

Recommendations on Policies that Impact the Youths of Vermont

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Education

While the State Youth Council supports certain aspects of Act 73; such as the funding formula, **the Council recommends that this law should not continue to be implemented in its current state without having reforms and edits including but not limited to**

- Distance
- Preserving VT communities through small schools
- Stress on teachers, staff, administrators, special education teachers
- Economic, such as, costs, closing of buildings, lay offs, bussing
- Additional Youth feedback



Education

The Council recommends the General Assembly **pass legislation to require Financial Literacy and Life Skills (Home Economics) classes in schools; additionally, allowing all High School students access to alternative learning pathways (Tech Centers).**



Education

The Council recommends the General Assembly **pass legislation to increase the number of specialist teachers in the state.**

- Specialist teachers include paraeducators, reading, writing and math interventionists, certified teachers, equity scholar, counselors/clinicians, Student Assistance Providers, translators, etc.
- Provide funding and incentives, such as loan forgiveness or relocation bonuses, to attract and retain qualified educators



Equity and Anti-Racism

The Council recommends the General Assembly implement the following three recommendations for the education system as presented in the 2024 report of the Executive Director of Racial Equity to the General Assembly (these three recommendations can be found on p. 19 of the document [p. 21 of the PDF] under appendix A):



Equity and Anti-Racism

A. Require The Secretary of Education to work with the Ethnic and Social Equity Standards in Schools Advisory Working Group to develop and maintain a model curriculum on teaching against hate speech and hateful imagery/symbols, enabling students to recognize discrimination, and to provide teaching materials, technical assistance, and coordination to school districts and superintendents to implement.

As a committee, we recommend that schools be required to instate a curriculum that teaches these topics as part of a required class.



Equity and Anti-Racism

B. Task the Ethnic and Social Equity in Schools Advisory Working Group with developing a model curriculum on hate speech/hateful imagery and a model policy on racial equity.

C. Require school boards to adopt a policy on racial equity at least as stringent as the model policy to be developed by the Secretary of Education.



Equity and Anti-Racism

Additionally, the Council recommends the General Assembly adopt a statewide equity plan as recommended in the 2024 report of the Executive Director of Racial Equity to the General Assembly (details can be found on pp.13 and 14 of the report in Appendix B).



Equity and Anti-Racism

Require schools to define the appropriate response for any incident of any level that occurs due to bias or prejudice, using both disciplinary and restorative actions. These consequences should be suggested by individuals trained in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and can include lessons, presentations, workshops, Restorative Justice practices, and dialogues related to the topic of the discrimination.



The Council recommends this strong effort to change the patterns of biased and prejudiced actions, without requiring victims to speak with their discriminator



Equity and Anti-Racism

The Council recommends the General Assembly **pass legislation to require schools to provide and maintain for students a feeling of comfort, and obligation, in reporting discrimination they experience, and witness, and to provide an alternative way of reporting incidents other than verbally reporting to a teacher, to allow reporting students to maintain anonymity.**



Some examples are a box where students can write their reports and drop them in the box, or an email to a designated administrator/staff member



Equity and Anti-Racism

In addition, we recommend that the General Assembly pass legislation to require schools to provide and maintain a feeling of comfort and obligation for students when reporting discrimination they experience and witness. We also recommend that legislation require schools to provide an alternative way of reporting incidents other than verbally reporting to a teacher.



Youth Mental Health

Due to the fact there are currently no eating disorder facilities for people under 15, and the ones in the state that do exist have chronically long wait times, the Council recommends the General Assembly **pass legislation to fund the building of an inpatient eating disorder facility within the state of Vermont that accepts youth aged 11–17.**



If this is not possible for this biennium, the Council strongly encourages the General Assembly help fund/build the expansion of the Kahm Center in Burlington



Youth Mental Health

The Council recommends the General Assembly pass legislation to instate 3 forgiven mental health days per semester for middle and high school students in the state of Vermont. Students who have a diagnosis from a certified clinician would have 5 mental health days per semester. In schools that have a trimester system, students without a diagnosis would have 2 days, and students that have a clinical diagnosis would have 3–4 days.



Climate Change

With the vision to increase composting participation across the state, the Council recommends the General Assembly **pass legislation to offer tax incentives for co-ops, garden centers, and other outdoor businesses to accept compost for free and benefit from selling the resulting soil**



The state could provide residents with compost buckets and establish a statewide online map of compost drop-off locations.



Climate Change

To protect Vermont's forests and keep stored carbon from being emitted into the atmosphere, the Council recommends the Governor and General Assembly **support and expand youth environmental stewardship opportunities, engaging young Vermonters in trail work, forestry, conservation, and environmental monitoring.**



Youth Voice

The Council recommends the General Assembly **pass a resolution allowing municipalities across the State to extend voting rights to 16 and/or 17 year olds in local elections and town meetings.**

- A resolution would provide youth with a direct voice in government, fostering a stronger sense of civic responsibility
- Ensures that Vermont's tradition of direct democracy on the town level endures, giving youth an early opportunity to value civic practice



Youth Voice

The Council recommends the General Assembly, in regards to existing legislation, that **Senate Bill 8 be passed and signed into law, expanding eligibility for coverage under the Dr. Dynosaur program to all Vermont residents under 26 years of age or below 312% of the federal poverty level.**



This expansion would provide a safety net toward those who may not have access to employer-sponsored insurance or those transitioning through differing educational and professional stages, ensuring their continuity of care during a formative stage of personal and professional development



The Council recommends the General Assembly **refrain from pushing back the implementation of the Raise the Age Initiative, and to follow through with the July 1st, 2027 implementation date outlined in Act 4.**

➤ The Raise the Age Initiative acknowledges that the human brain is not fully developed at the age of 18, and that poor decision making on the part of young adults should not be met with punitive, often harsh punishments, that follow them for the rest of their lives. Furthermore, it promotes restorative justice practices, a form of justice that is oftentimes more effective in dealing with low-stakes instances of law-breaking.



Youth in Vermont's Economy and Keeping Youth in the State

The Vermont State Youth Council requests **that its federal funding be replaced by an appropriation of \$140,000 in State funds for FY27.**

- Dedicated state funding will ensure youth council members have the right to fully express their identity and experiences, so they can truly represent the diversity and perspectives of young Vermonters
- The total includes \$47,000 in youth stipends; venue expenses and mileage reimbursement for in-person meetings; and costs associated with the administrative and technical assistance of Vermont Afterschool in support of the VSYC



Youth in Vermont's Economy and Keeping Youth in the State

The Council recommends the General Assembly **create a state fund for affordable housing in the state.**

➤ To support this fund, the General Assembly should consider installing an inheritance tax of 5% to be applied to Vermonters receiving an inheritance of \$250,000 or more. Another consideration would be to use revenue from the already existing estate tax for the affordable housing fund

➤ This tax money will go into a state fund for affordable housing, using different strategies such as utilizing abandoned buildings and dorms when empty, or building up instead of out



Preservation of Vermont's Traditions and the Future of Vermont's Rural Character, Activities, and Professions

To uphold Vermont's tradition of being a direct democracy at the town level, the Council recommends **Vermont public schools educate students on the history and importance of Town Meeting Day in the days and weeks leading up to it, and strongly encourage students to attend.**



Preservation of Vermont's Traditions and the Future of Vermont's Rural Character, Activities, and Professions

To improve the health and food security of Vermont youth and to support Vermont's farming tradition, the Council recommends that **Vermont's public schools are to be required (and assisted) to provide free school meals to all K–12 students, and to use a certain amount of food from local farms in school meals.**



State Youth Council Endorsed Bills

- H.30 - “An act relating to the use of seclusion and restraint on children and youth in the custody of the Department for Children and Families”
- H.192 - “An act relating to prohibiting solitary confinement for children”
- H.511 - “An act relating to the admittance of federal immigration authorities into schools”
- H.640 - “An act relating to adding voting student members to school district boards”



Updates & Next Steps

The State Youth Council has the following updates and goals in order to be more responsive during the legislative session, increase input from youth, and focus more on advocacy:

- Implementing strategy of creating biennial recommendations to better align with the Legislative schedule and have more time to advocate and connect with policymakers during the Legislative session
- Launched a newsletter for youth and youth groups to stay updated on the State Youth Council and increase youth feedback to the Council
- Planning to hold two Public Hearings to hear what youth want and need in Vermont to inform the Council's new biennial recommendations

