

Report on Act 176 for FY11
An Act Relating to the High School
Completion Program

Report to the Senate and House Committees on Education
January 30, 2012

Submitted by:



Integrated Support for Learning Division
(802) 828-3134

Report on the High School Completion Program (FY11)

The High School Completion Program, established by Act 176 as enacted in 2006, has continued to experience success and growth over its first five years. Legislative action in 2009 enabled the program to begin serving students still enrolled in high school, in addition to the unenrolled population. During FY10, 70% of the active plans were for unenrolled students and 30% were for the new enrolled group. During FY11, 67% of the active plans were for unenrolled students and 33% were for enrolled students.

It is important to note that graduation education plans are not written simply for the purpose of earning credits needed for a high school diploma. The beginning point of plan development is the determination of a student's skill in reading, writing and math, as well as the student's goals. Successful completion of a well-written plan should result in a high school diploma, and the skills necessary to successfully transition to post-secondary experience.

The High School Completion Program is managed by Vermont's Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) system, Learning Works. Learning Works is made up of the Department of Education and four non-profit AEL providers: Vermont Adult Learning (VAL), Central Vermont Adult Basic Education (CVABE), Northeast Kingdom Learning Services (NEKLS), and The Tutorial Center (TTC). During FY11, \$3,017,921 was expended through the High School Completion Program. Of that total, \$2,529,594 (84%) went to AEL providers, the remainder going to high school partners and other contracted service providers.

The AEL system has benefited from the establishment of the High School Completion Program. The program has become self-supporting, and if the appropriation for this program is allowed to grow with the growth in participation, then reimbursement funds will be sufficient to maintain the necessary infrastructure. At the conclusion of each fiscal year, the reimbursement schedule and eligibility expectations have been revised with the goal of using available funds as efficiently and effectively as possible.

During FY11, an evaluation of the program over its first four years was conducted. A grant from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation made this possible and the evaluation was conducted by staff from the University of Vermont. The Executive Summary of the evaluation report is attached and the full report is available upon request.

HSCP Reimbursements FY11/unenrolled students

	AEL Provider	District/ Tech	Other Providers	Total	Students Served	Grads
FY11 Q1						
CVABE	49,028	11,000	20,500	80,528	42	7
NEKLS	57,376	6,374	1,162	64,912	44	6
TTC	28,580	1,538	665	30,783	13	3
VAL	214,812	19,122	13,279	247,213	159	11
Q Total	\$349,796	\$38,034	\$35,606	\$423,436	258	27
FY11 Q2						
CVABE	91,012	13,772	47,658	152,442	67	4
NEKLS	43,723	4,211	647	48,581	35	4
TTC	25,039	1,195	0	26,234	9	2
VAL	237,331	19,201	7,462	263,994	181	13
Q Total	\$397,105	\$38,379	\$55,767	\$491,251	292	23
FY11 Q3						
CVABE	70,717	3,600	56,393	130,710	71	0
NEKLS	44,905	5,278	2,756	52,939	34	4
TTC	20,845	979	715	22,539	12	1
VAL	259,304	15,415	20,886	295,605	192	14
Q Total	\$395,771	\$25,272	\$80,750	\$501,793	309	19
FY11 Q4						
CVABE	138,705	18,473	51,534	208,712	77	38
NEKLS	42,972	3,052	1,196	47,220	27	8
TTC	34,167	790	0	34,957	14	6
VAL	304,679	20,139	19,283	344,101	176	54
Q Total	\$520,523	\$42,454	\$72,013	\$634,990	294	106
Year Total	\$1,663,195	\$144,139	\$244,136	\$2,051,470	513*	175

* total active plans for FY11, not cumulative

HSCP Reimbursements
FY11/enrolled students

	AEL Provider	District/ Tech	Other Providers	Total	Students Served	Grads
FY11 Q1						
CVABE	28,885	0	10,785	39,670	25	2
NEKLS	25,982	0	2,239	28,221	20	2
TTC	4,621	0	0	4,621	5	0
VAL	95,370	0	5,718	101,088	64	4
Q Total	\$154,858	0	\$18,742	\$173,600	114	8
FY11 Q2						
CVABE	67,949	0	28,053	96,002	52	0
NEKLS	26,984	0	3,038	30,022	22	1
TTC	13,420	0	0	13,420	7	0
VAL	89,721	0	3,470	93,191	68	2
Q Total	\$198,074	0	\$34,561	\$232,635	149	3
FY11 Q3						
CVABE	49,947	0	19,037	68,984	53	0
NEKLS	31,933	0	2,219	34,152	30	1
TTC	8,871	0	0	8,871	7	0
VAL	86,198	0	3,005	89,203	70	3
Q Total	\$176,949	0	\$24,261	\$201,210	160	4
FY11 Q4						
CVABE	105,196	0	15,905	121,101	54	34
NEKLS	66,709	0	1,354	68,063	37	18
TTC	21,393	0	0	21,393	8	6
VAL	143,220	0	5,229	148,449	76	38
Q Total	\$336,518	0	\$22,488	\$359,006	175	96
Year Total	\$866,399	0	\$100,052	\$966,451	258*	111

* total active plans for FY11, not cumulative

Vermont Department of Education

High School Completion Program FY11 High School Partner Participation

District	# plans	# grads	District \$	District	# plans	# grads	District \$
Arlington	2	2	248	Millers Run	1	0	400
Barnet	1	0	882	Milton	8	5	1551
Bellows Falls	4	3	581	Missisquoi Valley	17	6	832
BFA St. Albans	56	20	7301	Montpelier	37	19	12736
Bethel	1	1	701	Morristown	21	7	6236
Black River	5	1	400	Mt. Abraham	11	3	1636
Blue Mountain	2	0	800	Mt. Anthony	28	11	2599
Brattleboro	37	5	6233	Mt. Mansfield	4	2	1812
Burke	6	2	1405	North Country	47	14	3665
Burlington	61	18	11717	Northfield	4	3	1384
Burr & Burton	1	1	610	Otter Valley	3	0	400
Canaan	3	0	0	Oxbow	10	7	3192
Champlain Valley	4	2	991	Poultney	2	0	800
Colchester	8	4	1564	Proctor	7	1	800
Concord	1	0	400	Randolph	20	8	7274
Craftsbury	3	2	957	Richford	6	2	648
Danville	1	1	0	Rochester	2	0	0
East Haven	2	2	1546	Royalton	6	3	985
Enosburg	9	2	1413	Rutland	11	4	2084
Essex Comm Ed Ctr	20	11	2808	South Burlington	15	6	5028
Fair Haven	1	1	845	Spaulding	21	6	4243
Fairfax	14	7	1045	Springfield	32	8	3609
Green Mountain	4	0	400	St. Johnsbury	7	4	3099
Hartford	21	5	4147	Stowe	7	6	2385
Harwood	11	8	2011	Sutton	2	1	0
Hazen	5	1	823	Twinfield	4	4	716
Lake Region	28	12	1302	U-32	12	6	800
Lamoille	11	6	2573	Vergennes	4	1	1613
Leland & Gray	5	0	1200	West Rutland	6	1	965
Long Trail	1	1	239	Williamstown	15	5	4028
Lyndon	11	5	3636	Windsor	16	2	1934
Middlebury	6	1	400	Winooski	22	9	2102
Mill River	10	1	1720	Woodstock	11	5	3285

Vermont Department of Education

Vermont High School Completion Program 2006 – 2010 Evaluation Report Executive Summary July 2011

Introduction

The Vermont Legislature initiated the Vermont High School Completion Program (HSCP) on July 1, 2006 due to the enactment of Act 176 during the 2006 legislative session. The goal of the HSCP was to provide an alternative and flexible path to a high school diploma for Vermont students who were between 16 and 21 years of age and had left school. As an outgrowth of Act 176, the HSCP is operated by Learning Works, a consortium of Vermont's adult education and literacy providers, in partnership with Vermont high schools and the Vermont Department of Education. Learning Works organizations are Central Vermont Adult Basic Education, Northeast Kingdom Learning Services, The Tutorial Center and Vermont Adult Learning. For questions or more information about this study, please contact Carol Vallett, Ed.D., Research Associate Professor at 802-656-0266 or Carol.Vallett@uvm.edu.

Purpose of this Study

This external evaluation is funded by the Nellie Mae Foundation and conducted by the College of Education and Social Services of the University of Vermont as a subcontractor for the evaluation grant awarded to Learning Works and administered by Northeast Kingdom Learning Services. Data for this report were collected from October 2010 until May 2011. The evaluation serves to document the establishment and achievements of the first four years (July 1, 2006 - June 30, 2010) of the HSCP activities and to offer recommendations for improvement and extension of the program beyond Vermont. Further, it documents the process that has led to the establishment of the HSCP and explains subsequent changes that have been made to the program. Additionally, this report describes the student population served in the first four years of the program, summarizes outcomes, determines cost effectiveness, and identifies other outcomes and considerations.

The study was designed to evaluate the HSCP based on the following guiding questions:

- What practices and policies have proven successful for program implementation? What changes in the program might the Vermont

- Department of Education and the providing partners make in order to improve the HSCP?
- What lessons can Vermont schools learn from their participation in the HSCP that would inform future initiatives as the schools engage in their own transformation to 21st Century learning?
 - How can the HSCP become a national model for successful engagement of students who are at risk of non-completion or who have already dropped out of school?

HSCP Program Description

Act 176 established new systems for providing adult education services culminating in a high school diploma to 16 to 21 year old Vermonters who dropped out of school. The Act defined key elements of the program including the graduation education plan, responsibilities of the Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) providers and high schools, and provisions for reimbursement payments to HSCP partners.

The graduation education plan was defined in statute as a written plan that “shall define the scope and rigor of services necessary for the student to attain a high school diploma, and may describe the educational services to be provided by a public high school, an approved independent high school, an approved provider, or a combination of these” (Vermont General Assembly, 2006, p. 2). The plan was meant to outline not just the services provided to the students but also to help capture the student’s career, personal and educational goals and was only for 16-21 year olds not enrolled in a public school.

The Act designated that students who wished to engage in a graduation education plan be assigned to a high school in their district of residence. In turn, the high school agreed to partner with contracted AEL providers to develop the graduation plan and ultimately award the high school diploma. The Act further provided that both the schools (or school districts) and the AEL providers would be reimbursed for services provided to HSCP students based on the elements of these graduation plans.

Provisions were made for the Commissioner of Education to report on the HSCP to the legislature each year and that an initial \$1 million would be appropriated from the education fund to pay for reimbursements in the first year of the HSCP. The legislation was approved in May 2006, and the HSCP began operating on July 1, 2006. In subsequent years, two important changes have been made to the HSCP: 1) the initial required assessment levels of incoming students have been increased, and 2) legislative Act 44 in 2009 allowed students to be dually enrolled in high school and HSCP. Reimbursements to high schools for dually enrolled students were eliminated.

Evaluation Methodology

Data for this evaluation were collected from various sources using a mixed methods approach. The following list outlines the data collection methods and sample sizes.

- Semi-structured interview guides were developed for interviews with
 - HSCP plan managers (21)
 - Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) administrators (12)
 - High school partners
 - Principals/assistant principals (6)
 - Guidance personnel (14)
 - Students
 - In progress (22)
 - Graduates (5)
 - Community partners (5)
 - DOE staff (3)
- Data were also retrieved from DataWorks, the AEL system database. This included:
 - Student demographic data
 - Achievement data
 - Financial information for the program
- Documents were also collected from AEL and DOE personnel as well as public sources. These included:
 - Graduation Education Plans (42)
 - DOE yearly reports (4)
 - HSCP manual
 - Policy statements
 - Program guidelines
 - Legislation

Findings

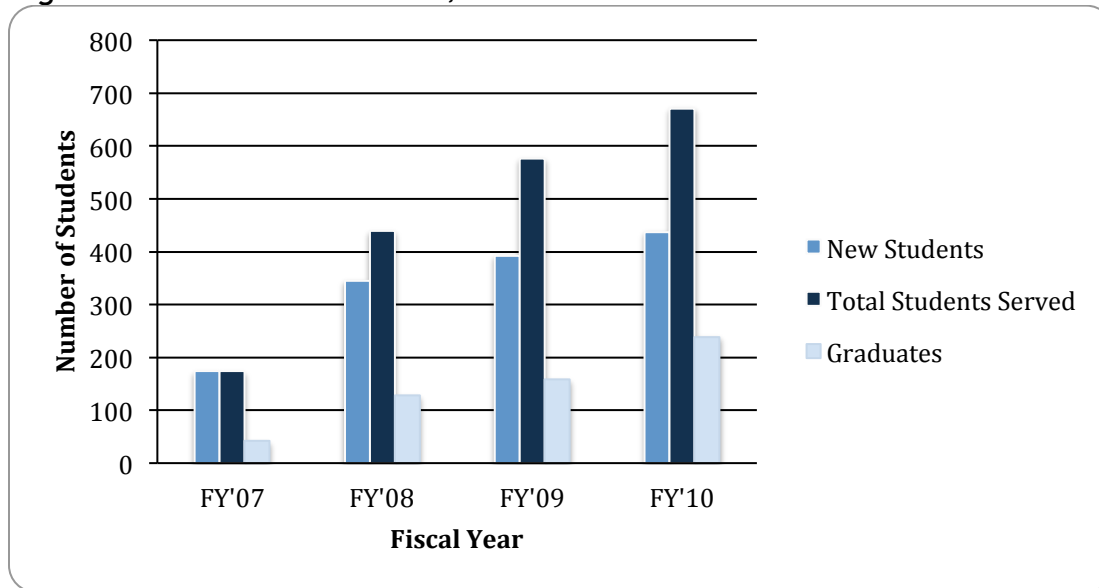
HSCP Students

During FY '07-FY '10, 1,348 students were enrolled in the HSCP. Student characteristics point to a typical student as being of traditional high school age (85%), ethnically white (93%), living at or just above the poverty level (72%), and most likely having completed the 11th grade (54%). Male and female students were equally represented in the HSCP population. Overall 10% of students were parents, 12% received special education services and 27% reported a disability of any sort. Just 2% were involved with the Department of Corrections. Details of HSCP student characteristics for FY '07-FY '10 can be found in the complete program evaluation report.

HSCP Graduates

In the first four years of operation, 566 students earned their high school diplomas through the HSCP with an overall graduation rate of nearly 42%. Figure 1 depicts the growth in students and graduates from FY '07 to FY '10.

Figure 1. HSCP New Students, Total Students Served and Graduates



The 238 graduates in 2010 include 41 students who were dually enrolled in their local high school and the HSCP. Analysis of graduates and non-graduates showed that graduation rate varied significantly by:

- Highest grade completed
- Special education status

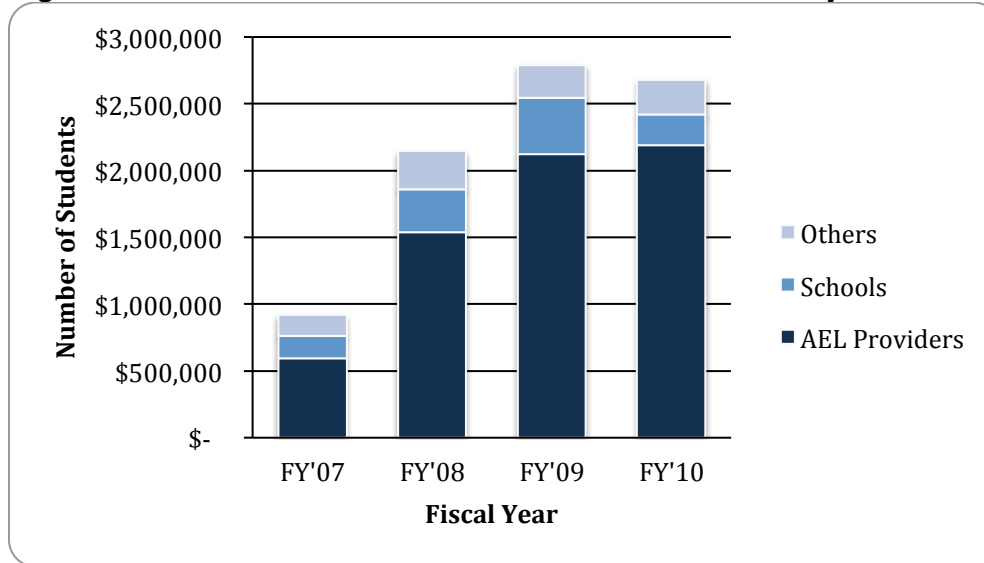
Increases in highest grade completed tracked with increased graduation rates. Students who had been designated with special education status graduated at significantly lower rates than their counterparts. However, special education status was self-reported; actual representation of this population in the database might be higher.

Commonly cited reasons for graduation success included student internal motivation, support from an adult, clear student goals, and flexible learning environment. Barriers to graduation often found were significant student learning gaps, substance abuse or mental health issues, work schedules, transportation problems, and unstable living arrangements.

HSCP Costs

Information was retrieved from DataWorks for FY '07-FY '10.

Figure 2. Student Reimbursement Totals FY '07-FY '10 by Provider



For unenrolled students, the average cost per student per year was \$4,685. For enrolled students (FY '10 only) the average cost per student was \$3,412. All expenses for HSCP were paid out of the State's Education Fund.

Evaluation Questions

What practices and policies have proven successful for program implementation?

Findings point to the following key successful practices for HSCP.

- Graduation Education Plans – Individualized and student focused learning contribute to student success.
- Flexibility – Accommodating student schedules rather than school schedules helps students complete HSCP.
- Scale – AEL programs were small enough so students received personal attention and made connections with adults and others.
- Intake Process – Common assessment process and standards assured that students had the right skills for the program.

- Focus on Outcomes – Focus on student demonstration of competency and requisite funding puts the emphasis on achievement and not seat time.
- AEL and High School Partnering – Joining two educational entities and requiring them to function together serves students well and has enhanced both types of organizations.

What changes in the program might the Department of Education and the providing partners make in order to improve the HSCP?

Findings suggest the following areas for program improvement.

- Communication – Enhance communication between DOE, AEL providers and high schools. This would aid more consistent practices. Expand outreach efforts to professional associations (i.e., principals, superintendents, guidance counselors).
- Professional Development - Expand professional development for all HSCP partners. Create a mentoring program for new plan managers with emphasis on those working in small AEL sites.
- Enrolled Students – Develop clearer and consistent practices for enrolled students. Current practice is inconsistent across the State.
- Special Education Students – AEL sites should work with school personnel to be sure that special education students are receiving sufficient support for success.
- Develop a Pre-HSCP Initiative – Students who do not meet intake assessment standards are falling into a void between HSCP and high school. A defined program would provide a clear pathway to HSCP entry.
- College Bound Students – Partner with high schools and CCV to be sure HSCP students are college ready.
- Document Competency-Based Outcomes – Establish multiple options and examples of competency-based outcomes and achievement measures. Work with schools as they consider adopting these practices. Bring in a national expert on this topic.
- Data Systems – Examine how DataWorks can become a student management system.
- Technology Integration – Integrate educational technology applications with student learning.
- Wrap-Around Support Services – Establish a network of support for students who need intensive services.

What lessons can Vermont schools learn from their participation in the HSCP that would inform future initiatives as the schools engage in their own transformation to 21st century learning?

- **Individualized Education Plans** – Schools should adopt the practice of developing a personalized graduation education plan for each student. Include a component of career and college readiness and goal setting.
- **Flexibility and Customization** – Schools need to move to more flexible schedules and learning that is designed for each student rather than for the school.
- **Competency-Based Outcomes** – Each high school should develop competency-based graduation standards.
- **Outside Learning Opportunities** – Schools could emulate elements of HSCP learning plans and incorporate more outside learning opportunities into students' academic lives. These could include internships, mentoring, employment, and college classes.

How can the HSCP become a national model for successful engagement of students who are at risk of non-completion or who have already dropped out of school?

The HSCP could consider:

- **Enact Program Improvements** – Adopt the suggestions from this evaluation.
- **Conduct a National Outreach Effort** – Present success, student stories, and history of HSCP at national conferences, author articles and conduct a general outreach campaign.
- **Develop Professional Development for AEL Professionals** – Create a workshop on HSCP for AEL professionals from other states and create a training manual.

Conclusions

In 2009, Vermont set its sights on high achievement by establishing a goal in legislation of 100% high school graduation rate by the year 2020. It is clear that the Vermont High School Completion Program is and will continue to be one of the pathways that will support this goal. However, it is important to remember that the HSCP is a dynamic operation that has and will continue to undergo changes to policies as it continues to evolve and grow. Additionally, the revenues spent on HSCP have continued to increase as have the number of students engaged. One might theorize that at some time in the future, the HSCP will be truly successful if the numbers in the program actually decline and it no longer exists in its current format. This would indicate that schools are indeed transforming and meeting the needs of all students. Until that time, the State and its students are being well served by the HSCP.

References

Vermont General Assembly. (2006). *An Act Relating to a High School Completion Program for 16-22 Year Olds*. Retrieved from <http://www.leg.state.vt.us/docs/legdoc.cfm?URL=/docs/2006/acts/ACT176.htm>.