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HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

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1 Vermont high school juniors can apply for a free, fast-
2 tracked Associate degree

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5 TEXT BODY:

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6 Vermont high school juniors can now apply to earn a
7 free, fast-tracked associate degree through the Free Degree
8 Promise pathway at the Community College of Vermont (CCV).
9 The Free Degree Promise builds on the state's Early
10 College Program to give students the chance to complete a free
11 associate degree of their choosing just one year after high school
graduation.

12 The state's Early College Program supports eligible high
13 school seniors to take a full year of college courses tuition-free
14 while completing their high school diploma. Students who
15 successfully complete Early College at CCV can continue full-
16 time enrollment to earn their associate degree through the Free
17 Degree Promise before entering the workforce or transferring
18 their credits to a bachelor's degree program.

19 The Free Degree Promise is available to current 10th-,
20 11th- and 12th-graders in Vermont. Since its launch in 2022,
21 CCV has seen triple the number of low-income students
22 accessing Early College and persisting toward associate degrees.

23 "The Free Degree Promise is making it possible for young
24 Vermonters to earn fast-tracked, debt-free degrees that open
25 doors to a lifetime of opportunity," said CCV President Joyce Judy
26 in a news release. "While Vermont has New England's lowest rate
27 of students continuing to college after high school at 40%,
28 students who participate in Early College continue at 80%. CCV's
29 goal is to make postsecondary education accessible for all
30 Vermonters, and pathways like the Free Degree Promise do just
31 that."

32 In its first three years, partners say, the Free Degree
33 Promise is reaching more low-income, first-generation and
34 students of color. Building on the success of state programs like
35 Early College and 802 Opportunity, the Promise also offers
36 enhanced advising and stipends for expenses like transportation
37 and textbooks.

38 "It's a bright spot. When young people have accelerated
39 pathways to debt-free degrees of their choosing, it's a
40 gamechanger," said Carolyn Weir, executive director of the J.
41 Warren and Lois McClure Foundation, the funder of the Promise.
42 "This pathway could be a great option for students looking to
43 explore their interests in order to graduate with a plan, students
44 ready to get a head start on college, and self-motivated students
45 who are ready for a change."

46 Visit ccv.edu/freedegree to learn more and apply.
47 Students and families are also invited to register to attend an
48 upcoming information session.

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