

Recommendations on Policies that Impact the Youths of Vermont

Harmony Devoe (She/Her), Council Chair

Astrid Longstreth (She/Her), Climate Change
Committee Chair

Aiden Otterman (He/Him), Youth Voice
Committee Chair

Nisha Hickok (She/Her), Equity and Anti-Racism
Committee Chair

Taryn Burns (She/Her), Education Committee Chair
Claire Zandstra (They/Them), Youth Mental Health
Committee Chair



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 centers to take compost free.**

- The companies could profit from selling the soil while assisting the state
- The state could provide buckets and an online map of drop-off sites



Climate Change

To encourage leaning off fossil fuel usage in public transportation, the Council recommends that the General Assembly **pass legislation to have 75% of school buses and 100% of public transportation be electric by the year 2050.**

- This builds off of VTrans' current plan to have all buses electric by 2050
- Benchmarks could be to have have 25% of school buses electric by 2040 and 25% of public transportation by 2030



Climate Change

To raise an environmentally conscious generation within the state of Vermont, the Council recommends the General Assembly **pass legislation to instill climate change into education by requiring it within the curriculum of science classes.**



This could be done by the addition of a standard dedicated to the understanding of climate change



As youth, this is important to us as we are the ones currently in the education system. The first step to solving a problem is knowing how to solve it, and educating oneself about it



Climate Change

To protect Vermont's forests and keep stored carbon from being emitted into the atmosphere, the Council recommends the General Assembly **pass legislation to conserve all current old growth forests in the state by 2040.**

- Because old growth forests store a large amount of carbon, this is essential to stopping climate change
- According to the Vermont Land Trust, less than 1% of Vermont's forests are old growth
- Results shown from the SYC survey indicate youth value the protection of Vermont's natural landscape and forests as the most important environmental issue



Education

The Council recommends the General Assembly **pass legislation to allow students the opportunity through school choice, public to private or public to public, to learn in a different environment and setting that will better fit their needs.**

- Allowing a percentage of students per grade level to transfer to public or private schools that accept public funding
- Implementing a randomized lottery system to ensure fairness and equity in the selection process
- Launching this initiative as a pilot program over two years, initially limiting participation to 10–20 students per grade level to evaluate its impact



Education

The Council recommends the General Assembly **pass legislation to provide more funding for state funded preschool—to increase the 10 hours that exist now to 25 hours**

- More time to develop critical early learning skills
- Equitable access to quality preschool education



Education

The Council recommends the General Assembly **pass legislation to increase specialist teachers and certified school personnel in the state.**

- Increase the number of specialist teachers and certified school personnel statewide
- 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 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.



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 carry out specific, direct, educational consequences for those who cause harm through an act of bias or prejudice. 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 regard to English Language Learners, the Council recommends **if a student scores 4 in all language domains on the Access for ELL's testing for 3 years consecutively without placing out, their proficiency shall be reevaluated in a more holistic manner.**

- We task the ELL Teacher at the given school to assess the student's proficiency by surveying the student's teachers, counselors, and advisors as well as the student themselves to determine proficiency
- This survey would evaluate a student's ability to complete assignments, participate in class, and to succeed in challenging courses in regards to their knowledge of English
- This process can also be initiated upon request after 2 years of a student scoring 4 in all language domains on the Access for ELL's testing



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.



Youth Mental Health

The Council recommends the General Assembly **pass legislation to:**

-  **Award multi-year grant funding to teen centers that apply for it annually**
-  **Assure the teen spaces have high-quality staff and diverse and accessible opportunities**
-  **Fund the creation of new teen spaces**



Youth Voice

The Council recommends the Governor **agrees to the repeal of the February 1, 2026 sunset period of Act 109 as included in the FY26 budget.** This repeal would allow the Vermont State Youth Council to continue to provide Vermont's youth with a platform to represent themselves in state politics



The sunset repeal would ensure the continuation of the important role the State Youth Council plays in providing a voice for Vermont's youth in state politics



Youth Voice

The Council recommends the General Assembly **pass a resolution providing support and empowerment to municipalities extending voting rights to 16 and/or 17 year olds in local elections and town meetings.** This resolution would provide youth with a direct voice in government, giving way to a generation of youth with a stronger sense of civic responsibility

- 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 **pass a resolution tasking the Vermont Agency of Education with creating a survey for students to evaluate their teacher's performances in class.** This survey would be given to students grades 6–12 at the midpoint and endpoint of each term of the school year.



Provides students with a voice in their school community, and teachers with professional development opportunities



Youth Voice

The Council recommends the General Assembly **adopt S.8 as introduced to expand eligibility for coverage under the Dr. Dynasaur program to all Vermont residents under 26 years of age or below 312 percent 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 **adopt H.2 as introduced to increase the minimum age at which a child may be subject to juvenile delinquency proceedings from 10 to 12**

- Raising the minimum age allows for the implementation of alternative measures, which can be more effective in addressing the underlying causes of juvenile misbehavior
- The council opposes the extended the deadline for implementation of the “Raise the Age” initiative



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 a “progressive” 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



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

The Council recommends **taxes are realistically payable and income-based.**



If an area has many out-of-state tax payers, the Council recommends the residents of that area are not subject to higher taxes, as is common in towns like Warren where, for example, the majority of homes are owned by out-of-staters, resulting in extremely high tax rates for residents in the town



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

The Council recommends **the Vermont Chamber of Commerce avidly promote local businesses and urge locals and tourists alike to support them, allowing for more local job opportunities.**

To uphold Vermont's tradition of being a Green Mountain State, the Council recommends **the State of Vermont ensures its National Forests are protected from the federal threat of allowing them to be bought by private owners, or exploited for their resources.**



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.**

To uphold Vermont's tradition of being a direct democracy at the town level, the Council recommends that **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.**



Next Steps

The State Youth Council has reevaluated their goals and timeline in order to better align with the Legislative session, be more responsive to proposed legislation, and focus more on advocacy by:

- Opening the SYC application earlier in the year and onboarding the new SYC members before school starts
- Recommendations will be created for each biennium instead of yearly, with a review in the Fall
- The second year of each biennium will have a greater focus on advocacy and connecting with policymakers

