

Vermont Community Schools Grant Program

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Vermont has used Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds to launch a competitive grant opportunity for school districts to pilot community school models around the state. Created by the [Community Schools Act](#) in 2021, this three-year grant program has been awarded to five projects serving 16 schools. Recipients have used funds to hire community school coordinators and are in the process of developing and implementing community school models with site-based leadership teams. [Community schools](#) offer a variety of services for students and families catered to the unique needs of the local community. Among the [selected projects](#), new and expanded services include health and wellness centers, mentoring, [farm-to-school](#) instruction, telehealth, healthy meals, clothing, outdoor learning opportunities and career planning.

Vermont has grounded the program design in [the research](#) of desirable features for community schools. This requires projects to demonstrate five foundations outlined in the legislation: integrated student supports; expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities; active family and community engagement; collaborative leadership and practices; and safe, inclusive and equitable learning environments. Research shows that community schools can be an effective strategy for improving [student attendance](#), [academic achievement](#) and can yield a [positive return on investment](#) of an estimated \$3 to \$15 for every \$1 invested. Community schools qualify as an [evidence-based intervention](#) for schools identified as needing support and improvement under the Every Student Succeeds Act and are considered [strategic investments](#) for federal relief funds.

Vermont has allocated \$3.4 million in ESSER III funds to support the five grant recipients from 2022-24. The year-one appropriation for the projects is just over \$1 million. Each project will undergo an evaluation by the agency of education in Vermont on its progress toward developing and implementing community school programs before receiving additional funds.



Identify the Needs of Local Communities

Community schools are meant to be responsive to the needs of the local community by design. The Community Schools Act in Vermont helps ensure this by directing recipients of the grant to perform a needs and assets assessment, unless the school has performed one in the prior three years. The assessments must include family and community engagement information from surveys or public meetings, measures of family and community engagement, and culturally and linguistically relevant communication between schools and families.

Grant recipients connect with site-based leadership teams consisting of principals, teachers, school staff, students, families, community partners and residents, nonprofit organizations, and the community school coordinator for planning and oversight of the community schools. In addition, many of the funded projects have involved the leadership teams in community outreach. The North Country Supervisory Union has established a community schools steering committee that is responsible for ensuring community outreach, evaluating the success of partnerships through surveys and meeting project benchmarks.



Form New District Partnerships

Community schools use a collaborative approach to meet the needs of students. By partnering with families, community organizations and local governments, community schools provide a broad range of accessible and well-coordinated supports and services that help students and families with increasingly complex needs. The five funded community school projects in Vermont total 44 community partnerships statewide. These new partnerships are with local health organizations, local farms, recreational facilities and youth organizations.

Hazen Union High School's community school coordinator has expanded the school's [Pathways Program](#). Through the program, the school partners with employers and community partners to provide students with learning opportunities outside of the traditional classroom, including independent and work-based learning.



Monitor Performance to Support Students

Vermont's Agency of Education selected applicants using an [equity lens tool](#) developed by the agency to avoid increasing equity gaps. The tool creates common vocabulary and protocol for evaluating policies, programs and practices for equity. As part of the protocol, community schools identify the potential impacts of the program on student groups based on their race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, language spoken at home, disability, family background and family income. The community schools adapt or refine current policies to result in more equitable outcomes.

At the end of each year, each recipient will undergo an evaluation by the agency of education using the equity lens tool to ensure that community school projects are making progress toward implementing community school programs. Continued funding from the grant program is contingent on this review. The secretary of education in Vermont may deny or reduce second- or third-year funding if progress is not demonstrated.

There are also two official reporting periods: The first took place Dec. 15, 2022, and the second will take place Dec. 15, 2024. On these dates, the agency of education will report to the governor and General Assembly on the impact of the community school grants, and the report will be made public.

More Information

See additional state profiles in the series: [Innovative State Strategies for Using ESSER Funds](#).