

**UNITING VERMONT:
A DESIGN FOR A UNIFIED PUBLIC-ACCESS HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM**

Labor Task Force for Public Higher Education in Vermont

Proposed by members of the Labor Unions of the Vermont State Colleges System (VSCS)
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Across Vermont, it has become apparent that the public-access higher education system established in the 1960's must adapt to changing conditions. This document outlines a proposal for a rational and pragmatic redesign of the system. The design will unite Vermont by providing an affordable, in-state, high-quality, equitable public-access option to serve more college-bound Vermonters in Vermont.

This proposal is presented by staff and faculty of the VSCS who volunteered to lead a visioning task force organized by the labor unions representing VSCS employees. Together, the staff and faculty have decades of experience in, and commitment to, the day-to-day operations of the Vermont State Colleges. We have the perspective and perseverance to unify the system and will do so with partners across all sectors of the state along with our communities and our students.

Recent upheavals have demonstrated the need for renewed attention to the fundamental elements of public-access higher education. Creating a sustainable system requires reiterating its purpose and properly balancing its operations through attention to cost, access, and quality. The design principles of this proposal address each of these fundamental elements.

1. Public-access higher education should serve the common good through career preparation, civic engagement, community service, and personal well-being.
2. Costs of attendance must be reduced, particularly to make undergraduate enrollment affordable.
3. Access can be expanded through an inclusive model of lifelong learning.
4. Quality will be assured through comprehensive faculty and staff collaboration.

Through conversations with members of the community and a study of similar system-wide reorganization efforts, the Task Force used the design principles to generate goals for the project.

- Enable students to graduate low-debt or no-debt
- Reduce expense of administrative operations to levels of peer institutions
- Maintain multiple campuses to support regional economic vibrancy
- Maintain multiple campuses as hubs for local educational and student life opportunities
- Design flexible delivery formats for in-person, online, applied, and self-directed learning
- Expand workforce development options through certificate and non-degree opportunities
- Foster collaboration through cross-campus structures that bolster communication
- Design interdisciplinary academic programs that are both practical and meaningful
- Form partnerships with local organizations to integrate applied learning

As detailed in the full proposal presentation, the vision and goals for the project can be achieved through the major recommendations listed below.

Recommendations 1 and 2 will increase financial efficiency through consolidation while enhancing access and quality through collaboration and shared decision-making.

1. Unify the four institutions of the VSCS into a single-accreditation institution of public-access higher education to be titled Vermont State University (VSU).
 - a. Appoint a president for VSU who will lead the University with a single executive team. The VSU Executive Office will replace the Chancellor's Office and consolidate the executive teams of the existing institutions.
 - b. Consolidate common upper-level administrative operations.
 - c. Disperse executive and upper-level administrative offices throughout the campuses, eliminating the need to rent office space in Montpelier.
 - d. Establish VSU campus hubs for direct academic and student-life operations: Castleton, Northern Vermont (Lyndon and Johnson), and Vermont Tech.
 - e. Coordinate community campus and residential campus operations. Connect each community campus (CCV campuses) with one of the residential campus hubs to ease academic transfer across the University.
 - f. Direct the campus hubs to establish distinctive instructional approaches and student life environments to act as magnets for attracting applicants and generating a sense of community on campus and among alumni.
 - g. Direct faculty to establish University-wide schools led by faculty deans to unify and manage academic affairs. Have faculty establish University-wide specialized academic support units, such as a Center for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment, a Center for Online Learning and Technology, and a Division of Graduate Studies.
2. Establish a structure for shared system-wide decision-making by trustees, faculty, staff, and the executive team.

Recommendation 3 and 4 call for a redesign of the higher education funding and allocation mechanism to balance equity with freedom of choice, which are Vermont's grounding values.

3. Increase state allocation for public-access higher education to correspond with regional peers and to be in compliance with Vermont 16 V.S.A. 2171: "the VSC ... shall [be] supported in whole or in substantial part with State funds."
4. Reconsider the distribution of public funds for enrollment in out-of-state colleges. Redirect a significant portion of this grant to the VSU.

By establishing Vermont State University, reconstituting the governance structure, increasing the state allocation, and redistributing public funds to strengthen equity, this design serves the common good with improved financial efficiency, reduced cost of attendance, expanded access for lifelong learning, and assured quality through collaboration. This proposal will unite Vermont and maintain our legacy of providing future generations with a network of opportunities for transformative higher education.

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