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## TESTIMONY

**Testimony To:** Senate Committee on Education

**Respectfully Submitted by:** Ted Fisher, Director of Communications and Legislative Affairs

**Subject:** S.207 - An act relating to revising the funding for and governance of career technical education

**Date:** January 24, 2024

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the topic of **S.207 - An act relating to revising the funding for and governance of career technical education.**

First off, let me express the Agency of Education's gratitude to the sponsors of this bill for agreeing to work with us on this important issue. I know all of us share the sentiments expressed by the Governor yesterday, that Career Technical Education is a critical part of a high-quality education system, that engages students and enables their success. Career Technical Education is also a critical part of Vermont's workforce development efforts; we have many job opportunities in high demand, exciting career fields that are open for CTE students to explore.

The Agency is committed to providing a complete policy proposal, including recommendations for financing the CTE system, as soon as possible. Our proposal will include, at minimum, a summary of findings and our proposed recommendations, if not the full studies. The Agency is also engaged in ongoing work, and has engaged a contractor, to come up with a more complete proposal for governance that we would like to address next year.

### Why CTE and Why Now

The Agency of Education recommends that we tackle the question of CTE and related funding this year. Much research and debate in recent years has focused on CTE governance. That work is critically important, but we have put off other, implementable changes, changes that would make a difference, because we were waiting for governance conversations to play out. Understanding that we have still outstanding recommendations on CTE finance to provide to you, as the bill reflects, this is why we believe it is important to make progress this year:

1. We need to act now. We have a critical workforce shortage, and we know that Vermont students are crying out for more career pathway opportunities in their middle and high school years. We can make progress this year, while the overall structure of the system is still being contemplated.



2. We can do more now to help ensure Vermont students are aware of all of the diverse areas CTE has to offer, and provide them more opportunities to explore their interests.
3. Investing in CTE programs now will not only help boost our state workforce, but it will also engage Vermont youth in meaningful pathways beyond high school. Ensuring that all students have exposure and access to CTE programs will increase equitable student outcomes for students.

## **Agency Recommendations**

While the Agency of Education is committed to bringing a funding proposal at a later date, we have several other important recommendations that we can start on while that proposal is finalized.

### **Remove the Six Semester Average**

State law currently uses an average of three years full-time equivalent student enrollment in the career technical center when calculating the tuition a CTE center charges to a sending school district. ([16 V.S.A. § 1552](#)) We propose to amend that to use the actual FTE enrollment for the prior year. The six-semester average is no longer accurate. Impacts to enrollment from the COVID-19 pandemic are currently underfunding CTE programs.

### **Expand CTE Exploration in Middle and Early High School**

We propose to expand CTE exploration opportunities by:

- Require pre-tech and related or new exploratory CTE courses to be offered in Grades 9 and 10 to all Vermont students, ideally in partnership with local high schools and CTE centers.
- Require all grade six through grade eight students to have career enrichment exposure, either annually or part of an ongoing program. This should include at minimum, an annual visit to the regional CTE center.

### **Model Policy on Comprehensive Career Development**

We propose to create a model policy, in consultation with the Commissioner of Labor, addressing the following:

- The role of the CTE center in providing career-focused education.
- How each supervisory union's career education and counseling policy practices align with CTE programs of study.
- How the supervisory unions will work with the CTE center and other supervisory unions in the CTE region to develop common/joint courses and approaches to career development, career exploration and CTE exposure.
- A plan for meeting the requirements for pre-tech and exploratory CTE courses in grades 9 and 10 as proposed above.
- A plan for meeting the requirements for career enrichment and exposure for students in grades 6 through 8 as proposed above.

We propose that the General Assembly require adoption of this model policy by Vermont Supervisory Unions (SU/SDs), in a similar manner to model policies required in other area policy in recent years (e.g. Act 29 of 2023).

## **Construction Aid**

We propose that the General Assembly include intent language committing to ensure that CTE centers are included in future updates to the State's construction aid program under 16 V.S.A. Chapter 123.

## **Adding CTE Provisions to the State Workforce Development Board**

We propose adding several items to the powers and duties of the State Workforce Development Board, namely:

- To center and align CTE systems in regional workforce efforts, by implementing common bell times for all high schools in CTE regions and developing shared plans across CTE regions.
- By providing leadership to Regional Advisory Boards program advisories for CTE and Regional Development Councils (RDC).

## **Change Oversight and Regulatory Responsibility from SBE to AOE**

The AOE proposes to assume oversight and regulatory responsibility from the State Board of Education (SBE), the current holder, by amending 16 V.S.A. § 1531-34. This would transfer Rule Series 2370 from the SBE to the AOE, and formally transfer oversight and evaluation functions to AOE. We believe this is important because:

- Oversight, evaluation, and technical support functions already rest with AOE, as well as our responsibilities for CTE oversight under federal law, so this change would conform statute to the reality of program administration as it is currently practiced.
- As the Board itself has noted, questions of capacity and roles and responsibilities implicate the relationship between the AOE and the SBE. Given that CTE rules have not been revised in over two decades, AOE believes it can more nimbly update CTE rules as part of proposed governance and finance reform, allowing the Board to continue with its other critical work.

## **Require Post Secondary Program Alignment**

We propose to require program and specific course articulation agreement between Vermont State University (including Community Colleges of Vermont) and CTE centers for the following programs:

- Manufacturing
- Engineering
- Health Sciences
- Education

These sectors are critical for the longevity and sustainability of our state and our students deserve to have a seamless pathway from CTE to the next step, particularly to

our state's public university system. AOE currently has the internal resources and capacity to support this work.

## **Conclusion**

Thank you again for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of this bill. We appreciate both the committee's patience, and its partnership, in this important work. We believe there are critical, essential steps that we can take this year, to make a meaningful difference for students, and ensure our CTE system is as strong as it can be.