

Youth Engagement & Feedback on Vermont's Proposed Statewide Graduation Requirements

About the project

In Spring 2026, UP for Learning partnered with the Vermont Agency of Education to bring student voice into conversations about Vermont's proposed statewide graduation requirements. Through surveys and focus groups, students from across Vermont were invited to share their experiences with graduation requirements, their perspectives on the proposed changes, and their vision for what they want their education to be.

This work did not just reveal what students think about the proposed requirements: It also shed light on how students experience graduation requirements, what values shape their perspectives, and what they believe policymakers should consider as Vermont moves toward statewide requirements.



By the Numbers



128 students participated in **10** focus groups

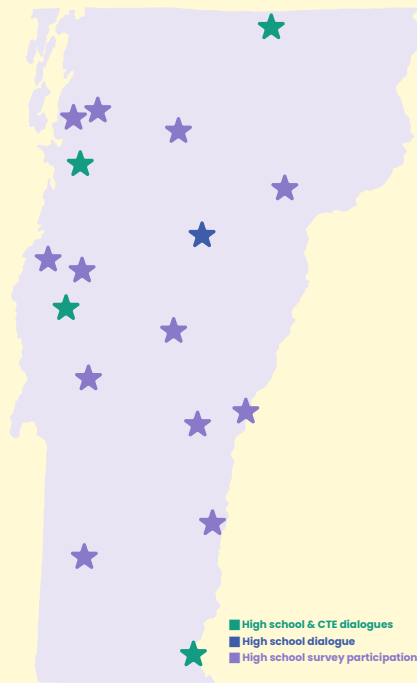
conducted across Vermont (5 at high schools, 4 at CTE centers, 1 virtual)



1,456 students completed the statewide survey



35 Vermont high schools and CTE centers represented in the survey



SAMPLE FOCUS GROUP AND SURVEY QUESTIONS:

Looking at the proposed graduation requirements, **what feels relevant to your future plans?** What feels less relevant?

What people or resources have helped you in meeting your school's graduation requirements?

What makes **a learning opportunity meaningful** and relevant?

For CTE students: Have there been **challenges in meeting graduation requirements when attending CTE** (getting in all the required credits)?

What kind of help do students need to meet these graduation requirements?

What Students Want Their Education to Be

Although students expressed a wide range of opinions regarding the proposed graduation requirements, a remarkably consistent set of values emerged throughout the data. Students care about what the requirements are, but more than that, they care about the conditions that make school meaningful, manageable, and enjoyable.

Students want graduation requirements that:

- **Are relevant to their future lives.** Students repeatedly emphasized that they want school to connect to life after graduation, whether that means college, a career, entrepreneurship, or another pathway.
- **Offer flexibility and choice.** Students generally understand and accept the need for graduation requirements, but do not want requirements to crowd out opportunities to pursue personal interests, electives, Flexible Pathways, and CTE programs.
- **Are inclusive and accessible.** Students want graduation requirements that work for all learners and do not unintentionally create barriers for students with different learning needs, identities, responsibilities, or life circumstances.
- **Are supported by clear guidance and caring adults.** Students identified the importance of caring adults, clear communication, school counselors, and accessible systems for helping them understand and meet graduation requirements.
- **Reflect what makes their schools special.** Students generally recognize the value of statewide consistency while also expressing pride in the programs, opportunities, and experiences that make their schools unique.

*"I want to learn things that are going to **boost me up in life** after high school."*

*"It would be really nice to have base requirements...but also **more room and options** for people to focus on what you are interested in."*

*"The purpose of statewide education standards is to **minimize the already present achievement gap** in our education system...They're meant to make you ready and able to enter the world, just as anybody of any other financial stature had when they were born."*



Read and reflect on the full report!

It highlights the voices of more than 1,500 students who participated in this project, sharing their priorities and values, the challenges they see in the current education system, and their recommendations for creating stronger support for students and schools.



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Report prepared for
the Vermont Agency of Education
by UP for Learning
May 22, 2026



Unleashing the Power of Partnership for Learning