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Burlington School District – Burlington City and Lake Project

Grant Summary:

The Flexible Pathways Expanded Learning Opportunities grant to the Burlington School District will support the development of the Burlington City Lake Project program (BCL Semester). This program will convene a cohort of approximately 24 Burlington High School (BHS) students each semester who, with dedicated faculty from BHS and several expanded learning providers, will use the city itself as the classroom. BCL Semester will be a fully integrated, project-based experience, exploring natural and cultural systems of the city (e.g. food systems; human impacts on Lake Champlain; changing demographics).

Work to Date:

In spring 2017, the group created a Project Steering Committee with representation from BSD and community-based partners, and hosted two steering committee meetings to design their vision, identify community stakeholders, and evaluate and interpret outputs.

In addition, they designed and executed a professionally facilitated, three-hour visioning session with community stakeholders, including more than 40 total participants, sixteen Burlington High School students and/or recent alumni, six representatives from the Burlington School District, and representatives from more than 14 local organizations.

Their action research blog and social media presence documenting their design process can be found at the following links:

- btvcityandlake.wordpress.com
- www.facebook.com/btvcityandlake/
- twitter.com/BTVCityandLake

This fall of 2017, the Burlington City and Lake Program was officially launched with this announcement from the project team comprised of Andy Barker, Dov Stucker, Signe Daly, and Peter McConville.

“After many months of dreaming and networking, our Project Team is excited to announce that we are formally moving ahead to design the Burlington City & Lake Semester in partnership with the Burlington School District! We’re grateful to the many people - like you - who have shared our enthusiasm for creating an educational experience that brings together a diverse group of students to explore our community deeply and forge new connections to each other and to this unique place. We are thrilled to be doing this work. Over the next 12 months, we will be designing the curriculum and the essential program elements, with the intention of enrolling about two dozen students in a pilot in the Fall of 2018. We will build on the valuable insights we gained at our Visioning Session with more than 40 community members in May. Our design work will continue to be deeply collaborative, with input from students, community partners, and experts within the school district. Please consider this an invitation to be in touch and to collaborate on this work with us!”

Concept Overview: Burlington City & Lake Semester

The Burlington City and Lake Semester will be an immersive, place-based semester program for high school students in the Burlington District. Based downtown, the program will offer students an exciting opportunity to pursue their education in the real-world environment of their hometown. Students will build community by engaging in their community, and gain global citizenship skills as they explore natural and cultural systems. As they reconnect their education to the unique people and places of Burlington, students will find new purpose as learners and citizens and develop a powerful sense of agency and stewardship.



Program and Curriculum Framework

The program and curriculum of the BCL Semester will be developed with input from multiple stakeholders, including BSD and BHS leadership, teachers, current students, community partners, parents, and representatives from the City. Some elements will be emergent, using the program's nimbleness to engage the real-world issues and challenges that can only be studied *here and now*. Other initial design principles include:

Integrated and Project-based: The curriculum will be project-based and fully integrated, drawing on tools and practices from various academic disciplines. Coursework will prepare students to meet the district's Graduate Expectations and Vermont's Educational Quality Standards. Program faculty will work collaboratively to deliver a rigorous, proficiency-based academic experience that will include reading, writing, presentations, field-based research and collaborative projects, as well as service learning, creative arts, and technology integration.

Intensive and Immersive: Students and program faculty will spend the entirety of each school day together at various project locations in the City, for the duration of the semester. This intensive design allows for the creation of unique, extended community partnerships and projects that support deep learning.

Authentic Outcomes: Project outcomes will be designed for authentic audiences, such as presentations to policymakers (e.g. City Council, State Representatives) and community partners; service-learning and conservation work; events; and publications. Students may also act as conveners and/or moderators of public forums.

Inclusive Practices: We will begin the program and curriculum development process by creating an Equity and Inclusion roadmap, with input from a wide range of stakeholders representing Burlington's diversity, including current BHS students. Partnerships, project design and student recruitment will be carried out in line with this roadmap to ensure that BCL embraces and reflects the city's diversity - and serves a cross-section of BHS students.

Student Voice: Students will be partners in the design, development and actual experience of the Burlington City & Lake Semester. Through the *School Innovation Seminar* course at BHS and other forums, they will have input into the program and curriculum in its development phase. During each semester, students and faculty will share the responsibility of self-governance, program planning and evaluation.

Community-building: Significant time and attention within each semester program will be devoted to community-building among students and, potentially, in the city at large. Active investment will be made in building bridges across cultures and backgrounds. Ongoing reflection on group process and individual contributions will be a cornerstone of the program.

What Could the Learning Look and Feel Like?



Burlington Waterfront Development Plan

BCL students could explore and inform policy and planning around the ongoing development of Burlington's Waterfront with business and nonprofit partners. Students could use social science research methods to prepare a brief to the City Council on best uses to serve the city's residents in the future.

Demographics of Change - Ethnographic Study and Mapping Project

Students could partner with a range of community groups to complete an ethnographic study of Burlington's changing demographics. Project outcomes might include creation of an interactive story-map in partnership with Burlington Geographic; or designing and moderating public events that highlight and celebrate the diversity of the city.

Housing Study and Policy Recommendations

Partnering with Burlington City Hall, CEDO, Champlain Housing Trust, Burlington Housing Authority, COTS, CVOEO and the Development Review Board, BCL students could research and analyze the complex housing situation in Burlington, and present proposals to the City Council for proactive, workable housing policy changes that balance affordability and livability.



Human Responsibility for Lake Champlain Health

BCL students could work with Burlington Public Works, ECHO, the Rubenstein Lab, and the Chittenden County Stream Team to study issues affecting the health of Lake Champlain. This cross-disciplinary inquiry could take students deep into an exploration of stormwater systems, wetlands, and myriad agricultural, industrial and recreational uses of the lake. In the project's culmination, students could present to policymakers, convene public information panels, and engage others in citizen science.



Applied Conservation in Burlington's Natural Areas

Students in BCL could make a lasting contribution to the City's conservation efforts, working with the City's Field Naturalist, the Parks Department, and the Conservation Board to develop a trail across Burlington connecting its public natural areas. Students would study and apply principles of natural history and land conservation; inventory natural communities and important species; research land records and create GIS maps; and participate in trail construction.

Timeline: The Burlington City and Lake Semester program will be designed during the 2017-2018 school year and enroll its first students in the Fall semester of 2018.

Principal Collaborators:

Dov Stucker and **Peter McConville**, both Burlington High School teachers, have designed and facilitated numerous place-based learning programs, both in the classroom and through the Partnership for Change.

Signe Daly is on the faculty at Champlain College and served as a parent representative to the Partnership for Change. **Andy Barker** is an independent social entrepreneur with a background in teaching, corporate social responsibility, sustainability strategy and partnership development.

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