

VSCS Testimony on Education Programs
House Committee on Education
May 12, 2026

Testimony Comments Submitted to: House Committee on Education

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Subject: Vermont State Colleges System Approach to Teacher Education Preparation

Date: May 12, 2026

My name is Dr. Leslie Johnson. I am Associate Academic Dean of Behavioral Science and Education at the Community College of Vermont (CCV). As part of my role at CCV, I provide leadership and direction for the college's Education curriculum and oversee the faculty who teach in our Education programs. I am joined by my colleague Dr. David Kupferman. I am the Dean of the Schools of Arts & Communication and Education, Psychology, & Social Sciences at Vermont State University. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with the committee about the work that the Vermont State Colleges System (VSCS) does to support aspiring educators. We would like to take a moment to acknowledge the testimony of Sarah Kourkoulis, an education major at Vermont State University and future teacher.

The VSCS has a deep history of supporting Vermont's teachers. The legacy institutions of Johnson State College, Lyndon State College, Castleton University, and the Randolph campus of Vermont Technical College all began as normal schools, training teachers in some capacity in Vermont for the past two hundred years. Today, we offer multiple pathways for students to pursue careers as Early Childhood, Elementary, Secondary, and Special Educators. By collaborating across institutions, our programs serve people at all stages of their lives and differing life circumstances.

Vermont State Colleges System (VSCS)

The Vermont State Colleges System exists for the benefit of Vermont. The VSCS provides affordable, high quality, student-centered, and accessible education, fully integrating professional, liberal, and career study, consistent with student aspirations and regional

and state needs. We are unique in the nation, as we are a system with only two institutions serving an entire state: Vermont State University, the state's sole public regional university, and the Community College of Vermont, the state's sole community college.

Vermont State University (VTSU)

Created three years ago through the unification of Castleton University, Northern Vermont University, and Vermont Technical College, Vermont State University serves approximately 4,500 students across five campuses, other learning sites, and online. Our goal is to provide high-quality education, from dual enrollment and early college programs to bachelor's and master's degrees in ways that are accessible and affordable for the people of Vermont. We are a hybrid institution by design, meaning that our classroom delivery models include a combination of in-person, remote, and online teaching. In this way, we strive to make higher education accessible to our students through these flexible options. And beginning this past academic year, we have endeavored to make that education more affordable through the Freedom and Unity Scholarship.

In terms of educating the teacher workforce of Vermont, we offer a variety of bachelor's degrees in education, including elementary and secondary education, both with dual licensure in special education, as well as art, music, early childhood, and physical education. Additionally, we offer post-baccalaureate degrees for those who possess a bachelor's degree in an area other than education who want to pursue licensure as well as master's degrees in a variety of specializations. All of our programs in education are ROPA accredited.

Community College of Vermont (CCV)

CCV is Vermont's second largest institution of higher education, with over 10,000 students enrolled each year. From secondary education students to people with decades of experience working in their fields, we serve people at all stages of their lives. The average CCV student is 26 years old. Ninety percent of our degree seeking students attending CCV part-time and 74% working full- or part-time jobs. In Fall 2025, 52% of our students were first in their families to attend college, and 53% received Pell Grants to support their education. Honoring this diversity, we offer in-person and online learning; robust academic, career development, and student support services; and affordable tuition, with scholarships and grant opportunities—such as the 802 Opportunity Grant—that result in many students attending at low cost or no cost to them.

Although CCV has long served as an accessible entry-point for aspiring educators, in recent years the teacher shortage in Vermont inspired us to consider ways to strengthen our academic pathways for careers in K-12 Education. In Fall 2024, CCV rolled out a sequence of foundational Education courses which are shared with VTSU and designed to prepare students to continue their education at the bachelor's degree level. This fall, CCV will offer two new academic programs: the Paraeducator Certificate (30 credits) and Liberal Studies Associate of Arts with Specialization in Education Degree (60 credits). These programs were developed in response to feedback from the Agency of Education, partner institutions of higher education, teachers at Career and Technical Education Centers, and administrators at school districts and supervisory unions across the state. With the creation of these programs at CCV, the VSCS now provides a stackable pathway of workforce aligned credentials in Education that begins at the secondary education level, continues through the certificate and associate degrees at CCV, and builds to the bachelor's degree and post-bachelor's programs at VTSU.

Innovations and Opportunities

Also beginning in Fall 2026, the VSCS is launching an online bachelor's degree in elementary education (K-6) with dual licensure in special education (K-8) in partnership with the Agency of Education (AOE) and Department of Labor (DOL) and with financial assistance from the McClure Foundation. This Elementary Education Teacher Apprenticeship Pathway has been in development for the past 18 months and is based on a 'learn-while-you-earn' model whereby people who are currently working in Vermont's K-12 schools who do not yet have a bachelor's degree can now pursue one resulting in dual licensure. These students will be part of the AOE's and DOL's Registered Teacher Apprenticeship Program, for which CCV and VTSU are providing the coursework and degree program. One of the primary drivers of this job-embedded education pathway is to meet the needs of the state's teacher workforce over the next decade in a way that is accessible for students due to the course delivery model: the entire program, starting at CCV and continuing through VTSU, is available online asynchronously, so that students do not need to interrupt their workday to take classes on campus. Indeed, all courses with practicum components and the student teaching semester are expected to take place in a student's current place of employment. The degree program is also available to students who are not currently working in a school, although those students will not be a part of the apprenticeship model.

An ongoing consideration for meeting the needs of Vermont's teacher workforce is students' access to capital. In the traditional on-campus program, an education student often needs to make other financial or personal arrangements to complete the student

teaching semester, since the expectation is that they are in a school building full time for 13 weeks. This is often a challenge for our students, who are typically older, come from economically disadvantaged households, and may have families of their own. While we have innovated ways to provide students with access to financial assistance over the past few years, issuing such aid on a regular basis has been a challenge. The VSCS is addressing this challenge is through a variety of approaches, including our Paraeducator Certificate, Liberal Studies Associate of Arts with Specialization in Education Degree and our 2+2 Pathways, as well as the Elementary Education Teacher Apprenticeship Pathway. At the same time, we acknowledge that these are only part of a multifaceted approach undertaken by various partnerships between the VSCS, state agencies and departments, and external donors.

We would like to conclude by once again expressing our appreciation to the State of Vermont for its ongoing support of the VSCS, and especially for the bridge funding for VTSU during its unification and development over the past three years. We look forward to continuing to work with the State to meet the needs of all Vermonters.

Thank you.