

State Board of Education
Transformation Discussion with Students from Central Vermont
October 16, 2007

Students broke into five groups to respond to three questions, facilitated by Department staff.

1. What has really worked for me in school?

- Being in a small school 47 seniors is good.
- Teachers and students are able build a relationship. Class size is from 15 smallest is 6.
- Learning about the community is important to me.
- Community Based Learning is a good avenue. Sign up is for one semester. Learning can be from working at a body shop to working in an elementary school. Students get to choose where they want to go. It allows for the chance to look at different career opportunities.
- Our school has a student support period which allows students to meet with faculty once time per week
- Small groups of students learning together works for me.
- The Independent Study Program has worked best for me. ISP has allowed individualized study with professional people within the community. It was hard to meet required courses because of busy schedule and ISP allows a student to build a more flexible schedule. ISP is open to all students with parental, guidance, and principal approval. Many more students taking are taking advantage this year as the program has matured. Astrology, advanced math studies has been tried. 8 block system in place at school. Schedules in ISP can include out of school time.
- Students do not take advantage of the CBL's program because it is geared to personal interests. ISP is easier to move into for the extra credits. CBL needs to work with Alternative Program system.
- Schools need to look at and support supplemental programming to meet student need. Students will then realize that it is not a free ticket.
- Tech center offers hands on learning along with real math and science applicable to the hands on work that we do. Never enjoyed traditional classes, as I live on a farm and the tech center offered real work which is what I can do well. Supports were in place to allow me to do this program. Tech center helps students get scholarships and meet with employers. Reduce travel time and choice because it takes away from study time. There is a separation between home school and tech.
- Prefer IS and correspondence courses because it allows self learning. Traditional classroom atmosphere gets in the way of learning with some students ahead and some behind. Allows moving at own pace and time to complete study at students own pace. Students pay for correspondence courses.
- Interactive classes, hands-on activities like labs in science.
- When the teacher steps back and acts as facilitator, and the students run the class.
- Like a variety of classes to choose from
- Classes should be based on abilities so everyone is on the same page.
- Hands-on.
- Independent study for classes not offered at the school.
- Interactive and smaller classes to promote closer student teacher relationship.
- Student leadership classes that would be active in school changes.

- Teachers respecting students as adults, and not just students builds good relationships.
- Principal being concerned with students and not just getting caught up in money, budgets, schedules, etc.
- Interactive principal who gets involved with the students daily.
- Having the same Teacher Advisor (TA) for the entire school experience (K-12), so they really get to know the student.
- Large variety of classes to choose from.
- Teachers who are willing to stray from their schedule to discuss important current events.
- Youth Group activities give the students something to look forward to.
- Helpful to have students voices heard in decision processes.
- Academic support -- help from others than teachers (?)
- Students have a voice in running of schools: student council and student on school board. Did away with bells between classes
- Grade groups have class officers who meet with administrators;
- Difference of opinion from another school: it is a question of popularity who has a voice ex., design on class T-shirts decided by a few
- Montpelier High principal has an open-door policy; generates enthusiasm; ex. students generated a student-led class; principal helped them set it up; gave resources
- U-32 editorial writing published/class + student council not a popularity contest; candidates have to write an essay
- U-32 also has a adult advisor for 6 years
- Williamstown just built “real” walls; open floor plan did not work – very helpful – for productivity, concentration, less distraction
- After-school classes (elective Upward Bound Program)/pay-per-course: Tai-cooking class, going to see a college
- Independent study program (counts as 1 credit): algebra
- Go through lessons in book and report to instructor
- Mentorship program: must be keyed in to instructor with checks in balances
- Classes at VTC (home school pays): get a foot in the door to college
- VAST
- Student-teacher relationships: teachers who say hi in the hall, who know your name
- Small classes help a lot
- Being able to get help from teachers after school
- Combining TAs: time to get homework done
- Hands-on programs
- Being able to work full-time with an academic component (get some help at school)
- Programs that show a way of life (the real world)
- Enrolled full-time without having to be there
- Community-based school: go out into the community and work, fundraise (on own time or during programs)
- Service-to-Community class through Home Economics: students generate ideas and learn how to be aware about the world (sent packages across the Atlantic to less fortunate kids)
- Being required to do community service gets people involved in community; jobs may come out of it; makes people aware
- In-school jobs: checking-in books and filing in library, answering phones in Guidance

- Pre-tech and tech center at Spaulding High School (prior to selecting alternative program)
- Job shadowing programs?/Community-based learning programs/internships (credits available)
- Student council program sets up homecoming and dances (serve as student representative and get student input)
- Student lounge

- Flexibility in any form, time schedule, homework, work, projects
 - If want to spend more time, more in-depth – ability to do that (or less time on less interest)
 - Planning out: Class plans & homework for a number of weeks or months or whole year (vs. homework regardless of activities)
 - Flexibility for vacations
 - Can plan when to work harder
 - Good preparation for how it's done college (college sometimes is a shock)
 - If don't get work done, don't get good grades
 - Learn to plan / learn from mistakes / learn responsibility
 - Choosing to stay with class (to pass in homework) or fall behind waiting until next lecture (technically a day behind) (if need an extra lesson, helpful to hear then go back and figure out)
 - Diversity in classes (taking accelerated or not almost every class) –if talk to teachers, get harder work, if don't like subject, teacher at tech center, for instance, will help figure out how to put the subject into classes
 - Independent study

- Working outside of school
 - Habitat for Humanity trip sophomore year
 - Spanish & French exchange trips (exchange with Nicaragua) – more view of the world
 - Community service learning (go to historical society or hospital or day care at school) – can work with if think want to go into the field (a student can get a job from his/her csl field)
 - Coop ½ way through school year (trucking – with a company paying for college to train kids)

- Teachers talking with students at an equal level
 - Some teachers make students feel stupid
 - Some teachers seem to not appreciate ideas or feelings
 - Some teachers more laid-back, others want more control
 - Seems to be more individual (teacher-based) than system/school-wide
 - Having a good relationship with a teacher
 - Having an educator as an advocate

- Senior project really valuable
 - Ability to do what's important to you
 - More in-depth

2. What has not worked/been challenging for me in school?

- Teachers need to learn to change teaching methods to reach all students
- Not enough options as far classes. Test format varies. It seems tests are testing ability to be quick. Slow test takers need the time to complete the test. Testing for knowledge should be the goal of the test. Allow review of the test to allow student to focus on what went wrong.
- SIMS math program is new age using all maths in one curriculum. SIMS I is in 8th-9th grade all the way up to SIMS VI. A lot of students feels SIMS really doesn't teach much. Wording is a issue – start developing along one path and by the end you are on something completely different. Books are too wordy with constant re-learning of units all the time. Morale seems to be low by students involved in SIMS –some students refusing to do it.
- New software for scheduling failed miserably. Bugs not worked out of software before it was implemented. Casey had same problem. It wasted a lot of time at the beginning of the year. Guidance department doesn't support students enough.
- Within classes individual needs are not being met. Advanced students are being held back.
- There is a “vibe” where a lot of students feel that they are not being respected by the administration. Students feel they are being talked down to. Student ideas approved and then not carried out.
- Test is not based on knowledge but as a statistical gathering tool. Students not being reflected upon positively – standardizing knowledge is impossible. Teachers believe this too. State mandated testing doesn't reflect well on student knowledge.
- Overkill on homework. Homework getting done just to get it done, not really learning. Too overwhelming. If you are going to have homework make it meaningful.
- Math class is most challenging with no relevance to everyday life or future plans, studies should be slower.
- Hard to have an interactive hands-on math class.
- Everyday in math you learn the skill, practice for 20 minutes, leave with homework, next day you review your homework in class, then you learn the new skill, practice for 20 minutes, leave with homework, circle goes around if you miss homework you get behind in class.
- Not knowing why we need this stuff.
- Class options are not available, limited enrollment in classes.
- Large class problems, no one on one, that many students cannot be accommodated by one teacher.
- Focusing on bookwork in class, reading chapters and answer questions. – Instead of reading the boring chapters, I just look for answers instead of reading the chapter. Some students may learn from that technique but not all, need more busy work.
- Need interactive classes so students can really participate.
- Shouldn't teach to tests.
- Should teach more life skills.
- Money shouldn't be the driving force of education.
- Teachers should push students to achieve excellence.
- Diversity is good.
- Students in class who don't want to be there but have to be doesn't make for a productive class.

- Many students are just taking particular classes just to get a good grade, and then the student who wants to take the class can't because there is no more room.
- It is difficult when there are disrespectful students (to teachers and other students) in the classroom, if group work is assigned, they won't participate but will still claim the credit.
- Required classes need to be looked at again.
- Alternative options for graduation, is one year of earth science really a valuable class for my future?
- Lot of disrespect shown to school building: damage: markings, windows kicked in during and after renovation
- Lot of gossip which is damaging
- When students are not treated as individuals; class is treated as a whole with same teaching techniques.
- Especially true in classes required for graduation: more students; harder for teacher to find a way to get to everybody. Not as true for electives
- Teachers get set in the way they teach their subject; same way all the time; do not excite student interest. I don't like to do things the same way my older siblings have done. Same projects every year; ex. slavery.
- Teachers can have a set idea of how they want a project to be, do not encourage creativity. Ex. writing a paper on Darfur: teacher supplies questions to students; they do not have a chance to ask questions themselves
- Some teachers leave room for creativity and own abilities (individualized format – PowerPoint, handouts, video ...);
- Challenge: Vermont students are not culturally educated (adopted Indian student gets asked questions about dress, ridiculed for forehead symbol, etc); having more diversity; because schools lack diversity, when someone of another culture joins the student body, there is a mistrust; "different" student feels alienated
- Need to offer more education about cultural identity to combat alienation by middle school peers.
- Multi-graded elementary school classes a challenge; repetitious curriculum; teachers do not individualize; older students do not help younger
- Multi-graded classes can work if skilled teacher and individualized instruction
- Need more technology: traveling laptops. Teachers do not want to use them because they do not work well.
- "Power School" --- a lot of teachers did not have enough training in making the switch for progress reports and grades. Some teachers reluctant to make the switch
- Textbooks are old; teachers have to create their own curriculum materials; sometimes the theme (point) not always clear to students until the end, but if teacher is passionate about content, it turns students on also.
- Textbooks are really heavy; don't fit in locker; not enough time between classes so have to carry everything; have to carry home every night. Teachers could be more creative in their use of textbooks – keep them either at home or at school ex. history can keep book at home, class is more interactive
- Teachers don't trust students enough to give them more time between classes, but some students are not trustworthy
- Vandalism at every school; sometimes all students punished for acts of a few; many privileges taken away because they have been abused in the past

- Testing was a huge anxiety; teachers are basing the whole grade on tests (e.g. chemistry tests)
- Test doesn't allow you to show who you are
- You can put hours and hours into studying and it doesn't allow you to succeed; it's a roadblock
- Standardized testing: basing one grade on what I've done in my entire life
- SATs
- Scheduling: not being able to take all the classes I want; classes are really long (it's hard to concentrate on the same thing for so long); days are really monotonous (having the same 4 classes all semester)
- Hazen has combination scheduling, which seems to work for testing and lectures, etc.
- Couldn't get into Jazz or Spanish...lots of classes couldn't get into because of scheduling
- Scheduling software issues
- Cliques: not belonging
- Feels like there is one "in group" and the rest are stragglers (school is 350 kids)
- Tech centers may be more diverse and accepting
- U-32: you need to really like books or have money to get by (be popular)
- If you aren't into sports, etc., you don't get treated the same
- People comment on tech centers as the easy way out but student/attendee feels very fortunate to be involved in something she is interested in
- "In crowd" is made up of partiers (drugs and alcohol create separation)
- Hazen UHS has Student Assistant person...does Peoples?
- Peoples has Guidance Counselors but student views these as people to talk to about college; there isn't anyone to talk to about drinking issues
- Student was singled out for smoking cigarettes (picked up habit from parents)
- U-32 has people students can talk to
- Senior privileges don't make sense (they don't hear morning announcements if they aren't there); seniors can go through the whole year without going to TA once
- Being in school all day might not be necessary if you have study halls
- Block scheduling is a challenge (lots of offerings, too many classes – works against you – challenge to fit the classes in)
- Not having enough class choices
- Hard to learn a language online without teacher
- Having class every day (hard to fit lab in)
- Scheduling in general can be a stumbling block
- TA system a complete waste of time
- Not having enough time to fit everything in (homework, home chores, clubs, sports, family, work)
- "Free block" doesn't look good on transcript
- Getting stressed out
- Food

3. What will make school a better place for students to learn?

- Not enough books available. Make sure students have access to resources that they need.
- Change the style that teachers are using to teach. Most teachers had photocopied packet with a quiz the next day. No actual teaching and learning occur when this happens. This is really not a good way to learn.
- Choice for tech center not available.
- Individual attention is going to want to make students learn. Public schools just don't offer the resources that students need. High school students do not have enough resources available to them to support them in their learning.
- Tech center offers what is needed
- Class availability – not offered enough to allow flexibility in schedule. With Correspondence Course you can build the flexibility in
- Better communication between students, faculty and guidance is needed and would be helpful. Kids are not encouraged to go to tech center – too many obstacles in the way as it is up to the student to do all the work.
- Teachers need to focus on individualized learning of students. Student focused learning will work better. More scheduling options needed to allow a better structure so students can access classes to meet their needs. SIMS math is a problem.
- Guidance program needs to be more supportive. Not enough respect for student ideas.
- Teachers are penalized if they do not follow the set way of teaching. Teachers should be allowed flexibility in the way that they teach.
- There is something that you can change about school what would it be?
- Never take math and science again. Have a major in high school, so I can focus.
- Integrate community in school. Use community around school. Look at community need. Find a purpose for students as there is a place where they could be part of and fill a need in the community.
- Strengthen the community service. CS more important than PE
- Individualizing – only path accepted now is high school, college, etc. Make alternatives more acceptable.
- More student run programs with advisors present, but students presiding.
- Students need more say and should be able to express the way they would like to learn.
- Students need more choice in the classes they can take and more say.
- Students and teachers need to be more open to change.
- More alternative programs in schools.
- Ability to choose the things you love and are good at and would most likely help you the future.
- To be able to choose to learn something you always wanted to do but never had the opportunity.
- Classes should be about life, such as filling out tax papers in math, individual classes to fit the student's needs.
- Class sizes need to stay small
- Being more prepared for college, more college prep is needed, and guidance needs to be more in contact with students from the very beginning.
- Need more guidance interaction with students and more info should be shared with TAs by guidance.

- See adults reaching out more to the students to make high school experience more positive.
- Bullying needs to go away students shut down and don't get anything out of it.
- Internet bullying needs to go away.
- More administrative help is needed for internet bullying issues.
- Equality in punishment for all students
- TA should have more input in punishments instead of principal.
- Students need to learn to deal with problems on their own.
- Restorative justice program instead of just suspending and not learning about the consequence of their actions.
- More efficient use of schoolwork and class time; lots of busy work that wastes time; teacher planning needs to be more flexible; teachers too stuck on lesson plans getting completed
- Some subjects are not as relevant (PHYSICS)
- Required curriculum has a lot of "old stuff"; develop more passion for future education
- Homework not always needed – repetitious and boring
- Lots of goofing off in class – time is wasted because of a lack of structure
- End up doing leftover work after school that takes time away from what you are really interested in
- School for 6-1/2 hours; then 4 hours of homework? Teachers not aware of the total load
- More should happen in the classroom
- Twinfield – small school teachers communicate so that load is more even for students
- Do students have a voice in homework load? Homework is "SOLE EXTINGUISHER OF PASSION"-- There has to be a better way to learn things. Brought the issue up with principal – he said that there are two extremes at the school: low course work for some students who are not motivated; high expectations for high achievers
- Have students choose what they want to learn about
- Teacher mindset: we are the teacher-we have power; you are the students. Needs to be more like, we are helping you be who you want to be/work together.
- What is the goal to the learning? Make it clear so students will get involved and make decisions. Put kids in situation where there is no one answer and let them learn.
- What is the purpose of school? People have different ideas: prepare for college. What about students who are not going to college? Non-college-bound students do not see reason for going to school
- No classes in high school for real-world life skills: balance checkbook, cook, make out a schedule, find classes to take. Not everyone has a mother or father to teach these life skills.
- Ex. On Your Own class introduced previous year at Williamstown. A lot of things discovered.
- I have no options to pursue my interests in school right now for what I want to do. Summer job – did network administration but cannot pursue this during the school year; lack opportunity.
- Make it a more comfortable environment (it's hard to sit in hard, plastic chairs); students are there all day
- Variety in classrooms

- More variety of classes in which people can learn in different ways (hands-on learning); for people who like to work on cars, put them around cars
- Being active in the community: people can know where their tax dollars are going as well as benefited from the work
- Improve opportunities to help teach responsibility
- Help kids become aware of opportunities (one student went to China and Switzerland)
- Some students only know about class trips through language programs

Part Two - Home School Students

What works

- Homeschooled until grade 5 then to private parochial school, 8, 9, 10 in public, now back to homeschooling
- Homeschooled. School choice is important. Cannot achieve the vision without school choice. Sent the money with the child and allow choice.
- With choice students learn at their own pace.
- On and off homeschooler. Public school teachers for the most part were helpful. Some teachers were too strict and taught to the curriculum. It is important for kids to be able to go at their own pace.
- Finding the best road....it might be a longer road, but you do get there.
- People don't learn the same way.

Challenges in homeschooling or other experiences

- Learning style did not work for a regular classroom.
- Isolation is a problem with homeschooling.
- Taking one course at a high school and there is not coordinator with the TA and the schedule of the course.
- Being in a high school classroom would be hard as it would be too distracting. The environment. Kids in high school have to be there and are not there because they want to be. In college people are there because they want to be and are more motivated.
- In public school a lot of time is not used for study it is used for other things.
- Classrooms are too distracting. Teachers spend too much time managing behavior.
- Class size makes a difference. A class size of 5 or 6 is good. Kids decide what subjects they want too.
- At the beginning of the year and every week a decision is made for what is to be done for the week.
- Basics are completed and then special interests are explored.
- Context as to what is taught in regards to health and moralistics is based on the belief of the homeschoolers

What could make it better?

- Do not rank students with special needs with regular students.
- Public schools do not have the capability to meet all the individual needs of children.
- The state should not be responsible to make sure children get a good education.
- The school system should be responsible to meet the needs of the students.