

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

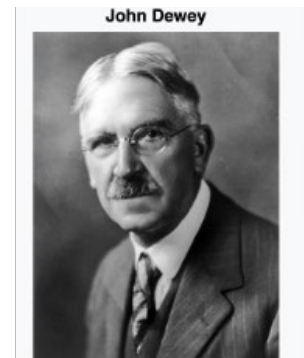
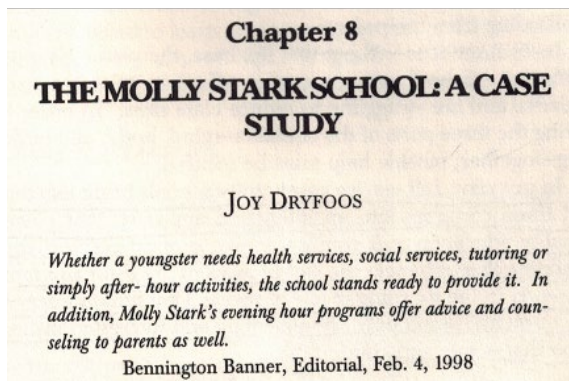
John Dewey, UVM graduate (1879) - "Schools as Social Centres (1902)"

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

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)

	Emerging	Maturing	Transforming
Characteristics what you would see in a CS at this stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Champions for community school call for the strategy and have developed an implementation team School community members are oriented to the strategy Setting priorities for implementation identified Desire to use data collaboratively for whole school transformation Data is shared with champions; new data interests and needs are identified Common understanding of community assets and needs (A&N) New systems and approaches to schooling are emerging (ie. whole school approach to restorative practices) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New youth, family, and community members are identified as leaders in the school and structures to promote community voice, reflection, and partnerships are developed Shared governance is visible Shared vision and goals are set for the CS based on A&N Data analysis begins and committees try practices such as “plan, do, study, act” New systems and approaches to schooling are codified in this phase Moving from outputs to outcomes Gaps have been identified and resources are connected to opportunities Community school has many feedback loops Alignment between budget and CS priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community leadership structures formalized, co-led, and co-created; all partners involved in processes Policies support CS sustainability & community voice All structures engage in continuous improvement Community school guides other schools and systems to enact CS strategy Affinity groups for youth and staff support equity work Plans exist for transition and orientation of new community members
Processes/Structures/Tasks what CS constituents would do at this stage	<p>Develop or start with an existing group of families, youth, teachers, administrators, and community partners to enact the following implementation functions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct an assets and needs assessment Utilize power analysis to determine which constituents to engage as champions School based data review Orient all school community members to the strategy Community asset mapping to identify potential partners <p>Additional tasks during this phase:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hire a Community School Coordinator Develop or utilize an existing ISS team using data (such as chronic absence) to begin connecting students to supports Develop youth and family leadership structures 	<p>Group responsible for implementation will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support co-constructed initiatives based on Assets & Needs assessment Formalize partnerships with a written agreement, such as a MOU or shared use agreement for space and data sharing and management Develop clear CS vision and goals and share with larger community <p>Additional tasks during this phase:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Structures in place to align classroom instruction with community & extended opportunities Build/identify designated room specifically for families/guardians CSC and other CS staff members are sustained through diverse funding sources 	<p>Group responsible for implementation will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lead participatory budgeting process or practice budget transparency Codify policies for sustainability with equity focus Coordinate advocacy efforts <p>Additional tasks during this phase:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family and youth advocate for policy and address systemic inequities Youth and community led initiatives, such as; conferences/town halls, YPAR projects occur annually Piloted initiatives evolve into new “way of doing school” All community members involved in community school continuous improvement
Measures/Benchmarks what to measure at each stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chronic absence Program attendance Enrollment Discipline Service use Student & Family engagement Youth feedback/voice (ie. Hope Survey) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School climate surveys Student and staff retention Staff turnover Academic growth Return on investment (ROI) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Graduation rates Post-secondary enrollment Deeper learning & deep listening Workforce development Economic development Micro credentials & Certificates for teachers/staff/partners

Community Schools Forward | Stages of Development
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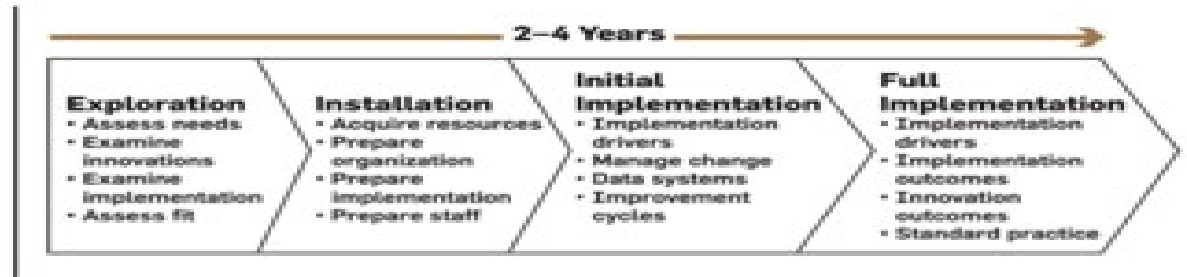
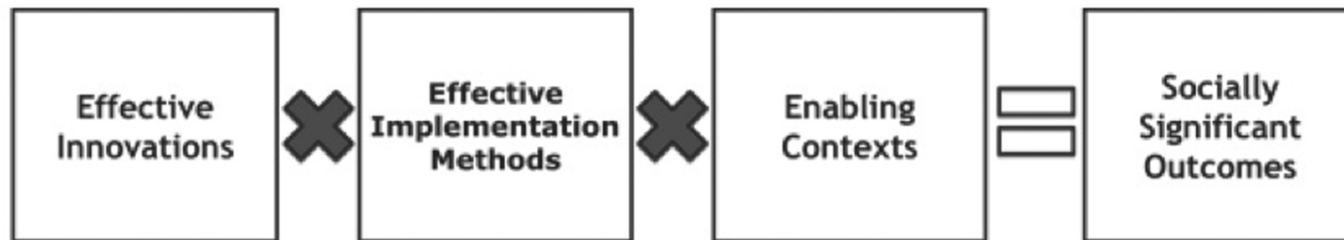


Figure 1. Implementation Stages

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



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.

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.**



Process and Outcome Evaluation



1) What are the experiences of new community school sites in implementing key organizational structures of the community school model? (Fehrer, 2016).



2) How has the funding support from the Vermont community school Act enabled awardees to create and implement community school vision?

2A) How are community schools integrating existing school-based systems of support and academic enrichment with new priority areas surfaced from the community school needs assessment and prioritization?



3) What are the preliminary outcomes of CS implementation in Vermont CS schools supported through the Vermont community School Act?

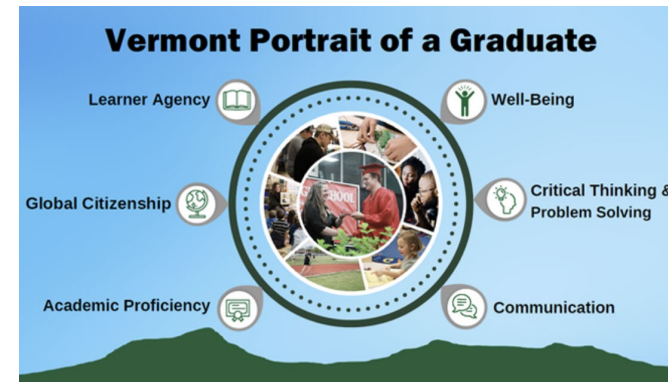
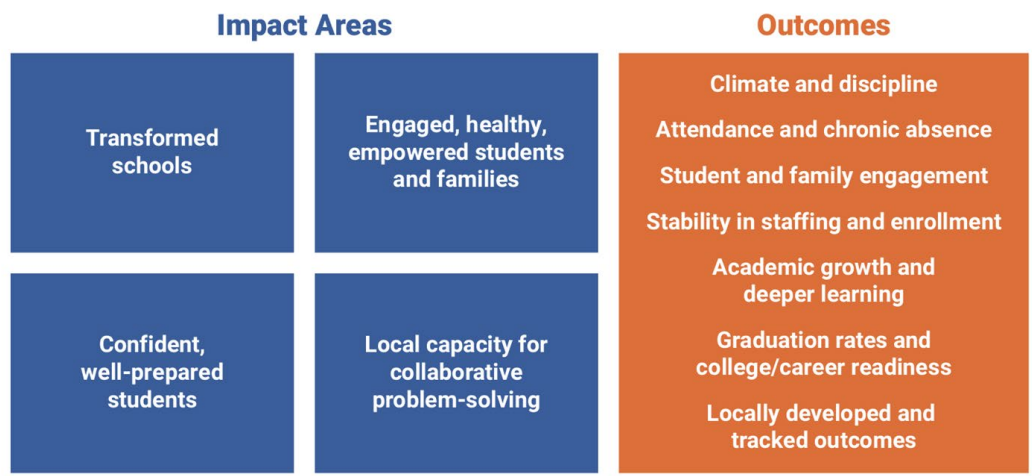


Figure 2. Community School Impact Areas and Outcomes



Source: Community Schools Forward. (2023).

“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**



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

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

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)



Recipe for Connection, Hazen HS 11/23 at Hardwick United Church


"I think that the atmosphere here really allows for that to be able to have honest meaningful conversations with kids outside of the school. "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."

- 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



RESEARCH SHOWS MENTORING SUCCESSFULLY

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



Cabot ES playground advocacy

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



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

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

“Art is an equalizer” - Mobile Arts, NCSU



Reading to Raise Anti-Racists, 2022-2023 - Ferrisburgh & Vergennes Union Elementary Schools

A Focus on Health & Wellness

Educator Wellness

Food Security

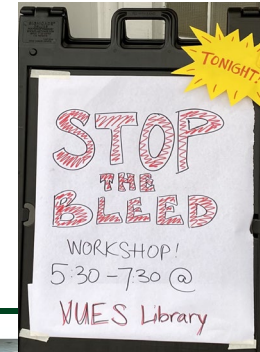
- OneGrocery in NCSU
- Vergennes Meal Program, school gardens, hydroponic lettuce
- Expanding food pantries in WRVSU

School based health services

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

“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 difficult to get kids to care even for families that have all the resources” - Director of School Health Services

Wellness Fridays at Hazen HS



Cabot Drive-Up Vaccine Clinic
provided by Vermont Center for Independent Living

YOU'VE GOT THIS.
We've got you.

Drive-through clinics are for anyone who has difficulty getting to or using a community vaccination location.

Agens served: 6 months-64 years
Vaccines provided: COVID, Flu

Vaccination will take place inside the school building. Masked, car side vaccines are available on request for those who need them.

Date: Friday, December 15th 2023, 2:00pm-5:00pm
Location: Cabot Schools, 25 Common Road, Cabot, VT 05647

GET VACCINATED. GET PEACE OF MIND.
The Aging and Disability Vaccination Collaborative, powered by USAging, has teamed up with community providers in your area to provide easy access to



Vergennes Elementary students participating in food systems learning via the CS garden, food delivery, & volunteering at the local food pantry.

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

NCU Addresses Homelessness Among Students in the District

NEWPORT CITY – Homelessness may sound like a concern for larger, urban areas, but it's also a real issue right here in the Northeast Kingdom.

Samantha Stevens, Community Schools Coordinator for the North Country Supervisory Union, said on Friday afternoon that there are 52 identified homeless students in the supervisory union. A couple of weeks ago, that number was 50. Stevens stressed that number is just the students who are identified. It doesn't mean there are not more.

The McKinney-Vento Act defines homelessness broader than the Housing and Urban Development definition (HUD) which funds many other local housing programs, such as those at Northeast Kingdom Community Action (NEKCA), said Stevens.

According to SchoolHouseConnection.org, “The McKinney-Vento Act provides rights and services to children and youth experiencing homelessness, which includes those who are: sharing the housing of others due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar

reason; staying in motels, trailer parks, or camp grounds due to the lack of an adequate alternative; staying in shelters or transitional housing; or sleeping in cars, parks, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, or similar settings.”

Stevens explained that a student who is living doubled up with another family would not be counted by HUD's definition but may be counted by the McKinney-Vento definition.

“If you live with another family or friend, but you don't own the place, and you



FOSTER FEST

Could your home be the right home for a child in need?

Wednesday, December 13th
North Country Career Center Room 380
Light Dinner at 5:30pm Informational Session 6 - 8pm

Fostering is a gift for the whole family!
Our community is in desperate need of homes of all types to care for children who can't be with their families. This holiday season, we invite you to consider whether you have space in your home and heart to provide a caring place for children to grow and thrive. Short-term, long-term, and foster-to-adopt will all be explained in this 2 hr informational session, with dinner included.
RSVP today for Foster Fest!

IT'S FREE!
Please RSVP

Contact Samantha.Stacy@ncsuvt.org | 802-334-0913
Or use the QR code to submit the RSVP form

Scan the QR code to RSVP
and see the full agenda!

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 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

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

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 advance 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.



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**