



219 North Main Street, Suite 402
Barre, VT 05641 (p) 802-479-1030 | (f) 802-479-1835

What is Act 77: The Flexible Pathways Initiative?

Historical Context

Education reform in Vermont has a long and rich history. Many of the recent efforts of educators, communities and lawmakers to make meaningful change for Vermont students can be traced through several essential documents that culminated in the passage of Act 77 in 2013 and are summarized below:

- High Schools on the Move, (2002) addressed “the critical issues facing Vermont high schools” and identified 12 principles that remain at the heart of the reform effort today.
- Act 176, also known as The High School Completion Program (HSCP), was created by the Vermont legislature in 2006 and incorporated into the Flexible Pathways initiative in 2013. The program was designed to offer a flexible pathway to graduation for those at least 16 years of age and at risk of disengaging from school.
- The Future of Education in Vermont (2007) identified five statewide components to be addressed: student-centered education; leadership; flexible learning environments; engaged community partners; and indicators of success.
- Act 44 (2009) contained the first use of the phrase “Flexible Pathways to Graduation” and established the goal of a 100% graduation rate by 2020.
- Policy Research Team Final Report (2011), a result of a study around flexible pathways and proficiency-based graduation, offered seven “Essential Recommendations,” all of which find reference points in Act 77.
- Act 77 became law in July of 2013 and represents the commitment of Vermont citizens, educators and lawmakers to establish a policy-friendly environment that fosters a system of public education in which every student graduates and every high school graduate is college and career ready.

Essential Elements of Act 77:

Flexible Pathways

Flexible Pathways are any combination of high-quality expanded learning opportunities, including academic and experiential components, which build and assess attainment of identified proficiencies and lead to secondary school completion, civic engagement and postsecondary readiness. Flexible pathways allow students to apply their knowledge and skills to tasks of personal interest as part of the personalized learning planning process. This does not refer to a finite menu of pre-selected pathways from which a student must choose, but also includes school-based course offerings, virtual or blended learning opportunities, community or work-based learning opportunities, and post-secondary learning options among others.

Personalized Learning Plans

Personalization of each student’s educational experience is most clearly illustrated in the requirement that all students in grades 7 through 12 will have **Personalized Learning Plans** (PLPs) by the 2018 - 2019 academic year. PLPs are plans co-developed by students,

parents/guardians and teachers as part of an on-going process. They provide students the opportunity to reflect upon their learning and future, communicate their needs, strengths and goals with the stakeholders in their lives, and define the scope and rigor of academic and experiential opportunities that define the student's pathway toward secondary school completion, postsecondary readiness and civic engagement.

Act 77 emphasizes the importance of the *planning process*. The PLP should be seen as a "living" document that can change as students' needs and ideas change. The honesty and commitment to this process by students, and the care and diligent use of the PLP by teachers and advisors, will determine the ultimate value of the Personalized Learning Plan process.