

Report of the Vermont Prekindergarten-16 Council
To the House and Senate Committees on Education and the State Board of Education

January 2013

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HISTORY and MISSION

In 2010, the Vermont legislature created the Prekindergarten–16 Council (Council) to further the state’s policy

— ... to enable and encourage all Vermonters to acquire the postsecondary education and training necessary for the state to develop and maintain a skilled, highly educated, and engaged citizenry and a competitive workforce.¶

The legislature also set the goal of ensuring that at least 60 percent of the adult population will have earned an associate’s or bachelor’s degree by 2020 (Act No. 133, Sec. 5, 2010 Session).

In furtherance of these goals, the Council is charged with developing and regularly updating a statewide plan to increase aspirations and attainment of postsecondary education. The enabling legislation instructs the Council to consider strategies that:

- (1) ensure that every high school graduate in Vermont is prepared to succeed in postsecondary education without remedial assistance;
- (2) increase the percentage of Vermonters who earn an associate’s or higher level degree or a postsecondary certification;
- (3) identify and address areas of educator preparation that could benefit from improved collaboration between the prekindergarten–12 educational system and the higher education community;
- (4) promote early career awareness and nurture postsecondary aspirations;
- (5) develop programs that guarantee college admission and financial aid for low income students who successfully complete early commitment requirements;
- (6) enhance student engagement in secondary school, ensuring that learning opportunities are relevant, rigorous, and personalized and that all students aspire to and prepare for success in postsecondary learning opportunities;
- (7) expand access to dual enrollment programs in order to serve students of varying interests and abilities, including those who are likely to attend college, those who are from groups that attend college at disproportionately low rates, and those who are prepared for a postsecondary curriculum prior to graduation from secondary school;
- (8) develop proposals for statewide college and career readiness standards and assessments;
- (9) create incentives for adults to begin or continue their postsecondary education; and ensure implementation of a prekindergarten–16 longitudinal data system, which it shall use to assess the success of the plan required by this subsection. (16 V.S.A. § 2905©)

The PreK–16 Council has embraced these challenges and is working to develop innovative solutions in concert with its member organizations, as described in the following pages. In the year ahead, the Council will examine policy and financial obstacles that may impede the state’s progress toward its educational reform goals.

MEMBERSHIP and ADMINISTRATION

The Council membership is established by statute. The names and affiliations of current Council members are set out in Appendix A.

At its first meeting on August 2, 2010, the Council chose Tim Donovan, Chancellor of the Vermont State Colleges, as its chair. Chancellor Donovan was elected unanimously to a second term on October 18, 2011, and continued to serve through July 2012. Peter Peltz, a member of the Vermont House of Representatives, was elected unanimously to lead the Council into its third year.

Legislative staff members Donna Russo-Savage, Agatha Kessler, and Marjorie Zunder provide support to the Council. Gretchen Babcock (January – March 2012) and Karen Scott (April – November 2012) provided additional support as part-time contractors.

Since created, the Council has received no legislative appropriation. To support its activities in FY 2012, the Council received a generous grant of \$35,000 from the J. Warren and Lois McClure Foundation, which was renewed for FY 2013. The Council appreciates the J. Warren and Lois McClure Foundation, the Richard E. and Deborah L. Tarrant Foundation, and the Ben and Jerry's Foundation for financial support since its inception.

Despite the generosity of these funders, the Council believes that sustainable staff support is needed going forward. The Council fulfills a unique role in bringing together the diverse sectors in Vermont's education system — early childhood education, K–12 schools, post-secondary institutions, and workforce development — for common dialogue, planning, and problem-solving.

Council communications are conducted virtually through a dedicated website www.prek16vt.org hosted by the Community College of Vermont. All Council notices, agendas, minutes, slide presentations and other meeting materials are posted to this site, along with relevant research and readings on current topics of interest to the Council. The website was renewed and upgraded in 2012 to improve its ability to serve as a tool for Council communications.

The Council is required by statute to meet quarterly. Its meetings are open to the public, and Council records are subject to Vermont's public records law. In 2012, the full Council met in January, April, June, September and December, and its working groups held several meetings during the year. The Council's higher education subcommittee met in September and November to approve a distribution from the Higher Education Endowment Trust Fund pursuant to 16 V.S.A. §2885(d). (See Higher Education Subcommittee below.)

2012 COUNCIL ACTIVITIES (through July 2012)

The working groups of the Council researched best practices in three areas in 2012, carried over from the 2011 identification process (see the Council's 2011 report), and made recommendations to the full Council. The three areas are discussed below.

Performance-Based Learning System

The Council has embraced the challenge of shifting the focus of education in the K–12 system from schooling and teaching to learning. This approach puts the needs of students at the center of the system rather than the interests of adults — teachers, administrators, or others in the educational bureaucracy. It will, however, require a major transformation of educational policy and practice to move from a traditional system where progress is measured by seat

time, credits, and grade levels to a 21st Century model that supports multiple learning pathways and personalized learning plans.

One of the key attributes of a learning-centered education system is the concept of performance-based learning. The essence of this powerful concept is that students only advance upon the mastery of explicit, measureable learning objectives, regardless of the time it takes a student to reach that mastery. Learning is the constant, and time is the variable.

The Vermont Department of Education has created opportunities for performance-based innovation through a series of grant-funded initiatives. The first Innovative Schools Grants provided incentives to Vermont high schools to develop flexible pathways and/or performance-based graduation models. These schools are working on establishing flexible pathways, dual enrollment opportunities for more students, virtual learning, early college programs, personal learning plans, engaging parents and comprehensive course development that emphasize preparation for post-secondary education. Schools are also engaged in discussions and actions that will assure sustainability of their initiatives and describing the outcomes they are working toward and experiencing. Second year schools will focus on creating multiple pathways with multiple (smarter balanced) assessments that will inform the profession.

A larger grant program, funded by the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, enlists partners, including the Council, the Vermont State College System, the New England Secondary Schools Consortium, and Voices for Vermont's Children, to drive a learning-centered, performance-based education system across the entire state.

Career Awareness

The working group determined that in order to have a successful strategy to bring adult learners to degree completion, Vermont needs a public engagement campaign. This campaign would identify and reach out to former college students who have the motivation and desire to complete their degrees. It would also connect with employers, especially in Vermont's key growth industries, to convince them to support their stop-out workers by providing tuition reimbursement, paid internships, guaranteed job placements, and other incentives for degree completers.

The group recommended a change from the focus on stop-out adults to one of more general career awareness across the spectrum of education. The reasoning is that there are several groups and entities (CCV, VSAC, etc.) already committed to moving adults who have stopped-out of their college education into the category of postsecondary graduates. This focus is too specific for the work of this Council. A more general focus on assuring that career development and awareness is highlighted from PreK through 16 is a better match for the high level discussions of this group.

The Council believes it is important to help students develop the vocabulary of career exploration and awareness early on, including exposure to a wide variety of careers and work opportunities. Many students and families experience a lack of awareness of what is out there, what education exists for various careers, and the realities of funding training and postsecondary education.

Alignment Initiative

The third major area of the Council’s work for 2012 was the Alignment Initiative, which addressed one of the key legislative purposes for the creation of the Council, “to help coordinate and better align the efforts of the prekindergarten–12 educational system with the higher education community.” The Working Group identified key immediate actions for the Council to take in order to facilitate alignment across the secondary-postsecondary shift. Although the actions can be targeted specifically to mathematics, they are relevant to establishing an “alignment system” more generally across Vermont:

The Council should define “college and career ready” at a statewide level and encourage the legislature, ROPA, Education Board, etc. to adopt such a definition.

Also needed is inclusion of “soft skills” focused on the career component (as well as their import for content/academic component), such as motivation, time management, note-taking, personal responsibility, financial literacy, etc.

Council should establish a PK–16 website or WIKI (perhaps in partnership with those already in use at DOE or VSAC) that showcases best practices nationally and locally for alignment regarding the transition out of high school to postsecondary opportunities, including examples of ideal course content, pedagogical principles, administrative policies, and financial alignment across the systems.

The Council should collaborate with ROPA, State DOE and the State Board of Education to encourage (require) cross-sector (i.e., secondary and postsecondary) group meetings at least twice per calendar year, based on a local regional approach.

Step 1 – Seek buy-in from state level education entities, including VSC, UVM, and independent colleges

Step 2 – Identify local/regional consortia for IHEs and secondary schools (e.g., Leahy Center focused on the Educational Service Agency in the NEK (NEKSDC), as well as all superintendents who met together regularly, to establish a community of practice that led to the Lyndon alignment model)

Step 3 – Identify champion(s) (e.g., one IHE contact and one who will spearhead the Cross-sector effort, with responsibility for (a) combating inertia, (b) helping to identify group goals, and (c) spearheading communication with other state cross-sector groups

Step 4 – Clearly stipulate the format and objectives for each cross-sector group

Step 5 – Establish timetable, roles and responsibilities, ultimate products that the group is responsible for.

Possible topics for groups to focus on:

Further aligning teacher preparation programs with new CCSS requirements

Working toward reducing need for developmental/remedial coursework upon college entry

Developing aligned course syllabi across the transition to college/career, in partnership with PreK–12, IHEs, and workforce stakeholders

Movement toward THIS being the model for professional development, particularly for high school faculty and IHE faculty that teach first-year students/general education classes, as well as teacher education faculty

Need to promote at least partial adoption of a new model that integrates PreK–12 faculty, including both discipline-specific and teacher education faculty

Faculty, parents, and community members can use this information to develop and implement local models

COUNCIL ACTIVITIES 2012 (after July 2012)

Under newly elected Chair Peter Peltz, the Council prioritized work in the following areas at the December 2012 meeting:

Prekindergarten Education

The Council believes that improving the quality of, access to, and coordination of prekindergarten education is a necessary foundation for the entire educational system in the state. A working group was established to study this area and make recommendations to the Council at the February meeting. Primary areas of investigation are current legislation, communication with key stakeholders and organizations, and advocacy.

Career and College Readiness/Transitions

Just as the Council believes that prekindergarten education is critically important to prepare young students for kindergarten and the early grades, this working group is committed to better prepare graduating students for their adult lives. The earlier work of the Performance-Based Learning System and the Career Awareness subcommittees will extend to proposals and coordination with educational oversight entities, workforce training, and the private sector to improve graduating students' engagement in employment and/or education opportunities.

HIGHER EDUCATION SUBCOMMITTEE

The Higher Education Endowment Trust Fund was created by the legislature in 1999 to provide scholarships for Vermont students and to incentivize the growth of endowment funds at the University of Vermont and the Vermont State Colleges. The Higher Education Subcommittee met in September and November and discussed the following:

Higher Education Endowment Trust Fund and Distributions Pursuant to 16 V.S.A. § 2885

Steve Wisloski, Deputy State Treasurer, presented the State Treasurer's annual report on the Higher Education Endowment Trust Fund (Fund). Mr. Wisloski reviewed the Fund's performance against the benchmarks set for FY2012 and against the Fund's overall performance since its inception in 2000. In light of the large, unexpected contribution to the Fund in FY2012, temporarily reducing percentages would not necessarily result in payments of smaller dollar amounts.

5% Distribution from Fiscal Year 2012 to UVM, VSC, and VSAC

The Treasurer pays this amount automatically if the fund will not fall below statutorily–required levels.

2% Distribution from Fiscal Year 2011 to UVM and VSC

The Subcommittee conditionally approved the distribution from FY2011 at its September 8, 2011 meeting. Provided that the Fund will not fall below statutorily–required levels, the Treasurer will pay this amount upon certification that (1) UVM and VSC received 2:1 matching donations from private sources and (2) they will use the funds to create or increase a permanent endowment.

2% Distribution from Fiscal Year 2012 to UVM and VSC

Mr. Wisloski testified that there is sufficient balance in the Fund to support distribution next year, although the Treasurer’s Office did not make a recommendation. A motion to conditionally approve distribution was made and seconded. UVM and VSC recused themselves. All remaining members voted in favor of the motion.

APPENDIX A

Members of the Prekindergarten-16 Council 2012-2013

Representative Peter Peltz, Chair

Tim Donovan, Chancellor of Vermont State Colleges, Chair 2010-2012

Armando Vilaseca, Commissioner of Education

Carrie Alice Ballou, designee of the Commissioner of Labor

Richard Cate, designee of the President of the University of Vermont

Don Vickers, President of Vermont Student Assistance Corporation

Susan Stitely, President of Association of Vermont Independent Colleges

Jeff Maher, Principal of Stowe High School (VPA designee)

Bob Rosane, Superintendent of Franklin Central (VSA designee)

Karen Heath, Teacher at Barre Elementary/Middle School (NEA designee)

Julie Coffey, Executive Director of the Building Bright Futures Council

Joe Teegarden, Director, Green Mountain Technology and Career Center (VACTCD
designee)

Lisa Ventriss, President of the Vermont Business Roundtable

Lindsay M. DesLauriers, Voices for Vermont Children

Senator Philip Baruth

Linda Olson, Faculty, Castleton State College (AFT designee)

Holly Morehouse, Director of the Vermont Center for Afterschool Excellence