

**Vermont's Vision: Shaping Our Future Together**  
**General Talking Points**

**Part 1: Why is change needed?**

1. Vermont's education system must change in order to meet the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the inevitable challenges and opportunities that our community and our society will be facing in the next decades.
2. In the past, our schools prepared young people to live and work in an economy that was based in our state's natural resources: forestry, farming and the granite industry. Until the 1950s, Vermont schools also prepared young people to take their places in a once-booming economy.
3. Now, we must prepare our young people for a global economy in which many of the jobs of Vermont's past have become automated, and in which many of the new jobs of the future have not yet been defined.
4. This new reality requires providing students not only with "the basics"—reading, writing, and arithmetic—that have defined our educational system since agrarian and industrial times, but also with a whole new set of skills to succeed in an information-age economy and innovation-driven society.
5. These new skills are not just related to advances in technology; they relate to the way workers and thinkers in our society and businesses operate. Very soon, the vast majority of jobs will require more independent thinking and problem solving. Collaboration with people and teams across the aisle and in offices around the globe will be the norm. For people and teams both locally and across the globe, there will be a need for more advanced critical thinking skills. This will be true for all jobs in the workforce.
6. To prepare our young people and our community for a bright and hopeful future, we must "remodel" our educational system, much as one would remodel a house. When you remodel a house, you do more than just repaint it: you make substantial changes, keeping the previous shape of the house, but updating old parts, and making the house more modern and efficient.
7. Right now Vermont's educational system—like many school systems around the country—is an older house that isn't "up to code" when it comes to preparing Vermont and its young people for the new world. The bad news is that remodeling creates temporary dust, noise, and inconvenience, but the good news is that when you remodel you don't have to start from scratch—you strengthen what's working and fix what's not. To be more successful in providing students with what they need to build our society and our democracy, we must remodel the way we deliver education to our young people.

8. This remodeling will be most successful when we all work on the project together. Like an orchestra, Vermont's educational system has many groups of players: students, families, taxpayers, business and community leaders, teachers, principals and administrators. The orchestra sounds best when each musician is skilled, the instruments are well tuned, and the sections work together in harmony toward the common goal of playing the best music they can.
9. No orchestra becomes great overnight. The beauty of the music depends on dedicated practice by musicians who strive for continuous improvement.
10. Vermont's vision is creating the plans for the remodeling of our educational system, and ensuring that the orchestra—our entire community—is working together to create a system that is world-class and second to none.
11. The opportunity we have to remodel teaching and learning, enabled in part by new precedent setting legislation entitled Act 77 along with Vermont's new Education Quality Standards, comes around only once in a generation; we must seize it fully!
12. We now know a great deal from science about how the brain learns. This information allows us to better remodel education in keeping with these new insights. This will help educators ensure that all learners can succeed.

## **Part 2: What is being remodeled?**

### Shaping Our Future Together: Time

Currently, the school day consists of short blocks of time within a six-hour day. This is problematic, because science has now validated what many of us have always have suspected: learners learn in different ways and in different time frames. In the new system, students will be able to move at their own pace—with guidance from staff and parents—through a set of learning experiences. Those who want to zip ahead can do so; those who need more time will have it.

### Shaping Our Future Together: Place and Space

Currently, students come to a school building every day, and spend most of their time at desks inside classrooms that seat 15-25 people. This is problematic for a couple of reasons. First, we know that physical activity promotes better learning, and that students who are sedentary for most of the day do not learn as well. Second, the classroom, and even the school building, is cut off from the larger world, making the learning seem not relevant to many students.

In the new system, some of the learning will take place beyond the walls of the schoolhouse and beyond the hours that the school is open. Students will be given the opportunity to determine for themselves what they are interested in learning and may choose to get credit for real-world, relevant and authentic learning experiences—whether as part of a service-learning project, or an extended learning opportunity in a local business. Of course, students will still spend time in classrooms but even then, classrooms will look and feel different from how they have in the past.

### Shaping Our Future Together: Student Learning

The basics will always be important because literacy and numeracy are the foundations of a quality education. In the old days, these skills were necessary and sufficient: one could get a well-paying job and have a comfortable life. Today, the 3R's are necessary, but insufficient. Today, young people must know how to collaborate and work in teams, how to analyze data and synthesize ideas, how to be adaptable and creative, and how to apply their learning in real-life situations. They must be technology literate and savvy, and they must be comfortable working with diverse groups of people.

We also want students to have a voice in *how* they learn because that creates a greater sense of motivation and hence a greater sense of ownership for their learning. Ultimately, we want to help build self-directed, interdependent learners who will continue to learn throughout their lifetime.

### Shaping Our Future Together: Teacher Learning

In a traditional school, the teacher is a sole practitioner who closes the door and stands at the head of the class, creating a world that is unto itself. Research now demonstrates that student learning depends a great deal on teacher learning and that teachers learn best when they are working together. Moreover, in order to help students learn the skills necessary for success in a global society, teachers must be able to model those skills.

In addition, while direct instruction will always be a legitimate educational strategy, teachers will target that instruction to smaller groups of students working on the same learning goal. In sum, teachers will shape the learning environment in customized ways for each learner. Toward that end, teachers will learn how to be coaches and mentors to students and each other, as well as facilitators of quality learning experiences in and out of the classroom.

### Shaping Our Future Together: Testing & Accountability

Research also tells us that students learn better when they are offered choices about

what and how they will learn, as well as how and when they will demonstrate their learning. Some young people prefer conventional tests; others prefer to “show what they know” through projects or demonstrations. Schools are currently developing varied means to assess and track each individual student’s learning progress.

All learners will be expected to achieve proficiency in the learning targets that are established. In other words, there will be no more D’s and C’s. Students will continue learning until they have reached proficiency.

### Shaping Our Future Together: Community Involvement

In a 20<sup>th</sup> century school district, schools were expected to “deliver” an education to the students on behalf of the community. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the school is considered part of the community, and the community is considered part of the schools. This interdependence requires that the community be involved in decisions about the schools, that the schools invite members of the community to become teachers and learners, and that all are united in a common quest to build a bright future for the community and beyond.

### **Part 4: What is Act 77: Flexible Pathways?**

1. Act 77 is legislation that was passed into law in July of 2013 to ensure that all Vermont students have access to high-quality educational experiences that best prepare them for life after graduation. In the words of the Agency of Education, “We are placing students at the center of the construction and implementation of their own learning experience. Our role as educators is to facilitate that experience in a way that maximizes the opportunities for students... to graduate college and career ready.”

2. Act 77 consists of high-quality academic and experiential components leading to high school completion and postsecondary readiness. They include community-based learning, internships, college courses, online coursework, independent studies, and career and technical education.

3. A student’s choice of his or her individual “pathway” will be built upon individual goals, learning styles, interests, and abilities. The “pathway” will be captured in a “Personalized Learning Plan” (PLP) that is co-created on an annual basis by the student, teachers and parents/guardians. This plan will evolve over the course of the student’s middle and high school years. There will be as many pathways as there are Vermont students, each customized to create the most enriching set of experiences for each respective student.

4. All students in grades 7 and 9 will have Personalized Learning Plans by November of 2015. By the 2018-19 school year, all students in grades 7 through 12 will have Personalized Learning Plans. Personalized learning and instructional

approaches are also acknowledged as critical from kindergarten through grade six as well.

5. The state has identified four types of experiences that can be included in a PLP, in addition to what is offered in the classroom:

- **Work-based learning opportunities** that are expanding to be more readily available for career exploration. This includes **increased access to Career and Technical Education**.
- **Virtual learning opportunities** in which learning that happens both through telecommunication, in which students and teachers are interacting in real time, and in a self-paced context according to the students' schedule). It also includes "blended" learning opportunities, which combine virtual learning with fact-to-face instruction.
- Dual enrollment opportunities, in which college courses are offered at local high schools, and in which students attend classes at local postsecondary institutions. Students participating in dual enrollment receive both high school and college credit for the given course. High school juniors and seniors may access up to two vouchers for use at participating colleges.
- The Early College Program, which enables students to simultaneously complete their 12<sup>th</sup> grade experience, earn a secondary diploma, and complete the first year of college. The Vermont Academy of Science and Technology has historically offered this option. Other postsecondary public and private institutions are now encouraged to develop similar programs.

6. Students, teachers and parents/legal guardians all participate in the creation and evolution of a student's Personalized Learning Plan. They work together to assess and design the best path to graduation based on the student's evolving interests and goals. Educators serve as guides in this process, helping students choose opportunities grounded in their knowledge of postsecondary school and career preparation.

### **Part 5: What does a Student-Centered Proficiency-Based environment look like?**

**1.** Proficiency-based or "competency-based" learning refers to a shift in the traditional movement of students through the grades based on their age and "seat time" in a classroom. Instead, students move ahead when they have demonstrated mastery of content. If an individual masters course content faster than his or her peers, that person can continue to progress to more challenging content. Alternately, if an individual requires a bit more time to learn content, they will be afforded the time and support necessary to master the material.

There are a number of key features that one can look for in a student-centered, proficiency-based environment:

- a. The environment is welcoming, caring and safe because learning involves taking risks and making mistakes
- b. Students share responsibility for their own learning, rather than the teacher or the parent taking responsibility for them.
- c. Students have a voice in determining how they will learn and demonstrate their learning.
- d. Assessments are customized for students.
- e. “Rubrics” or scoring guides are used to assess whether students have met the standards. These keep performance levels high even though the specific demonstrations of learning may vary.
- f. Students are allowed to move at different paces through the learning process.
- g. Students understand the learning goals and the level of thinking required to demonstrate proficiency.
- h. Students are grouped and re-grouped as needed, depending on what they need to learn next.

## **Part 6: What are Vermont’s Education Quality Standards?**

### **History:**

1. The 2014 Education Quality Standards (EQS) replace the former School Quality Standards (SQS). Established by the State Board of Education, these standards “ensure that all students in Vermont public schools are afforded educational opportunities that are substantially equal in quality, and enable them to achieve or exceed the standards approved by the State Board of Education...These rules are designed to ensure continuous improvement in student performance, instruction and leadership to enable students to attain rigorous standards in high quality programs.”

These revised standards signal the intentional shift from inputs to outcomes; from a focus on courses and Carnegie units (seat time) to a focus on mastery of content.

### **Relationship between Act 77 and the Education Quality Standards:**

The alignment between the EQS and Act 77 is highly intentional. While Act 77 is primarily about the shift to personalization in the educational experience, EQS is primarily about the shift to the demonstration of proficiency. This alignment recognizes that personalization and proficiency complement and reinforce one another.

## **Part 7: Why is the implementation of Act 77 called “Shaping Our Future Together”?**

The quality of our education system is inextricably tied to the strength of our state—now and in the years to come. Therefore, all residents of Vermont have a stake in the remodeling of our education system to meet the demands of a rapidly

changing world. In the past, education was an endeavor that occurred primarily inside the four walls of a school; today student learning is connected to real life and the real world young people will be entering upon graduation. Within the context of the community, youth have an opportunity to co-design their education and increase their roles and responsibilities as learners and authentic contributors. The skills they master are the very skills needed to succeed in work and in life: communication, collaboration and problem solving, When young people and adults mutually invest in shaping the highest quality education possible for all students, when learning is an act of civic engagement, we are shaping the most hopeful future possible for Vermont.

“Shaping Our Future Together” is also a challenge to the community at large, urging citizens of all backgrounds to view themselves as life-long learners, and as full participants in the continuous shaping of a bright and prosperous future for Vermont.