Educating Our Children in a Changing World

Version 1 for Weybridge pilot conversations
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ACSU Study Committee Discussion Guide
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Session 1 - Our Town & Our School (2 hours)

Purpose:
- Get to know each other
- Identify community strengths
- Discuss role of school in the town

1. Welcome & Introductions 20 min.
- Let’s go around the circle and say our names and where we live.
- Below are some suggested agreements to help us have a productive conversation
  - Each person gets a chance to talk.
  - Share “air time.”
  - Speak for yourself. Everyone is an expert on their own life experience.
  - Assume best intentions when other people are speaking.
  - It’s OK to disagree, but don’t make it personal.
  - If you feel offended, say so and say why.
  - Listen harder when you disagree.
  - Honor confidentiality. Some of what we talk about will be very personal. We will not tell these stories to other people, unless we all say it is OK.
  - Help the facilitator keep things on track.

2. Our Experiences Living Here 45 min.
- If a new person moved to our town, what places, people or events should they know about?
- What is our town like for different kinds of people who live here? For example, what is it like for our older residents, people from different ethnic, cultural backgrounds or economic backgrounds, business owners, visitors? What is it like for young people who live here?
- Tell a story about an experience you’ve had that makes you feel connected to our town, or proud to live here.

3. Identifying Our Town’s Most Important Qualities 20 min.
- Turn to the person sitting next to you and talk about the stories we just heard. What stood out when we listened to people sharing their experiences?
- With your partner, think of several words that describe our town. On the next page are some examples (feel free to use words that aren’t included here).

Facilitator Tips
1. Welcome everyone, tell them about the program and explain your role as a neutral guide for the conversation.
2. Distribute copies of the discussion guide.
3. Help the group set agreements. Refer to the suggested agreements for ideas.
4. Record the agreements on flip chart paper and post them so everyone can see them.
4. What Role Does the Local School Play in Our Town?  
20 min.

Now that we’ve talked about the town as a whole, let’s turn our attention to our school.

- What does it mean to us to have our own local school?
- In addition to being the place where we educate our town’s children, what other purposes does our school serve? How do we use our school building?
- How does the presence of our school contribute to our sense of community?
- What other institutions, events, or traditions contribute to our sense of community?

4. Closing  
15 min.

- Given what we’ve just talked about, let’s take another look at our list of words and see if there is anything we want to add or change.
- What was it like to participate in this first conversation?
- HOMEWORK
  - Watch a five minute video about one school district’s efforts to prepare students for the future.  
    http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EJjg9NfTXos
  - Review education fact sheet.

Facilitator Tips

1. Provide a brief overview of the upcoming sessions
2. Hand out education fact sheet and ask participants to review this prior to session 2.
Session 2 - What makes an excellent education and how are we doing? (2 hours)

Purpose:
- Identify shared priorities for a successful education
- Take stock of how students are doing across the ACSU schools
- Identify strengths we can build on

1. Welcome & Introductions 10 min.
- Let’s go around and reintroduce ourselves.
- Take a moment to think about the most important young person in your life (if you are a young person, think about yourself). Turn to your neighbor and let them know who this person is. Share some of your hopes and dreams for this person. Given our changing world, what do you think your young person will need to be successful in life?

2. What Should Students Know and Be Able to Do? 40 min.
- Below is a list of skills that many education and business experts believe today’s students need to know and be able to do.
- We’ll read each of these statements, and then we will talk about them.

### Essential Skills for Today’s Changing World*

- Critical thinking and problem-solving
- Creativity and innovation
- Communication and collaboration
- Information and media literacy
- Citizenship skills
- The ability to use information and communication technology
- Personal initiative and self direction
- Sense of responsibility, ethics and accountability
- Social and cross-cultural competence
- Reading, writing, math and science skills.
- Knowledge about world languages, economics, entrepreneurship, personal finance, health, arts, ecology, political science.

*Adapted from [www.21stcenturyschools.com](http://www.21stcenturyschools.com), and [The Transformation of Education in Vermont](http://education.vermont.gov/new/html/dept/transformation.html).

### Facilitator Tips

1. Welcome everyone and thank them for coming back.
2. Review agreements.
3. Review key ideas from Session 1.
4. After people have talked in pairs about their most important young person, invite a few people to briefly share the highlights of their discussion.

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[Facilitator Tips]

1. Invite volunteers to take turns reading the statements in the box until they have all been read.
2. Lead a discussion using the questions on the next page.
Discussion Questions
- Which skills and abilities seem most important? Why?
- Is there anything surprising?
- Is there anything that we strongly agree or disagree with?
- Is there anything missing?
- If we all seem to be in agreement, what might someone with a different point of view say?
- What themes are we hearing?

- Let’s take a minute to review the education fact sheet.
- What stands out about this information? Why?
- Does anything surprise you?
- What’s going well?
- If there are gaps in achievement among different groups of students, what would it take for all of our town’s children to succeed? What would it take for all children in the ACSU to succeed?

4. Identify Our Strengths. 30 min.
- Let’s take a minute to think about the strengths we currently have in our town’s school and in the Addison Central Supervisory Union (ACSU).
- Let’s go around the circle with each of us saying one of our ideas. We will repeat this process until all the ideas have been shared.
- When we look at these strengths, do we see any patterns or connections among them?
- How can we build on some of these strengths (either by working within our town or working with other towns and schools in the ACSU)?

Facilitator Tips
1. Invite people to reflect on the earlier discussion. Invite people to write each strength they can think of on a separate sticky note.
2. Post the notes where everyone can see them. Post similar ideas together.
3. Record key ideas on flip chart paper and check with the group to see if you have heard them correctly or if anything needs to be added or changed.
4. Provide a brief overview of the upcoming sessions.
5. Hand out cost fact sheet and ask participants to review this prior to session 2.

5. Closing 10 min.
- How is the discussion going so far?
- HOMEWORK
  ○ Review cost fact sheet
Session 3 - How can we provide the best education possible while managing our costs? (2 hours)

Purpose:
- Understand education costs and trends
- Consider approaches to community, education quality, and financial sustainability

1. Welcome 15 min.
   - Let’s reintroduce ourselves.
   - What stands out for us about the discussions we’ve been having?

2. Understanding the Cost of Education 30 min.
   - We’ll take a few minutes to review the cost fact sheet before we continue our discussion.
   - When you look at the information, what stands out? Why?
   - Does anything surprise us? Why?
   - What overall themes and trends do we see?

3. Things We Can Do to Address Community, Education Quality, and Cost 60 min.

Below are a series of possible approaches to address the issues we’ve been talking about. These approaches are designed to help us have a productive discussion about ways to move forward. For this discussion, we don’t have to choose any one approach. However, we will talk about some of the strengths and trade-offs that go with each of these approaches. We will also see if we can think of other approaches that aren’t listed here.

APPROACHES

Approach #1: Work to boost student enrollment

Possible strategies:
- Create a magnet school that is especially strong in a specific area (for example the arts or environmental sciences or global issues).
- Reach out to Vermont’s federal Refugee Resettlement program to attract New American families to town.
- Plan infrastructure improvements (such as affordable housing) or tax incentives (such as tax relief for new property owners with children) to attract new families.

Facilitator Tips
1. Welcome everyone and thank them for coming back.
2. Review agreements.
3. Review key ideas from Sessions 1 & 2.

Facilitator Tips
1. Invite people to take turns reading through the approaches and strategies out loud until all of the approaches have been read (if someone prefers not to read, let them know they are free to say “pass”)
2. If people are spending all their time talking about one approach, encourage them to look at the others as well, so all of the approaches are discussed.
Approach #2: Share resources

Possible strategies:
- Share personnel across the district.
- Share supplies, transportation, building maintenance, etc.
- Consolidate administrative responsibilities.

Approach #3: Streamline governance

Possible strategies:
- Combine school boards for several neighboring schools, but not the whole district.
- Form a single school board for the ACSU (Regional Education District, also known as a RED).
- Develop shared governance norms across the district and hold periodic joint meetings of ACSU school boards.

Approach #4: Transform Classrooms

Possible strategies:
- Blend traditional classroom learning with learning that takes place outside of the classroom.
- Create learning spaces that enable different ways of learning to happen simultaneously. Students work collaboratively, independently or one on one with teachers.
- Increase class size and incorporate 21st Century learning tools. The teacher’s role is to facilitate the effective use of these tools.

Approach #5: Use parts of the school building for another purpose that could generate income and/or enhance the life of the community.

Possible strategies:
- Create a performance space or arts center.
- House a health clinic
- Establish a community gathering place such as coffee house, teen center or senior center.
- House municipal entities such as a library or town offices.

Approach #6: Ensure that all ACSU students have access to similar opportunities.

Possible strategies
- Develop a shared curriculum that is implemented across the ACSU schools.
- Establish one elementary school that serves the whole ACSU.
- Reconfigure schools so that all children have the same school experience by progressing through the same schools in several of the ACSU towns as they move from pre-school through grade 12.
Approach #7: Promote professional development among ACSU educators.

Possible strategies:

- Form online and face to face networks so educators across the ACSU have easy, cost effective ways to share knowledge and experience with each other.
- Establish a mentoring system that pairs experienced and new educators with each other.
- Share professional development costs and opportunities across ACSU schools.

Discussion Questions

- Are there any approaches missing that should be added?
- Which approaches stand out? Why?
- What might we gain from some of these approaches? What might we lose?

4. Closing 15 min.

- Where do we agree?
- Where do we disagree?
- What themes are we noticing?

Facilitator Tips

1. Record themes on flipchart paper.
2. Provide a brief overview of the upcoming session.
Session 4 - Moving to Action (2 hours)

Purpose:
- Identify actions the town may want to take to improve quality of education and address cost issues
- Create recommendations for ACSU Study Committee

1. Welcome & Take Stock 30 min.
   Let's take a minute to review the key points from first 3 sessions
   - What are the most important things we’ve talked about?
   - When we think back over the previous discussions, what seems most promising?
   - What opportunities do we see?

2. Local Action 30 min.
   - Brainstorm a list of things that we can do as a town to strengthen our community, improve the quality of education for children or manage cost pressures.
   - Prioritize this list

3. Input for the ACSU Study Committee 40 min.
   As you know, the ACSU Study Committee is charged with making recommendations about whether or not to form a consolidated school board (also known as a Regional Education District or RED). The study committee may also make additional recommendations based on input from the towns.
   - What are the most important things we want the ACSU study committee to know about our priorities.
   - Brainstorm a list of specific ideas for the ACSU to consider.
   - Prioritize the list.

4. Closing 20 min.
   - What was it like to participate in this community discussion?
   - What did we learn about our community or our schools?
   - What was worthwhile about this experience?

Thank you for participating!

Facilitator Tips

1. Before the session begins, post flip chart pages with highlights from the first 3 sessions.

2. Welcome everyone and thank them for coming back.

3. Briefly review agreements.

4. As people brainstorm local action ideas, write them on a piece of flip chart paper.

5. Once everyone has shared their ideas, ask people if there are similar ideas that can be combined.

6. Invite people to make a case for their top ideas. If necessary, invite people to vote for their top ideas by placing sticky dots or a check mark by their top three choices.

7. Once everyone has posted their dots, circle the ideas with the most dots.

8. Repeat this process for input for the ACSU study committee.

9. Thank people for participating. Announce dates of upcoming meetings.