Vermont Act 67:
The Community Schools Act

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VT Community Schools: 

In their own words
Defining Community Schools

They…

...are not singular programs. Rather, it is an approach to schooling and represents a fundamental rethinking of how to deliver public education.

...align with Vermont’s student-centered approach to learning and existing regulatory framework for education.

...close equity gaps through the provision of services, resources, and opportunities for students AND their families, in the school.

.... leverage Vermont’s unique context, history, and values through place-based services and relational assets in rural communities emphasizing deeper learning by doing, schools as community centers and co-location of services for students, families, and community.
Community Schools in VT: History & Context

John Dewey, UVM graduate (1879) - "Schools as Social Centres (1902)"

Molly Stark School, Bennington VT - "Community of Learners"
- Principal leadership, community-based needs assessment, family resource center, expanded learning, health partnerships
- Affiliated with Yale University Schools of the 21st Century & Harvard Collaborative for Integrated School Services

"The State of VT appears to be ready to communicate these ideas to other schools and to encourage and plan a network of full-service community schools."
(Dryfoos, 1998)
Broader Policy & Initiative Connections

Implementation context of community schools in Vermont:

- **Act 77** (2013): Flexible Pathways, Personalized Learning
- **Education Quality Standards (2014):**
- **Act 173** (2018): Enhancing effectiveness, availability and equity of services […]
- **Act 1** (2019): An act relating to ethnic and social equity studies standards for public schools
- **Act 66** (2021): Expanded local wellness policy to include comprehensive health
- **Act 28** (2021): Literacy
- **Act 35** (2021): Equitable School Discipline
- Act 127:
  - Community Resilience and Workforce Development

Community Schools brings together under one umbrella a framework for connected and coherent implementation of myriad legislative initiatives and education goals.
Implementation Science has been described as the study of how evidence-based programs or interventions can be incorporated and adapted to maximize successful outcomes. (Kelly & Perkins, 2012)

“Full implementation of complex change efforts can take 5-10 years, with schools generally achieving partial implementation in the first 3-4 years of these efforts.” (Welner & Valladares, 2016)
Focusing on Implementation

“Populations benefit when effective innovations are supported by effective implementation in enabling contexts that facilitate their use on a socially significant scale” (Fixsen, 2019)

Implementation Science Provides a Formula for Success

![Diagram showing the relationship between effective innovations, effective implementation methods, enabling contexts, and socially significant outcomes.]

Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman, Wallace, 2008

**Community Schools**

“Community Schools has helped equalize playing field in smaller schools”
- CS leader

**Rural CS CS Leadership PDSA**

“I get to say Yes!”
- CS leader

**School, Community, LEA, State Policy**

“Integrated approach with community partners is roadmap to sustainability”
- CS partner

**Students Educators Families/Community**

“We are not raising children we are raising communities”
- CS Nurse
VT Community Schools

Caledonia Central Supervisory Union (5 districts)
  – (Cabot School, PK-12, N=159)

Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union (5 districts)
  – (Hazen Union High School, Grades 7-12, N=290)

North Country Supervisory Union (10 districts)
  – (PK-12, 12 schools, N=2,684)

Addison Northwest Supervisory District
  – Vergennes Union Elementary School (K-6, N=295)

White River Valley Supervisory Union (5 districts)
  – White River Valley Middle School (6-8, N=132)

Across all Act 67 Community Schools, over 3,500 PK-12 students, their families, and communities are being supported.
VT Community Schools: They’re Growing

From 16 community schools to a growing 28 community schools

From 3500 students to 5,223
State Level Partnership

To support the goals and value statement of Act 67, the AOE is positioned within the Vermont Community School model as a collaborative participant to support and guide implementation efforts.

Designed for Equity and Sustainability:

• Foster Community
• Establish a Supportive Accountability Approach serving as active implementation drivers, conducting “...purposeful, active and persistent supports for using innovations as intended and producing promised results in practice.” (Fixsen, 2019)
• Develop an Ethical Sustainable Framework for Evaluation
• Supports System-Level Innovations within AOE that mirror CS implementation and inter-agency partnerships:
  – AOE & VDH: School Based Health Centers & School Health
Supportive Accountability

Personalized reflection tools for each VT CS, organized by pillars, strategies, and activities have been continually utilized. These support progress toward 3-year goals and capture successes and new learning.

Quarterly check-in meetings with each CS Team provides opportunity problem-solve and identify resources, supports, and connections in local community and across VT and peer-learning via CS COHORT meetings.

Community School Site Visits: engaging with community partners, CS leaders, educators, students and families. Digital Storytelling and documentation.

End-of-year empathy interviews with each CS Lead Team captures lived experience (as individuals and team); Individual interviews with CS coordinators, principals, and superintendents were also conducted this year to gain insight into role-specific experiences and perspectives.

Site specific logic models and evaluation tools.
Community School Logic Models

**Inputs/Resources**
- VT Act 67 Funding
- AOE-UVM Research Practice Partnership in Evaluation, Guidance
- AOE Technical Assistance and Ongoing Support (Check-in Meetings, CSC Happenings, etc.)

**School/District Level**
- Community School Coordinator
- MTSS Coach
- Community Partners Coalition
- Vermont Collaborative Learning Network
- Hazen Leadership Team
- Equity Coordinator
- School Principal Support and Engagement
- Physical Space (e.g., school classrooms, gym/recreation facilities and equipment)
- Community Partner Involvement/Support

**Inputs**
- Integrated Student Supports
- Expanded/Enriched Learning
- Active Family/Community Engagement

**Short Term Outcomes**
- Integrated Student Supports
- Expanded/Enriched Learning
- Active Family/Community Engagement

**OSSU Vision/Long-Term Impacts**
- Community schools meet the unique needs of students and families and build on the assets they bring to their schools and communities.
- Community schools serve as resource hubs that provide a broad range of easily accessible, well-coordinated supports and services.
- Community schools are important centers for building community connection and resilience.
- Community schools combine challenging and culturally inclusive learning opportunities with the academic and social supports every student needs to reach their potential.
Ethical Framework for Evaluation

The Vermont Community Schools Research-Practice Partnership (VT CS RPP) between the AOE and UVM:

• **Supports and advances state goals** to foster community, supportive accountability, and resource development and identification.

• **Community-based, participatory research methodology** offers an ethical framework for evaluating implementation and effectiveness of Act 67.

• Partners (AOE, UVM, Community Schools) **codesign and test solutions** in a long-term, collaborative, and iterative processes.

• The long-term outcome of our RPP is to co-create and **disseminate contextually modified VT CS implementation guides** and assessment tools to foster a **sustainable state-wide ecosystem of community schools to foster the equitable transformation of Vermont school communities.**
“Implementation is most effective when data are used in an ongoing process of continuous program evaluation and improvement, and when sufficient time is allowed for the strategy to fully mature” (Maier, 2018)
Data Sources

Empathy Interviews
- Community School Coordinators, Principals, Superintendents

Quarterly Check-In Documents
- 4 quarterly check in documents/yr
- Logic Models

Grant Application / Renewals
- Community School goals, project priorities, long-term aims

CS Site Visits
- Community Partners, Students, Families
- Pillar Application
- Community School Visioning and Experiences – Storytelling and Dissemination

Existing Education / School Health Data
- SLDS/Education Dashboard
- YRBSS/BRFSS
- School Health Profiles
Emerging Themes

Research on VT community schools has revealed many common themes among schools/districts adopting this approach, here are a few:

- Connection and Community Resiliency
- SCL/Deeper Learning Across the Lifespan
- Increased Access to Health and Wellness Services
- Re-engaging the Disengaged
- Realizing Goals of Hallmark Legislation

2021-2022
- Staffing and structural support for CS,
- Needs/Asset mapping, assessing readiness, community partnerships,
- Hiring, MOUs, Building ownership and capacity,
- CS leadership and mindset

2022-2023
- Pillar implementation, Cross pillar work. Peer to peer sharing, crystalizing focus, de-implementation of strategies not working, PDSA cycles in action

2023-2024
- Scaling and expansion, Sustainability of CSC, School board advocacy,
- Expanding CS work across SU/SD. Collective Efficacy, Local Capacity for Problem Solving, Preliminary Outcome Exploration, Organizational readiness

12/19/23, WRVSU volunteers packing food bags for elementary school families, school closed due to flooding.
Connection & Community Resiliency

1. Education pipeline/resilient school communities (e.g., CSC into Guidance Department (OSSU); Parent Engagement (Cabot/NSCU); Staff Retention (OSSU/WRVSU)

1. Connection/Community (NCSU family and Mobile Arts; Vergennes mentoring; Recipe for Connection Hazen; ES Cabot Playground Advocacy; Community School Partner Coalitions Vergennes/Hazen)

“\textit{I think that the atmosphere here really allows for that to be able to have honest meaningful conversations with kids outside of the school. \textquotedblleft I think a lot of people in the community….they are making their self available to the school and the school is allowing that. There is back and forth and it’s appreciating. It’s not like the door is shut and the community can’t get in.\textquotedblright}"

- CS community partner/mentor/town manager

“The class has lumped together all sorts of people who may not otherwise have an opportunity to connect, and in doing so, has created unique bonds and moments of collaboration.”

- Hazen HS student

Become a Vergennes MENTOR

- Promotes self respect
- Increases school attendance
- Enhances self-esteem and confidence
- Increases student academic success
- Increases healthier relationships, lifestyle choices

Recipe for Connection, Hazen HS 11/23 at Hardwick United Church
Student-Centered/Deeper Learning

**Deeper Learning** (Cabot, Senior X, Bike Share,)

“I learned that I have a particular knack for community service: having a job or doing something that benefits other people in some way makes me feel like my job or service is important.” - Senior X Student

Senior X, Danville Health Center

**Intergenerational Learning** (Mobile Arts; Play Group; ABAR)

“Art is an equalizer” - Mobile Arts, NSCU

Hazen Union Middle/High School students participate in a locally-grown bike build and repair program, housed in Hazen Union High School.

Van Go, Community Art Nights, NCSU

Reading to Raise Anti-Racists, 2022-2023 - Ferrisburgh & Vergennes Union Elementary Schools
A Focus on Health & Wellness

Educator Wellness

Food Security

- OneGrocery in NCSU
- Vergennes Meal Program, school gardens, hydroponic lettuce
- Expanding food pantries in WRVSU

School based health services

- Telehealth/SBHC at Hazen
- Health Fairs and Community Workshops
- Primary Care Partnerships

“\textbf{The biggest frustration is when we see a kid who needs medical care and for whatever reason, we can’t get them from our school’s nurses office into the medical office, and we are eliminating that barrier. Being such a rural and impoverished community it’s really difficulty to get kids to care even for families that have all the resources}” - Director of School Health Services
Re-engagement

Restorative Truancy
Community Mentoring, Restorative Practices
Project Based Learning
Comprehensive Supports

“My student is now at school more and attends on days when we do not have available busing. I am seeing huge developmental growth in this student due to consistent attendance, all thanks to the support of restorative truancy” - Early Childhood Educator
Realizing Goals of Hallmark Legislation

[...] I have never seen a grant that appreciated the importance of the connection between providing socially relevant and focused basic needs support alongside all of those things that we say we [want to] do all the time about [...] having inclusive governance. You cannot do those things in a rural community with such a high level of poverty as we have without providing those basic supports around things like transportation and clothing and food and all of those things that make it possible for people to be fully engaged [...] No, I’ve never seen any funding source that [...] seems to understand the connection between these things like the Community Schools Grant has allowed for. - VT Community School Coordinator

I would have never have thought prior to the Community Schools grant [...] we need to do some work with like the local community around anti racist work [...] But [...] Community Schools offers us to expand our lens and expand our scope of our work in fundamental ways that wouldn’t be available without it. - CS Principal

“[o]ur margins are pretty tight with regard to [...] what we can spend do you know what I mean [...] our per pupil expenditures, so [...] anything we add to that, it’s gonna increase our per pupil expense, but our Community Schools grant really allows us to [...] work with families and the community in a way that doesn’t impact that expense…So those margins are real and the Community Schools grant really allows us to be more flexible in our thinking about like when can things happen and for whom can they happen - CS Principal

“[I] do think it is so much more approachable when folks can get a picture when you talk about a Community School versus MTSS, multi-tiered system of support. Right then people are turned off, like “you’re doing what?” - CS Superintendent
Realizing Goals of Hallmark Legislation: A Snapshot of Preliminary Outcomes

• 80% of CS invested in 25 MTSS strategies
• 100% of CS invested in 17 CBO
• 100% of CS invested in 13 CBL strategies and 60% of CS invested in 5 WBL
• 100% of CS invested in 17 strategies to support CHE/ Health and Wellness
• 100% of CS invested in 14 strategies to support MH/counseling & SEL strategies
• 100% of CS invested in 15 strategies to support youth voice and student agency
• 80% of CS invested in 24 equity literacy strategies;100% invested in 9 strategies to support culturally inclusive/sustaining
• 100% invested in 12 connected literacy strategies (e.g., Civic Literacy, Financial Literacy, Media/Digital Literacy and Literacy)
Preliminary Outcomes:
A Few Community School Spotlights

Hazen Union School:
- **50% reduction in Grade 9 absenteeism** over three years.
- **100% faculty retention** rate.
- **Staff-initiated holiday party implemented** 2024 (meaningful, as previous reports indicated a significant lack of organizational coherence and trust.)
- **Student population is maintaining** at approximately 290-300, despite demographic prediction of 250 students this year; Further, they are attracting students who need a more well-rounded, wrap-around, and flexible approach.
- **Approx. 140 students participate in Hazen Ski and Ride**, some of who have complete scholarships, and is almost entirely staffed by 24 community volunteers.
- **Hazen students have interacted with approximately 14 community members** this year in Fridays’ Career Cafes. These cafes are opportunities for intergenerational connections, students hear about community members life experiences and learning journeys, and the relationships between school and life. About 20-25 students attend each session.

North Country Supervisory Union:
- Launched the ‘**Van Go’ mobile arts program hosting 8 sessions/events in Troy, VT; 26 community members/families participated** over the first three events.
- Launched a Wednesday **learning series with 18 Life Skills students, who are developing nutrition and food prep skills in the NCSU Family Resource Center** with a member of UVM’s EFNEP program.
- **Community engagement opportunities at two schools began:** ‘Conversation and coffee’ weekly office hours with guidance and family support specialist staff at Coventry Village School. Troy School purchased sets of board games island hosted community game nights.
The Community School Coordinator

VT Community School research is in alignment with national scholarship…the **Community School Coordinator (CSC)** is essential to an effective and connected community school.

So, a community school coordinator is a human being who has a little bit in the school world and a little bit in the community world and their schedule can flex because they have different responsibilities…*somebody who understood the vision we were going for and the power that schools can have to leverage and coordinate and facilitate resources to wrap around a student or a community member and hold them up until they can stand on their own.*” - CS Principal

That person [CSC] is one of the prime reasons why we have expanding Flexible Pathways within our school, why we have an after-school program that offers a variety, a wide variety of things for students to do….A great, brilliant idea needs to have a lot of different logistical pieces in place for it to be carried forward. And that role is crucial to all of those logistical pieces. - CS Principal

(FitzGerald & Quiñones, 2018; Sanders et al., 2017)
State & National Attention:
VT Community Schools

- Invited NNERPP Member (70+ Education RPPs)
- Historic data sharing agreement between UVM CESS & VT AOE
- Institute for Rural Partnerships Grant and Press
  - CS RPP extensions: school mental health, SBHC, food systems
- Spencer Grant RPP Application Submission
- CSxFE Conference - Two Invited Presentations (2023/2024)
- University Assisted Community School National Network
- AERA - Rural CS Research Presentation feat. VT CS
- Academic Publications
  - Educational Policy (Y1 CS Experiences)
  - VT CS RPP Formation (forthcoming)
  - Y2 CS Implementation/Rural Perspective (forthcoming)
Community Schools: A Return on Investment for the State

A comprehensive ROI process is planned within the VT CS RPP.

To date, extensive qualitative, experiential data has been collected regarding CS implementation and evolution. Longitudinal, quantitative data (hard numbers) are forthcoming and will be used to contribute to ROI calculations.

Synthesis of cost-benefit research “suggests an excellent return on investment of up to $15 in social value and economic benefits for every dollar spent on school based wraparound services” (Oakes, 2017)

Recent ROI research was conducted in New Mexico focused on Community School Coordinators. This report states,

The calculated ROI represents the value of the benefits contributed to the community school by the Coordinator as measured by the ratio of the net benefits to the costs. The ROI results were positive producing a 7.11 to 1 ratio, meaning for each $1 invested in the cost of the Coordinator the school received $7.11 in return.

Martinez, L., Hayes, C. D., & Silloway, T. (2013); Bloodworth & Horner, 2019
Strategies for Sustainability

Predictable funding to support capacity building grants and scaled Community School development across the state:

- Aligns with and can advances our goals for students within other student-centered education regulation and initiatives (e.g., Act 77, Act 173, Act 1, Act 28, EQS, etc.)

Appropriately resourcing state-level supports/collaborative activity for sustaining Community Schools:

- Sustainable resourcing and anchoring organization structures for equitable and transformative research and evaluation (e.g., VT CS RPP) provide statewide networking, leadership, and support.

Figure 2. Seven reasons why a next generation of community schools will address inequality and transform education

Center for Universal Education at Brookings, 2021)
What Help Would Look Like at the Federal Level?

Leverage/replicate the 21CCLC Nita M. Lowey model for Full-Service Community School grant program to support:

- **Efficiency and predictability** – provide allocations to SEAs to run competitive grant program & identify connections across existing state/federal programs to support
- **Coherence and reduce initiative fatigue** – which will also address real-time and extended concerns about educator workforce shortages and unintended inequities that arise through short-term pilots and “innovation zones” which helps
- **Scale community school implementation** -- cohorts and communities can grow and can learn from one another and an SEA can staff & support it appropriately which requires
- **Avenues for small and rural districts and schools to compete** – (which is hard to do if you’re a school that has a shared principal or a nurse once a week) which can be supported by
- **FSCS grant allocations to states/SEAs**