



**LEGISLATIVE REPORT**

# **ACT 67 COMMUNITY SCHOOLS**

## **IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT**

**December 15, 2024**

Issued by the Vermont Agency of Education

## Acknowledgement

Material for this report was prepared by researchers at University of Vermont's College of Education and Social Services as part of a contract with the Agency of Education to study the implementation of Community Schools in Vermont. The full text of their report, titled Vermont Community Schools: Raising Communities, is available on [the UVM website](#).

## Executive Summary

Community Schooling offers a promising approach to address the increasingly complex needs of students in Vermont. This approach recognizes that the school, as an integral place in each student's life, can also be a hub to connect families, communities and students in ways that strengthen these relationships to the benefit of all. In this limited-scope pilot project, initiated at the height of the pandemic, five awardees developed and implemented strategic initiatives tailored to specific localized needs and assets.

Initiatives which bore highly promising results across academic, behavioral, and social domains. The localized approaches pursued by this small number of awardees limits the utility of a direct apples-to-apples comparison across districts, but taken in aggregate the indicators of improvement were consistent enough to signal real promise in this approach.

- **Academic** - Across awardee Supervisory Unions/Supervisory Districts and aligned with the Expanded and Enriched Learning Opportunity pillar of the Community School model, efforts resulted in improvement to both academic opportunities and outcomes. Additional course offerings were added to academic calendars, project and place-based curriculum was added to existing coursework, afterschool time programming was expanded, and standardized assessment results improved.
- **Behavioral** - In keeping with the Community School pillars of Integrated Student Supports and Safe, Equitable, and Inclusive Learning Environments, work across awardee SU/SDs saw marked improvements in student wellbeing and behavioral outcomes. Reported school climate improved along with reported food security and the number of students accessing healthcare, including mental and dental care. Simultaneously, truancy and absenteeism decreased while the number and type of behavioral referrals trended toward less frequency and less seriousness.
- **Social** - As highlighted by the Community School pillars of Active Community and Family Engagement and Collaborative Leadership Practices, the communities served by awardee SU/SDs saw significant advances in staff development and community engagement. Teacher retention rates, as well as reported job satisfaction, improved in Community Schools over the period of their award and all five awardees saw an increase in the number of community partners engaging with the school on meaningful projects.

The trends of this initial trial run are clear, students enrolled in Act 67 awardee schools are receiving a more engaging education from more satisfied educators in schools that are more connected to their local communities. In the words of Hazen Union School

Principal Jason Di Giulio, “Our students feel seen and supported, and families have access to resources that make a tangible difference in their lives. This holistic approach has improved attendance, decreased discipline referrals, and fostered stronger relationships across our school community.” A strategy that contributed to any one of those outcomes might invite further attention, a strategy that contributes to all of them would seem to demand it.

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## Purpose

This report was written and submitted pursuant to [Act 67 of 2021](#), as amended in 2024 by [Act 168](#). This statute states, “On or before each of December 15, 2024 and 2025, the Agency of Education shall report to the General Assembly and the Governor on the impact of the funding under this act.” Specifically, this statute charges the Agency to address two questions:

- (1) Does the community schools structure support schools in more efficient implementation of the education quality standards contained in 16 V.S.A. § 165?
- (2) Does the community schools structure improve access to and efficiency in the provision of mental health services, social support services, and health services?

This report will focus on the period between summer 2021 and autumn 2024 during which the initial, ESSER-funded round of Community School awards were active. The subsequent, one year state-funded awards are currently ongoing. This report will speak to the competition of those funds, but the implementation and impacts will be reviewed in greater depth in the December 15, 2025 report.

## Community School Theory of Action

Community Schools, also sometimes referred to as Full-Service Community Schools, are a strategy that seeks to leverage the physical and organizational centrality of a public school within a community to connect available resources to existing needs. This model is not about asking schools to shoulder additional burdens or step in to fill gaps between other providers, but rather about enabling schools to serve as a connection point between partners and create opportunities for mutually transformative action. Often the work of Community Schools is the work of identifying the existing strategies, resources, and initiatives that are already serving a school and a community well and connecting them to one another in service of larger strategic aims. This shared action allows schools to expand the range of resources and opportunities they can offer the students and families they serve beyond what would be possible using only existing infrastructure. By positioning the school as a resource hub, this model also allows schools to redefine and expand how they conceptualize their role in their community. In other words, a Community School might, through partnerships, offer resources and opportunities to the whole of their community, not just those households with school-age children.

A focus on meeting the needs of their community and doing so through leveraged partnerships are not qualities unique to Community Schools, these are features one would expect to see in some form in any public school. What particularly distinguishes a Community School, particularly in Vermont where the model was defined in Act 67 of

2021, is a designated Community School Coordinator and a plan of action that intentionally incorporates all five Community School Pillars.

The **Community School Coordinator** is a designated full-time or part-time school employee, “responsible for the identification, implementation, and coordination of community school programs.” Bringing this position into the school, rather than having it housed in a community partner as is more common in Community School models nationally, was an essential innovation for the implementation in a rural context. By housing this position in the school, the person who fills it can focus on community outreach but is trained and fluent in education rule, policy, and law. The **Community School Pillars** are five broad categories which represent the aims of the Community School model, into which any policy or initiative undertaken by a Community School should fall. As defined in statute, they are:

- **Integrated student supports** – Addressing barriers to learning that would prevent students from engaging with school. This pillar includes things like medical access and food security.
- **Expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities** – Improving the quality, variety, and number of educational opportunities available to students. This pillar includes things like expanded afterschool programming and implementing project-based learning.
- **Active family and community engagement** – Connecting the work of the school with the families and communities it serves. This pillar includes things like restorative truancy work and intergenerational community meals.
- **Collaborative leadership and practices** – Flattening hierarchies and bringing the voices of all stakeholders into the decision-making process. This pillar includes things like regular student participation in schoolwide planning and enhanced opportunities for teacher professional development.
- **Safe, inclusive, and equitable learning environments** – Unique to VT, this pillar was added in statute but not defined. We interpreted it to mean creating spaces where all people feel welcomed and supported in pursuing their education. This pillar includes things like peer mentoring programs and positive behavioral integrated supports.

In many Vermont towns, the school building represents the largest single piece of physical infrastructure and it is generally located at or near the center of the community. The Community School model seeks to use both that space and location to provide a centralized resource distribution hub. In the rural model we are piloting, schools are “pulling in” resource providers. This framework allows the Community Schools model to serve as an equity tool, overcoming resource disparity and provider deserts in Vermont’s geographically isolated towns. Rather than building access to many different providers across a broad geographic region, connections bring those providers into a space that is already accessible minimizing disruption and maximizing efficiency.

## Implementation

### Initial Grant Competition

With its signature by Governor Scott in June of 2021, Act 67 was passed into law and the Agency of Education was authorized to design and release a competitive grant program using \$3.4million of VT's Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funds with the intent to "...[provide] funding for the implementation of community school programs that provide students with equitable access to a high-quality education [...]." This grant was released on July 14, 2021. This application was designed to allow the maximum degree of flexibility to applicants while cleaving to both the best practices established by national Community School research and the specific requirements of the authorizing legislation. Per Act 67 §3(d)(1), applicants were required to assure that they either had in place at the time of the application or would secure within their first year, a needs and assets assessment, a part-time or full-time Community School Coordinator, and full implementation of positive behavioral integrated supports.

### Cohort One Summary

Six SU/SDs submitted applications, of whom five were granted awards. These five awardees made up the initial Act 67 Community Schools cohort that carried through the three original ESSER-funded years and the sustainability application track of the one additional state-funded year.

In the initial competition, applicants were asked to provide a detailed plan and budget document to support their first year of implementation with allowable award amounts ranging from \$50,000 to \$250,000. This process was repeated in each year of the award, with awardees being asked to provide a detailed proposal and budget for the coming fiscal year. **Table 1** displays the initial year one requests alongside the amounts that were awarded, in total, at the end of three years' implementation and the amount granted in the FY 25 state-funded sustainability awards.

**Table 1 - Cohort One Awards**

Awardee	Initial Award Requests*	Final Award Amounts*	Sustainability Award Request
Addison Northwest Supervisory District	\$238,943.00	\$761,774.40	\$75,000
Caledonia Central Supervisory Union	\$163,620.00	\$411,451.40	\$75,000
North Country Supervisory Union	\$228,370.00	\$751,201.40	\$75,000
Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union	\$123,000.00	\$395,831.40	\$75,000
White River Valler Supervisory Union	\$250,000.00	\$772,831.40	\$75,000

\*These totals are only for the initial three years of ESSER-funded work.

Of the five awardees in this first cohort, see **Table 2**, four opted for a “bottom up” model where implementation was focused first on one target school within the SU/SD. These target schools were used as incubators to develop strategies, engage with stakeholders, and pilot initiatives. These target schools also housed the newly hired Community School Coordinators. In all four of these SU/SDs, the work that began at one school spread organically to others in-district as initiatives bore fruit. Only one applicant, NCSU, opted for a “top down” mode where an SU-level Community School Coordinator position was created to vision and manage the Community Schools work district-wide with support from building level leadership in all twelve schools in the SU. By the end of the initial period of performance, there was active Community Schools work happening in twenty-eight schools across the five awardee SU/SDs.



**Table 2 – Awardee Implantation Site Details**

Awardee	Implementation Site	Grades Served	Number of Students
ANWSD	Vergennes Union ES	K-6	295
CCSU	Cabot School	PK-12	159
NCSU	12 schools within SU	PK-12	2,684
OSSU	Hazen Union HS	7-12	290
WRVSU	White River Valley MS	6-8	132

### Supportive Accountability

To both embody the ideals of the Community School model and ensure fullest possible insight into awardee progress, the Agency utilized a supportive accountability framework in its grant monitoring. This process involved bringing together both the school-level practitioners and the state-level evaluators to mutually develop evaluation materials. In practice, this meant that state evaluators used materials provided by awardees during their oversight meetings to develop detailed monitoring tools, which were then provided back to awardees during quarterly meetings to confirm accuracy, collect status updates, and allow opportunities for self-reflection. Consistent application of this practice over the life of the award resulted in a real-time process of continuous improvement for both the individual awardees and the larger state-wide Community School implementation effort.

In addition to one-on-one meetings with individual awardees, this model included the development of a full cohort community of practice with the Agency serving as a connection point for school-level practitioners to come together with colleagues across the state engaged in similar work. This space served as an incubator in which opportunities could be shared and challenges could be discussed and could serve as a nucleus for the continued development of Community Schools work in the state.

### Research Practice Partnership

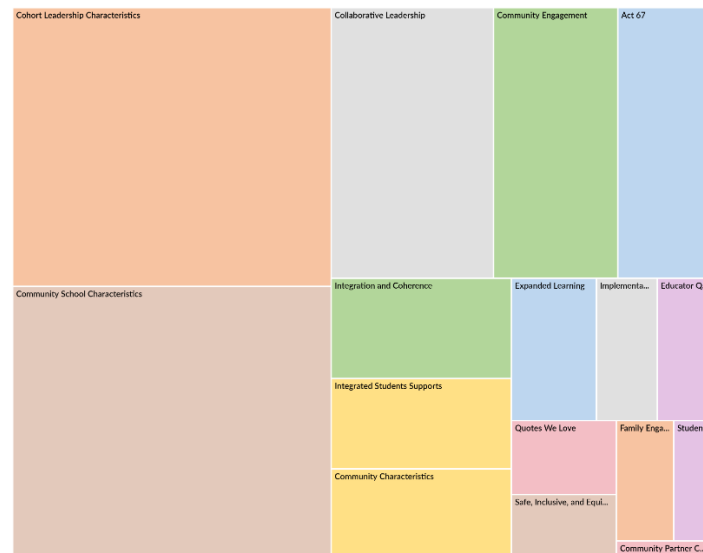
In order to best support, study, and report on implementation of Act 67, the Agency of Education, represented by Jess DeCarolus and Johannes Haensch, entered into a formal Research-Practice Partnership (RPP) with the University of Vermont College of Education and Social Services, represented by Bernice Garnett and Peter Knox. Through this partnership, researchers from the university were added to our existing state/local community of practice, providing access to high-quality implementation tools (e.g., the sample logic model in **Fig. 1**) and emerging research materials. In addition to

this direct support to awardees, the university provided the Agency with research support in the form of data collection and analysis (e.g., **Fig. 2**) of grant implementation. The ultimate deliverable of this formal partnership was the implementation report (linked above) which lays out in significant detail the work of the RPP and the results of our three years of study.

**Figure 1 – Logic Model of CS Implementation developed for ANSWSD by UVM**



**Figure 2 – Qualitative Interview Coding Heatmap**



## FY 25 Grant Competitions

In the summer of 2024, the Vermont legislature authorized an additional \$1 million of state funding to support the continued work of the Vermont Community Schools act. The agency prioritized the release of a Community School Sustainability award to the initial Act 67 recipient schools, with an amount of \$75,000 selected as the amount of funding necessary to, at minimum, maintain the Community School Coordinator without burdening local funding. The remainder of the allocation was competed in the form of \$120,000 Community School Foundation grants to new SU/SDs for the purpose of meeting the initial thresholds for implementation. At time of writing, that grant competition remains open.

## Impact

### Significant Findings

Best implementation research from national sources indicate that Community School development begins to precipitate meaningful change in systems after three to five years of sustained practice. As such, our initial cohort is now in a position to start seeing the positive impacts of their efforts, and those impacts have been highly encouraging. Because the individual projects varied across awardees, a straight comparison of metrics across districts would not deliver meaningful insight into the success of the Community School model. However, as data collected through interviews, site visits, and material submission was reviewed, clear themes emerged. Presented below in **Table 3** is a collection of significant data points across awardees and across domains. For the purposes of this chart, the unified social domain has been divided between student, educator, and family/community impacts. This is not an exhaustive list of data collected, but it is a particularly compelling collection of indicators that align with national research on Community School outcomes. These data points were provided by our awardees during our grant oversight and each is attributed to a specific, grant-funded initiative at the local level.

**Table 3 – Significant Data Points**

SU/SD	Academic	Behavioral	Social: Student Engagement	Social: Staff Recruitment / Retention	Social: Family and Community Engagement
<b>ANWSU</b>	Math/Literacy scores increased by 5% in Year 3.	<p>Overall reduction in disproportionate discipline rates for students of color at VUES.</p> <p>Access to health and wellness services for 40% of students and families in need with area health care providers.</p> <p>Decreased time between referral and service delivery and a 5% decrease in student absenteeism and school health office visits.</p>	<p>Increased attendance in VUES Afterschool program first-time participants.</p> <p>Student sense of belonging increased by 25% for new participants in AS activities.</p>	No data.	10 unique community mentors contributing 172 hours of mentoring to elementary students under 10y.o. AY 23/24.
<b>CCSU</b>	<p>100% of graduating seniors have applied to and been accepted to at least one two- or four-year institution.</p> <p>All graduates have completed a self-designed internship.</p> <p>100% participation in SeniorX Capstone Project-Based Learning Program (AY23/24)</p>	In AY23/24, no students were referred out of building for behavioral supports.	<p>Over 50% in grades 1-6 and 25% in grades 7-12 participate in Afterschool Program.</p> <p>25% of Cabot students grades 7-12 participate as youth facilitators</p>	2022-2024, 100% staff retention in elementary grades	<p>90% of families participating in afterschool program would sign up child again.</p> <p>60 community members attended latest SeniorX capstone exhibition of learning night.</p>

SU/SD	Academic	Behavioral	Social: Student Engagement	Social: Staff Recruitment / Retention	Social: Family and Community Engagement
<b>NCSU</b>	16hrs of nutrition/aged opportunities provided with 35 food workshop participants attending regular opportunities; 30 students with disabilities and significant social/behavioral support needs participated in life skills courses, developed food, prep skills.	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.	78 students participate in dental screenings/necessary procedures in AY 23/24 with 802 Smiles partnership.  Restorative Truancy Program (RTP) students show improved attendance rates after participation and 8 community volunteers were prepped for increased RTP support.	Staff surveys completed noting 100% of NCSU staff know about Community Schools and over 75% know about Community Schools opportunities and funding available to support their work.	50 participants at Early Childhood Play Group events; 38% attended more than one.  4 contracted content teachers offered 5-week series w/ Van Go Mobile Arts Lab in 2 locations across NCSU.
<b>OSSU</b>	Significant growth in MAP Test scores.  15 courses in school schedule that did not exist or could not be offered before; Study halls are minimally attended, as students are in courses or learning experiences.	Complete shift in referral cause: intense behavioral issues to benign (e.g., cell phone use, spending time in hallways to connect w/ other students, teachers).  25% reduction in hazing/harassment/bullying referrals.  33% reduction in overall behavioral referrals.	50% reduction in Grade 9 absenteeism over the three years of Act 67 implementation.	100% retention of existing teacher contracts between Act 67 Y2 and Y3; Attributed to school climate and culture changes within CS approach.  OSSU educators recruiting other educators for needed positions from outside the SU/district (Math Interventionist).	School was able to open doors as a community resource hub and emergency shelter during community flood event.  Growing partnerships with Hardwick Town Manager, Hardwick Recreation Committee, Lamoille Valley Rail Trail, The Civic Standard, The Center for Agricultural Economy, and other local CBOs.

SU/SD	Academic	Behavioral	Social: Student Engagement	Social: Staff Recruitment / Retention	Social: Family and Community Engagement
WRVSU	72% of 10th graders achieved the national benchmark in reading; 61% of 11th graders proficient or exceeding on spring science VTCAP (AY23/24)	7% decrease in the number of referrals (AY22-23 to AY23-24)	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.	"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	School- and Community-wide reads: Year 1- <i>Best at It</i> by Malik Pancholy; Year 2 <i>Dress Coded</i> by Carrie Firestone; Year 3 <i>First Rule of the Climate Club</i> by Carrie Firestone & <i>Two Degrees</i> by Alan Gratz; All books addressed issues of equity and climate change, identity, and action. Author visits and student-led book discussion groups attended by the community at local libraries and in Bethel University.

Chart developed in partnership with UVM research team as part of contracted services to AOE.

## Return on Investment

While work on establishing an exact dollar-for-dollar return on investment is still underway; we do have some initial indicators that highlight the degree to which this funding acted as a force multiplier, enhancing the capacity of the awardees to do the work of school. The role of the Community School Coordinator, in particular, is instrumental to this observed improvement. The addition of this one dedicated position with the specific charge to seek and maintain relationships with community partners unlocked significant opportunities for all awardees. Initial analysis of just the short-term funding benefits of this program indicates that awardee SU/SDs were able to expand the impact of the collective \$3M received from their ESSER-funded Act 67 awards with an additional collective \$2.63M in state grants and \$2.38M in private and federal awards. These braided funding streams allowed the awardee cohort significant resources to pursue a broad range of strategies across domains. A reading of the funded strategies, **Table 4**, of these awardees speaks to the depth and diversity of strategies pursued, aligned with the strategic priorities of the Agency and State Board of Education.

**Table 4 – Funded Strategies**

Category	Number of Strategies Funded	Percent of Awardees Participating
Multi-Tiered Systems of Support	25	80%
Community-Based Learning	13	100%
CHE/ Health and Wellness	17	100%
Mental Health/Counseling	14	100%
Student Voice/Agency	15	100%
Equity Literacy	24	80%
Connected Literacies	12	100%

## Recommendations

Based on the results of this pilot program, the Agency makes the following recommendations for the future.

- Given the strong indicators of success seen in the initial pilot cohort, the Agency strongly recommends additional study to explore how the Community School model might be a means of addressing resource disparities in the context of small and rural communities. The current body of research on Community Schooling nationally tends to focus on the benefits of the model in large, urban centers. The work undertaken by the Agency and our RPP has garnered national attention as work on the cutting-edge of education research. Vermont has an opportunity to be a leader in this space that should not be overlooked.
- While initial indicators are promising, further work is needed to fully study the return on investment of Community School implementation. There is work currently underway in partnership with the UVM CESS team to analyze and report a dollar-to-dollar return for every dollar invested in the Community School Coordinator position and the Community School implementation work that position enables.
- Based on observed difficulties in filling the Community School Coordinator position in our initial pilot cohort, the Agency recommends the creation of a designated Community School Coordinator credential (similar in design to the Work-Based Learning Coordinator credential) to foster a professional community of practice, ensure access to professional benefits, and connect practitioners with robust and high-quality professional development.



- Based on the observed essentiality of building and district leadership commitment to the success of Community School implementation, and to support the sustained work of Community Schools through turnover, the Agency recommends continuity of the Community School Community of Practice begun with the first cohort of awardees. Holding this space as a means to foster, encourage, and connect leaders with an interest in exploring the model.
- Given the enormous benefit in terms of implementation tools, data collection, and data research this program gained from the formal RPP with the University of Vermont College of Education and Social Services, we would recommend exploration of other opportunities to partner practitioners and policymakers with researchers, both in the continued implementation of Community Schools in Vermont and other emerging educational strategies. Bringing these groups into conversation stands to mutually benefit all parties and Vermont's youth as practice, theory, and policy inform one another to the improvement of all.