

Health in All Policies: Education

Current Practice and Future Opportunities

Health in All Policies recognizes that health is determined not only by genetics, health care, and individual behaviors but by a complex set of social, economic and environmental factors. This document highlights examples of current action and potential future opportunities to integrate health and health equity into budgetary, programmatic, and policy decision-making in the education sector.

Why This Matters

The health of youth, families, and communities has a profound impact on the learning of students in local schools. Educational attainment is itself considered a protective factor for health. The lines between serving student health and educational needs are often blurred. Schools across Vermont support students' physical, mental, and social-emotional well-being, and safety. At the state level, the Agency of Education provides technical assistance to schools on health education provision. Wellness is also a component of [Vermont Portrait of a Graduate](#). Health is infused through all elements of the education sector.

Sector: Education

The **Agency of Education** (AOE) implements state and federal laws, policies, and regulations to ensure all Vermont learners have equitable access to high-quality learning opportunities. As defined in [16 V.S.A. §11](#):

- **School district:** town school districts, union school districts, interstate school districts, city school districts, unified union districts, and incorporated school districts, each of which is governed by a publicly elected board.
- **Supervisory union:** an administrative, planning, and educational service unit created by the State Board under section 261 of this title that consists of two or more school districts; if the context allows, the term also means a supervisory district.
- **Supervisory district:** a supervisory union that consists of only one school district, which may be a unified union district.
- **Public school:** an elementary school or secondary school operated by a school district. A public school may maintain evening or summer schools for its students, and it shall be considered a public school.
- **Independent school:** a school other than a public school, which provides a program of elementary or secondary education, or both.
- **School board:** the board of school directors elected to manage the schools of a school district, the prudential committee of an incorporated school district, the supervisory union board of directors, and supervisors of unorganized towns & gores.
- **State Board:** the State Board of Education established by chapter 3 of this title.

Budget

Physical Health

Current Practice

- ▶ Universal school meals supplement the cost of each meal to ensure every child has access to food during the school day. ([16 V.S.A. § 4017](#))
- ▶ A school board may spend no more than 3% of that school year's budget on any necessary health service for a student whose parents are unable to pay for it. ([16 V.S.A. § 1386](#))
- ▶ The Commission on Public School Employee Health Benefits determines health care premiums and out-of-pocket expenses for school employee health benefits. ([16 V.S.A. § 2102](#))
- ▶ AOE is responsible for distributing Emergency Food Assistance Program USDA Foods in Vermont. These are foods purchased by the federal government with the dual mission of supporting American agriculture and vulnerable populations. AOE works with the Vermont Foodbank to order and distribute these foods to food pantries and meal sites.
- ▶ The Local Foods Incentive Grant was created in [Act 67](#). This program encourages collaboration between schools and local farms to increase access to high quality locally produced foods.
- ▶ Community Schools established in [Act 67](#) serve as resource hubs that provide a broad range of supports and services that help students and families with increasingly complex needs.
- ▶ [Act 166 of 2014](#) provides access to [publicly-funded](#) prekindergarten education for Vermont students. All prekindergarten education programs, including Head Start and public school-operated programs, must meet specific requirements to operate in Vermont. These programs allow for early academic and health intervention.

Future Opportunities

- ▶ Provide support for "[Every Day Counts: Leveraging Cross-Sector Solutions to Improve School Attendance and Advance Health and Educational Equity in Rural Vermont](#)" project. This will provide learning opportunities and curated online resources for Vermont's educational and health practitioners regarding relevant data, evidence-based interventions and bright spots from VT's rural communities to support attendance and youth wellbeing. Includes exploration of blended funding streams, including Medicaid and state and federal investments in Community Schools and school-based health services.

Mental and Social-Emotional Well-Being

Current Practice

- ▶ The [Bipartisan Safer Communities Act](#) established the Stronger Connections Grant which is awarded competitively to high-need local education agencies to help meet students' social, emotional, physical, and mental well-being needs. The goal is to create positive, inclusive, and supportive school environments.
- ▶ [Title IA](#) federal funding is dispersed based on the number of low-income children in each district. The goal is to close educational achievement gaps. Districts use Title IA for mental health supports, mentoring programs, systems to identify at-risk students, health, nutrition, and other social services, and family engagement.
- ▶ [BEST/Act 230](#) funding for training to educators in creating equitable, rigorous learning environments for students with emotional and behavioral needs.
- ▶ With funding from the AOE, Outright Vermont offers training and support for schools across the state to ensure that LGBTQ+ students have hope, equity, and power. LGBTQ+ youth need to be centered as capable leaders who identify, plan for, and lead change.

Future Opportunities

- ▶ [Project AWARE](#) is a SAMHSA-funded initiative to improve the mental health of school-aged youth by increasing awareness, providing training for educators, and connecting students and families to services. The AOE partners with the Department of Mental Health to implement this grant with three local education agencies and their local mental health designated agency.

Safety

Current Practice

- ▶ [Act 74 of 2021](#) established the statewide [PCB testing program](#) to reduce exposure to PCBs in school buildings.
- ▶ School buildings are used as local, regional, or State emergency operation centers and/or shelters in the event of emergencies. ([16 V.S.A. § 3453a](#))
- ▶ [Act 29 of 2023](#) establishes school safety requirements that include nationally recognized best practices such as conducting options-based response drills, developing emergency operations plans, managing access and visitors, and developing and using behavioral threat assessment programs.

Future Opportunities

- ▶ Partner with the Department of Public Safety to provide schools with [Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management](#) (BTAM) training.

Policy

Physical Health

Current Practice

- ▶ Federal regulation ([7 C.F.R. § 210.31](#)) requires local education agencies to establish a wellness policy. The policy must address standards for food provided to students, set wellness goals, and only market foods and beverages during the school day that meet federal nutrition requirements.
- ▶ Tobacco products or tobacco substitutes are not allowed on public school grounds or at public school sponsored functions. School boards may adopt policies that include confiscation and appropriate referrals to law enforcement authorities. ([16 V.S.A. § 140](#))
- ▶ The State Board, in consultation with the Department of Health, adopts policies regarding students with life-threatening allergies. ([16 V.S.A. § 1388](#))
- ▶ Recent [changes to federal regulations](#) limit the amount of added sugars in flavored milk, cereal, and yogurt offered in the child nutrition programs starting in school year 2025-2026. In addition, starting in school year 2027-2028, there will be a weekly added sugars limit, requiring that added sugars average less than 10% of calories per week, per program (lunch, breakfast).

Future Opportunities

- ▶ Provide training on assessment of local wellness policy implementation.

Mental and Social-Emotional Well-Being

Current Practice

- ▶ Each school district has a policy on alcohol and drug abuse consistent with State Board rules. ([16 V.S.A. § 1165](#))
- ▶ [Act 66 of 2021](#) required the inclusion of Comprehensive Health Education into the existing model Local Wellness Policy.

Future Opportunities

- ▶ AOE's Harassment, Hazing, and Bulling Prevention Workgroup is updating the model policy and procedures for implementation in school year 2025-2026.

Safety

Current Practice

- ▶ Require access control and visitor management policies. ([16 V.S.A. § 1484](#))
- ▶ Require policy regarding firearms and/or possession of firearms at school. [16 V.S.A. § 1166](#))
- ▶ Require harassment, hazing, and bullying prevention policies. ([16 V.S.A. § 570](#))
- ▶ [Act 29 of 2023](#) required guidance, policies, and procedures around options-based response drills, developing emergency operations plans, managing access and visitors, and developing and utilizing behavioral threat assessment programs. ([Emergency Operations Plan template](#) and [BTA Model Policy](#))

Future Opportunities

- ▶ Develop BTAM model procedures and best practices guide.

Program

Physical Health

Current Practice

- ▶ The Child and Adult Care Food Program provides federal funding for meals served in adult day centers.
- ▶ Each school district must make condoms available to all students in its secondary schools, free of charge. ([16 V.S.A. § 132](#))
- ▶ All students attending a public school or an approved independent school must have access to menstrual products at no cost and without having to request them. ([16 V.S.A. § 1432](#))
- ▶ All driver education courses must include instruction on the adverse environmental, health, economic, and other effects of unnecessary idling of motor vehicles and on the law governing prohibited idling of motor vehicles. ([16 V.S.A. § 1045](#))
- ▶ The proficiency-based learning team at the AOE supports schools throughout Vermont in the implementation of Physical and Health Education through trainings, resources, and direct technical assistance.

Future Opportunities

- ▶ Provide training to the field on the implementation of the 2024 National Physical Education Standards and 2024 National Health Education Standards.
- ▶ Expand data collection on and supports for Early Warning Systems to identify students at risk for chronic absenteeism.
- ▶ Expand technical assistance to schools identified for comprehensive support and improvement on Safe and Healthy School goals and evidence-based practices.

Mental and Social-Emotional Well-Being

Current Practice

- ▶ Each public school must develop and maintain a tiered system of academic and behavioral supports for the purpose of providing all students with the opportunity to succeed or to be challenged in the general education environment, often referred to as MTSS. ([16 V.S.A. § 2902](#)).
- ▶ Early MTSS aims to improve early learning, social and emotional well-being, and competence for children from birth through age eight.

- ▶ Each town, city, interstate, incorporated, unified, or union school district must coordinate with the State when establishing educational services to children and adolescents with severe emotional disturbance. ([16 V.S.A. § 910](#))
- ▶ As required in 16 V.S.A. [§133](#), [§135](#), and [§136](#), the AOE promotes the development and implementation of wellness programs across Vermont schools.
- ▶ All schools in Vermont are required to provide a comprehensive health education program as defined in [16 V.S.A. § 131](#).

Future Opportunities

- ▶ Engage in efforts that address the multiple factors that lead to chronic absenteeism.
- ▶ Provide additional guidance and resources on implementation of social-emotional learning in K-12 schools.

Safety

Current Practice

- ▶ Behavioral threat assessment team members receive training, including bias training. The AOE, in consultation with the Department of Public Safety, must develop guidance and resources to assist in providing the annual training. ([Act 29 of 2023](#))
- ▶ Provide technical assistance and guidance, in collaboration with the School Safety Center, to supervisory unions/school districts on the implementation of Act 29 requirements. These resources include Emergency Operations Plan and Behavioral Threat Assessment (BTA) open office hours.

Future Opportunities

- ▶ Provide schools with Level I and Level II annual training of BTA Teams to meet the training requirements in Act 29 § 1485. Behavioral threat assessment teams [Effective July 1, 2025].