



The Promise of 'Our Time'

DIALOGUE GUIDE

Vermont Youth Sing Out for School Redesign September 2016



UP
for Learning

Unleashing the Power of Partnership for Learning



SHAPING OUR FUTURE TOGETHER
COMMUNICATING SCHOOL REDESIGN

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Introduction: The Promise of ‘Our Time’

INTRODUCING ‘OUR TIME’

It’s time for students to speak out about school redesign. Especially in Vermont, where new laws call for redesigning education, it’s essential for young people to be part of the conversation and part of the process as schools change. That engagement is the promise of “Our Time,” a song written, composed, and performed by Vermont students to express their hope for change that will make a difference to them, their communities, and the greater world they will soon enter.

This guide introduces the original “Our Time” music video and an accompanying documentary, “Talking Our Time.” The Dialogue Guide suggests activities for exploring the videos in discussion groups, from school advisories to community gatherings. The aim of this landmark media arts project is to amplify the voices of young people across the state, recognizing their rich vision of education as a powerful way to build cross-generational understanding and support for student-centered change in our schools.

HISTORY OF ‘OUR TIME’

This media arts project began when a group of students, teachers, and consultants noticed a disturbing trend in the fall of 2015. Those youth-adult teams from seven high schools were part of Communicating School Redesign (CSR), an initiative to promote public understanding and support for Vermont’s ambitious vision of educational change. Our state’s vision for 21st-century learning became law in 2013 with passage of Act 77, also called the Flexible Pathways legislation. It is intended to create a shift in the way students learn, emphasizing relevance, choice, and students’ roles as active learners. Requiring new methods such as Personalized Learning Plans and flexible routes to graduation, the law encourages students to become co-creators of their education.

Brain research tells us that empowering learners in this way, moving to a more active and student-centered model, will engage a greater number of students. It will also build critical lifelong learning skills, increase post-secondary options, and nurture civic responsibility. By putting these promising research findings into action in Vermont schools, Act 77 aims to promote the best possible practices for teaching and learning. It offers students far higher levels of voice and choice. People who saw that potential this past year—including the students and adults involved in Communicating School Redesign—had high hopes for positive change as schools began to work on meeting the law’s requirements.

That’s when the disturbing trend appeared. As they conducted interviews and surveys, the CSR teams encountered student skepticism rather than empowerment. Instead of embracing their great new opportunities, many students were unsure, cautious, and even suspicious. Why this lack of enthusiasm? Maybe they weren’t used to taking the initiative in their education; if they hadn’t had a lot of choice and control before, perhaps they weren’t ready to take charge now. And maybe they saw this as one more thing adults were imposing on them, a lot of new words and new work coming at them, with little connection to their own world. Young people were not alone, as some teachers and parents also questioned a new state mandate coming down from “the top.” Whatever the reasons, it seemed as if many students just didn’t see themselves in the picture of Vermont’s bright educational future.

In response, the CSR teams asked a new set of questions: What if a message about the new design for learning came from students themselves? What if they could use their own language and a compelling medium instead of the more formal texts about school remodeling efforts? What if a different approach could give students all over the state a chance to talk about the issues of school change, exploring its potential and also expressing their concerns? What if community dialogue was grounded in what matters to students today, but also strikes a chord with learners of all ages?

From these questions, the idea of communicating with youth peers through song emerged. Working with UP for Learning, a Vermont organization that promotes youth-adult partnership in education, the CSR leadership team organized a new project. It rallied youth to capture a student's-eye-view of Vermont's shift toward student-centered learning. While writing a song was first and foremost a way for students to help each other explore the potential of school change, participants expected that their message would also reach across the generations. They believed in the wisdom of youth and their capacity to capture the essence of an issue when speaking their unfiltered truth.

The project began with a group of 12 talented student musicians from eight Vermont schools, who came together for a two-day intensive song writing session. Under the skilled direction of musician and teacher Brian Boyes and singer-songwriter Kris Gruen, students collaborated to create the song "Our Time." The music was then set to tracks and mixed at a professional sound studio. Next came the production of a music video. Schools across the state were invited to participate, and in the spring of 2016, over 150 Vermont students were filmed on-site, bringing the "Our Time" music video to life. A second, complementary video, "Talking Our Time," features student songwriters explaining the song, its relationship to Act 77: Flexible Pathways, and their experience in the project.

USING THE DIALOGUE RESOURCE

The goal of the Dialogue Guide that follows is to help schools and community groups throughout Vermont use the "Our Time" music and interview videos to launch discussions about education, learning, and school change.

The videos can provide a springboard for the following topics (and more):

- ✦ The core qualities of engaging learning and their relationship to personalized learning opportunities
- ✦ Moving away from grades to a proficiency-based system of assessment
- ✦ A shift from delivering the same content at a given pace in a class to content mastered at different paces based in the individual
- ✦ The importance of relevance and place
- ✦ The power of having both voice and choice in shaping learning
- ✦ Reframing "failure" as an essential step on a pathway to mastery
- ✦ Shifting the student-teacher relationship to one of learner-guide
- ✦ The importance of relationships in the learning context
- ✦ A growth mindset and belief in the learning capacity of all students
- ✦ The need for equity, ensuring that every learner has equal opportunity

Ideally, young people themselves will be organizing and leading video premieres and dialogue sessions, affirming their rightful role as change agents and true partners in education redesign in Vermont.

We invite you to explore the lyrics and make connections to your own experiences as students, teachers, parents, and community members. In the process, we hope that “Our Time,” with the passion and wisdom of the youth creators, can unite us as we shape a multigenerational vision for an educational system to serve all Vermont youth.

Mary Schell Whalen, UP for Learning

Brian Boyes, Cabot School

Helen Beattie, UP for Learning

Real education should educate us out of self into something far finer— into a selflessness which links us with all humanity.

—Nancy Astor, first woman in British Parliament

‘Our Time’ Shout Out!

The project would not have been possible without the generous participation and investment of youth and adults across Vermont.

Shout out to Sound Check singers and musicians: Tobi April, Asia Bernatchy, Brian Boyes, Cal Burke, Henry Burke, Benjamin Burr, Kris Gruen, Grace Ecklund-Gustavson, Jacob Kaplan, Wilson Knight, Caleb Quittner, Eli Rivers, Evan Warner, Dorothy Whalen.

Shout out to Vermont teachers: Anne Decker (U-32), Leah Desroches (Cabot School), Rebecca Elgood (Spaulding High School), Hilary Goldblatt (Montpelier High School), Kirk Kreitz (Montpelier High School), Rebecca McGregor (Lyndon Institute), Cailin O’Hara (Montpelier High School), Amy Panetta (Waits River Valley Elementary School).

Shout out to ‘Our Time’ music video performers: Students from Spaulding HS Chorus, Lyndon Institute, Cabot School Elementary Chorus, U32 Orchestra, Montpelier HS Band, Montpelier HS Orchestra, Montpelier HS Chorus, and Waits River Valley Elementary.

Shout out to our videographers on production crew: Brian Boyes, Mary Whalen, Ned Castle, Taylor Chapin and Meredith Holch, Helen Beattie.

Shout out to our funders and supporters: Bay and Paul Foundations, the Vermont School Boards Association, The Vermont Agency of Education, Cabot School, Guilford Sound & WGDR/Goddard College.

'Our Time' Lyrics & Connection to VT Education

LYRICS

CONNECTION TO VT EDUCATION: ACT 77

Now it's clear we long for more
Learn to dream, find, explore
Every journey brings us home
A story all our own

- ✦ Young people are inheriting a rapidly changing world that they wish to both better understand and shape.
- ✦ Brain research affirms that when learning "sticks," it is usually connected to one's own interests and dreams.

Finding purpose, meaning, hope
Uncovering a wider scope
Everyone contributes what
They've come to know

- ✦ New Act 77 opportunities heighten relevance in learning, and include a wide variety of ways to learn (community-based internships, virtual and blended learning, etc.).
- ✦ Young people are active and valued partners in their education.

Venture from the known
Hallways of the hearts and minds
We know it takes a village
to build a bridge for our time

- ✦ The roles of both students and teachers are changing in response to Act 77: Flexible Pathways.
- ✦ Learning is gaining knowledge AND engaging the heart. Social and emotional aspects of learning matter.
- ✦ The community — teachers, parents, adult mentors, internship advisors, local colleges, etc., all play a key role in this educational shift.

Chorus:
Any time, any place, any pace
Learning who we are, no, it's not a race
It's our time, our place, our pace
Choice and voice, we co-create

- ✦ Learning happens at any time of day or night, both during and outside of regular school hours.
- ✦ Learning occurs in a wide variety of community settings in addition to the school building.
- ✦ We all learn at different rates. Learning will be measured by collecting evidence that the content was mastered (versus counting hours in a seat or a one-time test). In this way, all students reach their full potential, at their own pace.
- ✦ The opportunities within Act 77 are real and meaningful. It is a learning agenda based on best learning practices to serve all students.
- ✦ Personalized Learning Plans ensure that students play a central role in designing their learning.
- ✦ The voice of every young person is elevated. Students co-create their education in partnership with teachers, mentors, and parents/guardians.

Taking risks without fear
Learner-guide, peer to peer
We all fall before we walk
Let's walk our talk

- ✦ Learning from trial and error is a natural process in order to master something new. School cultures are shifting so that learners are not penalized by their mistakes and therefore feel safe to take risks. For example, students are retaking tests they did not do well on, or rewriting papers with feedback from teachers and peers. With time, support, and practice, all students have the opportunity to “become proficient” and can demonstrate that they learned the material.
- ✦ Teachers are shifting their role from “sage on the stage” to learning guide. Students are sharing greater responsibility for learning.
- ✦ Peer-to-peer reflection and teaching are proven effective means to learn.

The way we think is how we grow
Unbound capacity to know
Relationships we trust down deep
Inside our bones

- ✦ Research has proven that one's belief in oneself as a learner has a significant impact on learning. If you believe you can learn, you will. If you do not believe in yourself as a learner, you block your learning potential. When we understand that the brain is like a muscle, and grows with use - that we control our intellectual growth and it is not fixed - we unlock a previously untapped margin of learning. In this way all students rightfully feel a sense of control over their lives, and can be hopeful about their futures.
- ✦ The relationship between a teacher and a student (or learner and guide) has a powerful impact on learning.

Lyrics and music created by Burke, Ecklund Gustavson, Warner, Bernatchy, Quittner, Kaplan, Burr, Knight, Chapin, Rivers, Boyes, Gruen, Trecartin, Beattie & Whalen (2016)

Choosing the Right Activity for Your Purpose

The following activities are intended for multiple audiences of varied sizes, and can be facilitated by either youth or adults (ideally youth!). Your choice will depend on many variables, not the least of which is your allotted time. The following chart can help you decide which activity would work best for your purposes.

The music video itself is accompanied by the “Talking Our Time” video, capturing lyric writers’ reflections about the song’s themes and their project experience as a whole. We include this resource as a powerful option in a number of activities, but recognize that its use may be time-dependent. The music video itself is the entryway into dialogue. This companion piece makes the connection to Vermont’s educational change agenda much clearer.

A number of activities draw upon the School Reform Initiative protocols. They are highly effective ways to generate dialogue in medium to large groups (schoolreforminitiative.org/protocols). If you choose one of these protocols and have not received prior training, it is important to take time to study the required steps and fully understand the sequence before attempting facilitation.

The following is a brainstormed list of ways you might consider weaving these resources into your school and community setting. (Note: It is ideal if students take ownership of use of this video as a dialogue starter. Amplifying student voice and leadership in the sharing process itself provides yet another example of their commitment to education and abilities to be agents of change. Facilitation training and support will be key.)

- Students run an assembly to premiere the video(s), followed by student-facilitated small group discussions (see Harwood Union example: [youtube.com/watch?v=IYo-C03cgAc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYo-C03cgAc)).
- Trained youth facilitators lead Teacher Advisory sessions exploring the song themes.
- Students host a community dialogue night.
- Students share the music video(s) with a local access television or radio station, including being interviewed about school change efforts.
- Students introduce the song at a school board meeting as a means to explore implications for Act 77 implementation and Act 46 implementation.
- Students lead a faculty meeting to spark dialogue about any one of the song’s themes.
- Project the song through the school-wide sound system as a start to the school day or at some other key events as a new tradition.
- Write a story about the song and how it relates to school change for the school newsletter and include links to the videos.
- Create a contest to have students, teachers, and community members write new lyrics to the same sound track, focusing on their vision of education and key elements of engaging learning. Share these alternatives with the greater school community.
- Create your own school’s music video capturing a shared vision for school redesign.
- Engage the local newspaper in posting articles about varied aspects of the song as a means to build public understanding of Act 77: Flexible Pathways or proficiency-based learning.
- Begin an Act 46 meeting by viewing the video and leading dialogue about decisions being grounded in what will best serve students and their learning.
- Start off Town Meeting with this video.
- Ask the local movie theater to play it as a lead in to the feature movie.
- Ask a local radio station to play it regularly.

ACTIVITY	DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS	RECOMMENDED TIME	AUDIENCE
1. Explore: Meaning, Purpose and Hope	The song lyrics spark individual reflection and small group dialogue. This activity is an excellent introductory, cross-generational option. It provides a reference point to explore the purpose and direction of education in Vermont.	20 to 30 minutes	Multigenerational Any size group
2. 'Talking Our Time': Pair Share	The companion video to the song makes a clear link between the lyrics, Act 77: Flexible Pathways and Personalized Learning Plans. It is an effective introduction to the new legislation through a youth perspective, drawing on personal stories and powerful metaphors.	30 minutes <i>Note: Seeing the music video in advance is highly recommended.</i>	Multigenerational Any size group
3. 'Talking Our Time': Chalk Talk	This provides a deeper pass into the themes surfaced in the "Talking Our Time" video through an engaging, highly interactive nonverbal dialogue strategy.	60 minutes	Multigenerational Up to 60 people
4. Act 77 Learning Opportunities	This activity introduces the basics of Act 77: Flexible Pathways. It encourages youth participants to identify what pathways they might like to explore. The song then reinforces the benefits of Act 77, with participants naming what most excites them about this shift to increased opportunities.	45 to 60 minutes	Youth are primary audience; easily adapted for adult or multigenerational participants 8 to 25 people
5. Ensuring Equity	The purpose of Act 77 is to ensure that ALL students have equitable access to the highest quality education possible, mirroring the the opportunities identified in the "Our Time" song. Yet there is a risk that Act 77 could actually increase the "equity gap" to expanded learning opportunities for all. This activity was created to explore this risk and to mobilize all stakeholder groups to ensure equity in implementation.	60 minutes	Multigenerational Any size group

Activity 1

Explore — Meaning, Purpose & Hope

PURPOSE OF ACTIVITY: The purpose of this activity is to help participants to reflect on their education using the “Our Time” song lyrics and music video. Individual reflection, small group dialogue, and sharing hopes for one’s own education provide a reference point to explore the purpose of education in Vermont. The key phrase “our time, our place, our pace” brings to light the potential of student ownership in learning, helping to dispel skepticism about the intention of change.

MATERIALS

- ♦ “Our Time” lyrics (page 11)
- ♦ “Our Time” mp3 recording
- ♦ “Our Time” music video

GUIDING QUESTION: What parts of this song speak to you and your learning?

ACTIVITY

Introduce: Set up the activity with some background information to help participants understand the significance of the song’s creation by students and for students. Explain that they will be listening and watching, reflecting, and sharing their responses with each other.

Listen/Watch & Reflect: Play the song twice. Choose the music video or mp3 audio version or use them both. Provide written lyrics and invite participants to highlight or underline the parts of the song that they are curious about or that speak to them. Invite them to reflect on the meaning, purpose, and opportunities in their learning experiences.

Share: Ask participants to join one or two others to share what they found most relevant in the lyrics. Make sure that they share air time, cuing half way through the allotted time to facilitate this happening.

Create: Ask pairs/triads to report out on what resonated or stood out for them. Record the reported comments as evidence of collective meaning and purpose in education. Post as a reference point for future exploration of personalized learning.

'Our Time' Lyrics

Now it's clear we long for more
Learn to dream, find, explore
Every journey brings us home
A story all our own

Finding purpose, meaning, hope
Uncovering a wider scope
Everyone contributes what
They've come to know

Venture from the known
Hallways of the hearts and minds
We know it takes a village
to build a bridge for our time

Chorus:

**Any time, any place, any pace
Learning who we are, no, it's not a race
It's our time, our place, our pace
Choice and voice, we co-create**

Taking risks without fear
Learner-guide, peer to peer
We all fall before we walk
Let's walk our talk

The way we think is how we grow
Unbound capacity to know
Relationships we trust down deep
Inside our bones

Activity 2

'Talking Our Time': Rotating Pair Share

PURPOSE OF ACTIVITY: The “Talking Our Time” video, featuring the reflections of the lyric-writing youth team, promotes deeper understanding of the themes in the song and serves as a springboard for further exploration of school change in Vermont. This activity assumes that the participants have already seen the “Our Time” music video in the recent past.

MATERIALS

- ✦ “Talking Our Time” video
- ✦ Optional: “Our Time” music video (to be reviewed)
- ✦ “Our Time” Lyrics & Connection to VT Education” handout for all participants (page 14 and 15)
- ✦ LCD with speakers

ACTIVITY

Introduce: Remind participants of the “Our Time” song, or show it again to refresh their memories. Explain that they are about to see an interview with the lyric-writing team, discussing the link between the lyrics and new learning opportunities in Vermont with Act 77: Flexible Pathways to Learning.

View: The “Talking Our Time” video.

Reflect: Pass out “Our Time Lyrics & Connection to VT Education.” Ask participants to review the handout and highlight:

- ✦ The one item from the “connections” column that is already a **strength** of their school community
- ✦ The aspect from the “connections” column they believe will be the greatest **challenge** to achieve
- ✦ The aspect from the “connections” column that most **excites** them

Share: Split your group in half and create an inner and outer circle, so that each person is facing a partner. (Allow time for them to briefly introduce themselves to each other.) Read one question and provide 1–2 minutes per partner to share his/her choice. Clarify that when one person is talking, the other person is an active listener. They should not interrupt, ask questions, or enter into dialogue. If the talker does not fill the allotted time, just enjoy the moment of silence!

Provide cues when half of the talk time has passed to make sure air time is shared. Have the inside circle move one (or more) person in a clockwise direction, and then offer the next question for the new pair to share.

ADDITIONAL OR ALTERNATIVE QUESTIONS FOR FACULTY AND SCHOOL BOARDS

The following are alternative or follow-up questions for faculty and school boards to consider:

- What strengths can we build upon in order to realize the promise of “Our Time” and be successful in implementing Act 77?
- What challenges do we face as we implement this new legislation?
- What are the opportunities of this new legislation that we want to focus on or optimize?
- How will we know that we have successfully implemented Act 77? What will be our indicators of success?
- What aspects of this vision of education should drive our decisions about Act 46 implementation?

'Our Time' Lyrics & Connection to VT Education

LYRICS

CONNECTION TO VT EDUCATION: ACT 77

Now it's clear we long for more
Learn to dream, find, explore
Every journey brings us home
A story all our own

- ✦ Young people are inheriting a rapidly changing world that they wish to both better understand and shape.
- ✦ Brain research affirms that when learning "sticks," it is usually connected to one's own interests and dreams.

Finding purpose, meaning, hope
Uncovering a wider scope
Everyone contributes what
They've come to know

- ✦ New Act 77 opportunities heighten relevance in learning, and include a wide variety of ways to learn (community-based internships, virtual and blended learning, etc.).
- ✦ Young people are active and valued partners in their education.

Venture from the known
Hallways of the hearts & minds
We know it takes a village
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- ✦ The roles of both students and teachers are changing in response to Act 77: Flexible Pathways.
- ✦ Learning is gaining knowledge AND engaging the heart. Social and emotional aspects of learning matter.
- ✦ The community - teachers, parents, adult mentors, internship advisors, local colleges, etc. - all play a key role in this educational shift.

Chorus:
Any time, any place, any pace
Learning who we are, no, it's not a race
It's our time, our place, our pace
Choice and voice, we co-create

- ✦ Learning happens at any time of day or night, both during and outside of regular school hours.
- ✦ Learning occurs in a wide variety of community settings in addition to the school building.
- ✦ We all learn at different rates. Learning will be measured by collecting evidence that the content was mastered (versus counting hours in a seat or a one-time test). In this way, all students reach their full potential, at their own pace.
- ✦ The opportunities within Act 77 are real and meaningful. It is a learning agenda based on best learning practices to serve all students.
- ✦ Personalized Learning Plans ensure that students play a central role in designing their learning.
- ✦ The voice of every young person is elevated. Students co-create their education in partnership with teachers, mentors, and parents/guardians.

Taking risks without fear
Learner-guide, peer to peer
We all fall before we walk,
Let's walk our talk

- ✦ Learning from trial and error is a natural process in order to master something new. School cultures are shifting so that learners are not penalized by their mistakes and therefore feel safe to take risks. For example, students are retaking tests they did not do well on, or rewriting papers with feedback from teachers and peers. With time, support, and practice, all students have the opportunity to “become proficient” and can demonstrate that they learned the material.
- ✦ Teachers are shifting their role from “sage on the stage” to learning guide. Students are sharing greater responsibility for learning.
- ✦ Peer-to-peer reflection and teaching are proven effective means to learn.

The way we think is how we grow
Unbound capacity to know
Relationships we trust down deep
Inside our bones

- ✦ Research has proven that one's belief in oneself as a learner has a significant impact on learning. If you believe you can learn, you will. If you do not believe in yourself as a learner, you block your learning potential. When we understand that the brain is like a muscle, and grows with use - that we control our intellectual growth and it is not fixed - we unlock a previously untapped margin of learning. In this way all students rightfully feel a sense of control over their lives, and can be hopeful about their futures.
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Lyrics and music created by Burke, Ecklund Gustavson, Warner, Bernatchy, Quittner, Kaplan, Burr, Knight, Chapin, Rivers, Boyes, Gruen, Trecartin, Beattie & Whalen (2016)

Activity 3

'Talking Our Time': Chalk Talk

PURPOSE OF ACTIVITY: The “Talking Our Time” video, featuring the reflections of the lyric-writing youth team, promotes deeper understanding of the themes in the song and serves as a springboard for further exploration of school change in Vermont. This activity assumes that the participants have already seen the “Our Time” music video in the recent past.

MATERIALS

- LCD with speakers
- “Talking Our Time” video
- Optional: “Our Time” music video (to be reviewed)
- Blank piece of paper or note card and writing utensil for each participant
- 4 to 8 large pieces of art paper or newsprint paper
- Enough markers for each participant (8 per Chalk Talk station)
- Chalk Talk Protocol (page 18)

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- Why personalized learning plans? What are the potential benefits?
- What would it look and feel like if failure was accepted and encouraged as part of learning? What would change?
- What needs to change for students to become “learners” and teachers to become “guides”?
- How do we “venture from the known, [into the] hallways of the hearts and minds”? What do we have to leave behind? What do we gain?
- What one line or phrase from the “Talking Our Time” video feels most important to you as a learner?

PREPARATION: Create Chalk Talk stations by choosing your focusing questions from those listed above. Write one question in the middle of each sheet.

ACTIVITY

Introduce: Remind participants of the “Our Time” song, or show it again to refresh their memories. Hand out a sheet of blank paper or note card and make sure each participant has a writing utensil. Ask them to write down one line that stands out for them as particularly powerful or important during the videotaped interview of the song lyric writers.

View: “Talking Our Time” video.

Share: Ask participants to share the one line they identified from the video that was most memorable, as a “wave” going through the room. Clarify that they are not sharing why they chose this line (unless you have a small group and quite a bit of time).

Chalk Talk Stations: Create separate chalk talk stations around the room, ensuring that no more than eight participants are at any one station at a time. Split up your group between the stations. (Note: If it is a very small group, they can proceed through the stations together). Follow the chalk talk instructions noted on page 18.



ADDITIONAL OR ALTERNATIVE QUESTIONS FOR FACULTY AND SCHOOL BOARDS

See page 13 for alternative or follow-up questions for faculty and school boards to consider.

Chalk Talk

Developed by Hilton Smith, Foxfire Fund; adapted by Marylyn Wentworth.

Purpose

Chalk Talk is a silent way to reflect, generate ideas, check on learning, develop projects, or solve problems. It can be used productively with any group — students, faculty, workshop participants, or committees. Because it is done completely in silence, it gives groups a change of pace and encourages thoughtful contemplation. It can be an unforgettable experience. Middle level students absolutely love it — it's the quietest they'll ever be!

Time

Varies according to need; can be from 5 minutes to an hour

Materials

Chalk board and chalk, white board and dry-erase markers, or large roll paper on the wall and chart markers

Process

1. The facilitator explains *very briefly* that Chalk Talk is a silent activity. No one may talk at all and anyone may add to the Chalk Talk with words or graphics as they please. You can comment on other people's ideas simply by drawing a connecting line to the comment. It can also be very effective to say nothing at all except to put finger to lips in a gesture of silence and simply begin with Step 2.
2. The facilitator writes a relevant question in a circle on the board.
Sample questions:
 - What did you learn today?
 - So What?, or Now What?
 - What do you think about social responsibility and schooling?
 - How can we involve the community in the school, and the school in community?
 - How can we keep the noise level down in this room?
 - What do you want to tell the scheduling committee?
 - What do you know about Croatia?
 - How are decimals used in the world?
3. The facilitator either hands a piece of chalk to everyone, or places many pieces of chalk at the board and hands several pieces to people at random.
4. People write as they feel moved. There are likely to be long silences — that is natural, so allow plenty of wait time before deciding it is over.

Protocols are most powerful and effective when used within an ongoing professional learning community and facilitated by a skilled facilitator. To learn more about professional learning communities and seminars for facilitation, please visit the School Reform Initiative website at www.schoolreforminitiative.org.

Activity 4

Act 77 Learning Opportunities

PURPOSE OF ACTIVITY: The purpose of this activity is to reveal the connection between a student finding meaning, purpose, and hope in her/his education and the opportunities of Flexible Pathways and personalized learning plans. The call for “our time, our place, our pace” by students is met by the response of opportunities resulting from Vermont’s Flexible Pathways: Act 77.

MATERIALS

- “Our Time” music video and/or “Our Time” mp3 recording
- LCD projector and speakers
- Act 77 Infographic (pages 21 and 22)
- “Our Time’ Lyrics & Connection to VT Education” handout (reference; pages 14 and 15))
- Chart Paper & Markers

GUIDING QUESTION: How does Vermont’s Flexible Pathways to Learning: Act 77 provide you with opportunities to engage in and expand your learning?

ACTIVITY

Read/Reflect/Discuss: Provide 5 minutes for participants to read the Act 77 infographic and make notes on three responses:

- One reason why s/he feels Act 77 was created that has personal relevance
- One pathway s/he hopes to take in learning (for example, work-based learning)
- One specific learning opportunity that s/he is curious about pursuing (for example, working with patients in a hospital, learning a new language, or building a specific skill)

Ask participants to turn to a partner and share the pathway and opportunity that they are curious about pursuing.

Brainstorm: Ask students to generate options that they could pursue in their learning, inviting everyone to call out ideas for recording on chart paper. Emphasize that this is a brainstorm: they should stay open minded and focus on what they are curious about. Reinforce that Act 77 does not suggest that you should commit to one given path or career direction. Many spend a lifetime trying different career paths! Act 77 simply opens the door for exploring many potential interests over the course of four years. Through trial and error, students will be able to start to chart a course for their future direction.

Discuss: Looking at the brainstorm results, invite discussion: What are they surprised about? What could be next steps? Who are the people that can support next steps?

Listen/Watch/Connect: Show the music video or play the song. Distribute the “‘Our Time’ Lyrics & Connection to VT Education” and ask participants to find and circle a passage that relates to their new pathway option and/or excites them about the new possibilities for learning. When participants have chosen a passage on the chart, ask them to turn back to their partners to share their selections.

Act 77: Flexible Pathways

Amplifying Learning in Vermont

Act 77 is important to me because **it gives me opportunities that have never been offered before.**

—Bridget Couture, student at Twinfield Union School

This is **such an exciting step forward** for our schools and students. We can't address challenges around engagement, relevance, and student responsibility for learning without taking on this issue of personalization.

—Rebecca Holcombe,
Vermont Secretary of Education

How can I learn more?

See your school counselor, check out the Vermont Agency of Education for an overview and links to information about Act 77 at education.vermont.gov/flexible-pathways, or visit shapingourfuturetogether.org.



What is Act 77?

Act 77 is a law passed in July 2013 to ensure that all Vermont students have access to high-quality educational experiences that will prepare them for life after graduation. Act 77 is grounded in what we now know about learning and the brain. The law also seeks to make school relevant to our changing world.

Why Act 77?

Everyone desires and deserves to be valued and known, to have a sense of purpose in life, and to pursue that purpose with intention. Act 77 is a means to this end for students, teachers, parents/guardians, and community members — who are all partners in learning:

- **Students** take ownership of their learning by co-creating and pursuing their high school path based on their interests, fostering a sense of purpose and a capacity to shape their future.
- **Teachers** co-create engaging learning opportunities, building on their deep desire to nurture a love of learning in all students and to be continuous learners themselves.
- **Parents/guardians** provide insight and input into their child's chosen pathway throughout their middle and high school years, helping their child best prepare for graduation and beyond.
- **Community members** benefit from increased opportunities to support and learn from young people as they do meaningful work through internships, service learning, independent study, and enrollment in college classes, building a more vital community where all members contribute and are valued.

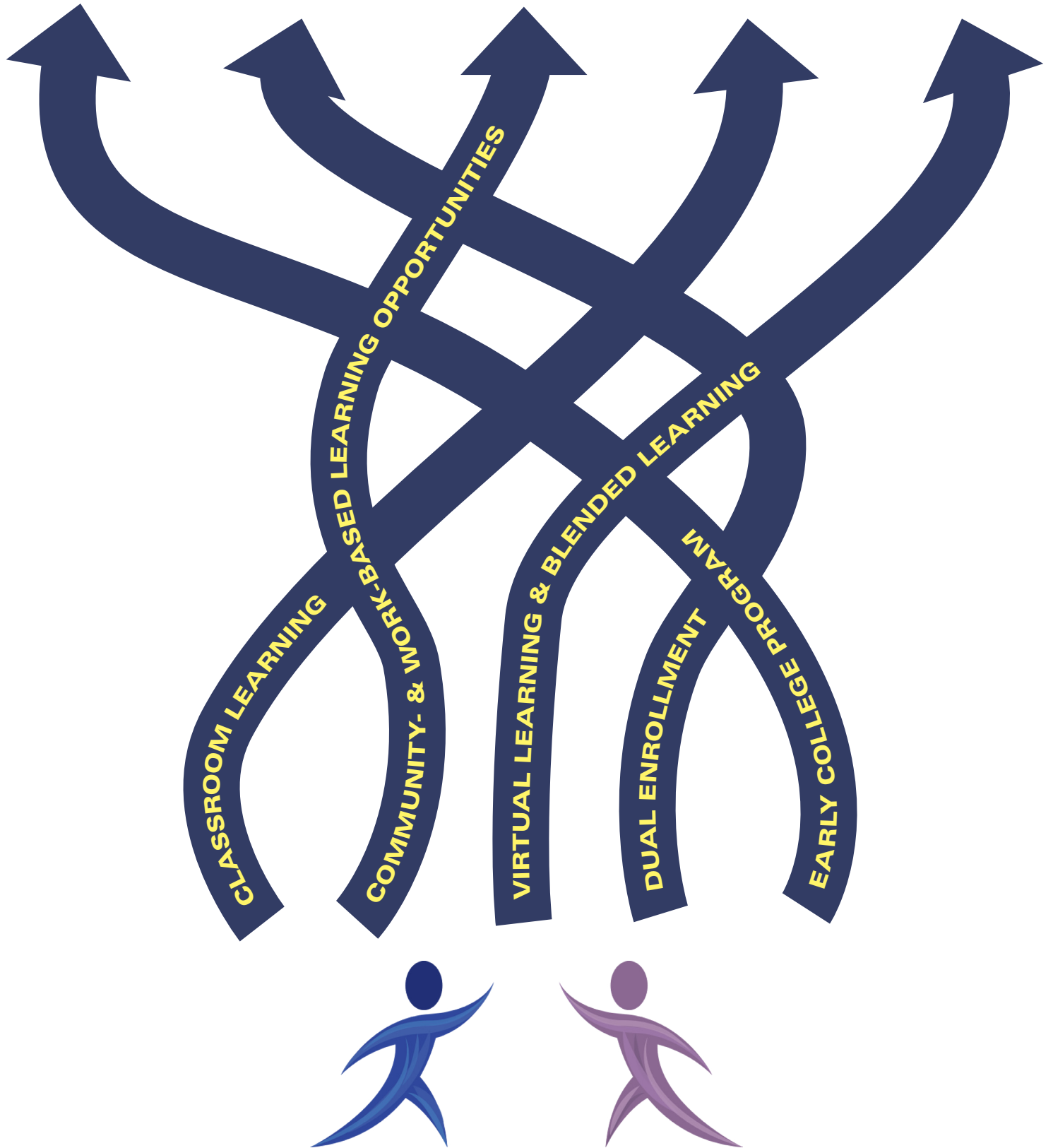
What will learning look like?

Act 77 adds options to the school classroom that can lead to high school completion and post-secondary readiness. There will be as many pathways as there are Vermont students. A student's choice of his or her individual pathway will be built on individual goals, learning styles, interests, and abilities. Each student, in partnership with teachers and parents/guardians, will customize their own engaging, rigorous, and relevant plan for graduation. The pathway options include:

- **Community- and work-based learning opportunities**, including general career, career technical education, internships and expanded learning community-based options.
- **Virtual and blended learning** (a mix of online and traditional classroom learning) to allow students to leverage technology in support of their learning.
- **Dual enrollment** in two college classes in junior and/or senior years, earning high school and college credit at the same time.
- The **Early College Program** 12th-grade experience allows students to earn both a high school diploma and complete the first year of college at many Vermont colleges.
- **School-based classroom learning** will continue to be a pathway option.

A student's pathway will be captured in a Personalized Learning Plan that is co-created on an annual basis by the student, teachers, and parents/guardians. This plan will evolve over the course of the individual's middle and high school years, as interests shift and grow. By the 2018–19 school year, all students in grades 7 through 12 will have Personalized Learning Plans.

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION



Act 77: **Flexible Pathways**

Activity 5

Ensuring Equity

PURPOSE OF ACTIVITY: The purpose of Act 77 is to ensure that ALL students have equitable access to the highest quality education possible, mirroring the opportunities identified in the “Our Time” song. Yet there is a risk that Act 77 could actually increase the “equity gap” to expanded learning opportunities. This activity was created to explore this risk and to mobilize all “stakeholder” groups (students, teachers, parents, community members, board members) to make sure that equity is at the forefront of implementation efforts.

MATERIALS

- ✦ “Our Time” music video
- ✦ Reading: “‘Our Time’ for All: A Call to Action for Equity” (page 25)
- ✦ Protocol for Dialogue: Save the Last Word (page 24)

ACTIVITY

Introduce: Describe the purpose of the activity as noted above. Explain that you are going to start by watching the *Our Time* video, which captures a vision of the depth and quality of education that each young person has a right to experience.

View: *Our Time* music video

Review: The Save the Last Word for Me protocol, referencing participants’ written directions. Follow the protocol as described, referencing the attached reading.

Save the Last Word for ME

Developed by Patricia Averette.

Purpose

To clarify and deepen our thinking about a text

Roles

Timekeeper/facilitator, who both participates and keeps the process moving

Time

Approximately 30 minutes

Process

- The process is designed to build on each other's thinking, not to enter into a dialogue.
 - Participants may decide to have an open dialogue about the text at the end of the 30 minutes.
 - Timing is important; each round should last approximately 7 minutes.
1. Create a group of 4 participants. Choose a timekeeper (who also participates) who has a watch.
 2. Each participant silently identifies what she/he considers to be (for her/him) the most significant idea addressed in the article, and highlights that passage.
 3. When the group is ready, a volunteer member identifies the part of the article that she/he found to be most significant and reads it out loud to the group. This person (the *presenter*) says nothing about why she/he chose that particular passage.
 4. The group should pause for a moment to consider the passage before moving to the next step.
 5. The other 3 participants each have 1 minute to respond to the passage — saying what it makes them think about, what questions it raises for them, etc.
 6. The first participant then has 3 minutes to state why she/he chose that part of the article and to respond to — or build on — what she/he heard from her/his colleagues.
 7. The same pattern is followed until all 4 members of the group have had a chance to be the presenter and to have the “last word.”
 8. Optional open dialogue about the text and the ideas and questions raised during the first part of the protocol.
 9. Debrief the experience. How was this a useful way to explore the ideas in the text and to explore your own thinking?

Protocols are most powerful and effective when used within an ongoing professional learning community and facilitated by a skilled facilitator. To learn more about professional learning communities and seminars for facilitation, please visit the School Reform Initiative website at www.schoolreforminitiative.org.

'Our Time' for All: A CALL TO ACTION FOR EQUITY

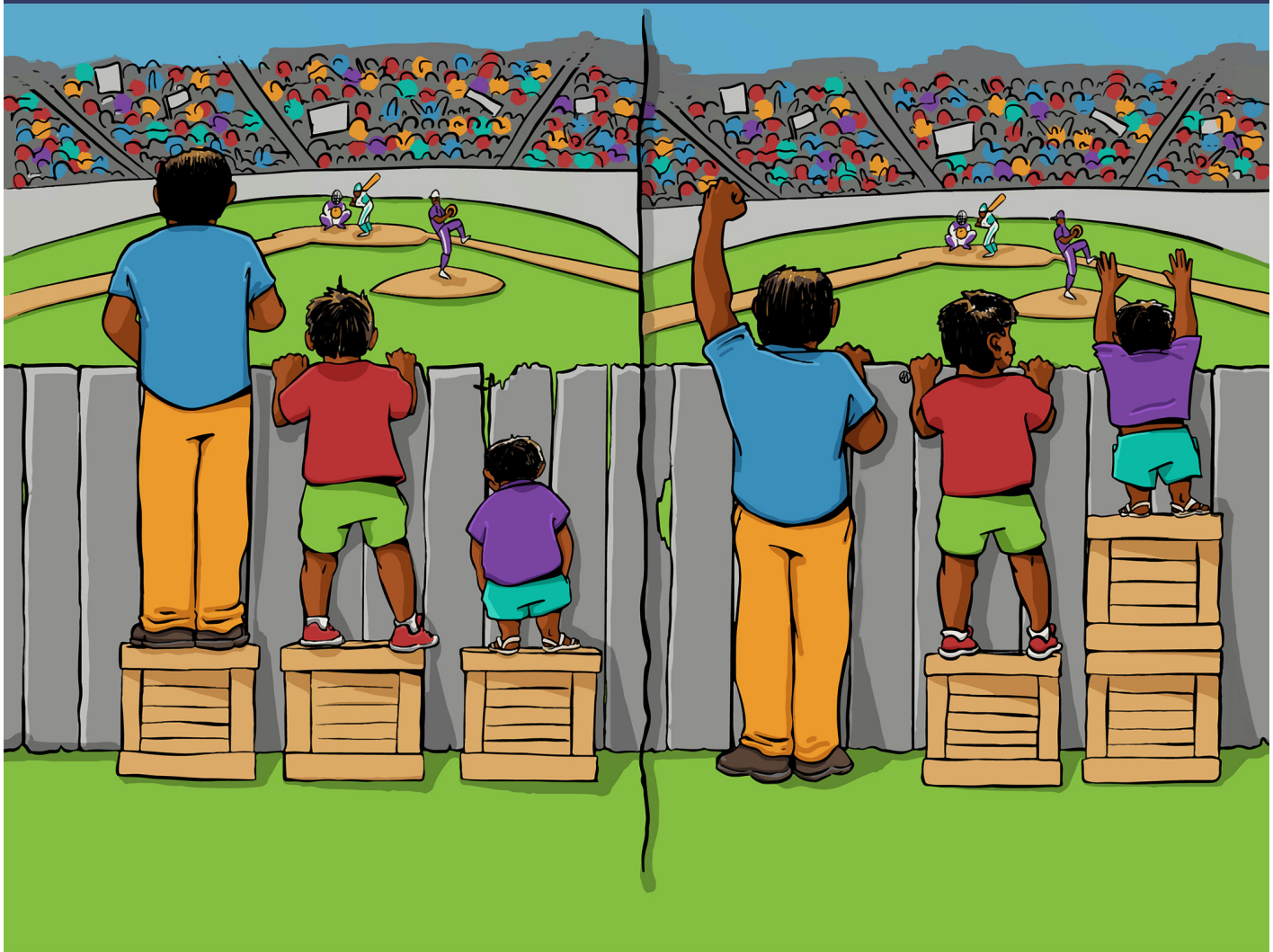
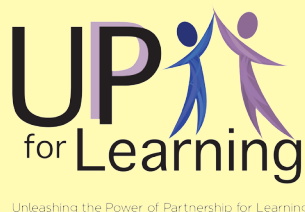


image: Interaction Institute for Social Change | Artist: Angus Maguire

AUTHORS: Martha Rich, Helen Beattie & Mary Whalen | August 2016



Personalized Learning: Ensuring Equal Access to the Best Possible Education

THE PROMISE OF ACT 77

It should be a great time to be in a Vermont school. Learning opportunities for Vermont students are more abundant than ever before. Those opportunities are also more aligned with brain research, guided by the latest scientific knowledge on the way people learn. Right now, Vermont schools are aiming high, reaching toward new levels of success and satisfaction for every student. In that effort, two goals stand out as most important: quality (the best possible education) and equity (fair and equal opportunity for all). In 2013, a new law called Act 77 made the focus on quality and equity official. This law sets out a compelling vision of change—but it also carries a hidden risk. Unless we address that risk, the promise of great Vermont schools cannot be fulfilled.

To pursue quality, Act 77 asks schools to help students personalize their learning with varied options. Rather than a single route to graduation for everyone, schools should provide “flexible pathways” suited to the interests and talents of individual students. The law promotes both student voice and student choice. It says schools should trust young people to be partners in designing their own educational plans. Act 77 also emphasizes equity. It says all students, without exception, should have the opportunity to pursue flexible pathways and achieve their highest possible potential.

Let us think of education as the means of developing our greatest abilities, because in each of us there is a private hope and dream which, fulfilled, can be translated into benefit for everyone and greater strength in our nation.

—John F. Kennedy

THE PROBLEM OF ACHIEVEMENT GAPS

Over time, if this vision becomes reality, it could solve a stubborn problem in our schools. This is the issue of “achievement gaps,” meaning differences in academic achievement related to non-academic influences such as family income, race, and gender. In America, we want to believe that these influences do not determine how well someone does in school. Educational success should result from a person’s intellectual potential, motivation, and effort. This seems especially true when we recognize that intelligence takes many forms. As a student in the Governor’s Institutes of Vermont put it: “I learned that everyone has some amazing ability if you just give them a chance.”

We also know that believing in your own potential—what we call a “growth mindset”—can be a powerful force in learning. When you understand that the brain is like a muscle and grows with use, you can pursue opportunities with confidence and hope. Brain research shows that if you believe you can learn, you will. Recognizing this, it seems even more unfair that factors like wealth or gender or skin color could get in the way. Caring about equity means believing that everyone should have a fair chance to succeed, no matter how they look or what their family background may be.

Yet achievement gaps do show up for students in Vermont (and around the country). Family income is one example. As a group, students living in families with higher incomes typically do better on academic tests than those living in low-income families. (It's important to recognize the "group" aspect; there are always individual exceptions, but large sets of data show this trend.) The achievement difference becomes clear when we compare students who are similar in all ways except family background. If you live in poverty, even though you have the same personal potential for learning and work just as hard as a wealthier student, you are less likely to achieve at the same level. The reason for this achievement gap is not variation in intelligence or effort. Instead, a major cause is the access to learning opportunities more money can provide. In early childhood, for example, some children attend structured daycare and preschool activities because their families can afford fees and transportation. Other families cannot.

There are also achievement gaps associated with gender. For instance, more boys than girls enroll in technical studies like computer sciences. Gender gaps often persist through unconscious bias or stereotypes about groups: beliefs that girls "aren't good at math" or that boys "can't sit still to concentrate." Assumptions like these affect both the messages adults give young people and the ways students think about themselves. They can get in the way of a growth mindset and limit personal choices: "Only girls like poetry; I can't write that stuff"..."Boys are better at building robots. I'm not going to try it."

Racial and ethnic stereotyping is another form of harmful bias. As Nina Lam, a Chinese-Iranian-American student, says in a poem for the Young Writers Project, it's hard to grow up looking different in "mostly-white Vermont." She writes of her wish that instead of "...assumptions about my intelligence/I think that I'd just like to blend in for once/ And be any other person." Groups such as African-Americans and Latinos, who must cope with a long history of unfair stereotypes about inferior intelligence, face an added burden called "stereotype threat." They feel a higher level of stress and fear of failure in school, even when their actual academic skills match those of white students.

While gender and racial differences tend to be visible right away, negative assumptions may also develop about less obvious characteristics. A student with older brothers and sisters may find that people expect him to be a certain way because of his siblings. A student who is the first in her family to consider college may wonder if she's really "college material" when none of her relatives or friends have gone there. A student taking all AP classes may really want to try a forestry course, but worries that it's only for kids who can't succeed in "regular classes." Teachers, counselors, and parents may encourage such perceptions with a sincere belief that they're serving students' best interests. When that happens, pathways get cut off rather than opened. Achievement gaps—inequalities driven by different access rather than different learning potential—are the result.

With two-thirds of the differences in standardized test scores attributable to outside of school factors, the simple scientific fact is that test score gaps measure the health of our society more than the quality of our schools.

—Vermont State Board of Education, August 2016

THE RISK OF INCREASING GAPS

Vermont's new vision for quality and equity in its educational system is intended to reduce achievement gaps. As schools change to match the vision, the gaps should grow smaller and even disappear. Translating intentions into action, though, is always the risky part. If the ideas that drive Act 77 aren't carried out in actions across the state, the gaps could actually grow instead of decreasing.

The greatest risk is that new systems designed to raise quality could end up serving only one group of students: those who are already successful. These students are the ones who know how to advocate for themselves and have confidence in their skills. They may have families who advocate for them, too, and encourage them to try new things. High-achieving students with strong growth mindsets and strong adult support can benefit a great deal from the new opportunities of the Flexible Pathways law.

Other students, though, may hesitate to pursue the same options. For instance, enrolling in a college course is a flexible pathway option, but what if only students with cars and money for gas can afford to drive to the college? Digital learning is another option, but consider the challenges of succeeding in the absence of a home computer. If parents don't speak English, filling out special permission forms may be a barrier. This kind of disadvantage can remain hidden. It's what Vermont educator Jason Finley calls an "equity trap," a pitfall on the route to fair treatment and opportunity for everyone.

A CALL TO ACTION

To succeed in promoting genuine equity, schools need to understand the extra challenges for students who lack economic resources, struggle with social bias, or face other barriers to opportunity. Schools need to include strategies for meeting these challenges as they design new systems in response to Act 77. They need to ensure that the necessary supports are there to make options truly open to all. At the same time, the people in school communities—teachers, administrators, board members, parents, coaches, students themselves—need to step up as allies. Each of us can play a key role in being guardians and advocates for equity.

It really boils down to this, that all life is interrelated. We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied into a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one destiny, affects all indirectly.

— Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Stereotypes and biases are deeply engrained in our culture and embedded in our individual perceptions of the world. We can counter them through continuous reflection and dialogue. We need ways to talk openly and frequently about equity, holding courageous conversations both in our peer groups and across the generations. Ultimately, we need to tackle the larger issues that create achievement gaps: addressing widespread poverty, reducing income disparity, challenging biases based on gender, race, and a host of other factors, and offering a wide variety of resources so that families thrive in supportive communities. When that happens, it will be a truly great time in Vermont schools. Vermont youth will step into the world empowered, ready to follow their dreams and contribute their talents to a rapidly changing world.

It is time we commit, across all agencies and at all levels, to attacking the underlying challenges of poverty, despair, addiction, and inequity that undermine school performance, rather than blaming the schools that strive to overcome these very manifestations of our greater social troubles.

—Vermont State Board of Education, August 2016

How can we ensure equity in school improvement efforts?

All students understand and believe in their capacity as learners and become advocates for themselves.

Young people often come to believe negative societal messages or stereotypes about their capacity to learn. These messages can be echoed in family and school settings in both obvious and subtle ways. When you don't believe in your learning potential, why try something new or take risks in learning? When you have given up hope in pursuing your dreams, why advocate for yourself? Yet we know through current brain research that all young people can literally grow their intelligence in the same way muscles are strengthened—with practice, support, and time. Individuals who believe in their learning capacity, and understand how they learn best, are more hopeful, more motivated, and better able to self-advocate in pursuit of their life goals. They have the ability to shape how they learn.

Equity in access to new educational opportunities will require that all students believe in their learning capacity and are effective learners.

All students help their peers break down negative stereotypes and encourage each other in the pursuit of learning.

Peers can be powerful messengers of negative stereotypes about each other's perceived worth and potential. Young people are used to the labels that get attached to groups at school: jocks, geeks, the art crowd, and so forth. It's easy to make assumptions about people in such groups without ever knowing them as individuals: "Those are the smart kids... Those are the slackers." With support and guidance, though, young people can learn to question assumptions and break down stereotypes. By "turning up the volume" on internal messages that feed stereotypes, all people—youth and adults—can learn to control them. When we become aware of internal biases, we can reduce the negative impact our assumptions have on others. We can also take the next steps, speaking up as allies and advocates. Quality schools are those that engage everyone in building a sense of community, caring, and shared responsibility for all members.

Equity in access to new educational opportunities will require that all students believe in the worth and potential of each and every one of their peers, creating a new cultural norm.

All teachers and educational leaders believe in the learning potential of all learners and support the pursuit of varied opportunities.

Research has established a strong link between the teacher's expectations of a student and the student's performance. It is clear that students will perform to a teacher's expectations, whether high or low. When adults give up on students, students give up on themselves. Conversely, when teachers believe in every student's capacity and convey that confidence, they help students break free of their own self-limiting beliefs. With that freedom, students become partners in shaping their education, exploring personal interests and mapping out pathways that

make sense to them. In order to support full access to individual pathways, adults in schools need to work against resource barriers as well, seeking ways to provide transportation, technology, academic interventions, and other services for students who require them. At the same time, teachers themselves will need support: professional development, time, and encouragement to examine their practices and collaborate with colleagues on continuous improvement.

Equity in access to personalized learning opportunities depends on educators' awareness of their own biases and consistent advocacy for all students.

All parents believe in their children's capacity to learn and support them in exploring new pathways.

Parents want the very best for their children, but they too are subject to negative societal pressures and biases. Their own educational experiences and family circumstances may produce a bias against certain pathways: "College is only for rich people"... "People in our family don't work with their hands." Directly or indirectly, parents may be passing on messages that restrict their children's expectations and choices. When parents let go of preconceived ideas, they can help young people name their own interests and dreams. To support their children through the personalized learning process, parents can first of all listen—and then advocate. This may include working with school personnel to overcome access barriers such as transportation, making sure that resources are available even when the family cannot provide them.

Equity in access to new educational opportunities depends on parents keeping open minds to understand their children's goals, and advocating for individual pathways with attention to resource support.

All school boards and administrators work to provide resources and monitor key variables in access to opportunities.

School boards and administrators are guardians of the quality and equity goals in Act 77. Putting the law into action requires creative use of resources, including personnel skills, time, and money. Supporting costs associated with equal access, such as specialized professional development, transportation, and technology, may require thoughtful trade-offs that make equity a priority. In addition, boards and administrators must take responsibility for monitoring progress. This means tracking key markers, such as socioeconomic status, gender, and race, for student enrollment in various pathways, as well as data on attendance, disciplinary actions, and post-graduate plans. A rubric such as the Equity Dimension of the Global Best Practices framework could help guide the monitoring effort. Whatever tools they use, school leaders should work to create a permanent institutional lens that oversees and protects equitable access to all educational pathways.

Equity in access to new educational opportunities will require school leaders to become champions for equity, freeing resources and following progress.

All schools and communities build bridges to provide a rich array of learning options available to all students.

Research has clearly shown that relevance—linking learning to personal interests—increases engagement and success in school. For many students, especially as they grow older, the most compelling learning experiences will take place beyond school walls. For this reason, strong school-community collaboration is essential to realizing the full potential of Act 77’s flexible pathways vision. Creating a range of community- and work-based learning opportunities will require community members to step up as partners in helping young people meet academic goals. It will also require that educators work closely with those community mentors, understanding the challenges they face in taking on a new role.

Equity in access to new educational opportunities depends on schools’ efforts to reach out to community members as partners, and the community’s willingness to respond with meaningful connections, creating new opportunities for students.

If we are serious about closing achievement gaps, we will have to move beyond the simplistic rhetoric of “It’s the family,” or “It’s the schools,” or “It’s poverty”—or “It’s stereotyping,” for that matter. Serious analyses make it clear that all of these factors matter. Unless we learn to think complexly about the problem, then surely we will continue to fail our big test, which is to find a way for all children to thrive in school.

—Joshua Aronson, researcher at New York University

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More Resources

Act 77

Want to know more about the history or content of Act 77: Flexible Pathways? Here are some links to excellent resources to help you answer your questions.

shapingourfuturetogether.org includes many sources of information about Act 77 and proficiency-based graduation requirements. Check out the “Resources” section.

You might enjoy some of the informational videos that schools have made to help explain Act 77 to their communities: **shapingourfuturetogether.org/school-stories**.

The Agency of Education offers a comprehensive overview of Act 77 at **education.vermont.gov/flexible-pathways**.

Personalized Learning Plans

Want to know more about personalized learning plans? Check out the Agency of Education website at **education.vermont.gov/plp-working-group/main**.

Would you like a better understanding of proficiency-based education? Check out this Agency of Education page and the embedded links in the overview: **education.vermont.gov/proficiency-based-learning**.

Language and dialogue

Want help to unpack the jargon of education legislation or “educator talk”? Check out the Great Schools Partnership glossary: **greatschoolspartnership.org/resources/glossary-of-education-reform**.

Want to see what an all-school dialogue day that is student-facilitated looks and sounds like? Be inspired and informed by Harwood Union High School’s process: **youtube.com/watch?v=1tJeoJKdJas**

UP for Learning

Want to know more about the “Our Time” project or any other of UP for Learning’s resources to elevate the role of young people in their learning and in school change efforts? Go to **upforlearning.com**.

