Public education in Vermont is currently undergoing significant change as a result of Act 77, which was signed into law by Governor Shumlin in June of 2013. With the adoption of Act 77, public schools in Vermont are mandated to move away from Carnegie units and “seat time” requirements toward more personalized approaches to learning and flexible pathways to high school graduation. This paradigm shift has significant implications for all stakeholders involved in public education. Scholars, policymakers, and educators are just beginning to grapple with the complexities, challenges, and possibilities of this personalized approach to public education, and very little research exists to inform this immense transformational process.

A team of students from UVM, however, is currently attempting to address this knowledge gap by conducting research around the state on critical issues raised by Act 77, particularly as they relate to the Personalized Learning Plan (PLP) component of the legislation. The group is primarily using qualitative methods to investigate the implications of PLPs for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and afterschool programming, examine within-school systems for developing and expanding personalized approaches to curriculum and instruction, illuminate how high school history teachers are reformulating their curriculum and instruction for a proficiency-based grading system, and explore PLPs as an avenue for students to incorporate community-based learning in their high school education and officially recognize the skills they have learned in their academic record. This group intends to share preliminary findings from its research at the Student Research Conference (SRC) to initiate dialogue on this significant and potentially landmark shift in Vermont’s public education system. Beyond the SRC, research that emerges from this group has potential to inform Vermont’s implementation of Act 77 and other states’ transitions from Carnegie units and seat time requirements to more personalized and flexible approaches to public education.