VT Flexible Pathways Tool: Considerations for Student Participation in a Flexible Pathway

Facilitation Guide

September 16, 2019

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Facilitation Guide:
Considerations for Student Participation in a Flexible Pathway

Over the course of several months during the 2018-2019 academic year, the Agency of Education (AOE) and our partners at the Northeast Comprehensive Center (NCC) engaged in initial field testing through a series of workshops, trainings, presentations and site visits to:

1. Introduce field educators to a developing set of tools[1] to support SUs/SDs in the implementation of flexible pathways;
2. Elicit feedback and refine the tools based on that feedback; and
3. Develop a guide based on facilitation of school teams as they used the draft tools.

What follows is a facilitation guide informed by frequently asked questions, suggestions from the field, and successful strategies that were used to complete the field testing.

Background:

From 2016 – 2019, AOE staff from the Student Pathways division engaged in listening tours, participated on Integrated Field Reviews (IFRs), facilitated collaboratives and showcases of learning, and collected the questions and observations of students, educators, parents and community members, legislators and business owners, and other Vermont stakeholders to better understand challenges to implementation of personalized learning and flexible pathways in Vermont. We called what we learned *case studies in inequities* – common barriers that contributed to a lack of parity between student groups in access, opportunity and equity of educational experience, specifically regarding flexible pathways to graduation. These common barriers are diverse; some are the result of legislation and policy coming into conflict, some the result of geographic and resource challenges, and some the result of implementation failures. In 2018, the Agency began in earnest to collate what we learned to develop supports for the field. As a local control state, our challenge was to develop technical assistance sensitive to the unique needs and context of a local school community that also encouraged consistency in implementation and educational equity across the state. A set of resources that we refer to as the Flexible Pathways Implementation Kit is the result of our efforts. What follows, are recommendations for using the *VT Flexible Pathways Tool: Considerations for Student Participation in a Flexible Pathway*. This tool will be referred to as the Student Participation tool throughout the facilitation guide.

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[1] *VT Flexible Pathways Profile: A Tool to Evaluate Flexible Pathways at the Local Level* and the *VT Flexible Pathways Tool: Considerations for Student Participation in a Flexible Pathway*

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Purpose of the Student Participation Tool:

The purpose of the Student Participation tool is to support a consistent process for students and their advisors to determine how a flexible pathway opportunity fits within a student's personalized learning plan (PLP), to verify the necessary preparation required to engage in the learning experience, and to identify the supports they may need to be successful. It is not intended to be a checklist, but rather a guide for students to ensure that the potential learning experience is practical and aligned to the student's near and long-term goals with evidence to support why the learning opportunity is or is not appropriate for the student. This tool is also meant to support discussions about Flexible Pathways options with students and their families, and for educators to ensure that they have considered the questions listed and are working towards implementing procedures, practices, and processes consistent with Vermont's Education Quality Standards.

Using the Student Participation Tool:

The Student Participation Tool should be used with students seeking to experience learning through an approved Flexible Pathway opportunity. Flexible Pathway opportunities are approved at the local level using the *VT Flexible Pathways Profile: A Tool to Evaluate Flexible Pathways at the Local Level*.

What are flexible pathways?

The Flexible Pathways to Secondary School Completion Initiative, passed by the Legislature in 2013, described opportunities school districts could provide to engage and support students to complete secondary school.

Flexible Pathway Opportunities may include:
- Blended/Virtual Learning
- Career Technical Education
- Dual Enrollment
- Early College
- Expanded Learning Opportunities
  - After-school and Summer Programs
- High School Completion Program
- Work-Based Learning

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Convening a Team:

When using the Student Participation tool to determine participation in a Flexible Pathway learning experience offered at your school it is recommended that you convene a team of a stakeholders knowledgeable both about the student and the specific experience. In many cases, this may be a small team consisting of only a student and the school counselor who will use the Pathway Profile tool as a resource. However, depending on where a school may be in developing their Pathway Profiles, you may want to consider a larger team to begin with.

While team composition may change from school to school or based on the flexible pathway experience being reviewed, it is important to have on any team some individuals who meet these overarching criteria:

- A decision-maker,
- Personnel familiar with the specific flexible pathway under consideration,
- Personnel involved in PLP/scheduling/etc.,
- Personnel involved in assessing for/awarding of "credit,"
- The student pursuing the flexible pathway learning experience.

[Note, as it pertains to the Student Participation tool, one individual may meet several of the criteria above.]

Students should be involved in determining whether a particular flexible pathway learning experience is appropriate for them using the *Student Participation Tool*. However, the process should be facilitated by one or more educators who know the student well, and who understand the requirements of the Flexible Pathway Opportunity being considered. Appropriate educators could include school counselors, advisors, work-based learning coordinators, community-based learning coordinators, or others with similar roles. In addition, educators and special educators who know the student and his/her skills well may be consulted or included in completing the tool.

> *Example:* A student wishes to engage in a Dual Enrollment opportunity by taking an online advanced algebra class. The student may meet with her school counselor, who knows her well and has strong knowledge of the Dual Enrollment program, to complete the tool. Additionally, the school counselor may seek feedback from or invite the student's algebra teacher to participate in a meeting with the student to help to determine if the opportunity is appropriate.

Strategies to Consider:

Many teams may wonder when or how they'll find the time to complete Student Participation tools. We suggest that schools/leaders consider leveraging existing teams, schedules, and structures to engage in the determination of suitable and practical learning experiences with their students. For example, consider:

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- Leveraging existing school counseling meetings (e.g., when determining student schedules or getting college/career advising);
- Leveraging Student Advisory as an opportunity for staff and student teams to engage in targeted work;
- Incorporating Student Participation tools into College and Career Readiness classes (e.g., Career Exploration, SAT Prep, Personal Finance)
- Utilizing WIN time or flex blocks for staff and students to prepare for, engage in, and determine appropriate and practical learning that takes place outside of the school/classroom.

When This Tool Should be Used:

The Student Participation tool should be completed prior to the student engaging in the Flexible Pathway opportunity, in order to ensure that the learning experience is appropriate and practical, and to surface any issues that may need to be addressed before the student engages in the experience. However, students and their advisors should revisit the tool periodically as the opportunity progresses, or as the student faces transitions, to ensure that the student is succeeding and to identify any roadblocks that the student may encounter. This is especially important if the initial completion of the tool surfaced any potential challenges or areas where the student would need ongoing support.

We recommend that schools begin using the Student Participation tool and their SU/SD Flexible Pathway Profiles with students no later than 7th grade. Although some Flexible Pathway Opportunities are only available to eligible students in high school, the more familiar students are with the flexible pathway options the better prepared they should be in determining appropriate and relevant learning experiences that support their near and long-term goals.

Communication to students and families about Flexible Pathway Profiles and Student Participation tools increases transparency around student expectations, readiness criteria, and intended outcomes for students pursuing flexible pathway opportunities. Making these tools available during Parent Conferences, Open House, Transition Days, and on the school's website allows for multiple entry points and communication channels for equitable access to student participation in flexible pathways.

Walking a Team Through the Student Participation Tool:

Prior to engaging with the tool, we recommend the team has the following materials on hand (see also Resources section below): the student's PLP, the Flexible Pathway Profile, the School Handbook, and the School's Program of Studies.

Once a team has been convened, consider the following set of recommended steps as you complete the tool:

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1. Identify a team member who can act as the facilitator and who can convene the group when updates to the tool are needed. It will be important to capture the information as you complete the Student Participation tool.

2. As a team read through each question in the Consideration column. Clarify any questions the student may have about the tool. If your school deems it appropriate to make this form available to students (e.g., on school website), a student may review the form prior to the meeting, and be expected to come prepared with any outstanding questions, thoughts, concerns, etc.

3. Collect the appropriate information to inform whether the experience is suitable and practical for the student. Depending on the school, this step may be completed in advance of the meeting to allow additional time for the student to review and gather supporting documents and consult with appropriate school personnel (e.g., during Advisory).

4. Add the information to the Evidence column and/or provide a brief explanation to answer the corresponding question in the Evidence column. If steps 2 and 3 are completed in advance of the meeting, we strongly encourage that the team reviews all information in the evidence column. This collaborative team review will support a shared understanding of the determination for student participation in the learning experience.

What is 'Yes'?
If the evidence provided answers the question in the affirmative, answer 'Yes' in the *YES, or Action Steps to get to Yes* column. When saying 'Yes,' Teams should, as much as possible, consider linking/attaching existing student/school/district documentation related to the question.

What if we cannot say 'Yes'?
If the answer to a question is 'no' or 'not yet' it does not necessarily mean that the conversation is over and the student cannot participate in the experience. Instead, use the questions to prompt educators' and the student's thinking about what action steps are necessary to get to yes, including what additional information, resources, or improved student supports may be needed and could be reasonably implemented to make the experience work for the student.

When identifying action steps, it will be important to identify who is responsible for tracking down information and when the team will revisit the tool.

Resources:

A note about terminology:

The intention is for the Student Participation Tool to be used in a local context and therefore, it is not possible to provide a list of definitions for all terms that appear in it.

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Rather, these terms should be defined or interpreted using the school or SU's local context, and in a way that makes sense for the student being considered.

For example, consider question 1d, *Has the student been determined to be academically ready to be successful in this experience?*

In this case, students being 'determined to be academically ready' does not necessarily imply that that they have been formally assessed for a specific skill, ability or other qualities using a particular tool or program. Rather, it suggests that the educators who know the student best should think about the student's overall academic readiness using all information available to them to make an informed decision about whether the experience is an appropriate fit for the student.

What materials should we have on hand while completing the Student Participation tool?

- **General Flexible Pathway Guidance Materials:** Relevant, local (at the LEA or school level) guidance on Flexible Pathways, including any policy guidance around flexible pathway opportunities offered through the LEA or school; any documented procedures or policies for already approved flexible pathway opportunities and/or off campus experiences.
- **Specific Flexible Pathway Experience Materials:** Information about the specific experience being considered, such as program materials, course syllabi, letters of agreement or contracts between the school and the site facilitating the opportunity.
- **Student Materials:** The student's Personal Learning Plan and other individual goal planning documents, the student's schedule and transcript, or any other materials determined relevant to team members.

Pathway Profile Examples:

The Northeast Comprehensive Center and the AOE have gathered feedback from a number of stakeholder groups including school teams. As a result, the AOE will be rolling out the following Flexible Pathway Profile and Student Participation Tool examples as part of the Flexible Pathways Implementation Kit. These additional resources will be released through the AOE Weekly Field Memo and located on the AOE website.

- Dual Enrollment Profile
- Early College Profile
- Early College Student Participation tool
- Work-Based Learning Profile

Links to Resources:

The following resources are referenced throughout the Flexible Pathways Implementation Kit. These resources are categorized according to the tool they are referenced in.

Pathways Profile Tool links:

16 V.S.A. § 255 Title 16, Chapter 5, Subchapter 4, § 255. Public and independent school employees; contractors

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Accessibility

AOE Case Study Learning Project

AOE Special Education Resources

ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards & Competencies

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)

Vermont Occupational Safety and Health Administration (VOSHA)

Vermont School Boards Association (VSBA)

VSBA Model Policy Manual

VSBA Required Policy: Volunteers and Work Study Students

 Vermont Student Data Privacy Alliance

Student Participation Tool links:

After-school and Summer Programs

Blended/Virtual Learning

Career Technical Education

Dual Enrollment

Early College

Expanded Learning Opportunities

High School Completion Program

Personalized Learning Planning Process

Work-Based Learning

DE Profile Tool Exemplar:

Agency of Education Dual Enrollment webpage

AOE Dual Enrollment Program Manual

Vermont State Colleges System, ADA/Section 504 Coordinators

Vermont State Colleges Policies and Procedures

Vermont State Colleges Policy 504: Campus Safety Policy

Vermont State Colleges Policy 208: Criminal Background Checks

EC Profile Exemplar:

AOE Early College Program webpage

Early College Program Manual

Intro to College and Careers course

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Vermont State Colleges Policy 208: Criminal Background Checks
Vermont Student Assistance Corp (VSAC)

EC Student Tool Exemplar:
Castleton University Early College Program Form
Community College of Vermont (CCV) Early College Form
Northern Vermont University Early College Assurance Form
Vermont Agency of Transportation
VSAC Planning for College

WBL Profile Exemplar:
ADA Policies for and Procedures for Small Business
AOE Work-Based Learning webpage
Child Labor Poster, VDOL
Information and Technical Assistance on the Americans with Disabilities Act
Vermont's Work-Based Learning Manual
Wages and the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)

AOE webpages:
Blended/Virtual Learning
Career Technical Education
Dual Enrollment
Early College
Expanded Learning Opportunities
High School Completion Program
Personalized Learning
Work-Based Learning

AOE Contact Information:

At this point, the AOE is not collecting the Flexible Pathway Profile or Student Participation Tools nor are they asking schools to submit them. The AOE expects that schools will use the questions in the guides to ensure appropriate, equitable placement, understands that the local context will vary from school to school, and hopes that schools will publish their Flexible Pathways Profiles on their SU/SD websites.

Questions about the Facilitation Guides and Flexible Pathway Tools should be directed to Veronica Newton, Program Manager, Personalized Learning Team at veronica.newton@vermont.gov or Jess DeCarolis, Division Director, Student Pathways at jess.decarolis@vermont.gov.

Thank You:

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