—safe, inclusive, and equitable learning environments—and appreciated the foresight of legislators to include it in Vermont's community school framework. We were delighted to learn that Vermont has set a national standard by adding this fifth pillar.

The VCSC appreciates the Committee's continued focus on Act 67, the five community school awardees, and your enthusiastic support of their encouraging results. The rich stories of what the pilot school communities have accomplished in a few short years are inspiring. The detailed testimony of Jess DeCarolis and Bernice Garnett with the Research Practice Partnership illustrates the transformative impact of Vermont's five-pillar framework on students and school communities alike. Whether it is the 50% reduction in 9<sup>th</sup>-grade absenteeism at Hazen Union School<sup>1</sup>, the creation of an after-school program in Cabot "that serves as a work-based learning experience rooted in student leadership and voice"<sup>2</sup>, or the expansion of student dental health services in the North Country Supervisory Union,<sup>3</sup> to name a few, Vermont's community schools are focused on building safe, inclusive, and equitable learning environments, school community by school community.

<sup>1</sup> [Community Schools Testimony](#), Jess DeCarolis, slide 23

<sup>2</sup> [Community Schools Testimony](#), Rebecca Tatistcheff, page 1, paragraph 2.

<sup>3</sup> [Community Schools Testimony](#), Sam Stevens @ 18.30 minutes.

We also understand that two additional factors have allowed these schools and districts to do so well – the community schools’ grant funding and the evaluation process of the Research Practice Partnership. With that in mind, we are writing in support of not only ongoing funding of Act 67 community school grantees but also establishing an annual allocation to support the expansion of community school models that includes resources for ongoing evaluation support.

**We are requesting this Committee’s strongest possible advocacy with the Senate Committee on Appropriations for an annual allocation for community schools.** It is clear from Act 67 school district outcomes, preliminary evaluation data, and the support of our existing education policy infrastructure<sup>4</sup> that with a financial commitment, we can build a strong community school network across Vermont.

We believe your leadership is essential to ensure that there is sustainable funding for community schools in Vermont. Thank you for your deep commitment to Vermont’s students and education system.

John Castle, Vermont Rural Education Collaborative  
Natasha Eckart-Baning  
[Carlen Finn](#), Voices for Vermont’s Children  
Ben Freeman, Vermont Learning for the Future  
Dr. Bernice Garnett, University of Vermont  
Lindsey Halman, UP For Learning  
Rebecca Tatistcheff Cabot School  
Dr. Kathleen Kesson, Author, *Community School Blueprint*  
Stephanie Yu, Public Assets Institute

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<sup>4</sup> [Community Schools Testimony](#), Jess DeCarolis, Slide 5.