

## **Report on Act 77 of 2013**

### **16 VSA §4011(e) Reports**

#### **Annual Report on Early College Programs in the Vermont State Colleges System to the House and Senate Committees on Education**

**Submitted by Chancellor Elizabeth Mauch**

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**Early College Report to Legislature**

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**Legislation:** Act 77 of 2013 An Act Relating to Encouraging Flexible Pathways to Secondary School Completion

**Summary of Legislation:** This act creates a Flexible Pathways Initiative within the Agency of Education to expand opportunities for secondary students to complete high school and achieve postsecondary readiness. Among other programs, the act provides the opportunity for students to complete 12th grade entirely at a postsecondary institution. For the purposes of this report, the act specifically amends 16 VSA §4011(a) to require any postsecondary institution receiving funds for early college to “report to the House and Senate Committees on Education annually in January regarding the early college program, including data relating to the levels of participation, the success of the program in achieving the stated goals of the program to enhance secondary students’ education experiences and prepare them for success in college and beyond, and the specific outcomes for participating students relating to programmatic goals.”

**Summary of Findings**

1. Early College continues to be an important, successful flexible pathway option for high school seniors across the state. Enrollments and success rates are high, with a total of 377 students participating this fall, and 96% of last year’s Early College cohort successfully continuing from fall to spring. Students participating in Early College within the VSC also have high continuation rates to a second year of postsecondary education. Most significantly, the VSC is seeing the impact of focused efforts to support continuation, particularly of underserved students, with a **41% increase in the number of first-generation students who continue their education after Early College**, from the 2022-2023 cohort (88 students) to the 2023-2024 cohort (124 students).
2. This fall, the Community College of Vermont has seen its highest levels of student participation in Early College to date, welcoming a class of 240 students--**a 72% increase since the spring 2022 announcement of the Free Degree Promise**, which covers tuition and fees after any federal and state financial aid and provides stipends to help with books, transportation, and other costs associated with going to college through the high school class of 2026. Early College students at CCV enrolled from 13 Vermont Counties--38% were first generation, 47% were low-income, and 18% were BIPOC.
3. **Act 77’s Dual Enrollment Program and the Fast Forward program supported at Career and Technical Education Centers** continues to serve as a critical ‘on ramp’ for students to gain skills and confidence to participate in Early College, particularly those students who may not begin high school with strong postsecondary aspirations and preparation. At CCV, 47% of its current 240 Early College students had previously enrolled in dual enrollment or CTE Fast Forward courses.
4. Representatives from the VSC continue to work with a cross-agency group inclusive of VSAC, the Vermont Agency of Education, and the Vermont Virtual Learning Collaborative to investigate and **address barriers to Early College participation by underserved populations**. This year, the group divided into three smaller working groups focusing on using data to improve equity, promoting EC opportunities statewide with a focus on underserved populations, and providing enhanced programs and support for students once enrolled in EC to promote student success.

## Vermont High School Students Enrolled in Flexible Pathways Early College Programs

	Community College of Vermont	Vermont State University*	VSC System Total
<b>ACADEMIC YEAR 2024-2025</b>			
Fall 2024	241	136	377
<b>ACADEMIC YEAR 2023-2024</b>			
Fall 2023	234	136	370
Spring 2024	227	128	355
Full AY students	227	128	355
<i>Fall-Spring Continuation Rate</i>			<i>96%</i>
<b>ACADEMIC YEAR 2022-2023</b>			
Fall 2022	198	153	351
Spring 2023	190	144	334
Full AY students	190	144	334
<i>Fall-Spring Continuation Rate</i>			<i>95%</i>
<b>ACADEMIC YEAR 2021-2022</b>			
Fall 2021	140	122	262
Spring 2022	137	111	248
Full AY students	137	111	248
<i>Fall-Spring Continuation Rate</i>			<i>95%</i>
<b>ACADEMIC YEAR 2020-2021</b>			
Fall 2020	181	134	315
Spring 2021	161	117	278
Full AY students	161	117	278
<i>Fall-Spring Continuation Rate</i>			<i>88%</i>
<b>ACADEMIC YEAR 2019-2020</b>			
Fall 2019	160	150	310
Spring 2020	155	130	285
Full AY students	155	130	285
<i>Fall-Spring Continuation Rate</i>			<i>92%</i>

\*Vermont State University data represent Early College and VAST program students across all campuses and before Fall 2023, its legacy institutions (Castleton University, Northern Vermont University-Johnson and -Lyndon, and Vermont Technical College in Randolph and Williston).

## Continuation rates of VSC System Early College Students

<b>Early College Year 2023-2024 Cohort Total</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>% Total Cohort</b>
Returned to the VSC System	168	45%
Attended other colleges (VT and out-of-state)	132	36%
<b>Total continuing in Fall 2024</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>81%</b>
<i>of which:</i>		
First-Generation Students	124	34%
Not First-Generation	164	44%
Unknown First-Generation Status	12	3%
<b>Did not continue at any college after EC year</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>19%</b>
<b>Early College Year 2022-2023 Cohort Total</b>	<b>351</b>	<b>% Total Cohort</b>
Returned to the VSC System	143	41%
Attended other colleges (VT and out-of-state)	128	36%
<b>Total continuing in Fall 2023</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>77%</b>
<i>of which:</i>		
First-Generation Students	88	25%
Not First-Generation	174	50%
Unknown First-Generation Status	9	3%
<b>Did not continue at any college after EC year</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>23%</b>
<b>Early College Year 2021-2022 Cohort Total</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>% Total Cohort</b>
Returned to the VSC System	83	32%
Attended other colleges (VT and out-of-state)	128	49%
<b>Total continuing in Fall 2022</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>81%</b>
<i>of which:</i>		
First-Generation Students	88	34%
Not First-Generation	114	44%
Unknown First-Generation Status	9	3%
<b>Did not continue at any college after EC year</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>19%</b>
<b>Early College Year 2020-2021 Cohort Total</b>	<b>315</b>	<b>% Total Cohort</b>
Returned to the VSC System	85	27%
Attended other colleges (VT and out-of-state)	133	42%
<b>Total continuing in Fall 2021</b>	<b>218</b>	<b>69%</b>
<i>of which:</i>		
First-Generation Students	98	31%
Not First-Generation	115	37%
Unknown First-Generation Status	5	2%
<b>Did not continue at any college</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>31%</b>



## **Early College & Impacts of Free Degree Promise**

The Free Degree Promise, funded by the J. Warren & Lois McClure Foundation, builds on Early College to give students who continue at CCV the chance to earn an associate degree at no cost within a year of high school graduation. The program includes additional stipends to help with transportation, books, and other expenses. The promise of a free degree, along with strong partnerships with high schools and technical centers, has helped CCV's Early College program continue to grow over the last two years.

In fall 2024, CCV welcomed its largest class of 240 Early College students, 158 of whom expressed intent to continue as Free Degree Promise students next year. This year's Early College cohort represents 92 first generation students, 113 low-income students, and 43 students who are BIPOC.

CCV is currently serving the third year of Free Degree Promise students. The cohort of 82 students who successfully completed Early College includes over 51% first generation and 41% low-income students from 45 Vermont high schools, including home school. The Free Degree Promise has resulted in a 150% increase in the number of low-income students enrolled in Early College over the last three years.

CCV partners closely with high schools and focuses on outreach to students and families who are less likely to know about and access Dual Enrollment, Early and College and the Free Degree Promise. These opportunities can be game-changers for students and ensure the economic vitality of Vermont.

## **Student Experiences**

### *Faith Holbrook: Early College & Free Degree Promise graduate*

Faith Holbrook always knew she wanted to attend college. Even as a young child in Essex, she saw herself growing up and getting her degree. Her grandparents, who adopted her and her little brother when she was seven years old, always emphasized the importance of education and she credits them for nurturing her academic enthusiasm. "They had a family at a young age and didn't attend college, and none of their four children experienced college," Faith explained, "but they saw through friends and family what having a degree could do for a career and life."

Faith proactively consulted her school counselor early in her freshman year at Essex High School: "I knew I could not afford to pay for school." Her counselor told her about the state's Early College program at CCV, and Faith was thrilled to pursue it. When her year at CCV was coming to an end in 2022, she received an email from the McClure Foundation about a new program for students who complete Early College at CCV, called the Free Degree Promise. "I'd get to finish my associate degree at no cost," she recalled. "I read it once, twice, a third time... My grandparents and I hovered around the computer in awe." "When you remove the financial barrier, students view their future with clarity, hope, and excitement. They can focus on setting goals and planning a pathway to a degree," says Sarah Kresser, the Early College Degree Program Manager at CCV. "This gives them more agency and motivation."

With the Free Degree Promise and family support, Faith embarked on what she calls an "opportunity of a lifetime." Faith will graduate with her bachelor's degree this June, which she says would not have been possible without her associate degree "being taken care of by the incredible Free Degree Promise." After gaining more management experience and saving enough money, Faith and her fiancé plan to start their own business purchasing and managing properties in Vermont.

Read more experiences of Free Degree Promise students [Chelsea](#), [Blake](#), [Donovan](#), and [Alexis](#)



### **Why Students Participate**

Of 150+ interviews conducted with Early College and VAST applicants during the admissions process, many students shared that early college would help start them on the path to their future:

- Many individuals are considering or planning to attend college to pursue degrees in fields such as business, engineering, psychology, nursing, art, and more.
- Some are exploring different paths within the college, such as internships, studying abroad, or pursuing advanced degrees, and feel Early College or VAST makes these more achievable.
- Many students are motivated to start their college experience early by a combination of factors, including a desire for academic challenge, alignment with career goals, financial incentive, peer and family influence, a need for change, specific curriculum interests, flexibility, positive remote learning experiences, and guidance counselor recommendations. The Early College and VAST Programs are seen as a pathway to a more engaging and focused educational experience, providing a head start on college and future careers.

### **Strong Academic Achievement**

Of the 135 students who are participating in VTSU's Early College and VAST program this year:

- 25 students earned a 4.0 GPA during their first semester (17 of the 25 have 4.0 avg. college GPA)
- 41 students earned between a 3.5 to 4.0 GPA
- The average GPA for Early College and VAST students for the Fall 2024 term was 3.16

### **Student Financial Support**

All students completing the Early College or VAST year will earn a \$2,000 Better Together Scholarship in good academic standing. This scholarship recognizes these students' hard work and shows VTSU's commitment to helping them earn an affordable college degree. This year VTSU will award 122 Better Together Scholarships.

### **In Their Own Words**

*Otter Valley Union High School | VTSU @ Castleton – Early College*

It has given me a once in a lifetime opportunity to figure out my academic interests with the most variety I've ever had. It has helped me figure out what kind of learner I am. Early college has helped me build important real world communication skills and time management skills as well. Early college has been an amazing experience for me and I do not regret this decision and while I acknowledge it doesn't work for everyone I strongly recommend people give it a try because it's completely changed my trajectory.

*Springfield High School | VTSU @ Randolph – Early College Alumni*

Early College prepared me to study Dental Hygiene at Vermont State University. I started out at Randolph for my Early College year and was able to gain admission into the Dental hygiene program at Williston when I graduated. It was a great experience and really helped me prepare.