

Vermont Community Schools

House Education Committee

April 15, 2026

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Education is the most powerful resource to break systemic poverty, but we can't pretend that it's accessible to all unless we focus on this model and fund it.

When poverty is systemic, its symptoms are pathologized as academic failure. Community Schools address social determinants of learning- in NCSU it is, essentially, an anti-poverty program. Educational equity is impossible without economic justice, and investing in education in rural communities, where resources are scarce, has to look like more than a literacy program. It has to include the social supports that create optimal conditions for learning, student by student, family by family. You can only achieve that through human relationships. Investment in the Community Schools Coordinator is an investment in the human power needed to engage, assess, and intervene in the myriad ways that poverty prevents a student from accessing education. Education is the most powerful resource to break systemic poverty, but we can't pretend that it's accessible to all unless we focus on this model and fund it.

- Sam Stevens, Community School Coordinator, NCSU

Video: We Are Community Schools [The Pilot]

“Every piece of the school...and then every piece of the community”

Community schools are not an add-on, they are a structure that allows schools to meet the full needs of students so they can access learning



When we intentionally integrate academics, mental health supports, family engagement, and community partnerships, we remove barriers that have historically prevented students from succeeding. The lesson is that student achievement and well-being are not separate efforts. They are deeply connected, and community schools provide a proven framework to address both in a coordinated and sustainable way. Community schools also demonstrate that partnership is not just beneficial, it is necessary. As highlighted in recent work in Vermont, when schools and community-based organizations align their expertise, they can simultaneously improve student outcomes and reduce costs.

- Karen Conroy, Superintendent, SJSD

A Very Brief History

"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)

1. The notion of Community Schools comes from a long and storied history dating back to the end of the 19th century.
2. It has more than 45 years of research and data following the passage of the first federal legislation in 1974 and subsequent amendments made to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in [1978 establishing Title VIII - Community Schools Act \(PL 93-381\)](#).
3. The U.S. Department of Education has supported [Full-Service Community Schools](#) through competitive grant funding going back to 2008.
4. In 2015, legislative language was included under [Part F of the Every Student Succeeds Act](#) (also known as ESEA) defining Community Schools.
5. In 2021, the Vermont Legislature passed the [Act 67 Community Schools Act](#) using one-time ARP-ESSER funding.
6. In 2024, the VT Legislature approved one additional year of state funding for Community Schools via [Act 168 \(2024\)](#).

Learn more about the pillars: [Act 67 webpage](#), [AOE](#); [Digital story](#)



Community

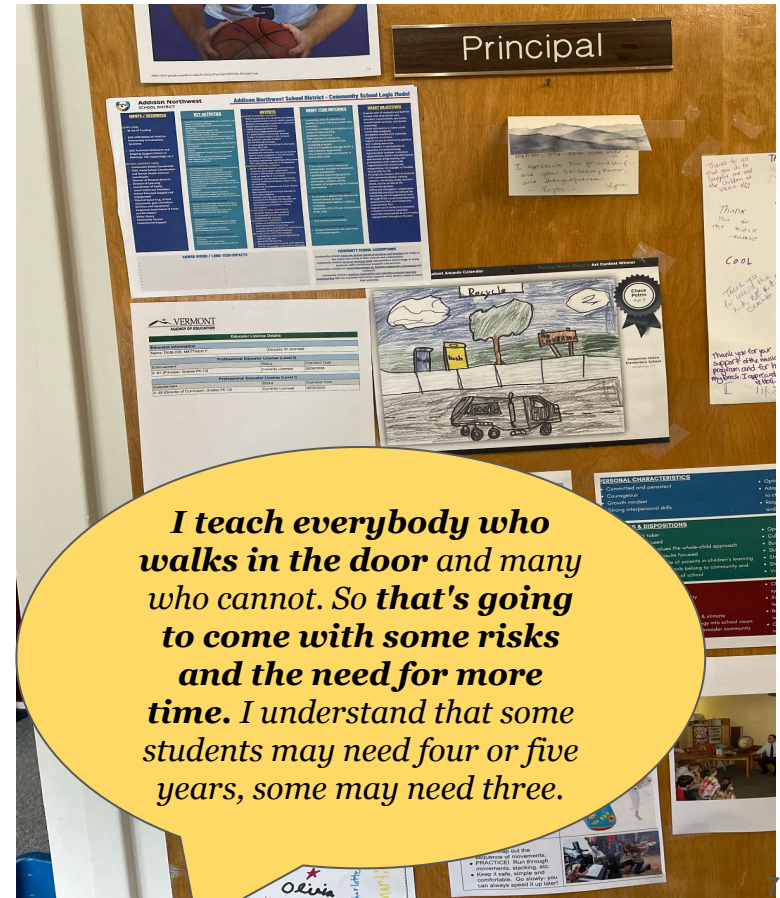
Democracy must begin at home, and its home is the neighboring community.

—John Dewey (*The Public and Its Problems* 213)

Community Schools fosters the mindsets and practices that Vermonters are asking for

In a landscape where schools struggle with implementation of state requirements, community schools is a welcome "how-to" for districts who want to actualize a vision of equitable, relevant, responsive schools. Community Schools is not just a program, it is a way of doing school that fosters the mindsets and practices that Vermonters are asking for: deep partnership with communities and families, the use of a network approach to comprehensive services (including food, housing, health, and enrichment), and a school experience that prepares young people for success in their lives and futures.

- Bec Dezan, Community School Coordinator, U-32, WCUUSD



I teach everybody who walks in the door and many who cannot. So that's going to come with some risks and the need for more time. I understand that some students may need four or five years, some may need three.

Outcomes

- Socially Significant Outcomes (Students, Staff, Family)
- Student Centered, Deeper Learning
- Increased Access to Health & Wellness
- Community Resiliency and Connection

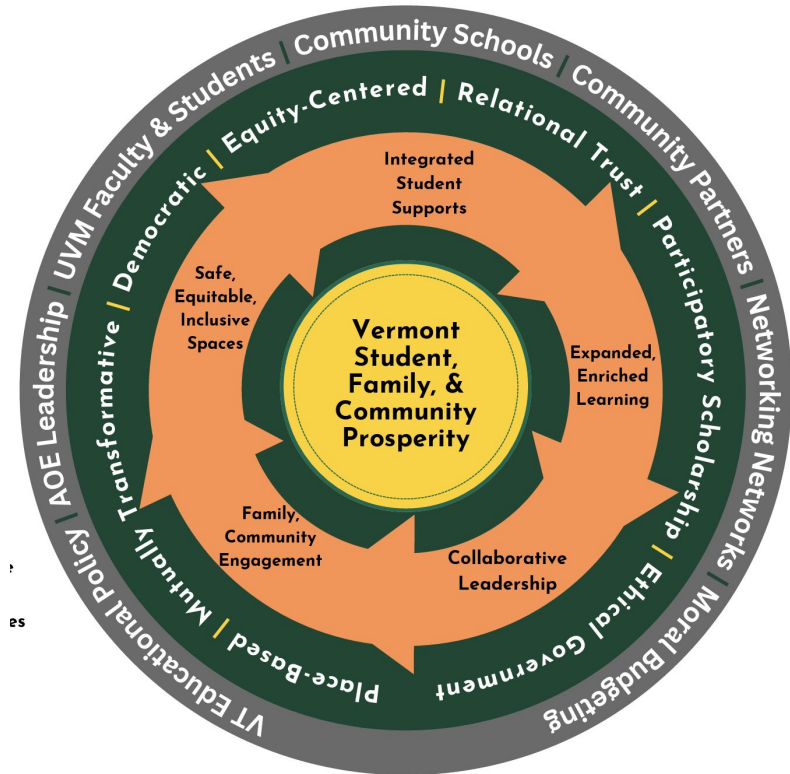


Academics	Behavioral	Staff Recruitment / Retention	Student Engagement	Family/Community Engagement
<p>WRVSV 72% of 10th graders achieved the national benchmark in reading; 61% of 11th graders proficient or exceeding on spring science VTCAP (AY23/24)</p> <p>Cabot School 100% participation in SeniorX Capstone Project-Based Learning Program (AY23/24)</p> <p>NCSU 30 students with disabilities developed food preparation skills</p>	<p>Hazen Union School 50% reduction in absenteeism in grade nine over the past three years</p> <p>WRVSV 7% decrease in the number of referrals (AY22-23 to AY23-24)</p> <p>NCSU Student participation in Restorative Truancy Program grew from 12 (AY21/22), to 17 (AY22/23), to over 25 (AY 23/24), ALL seeing a reduction in absenteeism.</p>	<p>Hazen Union School 100% Staff Retention (AY 22/23 & 23/24)</p> <p>Cabot 100% staff retention in elementary grades (AY 22/23 & 23/24)</p> <p>WRVSV "I've never been in this kind of a school, this position where there are far more brilliant ideas waiting to become fruit than I've ever experienced before." - Pierre LaFlamme, Principal, WRVMS</p>	<p>NCSU 78 students participate in dental screenings/necessary procedures in AY 23/24 with 802 Smiles partnership.</p> <p>WRVSV Student ridership through TriValley Transit partnership increased from approx. 8/week to over 45/week; Continues to provide needed transport for over 40% of students participating in afterschool clubs/activities.</p> <p>Cabot School Over 50% in grades 1-6 and 25% in grades 7-12 participate in AfterSchool Program.</p>	<p>NCSU 220 attendees over 10 weeks of the Art VanGO! with 102 unique visitors</p> <p>Vergennes Elementary 10 unique community mentors contributing 172 hours of mentoring to elementary students under 10y.o. AY 23/24</p> <p>WRVSV Over 100 community member attended Understand Food Insecurity Community Dinner. Raised over \$700 for Bethel food shelf.</p>



FA25	School Health	Food Security	Community Connections	Deeper Learning
BSD	Expanded partnerships with mental health providers, health providers, co-teaching initiatives, and wellness programs.	Established partnership with North End Food Pantry.	Community of Care Project Team Public Service Announcements/ Documentaries on how the community should care for one another and build it each other up.	Multilingual family forums and participatory events with community members and other departments; Included in family-led school event planning.
ENSU	School based mental health services for students and families established on-site with at least 1.5 FTE;	88 students registered and attended at least one day of the EPIC afterschool program which provides meals and resources for students, families.	Weekly newsletter created and distributed starting in October 2025 w/ ongoing CS news, updates, opportunities.	Community Learning Series (adult education) underway; Community partners, instructors identified
KESD	SEL curriculum integrated into afterschool, summer programming; KESD Wellness Fair w/ student leaders planned for May 2026		KESD Family Engagement Events held October to December - More than 25 unique families attended.	
SJSD	All behavior staff, counselors, therapists, special educators were trained to use Wayfinder Curric. & platform.		Partnership with VTVLC to provide world language as an elective for 7th-8th graders, allowed space for 10-15 students/ trimester	Adult Diploma Program in partnership with NEKLS, ENSU planning underway
U32	School-based Health Partnership Exploration Committee (SBHPEC) established, visited 3 sites.	Hosted a community meal/celebration w/ more than 400 people; 90% of food sourced from vendors in the community.	Extended day OST afterschool programming survey; Info led to six weeks pilot program with 75 kids and 8-10 staff	100+ attendees (60 unique) individuals (5-85 yrs old) attended Community Learning Series.
WSESU	Putney Strong student, community movement program (before school); 25-40 students and comm. Members; 2x week.	After school cooking classes w/ meals sent home	Afterschool program as Spring Enrichment session for 5th-8th grade; Conduct community service/community engagement around Putney.	Intergenerational Meals program planning underway; Beginning with Coffee/Bagel breakfast with area seniors.

Schools that serve as community hubs provide a range of care that goes beyond what typically is associated with a building.



*Schools that serve as community hubs provide a range of care that goes beyond what typically is associated with a building. Our school operates for roughly 48 weeks a year. We offer child care, weekend food supply, coordination with mental health and other health agencies, and more. **Schools work better for communities and communities work more effectively with schools when there is a point of contact to liase as a majority function of their work.** Community schools can and should provide these opportunities for all schools, school districts, and supervisory unions.*

- Matt DeBlois, Principal, Vergennes Elementary, ANWSD

Current State

11

CCSC Supported School
Districts/Supervisory
Unions

38

Vermont CCSC
Supported
Community Schools

8,966

Students in CCSC
supported
Community Schools

The [Catamount Community Schools Collaborative \(CCSC\)](#) is a dynamic and longstanding research-policy-practice-partnership (RP3) between the University of Vermont's College of Education and Social Services, the Vermont Agency of Education, and state and community partners to support a sustainable ecosystem of community schools across Vermont.

CATAMOUNT COMMUNITY SCHOOLS COLLABORATIVE

The evolutionary timeline of a University-Assisted Community School in the State of Vermont.

2021

VT Act 67 - The Community
Schools Act



In 2021, the VT State Legislature passed Act 67 - The Community Schools Act; UVM faculty establish relationship with VT Agency of Education (AOE).

2022

Community Schools
Research-Practice
Partnership



VT AOE and UVM increase personnel supporting Community Schools implementation; Research-Practice Partnership (RPP) is officially established through MOUs, consistent meeting/site visit attendance; Evaluation and research support.

2023

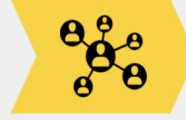
Evolution to Research-Policy-
Practice Partnership (RP3)



Increased UVM visibility through evaluation and research support; Collaborative research agenda established with AOE and Community School partners; Increased participation in national forums, state policy development, networks, and conferences telling the Vermont CS story.

2024

Catamount Community Schools
Collaborative (CCSC)



Internal UVM funding, continued VT Legislative funding, and significant external funding through the U.S. DoE allows for increased infrastructure, support, and expansion of CS in VT; Sparks the official formation of a UACS model in VT - the CCSC.



Cohort	SU/SD	# Schools	# Pre-K	(+CTE)	SU/SD Pop.	CS Schools	CS Populations
1	ANWSD	4	1		832	1	260
2	BSD	11	3	1	3,716	2	985
1	CCSU*	7	7		1,253	1	152
2	ENSU	1	1	1	362	1	192
2	KESD*	7	3	1	1,004	7	1004
1	NCSU	11	9	1	2614	11	2614
1	OSSU*	7	3		853	1	280
2	SJSD	1	1	1	1033	1	615
2	WCUUSD	6	5		1,416	2	906
1	WRVSU*	10	6	1	1,194	10	1,194
2	WSESU*	9	6	1	2,349	1	175
Totals		74	45		16,626	38	8,377
% of PS		24%	31%		22%	12%	12%

*The total SU/SD population is not reflected due to tuition students

The above data was obtained from the 2025-2026 Vermont Education Directory

The Community School approach aligns the systems to increase access.

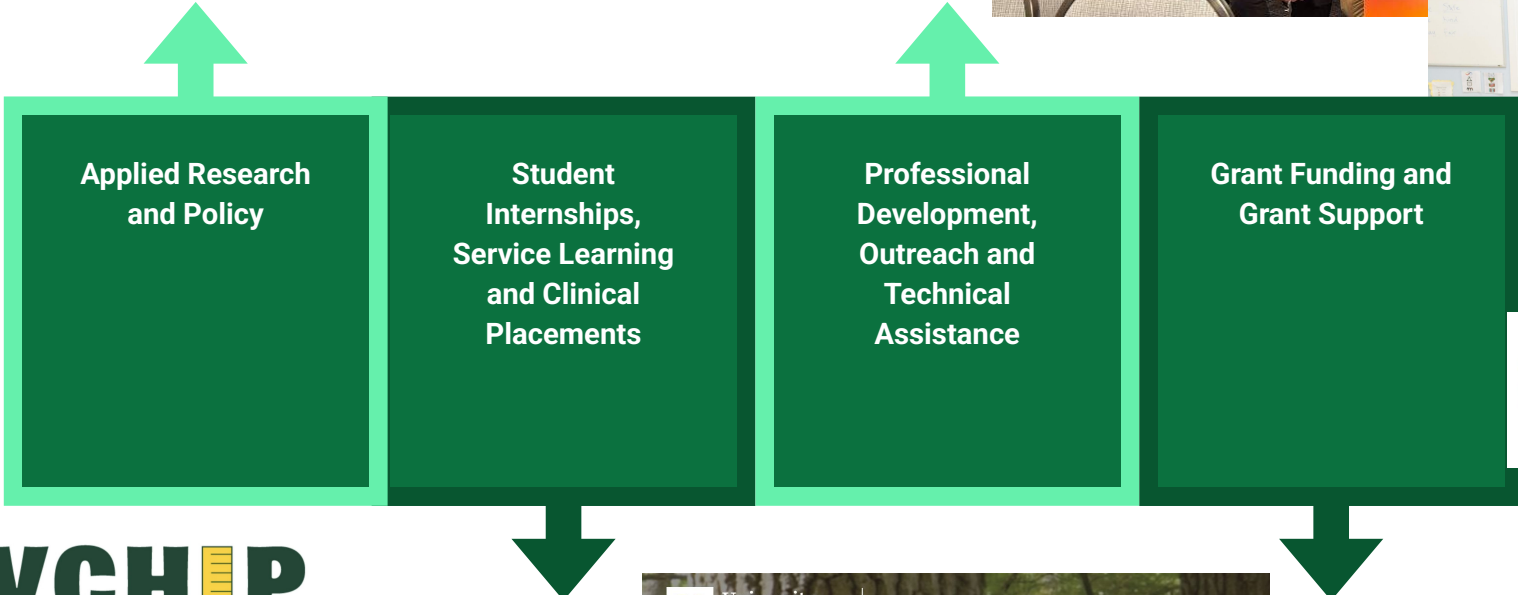
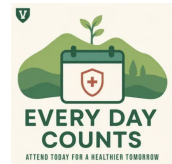
Community schools are an expression of equity through access. At their core, they are about ensuring that every student, regardless of background, circumstance, or need, can access the conditions required to learn, belong, and succeed. When we remove barriers to access, all students have the opportunity to thrive (or at the very least, a fair chance to do so). The Community School approach aligns the systems to increase access. MTSS ensures access to learning and academic support. PBIS ensures access to behavioral support and belonging. Community Schools ensure access to community, stability, and community-based learning and services.

– Jason DiGiulio, Principal, Hazen Union, OSSU



Enabling Conditions

Catamount Community Schools Collaborative and local and state level partners supports CS implementation and sustainability through long-term, mutually beneficial, democratic partnerships via 4 main [University Assisted Community School](#) Strategies.



CCSC Student Internships: Place-based Learning

Catamount Community Schools Collaborative

UVM Student Internship Placements

2024 - Present

UVM Students Support Community Schools in White River Valley

STUDENT SUCCESS UVM IMPACT

View

July 27, 2025

By Peter Koveralls

"Having an intern has helped us build momentum around a program that didn't previously exist."



	Mental Health / Psych	Food Systems	Public Health	PComm / CDAE	Place-Based Education	Graduate Education	Summer Residential Internship Cohorts
Cabot School	Clinical Mental Health Grad Student						
North Country Supervisory Union		Food Systems Undergrad	MPH Student			SHIE (Doctoral)	
Vergennes Elementary	Clinical Mental Health Grad Student						
White River Valley Middle School			MPH Student		Indiv. Designed Major Undergrad		Interdisciplinary Undergrads (12)
Hazen Union School			Public Health Undergrad				Interdisciplinary Undergrad (1)
CCSC				PComm Undergrads (2)		SHIE (Doctoral) HESA (Masters)	
Burlington School District	Psychology Undergraduate						
Essex North Supervisory Union				Public Comm. Undergraduate			



College of Education and Social Services



Multiplying Effect of Community Schools

“We were awarded an Act 78 Program Track grant, and are awaiting word on the Center Track Grant award notification. She has helped us leverage an additional \$250,00 on top of our community schools grant allocation to support our local community schools, and to bridge an equity and access gap that exists in our district. When you are on the ground doing the work and simultaneously trying to vision forward and build new programming, Jess adds a level of capacity that complements the work of our school based team. Simply put, the benefit of technical assistance and support from Jess result[ed] in a work based learning program that connects older students with younger learners, and meets a deep need for third space programming that builds a sense of belonging, combats chronic absenteeism, and bridges access divides that impact our rural communities.” - **Cohort 2 Community School Team**

State-level Return on Investment

Through to FY29, by **leveraging \$1M of state investment, secured \approx \$3.5M of additional grant funding** for VT CS.*

As of April, excluding the additional grant funds referenced above, **the \approx ROI of the Community Schools Coordinator in Vermont is 1.5x per \$1 expenditure.****

**Also supported through VREC investments & CCSC; **Made possible through CCSC investment and contract with APEX Consulting*

OSSU CSC supported partnership with the local Food Bank; garnered in-kind donations that equates to a \$500 credit a month to supply Hazen's Food Shelf to support student & family food security

WRVSU CSC supported a partnership with Hopkins Center at Dartmouth University to bring visiting performers to SU schools, meet with students, support integrated arts & music education and performing arts events, and offer free and/or discounted tickets to performances at Hopkins Center

NCSU CSC provides targeted support for McKinney-Vento students & families; helps students transition to school, provides transportation to NCSU, often spends up to 2 hrs per student, for 4 weeks to support re-entry so students gain the confidence to re-engage, attend, and graduate.

*One area we would highlight is the development of integrated student supports through partnerships such as our work with our designated agency Northeast Kingdom Human Services and the expansion of therapeutic classrooms like Catamount Community Connections Program (C3P). **These efforts have allowed us to reduce wait times for mental health services, respond more proactively to student needs, and keep more students engaged in their learning environment.** Through programs like C3P, we are seeing measurable outcomes. Data from school-based partnerships show that students reduced needs in at least one domain, with improvements in attendance, behavior, and engagement. In addition, **this model is cost-effective.** Traditional out-of-district placements can cost up to over \$150,000 per student annually, while local, integrated programs reduce those costs significantly by keeping students in their community and leveraging Medicaid funding.*

– Karen Conroy, Superintendent, SJSB



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COMMUNITY SCHOOLS PROGRAMS



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<p>March 6 Monday 5:30-7:30pm VUES Library</p>	<p>COMMUNITY SEED SWAP</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> UVM Master Gardener, Jessica Clements will teach us about seed saving, exchanging, and starting. Bring labeled seeds, starts, or cuttings to trade with local growers in the community, but not necessary. An assortment of seeds & supplies will be available. <p>https://www.eventbrite.com/e/community-seed-swap-tickets-54710666727</p>	
<p>March 13 Monday 5:30-7:30pm VUES Gym</p>	<p>HEARTSAVER CPR AED COURSE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learn to give Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation and use an Automated External Defibrillator (AED) safely, timely, and effectively. Taught by Certified Trainer, Jaime Wells. All participants will receive a personal CPR travel mask. No previous training necessary. <p>https://www.eventbrite.com/e/heart-saver-cpr-aed-course-tickets-550092055937</p>	
<p>March 21 Tuesday 5:30-7:30pm VUES Library</p>	<p>BECOME AN ASKABLE ADULT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Join WomenSafe's Teen Violence Prevention Specialist and connected youth partners to discuss how to become a trustworthy, safe, and approachable adult for the young people in your life - including discussions involve healthy relationships, healthy sexuality, and interpersonal violence <p>https://www.eventbrite.com/e/become-an-askable-adult-tickets-55037206597</p>	
<p>March 29 Wednesday 5:30-7:30pm Little City Cycles</p>	<p>INTRO TO BIKE MECHANICS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meet at Little City Cycles in Vergennes and learn hands-on about Bike Part Identification, Safety Check, Chain Lube, Flat Fix, Cable Systems, Brakes, and Gear Adjust. Led by owner, and bike lover, Tim Mathewson. All supplies provided. Youth should be accompanied by an adult. <p>https://www.eventbrite.com/e/intro-to-bike-mechanics-tickets-54721128107</p>	
<p>April 5 Wednesday 5:30-7:30pm VUES Gym</p>	<p>STOP THE BLEED: BLEEDING CONTROL COURSE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learn how you can identify and proper techniques to control life-threatening bleeding after an injury, with trained UVM Medical Professionals. Prepare yourself to take the necessary actions to save a life. All participants receive a free personal Bleeding Control Kit. <p>https://www.eventbrite.com/e/stop-the-bleed-bleeding-control-course-tickets-5549222727</p>	
<p>April 12 Wednesday 5:30-7:30pm VUES Library</p>	<p>PARENT POWER - ONLINE SAFETY DISCUSSION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kidpower VT discusses online safety, strengthen communication to keep conversations with your kids about their online lives open, respectful, and supportive; boundary setting, age-appropriate understanding of issues including such as online privacy, cyberbullying, and digital citizenship. <p>https://www.eventbrite.com/e/parent-power-online-safety-discussion-led-by-kidpower-vermont-tickets-55657228197</p>	
<p>April 19 Wednesday 4:00-7:00pm VUES Garden</p>	<p>COMMUNITY CELEBRATION AND GARDEN PARTY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Celebrate our wonderful community together with music, games, and garden activities. Bring your extra seeds, plant starts or cuttings to exchange with other growers. Containers, soil, and other materials provided. Help prepare the VUES School Garden for their growing season. <p>https://www.eventbrite.com/e/community-celebration-and-garden-party-tickets-55657228197</p>	

Community Schools are Critical Partners for Families & Communities

The systemic injustice that makes Community Schools a critical investment are not being addressed in any other area- not AHS, not VDL, not DOC, not ACCD. If those agencies and departments were working in coordination and according to their statutory mandates, there would be a true safety net, and children would come to school ready to learn. So, by all means, fix the broken systems so that Community Schools doesn't have to exist, but until that happens, fund and support the only thing that can create conditions for learning in every community, for every student. Community Schools is the only structure that can do that with the immediacy that this generation of students requires.

- Sam Stevens, Community School Coordinator, NCSU

Legislative Request - Sustain Community Schools

Community Schools is Vermont's vision for public education.

A small state investment in Community Schools opens the door to additional funding for Vermont schools and districts – through partnerships, philanthropic investments, and potentially new federal funding opportunities.

Partners, agencies and funders look for promising and proven practices.

Scaling Community School development across the state can secure investments and create opportunities for our students, schools, and communities.

Act now:

I. Reinstate the Community Schools grant program first outlined in [2021 Acts and Resolves No. 67](#) and amended in [Act 168 \(2024\)](#) (see pp. 22-28).

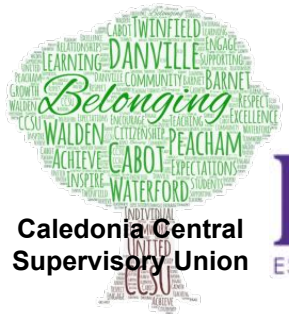
II. Establish an annual appropriation to be administered by the Agency of Education to support systems-level school transformation across our PK-12 public education system.

- Consider an appropriation of \$2.5M annually to support three-year awards for cohorts of up to five grantees, supporting a maximum of three cohorts per year (i.e., up to 15 awardees in their 1st, 2nd, or 3rd year of award).
- Consider allowing the AOE to use not more than 10% of the Community School appropriation to support program administration.



A Vision for Public Education State and Community in Partnership

Research Practice Policy Partnership





RSVP

BEFORE APRIL 6TH

FOR THE SPRING 2026 COMMUNITY SCHOOLS SYMPOSIUM

HOSTED BY THE CATAMOUNT COMMUNITY SCHOOLS COLLABORATIVE

MAY

FRIDAY

1

9AM-3PM

UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT, DAVIS CENTER SUGAR MAPLE BALLROOM

TOGETHER WE WILL:

- EXPLORE THE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS APPROACH AND CELEBRATE THE POWER OF PLACE, PARTNERSHIPS AND SHARED ASSETS
- HIGHLIGHT THE VITAL WORK OF VERMONT COMMUNITY SCHOOLS AND IMPACT OF UNIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

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QUESTIONS? EMAIL CCSC PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR,
BERNICE GARNETT (BGARNETT@UVM.EDU)