

Burlington-Winooski Explainer **Final Draft**

Working Together to Shape a Bright Future

Since 2011, the communities of Winooski and Burlington have been engaged in a conversation about how to “remodel” our educational system for the needs and demands of 21st century life. Our goals are clear: to shape a hopeful and prosperous future for our two communities, and to ensure that all young people in Winooski and Burlington have the knowledge, skills, and habits they need to thrive in a complex, global society.

Today, our 21st century economy requires that every young person master a broad set of higher level skills and abilities that were previously expected of just a few: for example, the ability to write and speak well, to analyze and synthesize information, to master technology, to work with diverse groups of people, and to solve problems as part of a team. Together, we are focused on how best to educate our young people for college, career, and citizenship in an era of unprecedented social and economic change.

Fundamental to our school change efforts is a commitment to equitable and respectful school environments where students from all backgrounds, races, and cultures feel welcome, listened to, and encouraged to learn at high levels. Winooski and Burlington are two of the most diverse cities in Vermont. Since all of our students will be living in a far more diverse society than what their parents and grandparents experienced, our diversity is a unique asset that must be fully embraced.

As we work to bring our educational system “up to code” for modern life, we are grateful to be the beneficiaries of a large grant from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, the largest private funder in New England devoted exclusively to education. The grant enables us to jumpstart the change process—to make substantial progress in a much shorter time than would otherwise be possible.

The Partnership for Change

Effectively remodeling the educational system requires strong partnerships with our entire community, including families, citizens, higher education partners, and the non-profit and business sectors. To build these connections, as well as to ensure best use of grant funding and sustainability of the work over time, the Winooski and Burlington school districts created the Partnership for Change. A research and innovation arm of the two districts, the Partnership serves as:

- A bridge between the two school districts, and between the districts and their local communities

- An incubator of ideas
- A communicator and disseminator of best practices
- A convener of school and community-based conversations
- A strategic advisor and facilitator

Since its launch in 2012, the Partnership has:

- Convened learning conversations in homes and community spaces across Winooski and Burlington
- Engaged a broad and diverse group of stakeholders on teams devoted to five key levers for school change
- Supported yearlong fellowships for local educators to serve as lead learners and facilitators of collaborative research
- Awarded mini-grants for pilot programs and projects designed and implemented by teachers, parents, students, and community partners
- Provided funding, training, and support for the rollout of 1:1 technology in both districts

Through the Partnership, Winooski and Burlington Schools have forged a common vision:

We will create innovative, collaborative, and equitable learning organizations that inspire all learners to lead their communities to a dynamic and sustainable future.

For more information about the Partnership for Change: <http://partnershipvt.org/>

Vermont's Education Landscape

The state of Vermont is in the vanguard of a growing movement in New England that is remodeling education for 21st century realities, recognizing that there is a significant gap between what we know about learning from science and best practice and what is happening in our schools and classrooms.

In 2013, the state passed Legislative Act 77, “An act relating to encouraging flexible pathways to secondary school completion.” The purpose of the legislation is to encourage and support the creativity of school districts as they develop and expand high-quality educational experiences that acknowledge individual goals, learning styles, and abilities. Through several concrete strategies—personal learning plans, community-based learning opportunities, virtual learning, and dual enrollment—the legislation is aimed at increasing high school completion rates and postsecondary continuation in Vermont, as central to maintaining and strengthening the quality of life in our communities.

Similarly, in 2013, the Vermont State Board of Education articulated a set of

priorities aimed at “providing equitable, high-quality learning opportunities to all children, delivered within a flexible and personalized system.” The priorities include closing opportunity gaps, promoting student voice, creating a more balanced assessment system, and enhancing school leadership.

Both Act 77 and the State Board Priorities support the current work of the Winooski and Burlington School Districts.

At the local level, municipal leaders in both Winooski and Burlington have demonstrated strong support for our change efforts. In 2013, Burlington Mayor Miro Weinberger moved his office to Burlington High School for a week, immersing himself in some of the innovative teaching and learning efforts and reinforcing the vital connection between education and the city’s future economic and civic development. As a result of his week at school, Mayor Weinberger has since established the Youth Advisory Council, a student-designed, student-run course through which local high school students provide input on the future of their city. The City of Winooski is also supporting our work through partnerships with the school district on a number of programs and activities. Every month, a group of Winooski High School students meets with Winooski city officials over lunch to weigh in on matters concerning youth in their community. In addition, the city and school, with support from the Partnership for Change, are working to expand a community-based tutoring program at the Winooski Teen Center to create a sustainable, yearlong option for students.

Students-at-the-Center: Our Common Framework

While the Winooski and Burlington School Districts are distinct entities operating in distinct contexts, we share a common framework that puts students at the center of everything we do. Researchers and practitioners in the fields of neuroscience and human development have recently defined the most important features of an educational system that gives all young people the opportunity to realize their talents and participate fully in community life. They are as follows:

Learning is personalized.

We recognize that every learner is different; the educational experience should be customized to support each student’s specific learning needs and passions. We have the know-how and the technology to make this a reality.

Teaching is focused on coaching and facilitating.

The educational model of our childhoods, with the teacher delivering content that the students were expected to absorb, is replaced by a more active back and forth between teacher and student. Like the athletic coach who motivates his players to reach their personal best, a 21st century teacher supports the design of projects that

set students' discoveries and talents in motion.

Learning reaches beyond the school walls.

Students learn through real-world experiences in the community, through internships, apprenticeships, college courses, collaborative projects, and exposure to different adult role models. They also have the opportunity to solve real-world problems on behalf of the community. In addition, online learning gives students unusual access to the wider world.

Progress is measured by mastery, not by age or the number of classroom hours.

Just as student athletes must practice in order to be able to play the game, students must reach a level of proficiency in their academic skills and knowledge that enable them to "show what they know." Those who demonstrate mastery in a given area can move on; those who need more time can continue learning. There are high expectations for all students and a wide range of authentic assessments of progress.

Time is a flexible resource.

Student-centered learning often requires changing the school schedule. The confines of the traditional 60-90-minute class, 6-hour school day, and 180-day school year are replaced with a philosophy of "anytime, anywhere" learning. For example, many of our students see the summer and school vacations as opportunities for intensive learning experiences outside of the classroom.

Implementing Our Vision

Such an ambitious agenda requires a robust implementation plan. Winooski and Burlington School Districts are focusing the remodeling efforts on five key levers for change that align with the Students-at-the-Center Framework. We identified these levers based on input from our local communities, as well as cutting-edge research and cumulative data.

Strengthening Youth Leadership and Engagement

Students learn more when they are engaged in what they are doing and have a voice in decision-making.

For more than one hundred years, schools have been teacher-centered environments, in which adults design and deliver the same lesson plan to all students. But research and best practices suggest that when young people have an authentic role in shaping their education, they succeed at much higher levels. In other words, if students participate in the design of their own education, tailoring it to their learning style, interests, and goals, they can achieve much more.

We also know that students are more motivated to become engaged in school when they feel their voice is valued. For this reason, creating opportunities in our schools and communities for young people to drive change and participate in decision-making is key to their success. And elevating student voice has another benefit—it gives adults the opportunity to make use of the previously untapped expertise of our youth. Listening to our students is critical to remodeling our schools because they know better than anyone what it's like to be in school today. And, when it comes to the future of our cities, whose perspective could be more important than that of the young people who will soon inherit them?

In Winooski and Burlington, a major goal of the school remodeling process is giving students the ability to take ownership of their learning. Supported by teachers, parents, guidance counselors, and other adults, all students will create a Personal Learning Plan based on their own learning profile, goals, and interests. Students will use this tool throughout middle and high school, working with advisors and family members to reflect on their learning and track progress toward their goals.

Winooski and Burlington are also committed to building student leadership in our schools and our cities. We are creating positions for students on the boards and committees that govern our schools and finding ways for youth to become partners in solving real problems in our community. Our remodeled educational system will not just embrace youth voice—it will depend on it. A key part of this work is helping young people build the skills they need to lead conversations, share their personal stories, and advocate for what they care about.

A Case in Point: School Innovation Seminar

One new opportunity for students to weigh in on how school works is the School Innovation Seminar at Burlington High School. In this elective course, students explore how people learn, what helps real learning happen, and what kinds of learning environments, opportunities, or systems best meet the needs of all learners. Seminar students guide and contribute to school change in a number of ways. They serve as consultants to educators and community partners who work with youth, design prototypes for 21st century learning, and pilot innovative practices. Along the way, students take ownership of their learning by helping design curriculum, co-creating a collaborative classroom culture, teaching, and determining how to assess their learning.

To Learn More about Strengthening Youth Leadership and Engagement:

Motivation, Engagement, and Student Voice by Eric Toshalis and Michael J. Nakkula from the *Students at the Center* series. To download: www.studentsatthecenter.org

Student and Youth Voice: Asking, Listening, and Taking Action via What Kids Can Do. To learn more: www.whatkidscando.org

Reshaping Teaching and Learning

Today, we know more than ever before about how people learn—and we have an abundance of new tools to support teaching and learning.

Brain research shows that learning works best when students have an active role in and understand the purpose of learning activities. For this reason, the most effective teaching and learning often start with students asking their own questions. Like coaches, teachers can motivate students, build their capacity, and guide them through the discovery process, but the learners do the work of identifying questions and finding the answers.

Thanks to sophisticated new technology, giving all students the opportunity to ask and answer their own questions is possible. Digital resources give learners access to a great deal more information than textbooks alone and new systems offer teachers increased flexibility in managing student learning. Thanks to these tools, learning can now be customized to each student's learning style, interests, and aspirations.

Meaningful learning also depends on trusting relationships—between students and teachers, students and students, and teachers and teachers. The spaces, time, and resources for learning can be used in ways that encourage and enhance those relationships. To support relationship building and learning across disciplines, Winooski and Burlington Schools are exploring new structures for grouping students and teachers. In addition, these new approaches to teaching and learning require a more flexible use of time and space that goes beyond the traditional eight-hour schedule and brick and mortar of school walls.

Winooski and Burlington Schools recognize that supporting teacher learning is fundamental to reshaping our schools. In fact, research shows that student outcomes improve when teachers are actively engaged in their own learning. For this reason, both districts are committed to providing intensive professional development for all educators, including support for the shift to student-centered instruction and the use of new classroom technology.

A Case in Point: iLab

At Winooski Middle/High School, the iLab is a new environment for 21st century teaching and learning. Although students sign up for it like any other course, the iLab offers a learning experience vastly different from traditional middle and high school classes. Located in a flexible, technology-rich space, the iLab gives students the opportunity to explore areas of interest, reach out to experts in the community, and take ownership of the learning process. At the same time, the iLab is a space where students and teachers alike can try out innovative education practices that can then be replicated throughout WMHS. All of the student-designed projects

undertaken in the iLab, follow a simple framework: Think it, Learn it, Make it, Share it. With individualized support from faculty advisors, iLab students study what they care about and share that passion with their peers, teachers, families, and the community. In future years, the iLab will grow to encompass even more options for student-directed, community-connected learning. Expansions could include an internship option through which students partner with local professionals to explore a field of interest and a problem-based learning course in which students work as a team to solve real problems in their community.

To Learn More about Reshaping Teaching and Learning:

How Youth Learn: A Portfolio to Inform and Inspire Educators, Students, Parents & More via What Kids Can Do. To learn more: www.howyouthlearn.org

Moving Toward a Proficiency-Based System

The world has changed and so has what students need to know and be able to do for 21st century success.

For the past century, Winooski and Burlington schools, along with most schools across the country, have measured students' readiness for graduation according to seat-time, or how many classes they take in each content area. But as young people prepare to enter today's rapidly changing world and contribute to a complex, global economy, it is crucial that high school diplomas mean much more. In order to thrive in the 21st century, all students must graduate with a broad set of skills, knowledge, and dispositions that are applicable to any career. Educators call these "proficiencies"—implying that all students must demonstrate mastery in order to graduate.

In each content area, Winooski and Burlington teachers are working to reshape curriculum with the mastery of specific proficiencies in mind. Students may still learn the quadratic formula in math and read Shakespeare in English, but the proficiencies that are required for mastery in these content areas will be more specific and much clearer to students, teachers, and parents. All parties will understand what aspects of the learning students have mastered and what remains to be mastered. While in a traditional curriculum, students can move from grade to grade without fully understanding what they have learned, proficiency-based learning requires that all students achieve excellence.

Sidebar

What Our Graduates Need to Succeed

In Winooski and Burlington, we identified new Graduate Expectations as part of a yearlong, community-wide process. Graduate Expectations are the overarching habits and dispositions that the community considers most important to the success

of all students in their lives after high school. By shaping our Graduate Expectations in partnership with our community, we ensure that everyone—students, educators, parents, and even employers—understands clearly what our youth must master for graduation and future success.

Burlington Graduate Expectations

Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
Effective Communication
Curiosity and Creativity
Cross-Cultural Understanding and Civic Engagement
Personal Development

Winooski Graduate Expectations

Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
Cross-Cultural Understanding and Community Engagement
Effective Oral and Written Communication
Engagement in Learning
Persistence
Physical, Social, and Emotional Well-Being

End Sidebar

A Case in Point: Proficiency-Based Learning in the Physics Classroom

The shift to a proficiency-based system is already emerging in our schools. After a summer 2013 site visit to the Eagle Rock School in Colorado, a national leader in proficiency-based learning, Burlington High School physics teacher Lisa Carpenter reorganized her curriculum around the key proficiencies within her content area. This change better supports all students' mastery of important physics concepts because now both Lisa and her students clearly understand what has been learned and what still needs work. Lisa has also opened up new possibilities for her students on the journey toward mastery. For instance, in order to learn about the properties of energy, students were charged with finding ways to increase energy efficiency in the Burlington community. They used their physics skills and knowledge to design prototype solutions, at least one of which will be produced in partnership with community businesses and organizations.

To Learn More about Moving Toward a Proficiency-Based System:

Proficiency-Based Learning Simplified from the Great Schools Partnership. To learn more: <http://www.greatschoolspartnership.org/proficiency>

Making Mastery Work: A Close-Up View of Competency Education via Competency Works. To download: <http://www.competencyworks.org/resources/making-mastery-work>

Bridging School and Family

Students succeed when schools support families as full partners in their children's education.

Families recognize that they raise their children in partnership with the community and, as a result, that schools are one of the most important influences in a child's development. This reality offers an incredible opportunity for families and schools to collaborate in preparing the next generation to thrive in college, career, and citizenship. Although parent involvement in education has long been limited to parent-teacher conferences once or twice a year, recent research shows that engaging families more deeply in their child's learning leads to even greater outcomes.

One important step toward strengthening family-school partnerships is ensuring effective communication. In spring 2013, the Partnership for Change commissioned a study of family-school communication in Winooski and Burlington. We learned a lot from these surveys, particularly that communication between families and schools must be two-way. Certainly, schools need to share clear and timely information with families about their child's progress. But there also need to be structures in place for families to ask questions and get answers from someone who knows their child well.

Families also deserve a voice in the educational system at large. In addition to being a partner in their own child's learning, parents should be represented on decision-making bodies and design teams. By working in partnership with educators, our students' families can help ensure that all young people leave high school prepared for today's world.

As a result, Winooski and Burlington are committed to strengthening relationships and communication between schools and families in order to help students reach their learning goals and plan for college and career. We hope to build on what we learned from the 2013 survey to improve family-school communication. In addition, Personal Learning Plans will make it easier for families to partner with educators and ensure that their children are making progress toward their goals.

A Case in Point: Student-Led Conferences

Student-led conferences are an essential step toward giving students and their families a greater voice in the learning process. This alternative to traditional parent-teacher conferences makes the conversation more authentic by putting the student at the center. Student-led conferences begin with the student sharing their learning. Families then have an opportunity to respond to and ask questions about their child's work. Finally, the student, teacher, and family members work together to plan next steps in the student's learning journey.

A Case in Point: Parents and Youth for Change

Winooski and Burlington want to make sure that all families in our community have a voice in our school systems, particularly those who have historically been left out of the conversation surrounding public education. That is why we have joined forces with Voices for Vermont's Children, an organization that has worked statewide to improve opportunities for children and their families for more than 30 years. Parents and Youth for Change is a project of Voices charged specifically with helping families and youth in Winooski and Burlington build relationships with one another, learn about educational issues, and take action toward better preparing all students for bright and hopeful futures. As the Lead Community Partner in our remodeling efforts, Parents for Change helps build leadership in underserved communities. Their local community organizers are committed to engaging diverse groups of Burlington and Winooski residents in the school change process.

To Learn More about Bridging School and Family:

A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement via SEDL. To download: www.sedl.org

What Research Says About Family-School-Community Partnerships via NCSE. To download: www.schoolengagement.org

Bridging School and Community

The best way to build skills for college, career, and citizenship is through real-life experiences in a real-world environment.

Learning about authentic issues, in community spaces, and with local experts helps students master what they need to know and be able to do for success after high school. Plus, research shows that when students see the purpose and relevance of what they are learning, they tend to be more engaged in school.

Of course, extending learning into the community is not just good for our students—it's good for our cities. Providing all our young people with a world-class education is critical to ensuring that Winooski and Burlington continue to grow and prosper. Thus, it is everyone's charge to ensure that they are well prepared for the tasks ahead of them. Municipalities, local businesses, and community organizations benefit from collaborating with learners and teachers because it gives them an opportunity to help shape the next generation of our community.

Winooski and Burlington are cities unusually rich in resources for learning: five distinctive colleges and universities, a diverse business landscape, a range of non-profit organizations and social services, and a vibrant arts culture. Not to mention,

our unique urban-rural location boasts access to Lake Champlain, the Green Mountains, the nation's leading farm-to-table food system, and more. With all of this just beyond school walls, the opportunities for students and teachers to partner with the community are endless.

The Winooski and Burlington school districts are committed to making relevant and applied community-based learning available for all students. These opportunities could include getting credit for independent career exploration (e.g. internships), bringing experts into the school building to enhance the classroom learning experience, and using skills and content knowledge to solve real world problems. Already, community based-learning can be seen in our schools from an initiative to explore Burlington using cutting-edge DNA barcoding technology in Advanced Genetics classes, to a day of learning about race and equity in community spaces and with community partners.

A Case in Point: The Future of Burlington

At Burlington High School, the Year End Studies (YES) program ends the school year with two weeks of intensive, high-interest learning opportunities that connect to our local community. In his inaugural YES course titled "The Future of Burlington," BHS civics teacher Dov Stucker began by asking students: *Imagine that you were to disappear, entirely, from Burlington, and then return in twenty-five years. What would you want to see?* From a wide range of answers, a central theme emerged: a vibrant Waterfront. As a result, the class spent the next two weeks discovering the history of the Waterfront, what happens there at the present time, and what its future holds. After dozens of tours and meetings with community partners, the students produced a formal document summarizing their key recommendations for the development of the Waterfront. This brief was submitted to Burlington's Mayor Weinberger and his Public Investment Team for consideration as new Waterfront projects unfold.

To Learn More about Bridging School and Community:

Community-Based Learning: Engaging Students for Success and Citizenship from the Coalition for Community Schools. To download: <http://www.communityschools.org>

Emerging Issues in School, Family, and Community Connections from SEDL. To download: <http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/emergingissues.pdf>

How YOU Can Help!

Your voice

We believe that the talent and drive needed to move our schools forward lie within our communities. In order to capture the wisdom of our whole community—including students, teachers, parents, and community members—we regularly host

learning conversations. These can be small gatherings among friends and colleagues or large, community-wide events. In addition, we are committed to including diverse voices on the teams that are doing the work of redesigning our school systems.

Your connections

In order to help our young people learn about 21st century careers and master real-world skills, we need you to connect with our schools. Already, community partners bring their expertise to Winooski and Burlington students through Year End Studies (YES), School Innovation Seminar, the iLab, and other programs. We view our community as the classroom of the future—help us build new partnerships today!

Your support

Although generous support from Nellie Mae Education Foundation has allowed us to jumpstart our efforts, long-term change requires sustainable funding sources. As taxpayers, we need your help to ensure that our schools have the resources they need to prepare all students for today's world and shape a bright future for our communities.

Your commitment to preparing our communities for a dynamic and hopeful future!

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