

Vermont's Free Degree Promise



The McClure Foundation's Free Degree Promise offers all students in the Vermont high school classes of 2023-2026 the opportunity to earn a free associate degree through the state's Early College program at the Community College of Vermont (CCV).

A free, fast-tracked associate degree is a game changer for Vermont youth.

In its first two years, the McClure Foundation's Free Degree Promise has resulted in:

- **70% increase in Early College enrollment at CCV.** Over 235 seniors from approximately 90% of Vermont high schools and tech centers and all 14 counties are enrolled full-time in a free year of college.
- **29% increase in Early College completers continuing their near-full-time enrollment.** 90+ Early College completers have continued at CCV toward their free associate degree.
- **More equitable enrollment.** The number of first-generation students enrolled in Early College at CCV nearly doubled from 61 to 115. Participation among students of color and from low-income households is also increasing.

What is the Free Degree Promise?

AN ACCELERATED PATHWAY to a free degree. The state's Early College program allows Vermont high school seniors to complete their last year of high school and their first year of college at the same time, earning free college credits that also count toward graduation from high school.

The McClure Foundation's promise builds on the Early College program with a second year of free college at CCV, giving students the chance to earn an associate degree the year after high school graduation. The Promise covers tuition and fees after federal and state financial aid and also offers a living stipend and enhanced advising, putting students on a fast track to a debt-free degree that creates a lifetime of opportunities.

Why CCV?

Community colleges are engines of economic mobility. With locations within 25 miles of 95% of Vermonters and robust online offerings, CCV serves the greatest number of Vermonters of any college in the state.

THE J. WARREN
& LOIS MCCLURE
FOUNDATION



The FREE DEGREE PROMISE is:

Making College an Easy Choice

We know that when college and career training is affordable, more students enroll. Removing barriers to education improves both access and outcomes.

“Without that added stress of having to pay for my college I can move on with other things in my life.”

– Savannah, Free Degree Promise student

Shifting Conversations

Families’ conversations about life after high school should be focused on what their children want rather than what they can afford. When young people know they can pursue and afford a degree, they can imagine a life full of opportunity.

“I was ready to push myself, to take my learning to the next level.”

– Blake, Free Degree Promise graduate

Creating Lifelong Opportunities

Education after high school is a good investment. No matter the path, education opens more doors and provides individuals with more flexibility and control over their future.

“To get those two years, and not be in debt, and get farther...it opens a lot of doors and opportunities.”

– OJ, Early College completer

Meeting Students Where They Are

Young people are ready to explore their interests and career paths with confidence. Removing barriers to education allows students to focus on their “why” and walk toward their purpose.

“It definitely boosts your confidence and your self-esteem to know that someone’s behind you.”

– Caitlin, Free Degree Promise student

Building a Better Future for All

Access to postsecondary education is an investment in a thriving future for Vermont: economically, civically, and socially. As more students attain degrees, our skilled workforce grows, filling critical jobs that sustain local communities.

Three Factors Contributing to Early Success

1 A commitment to universal access

All students in the high school classes of 2023-2026 are eligible to apply and can choose any degree program offered by CCV. This gift drives across-the-board enrollment by reducing the stigma of accessing supports, helping the students who stand to benefit the most.

2 Support beyond tuition

In partnership with the Vermont Community Foundation, the McClure Foundation is providing living stipends and enhanced advising to students—and is directly resourcing CCV to market, administer, and evaluate the initiative.

3 Leveraging public funding

This promise builds on the state’s Early College program, which has been helping students get a jumpstart on college pathways since 2014, and on recent public investments like the 802 Opportunity Grant and Vermont Tuition Advantage.

A Promise is a Promise

The McClure Foundation and CCV are committed to these students. Our work ahead includes supporting enrolled students, making sure that the VT high school classes of 2024-2026 and their families are aware of the Free Degree Promise, and sharing what we are learning with the state.

THE J. WARREN
& LOIS MCCLURE
FOUNDATION

For more information on the McClure Foundation, visit mcclurevt.org or contact Executive Director Carolyn Weir at cweir@vermontcf.org or 802-388-3355 x239.