

Memo

To: To Whom It May Concern

From: George C. Cross, Chair, Community High School of Vermont State Advisory Board

Date: July 28, 2014

Re: Information for the CHSVT Report to the Joint Legislative Corrections Oversight Committee

*(Note: For those who have seen an earlier version of this memo, what follows has been updated following the July 22, 2014 meeting of the Joint Legislative Corrections Oversight Committee based on questions asked and comments made by members of said committee.)*

**REPORT DIRECTIVE:**

H.885 passed by the 2014 legislature included a directive for the preparation of a report regarding the Community High School of Vermont. In part that legislation included the following; *“the Commissioner of Corrections, in consultation with the Community High School of Vermont Board, shall prepare and submit a report to the Joint Legislative Corrections Oversight Committee on the current trends relating to the student population at the Community High School of Vermont.”*

The CHSVT Board has had an opportunity to review the draft report prepared by the CHSVT administrative team for the Commissioner; however, please be advised that this memo is not an official response from the CHSVT Board, but simply a clarification of several points as I see them. Thus, as the Chair of the CHSVT State Advisory Board, I am taking the liberty to provide this supplementary information for possible inclusion in said report.

**CHSVT STUDENT ENROLLEES:**

It is important to clearly understand that CHSVT serves three basic populations:

- 1) Individuals under the supervision of DOC who are under age 23 and do not have a high school diploma. This population is required by Vermont law to attend CHSVT.
- 2) Individuals 23 and older who do not have a high school diploma. Since there is no upper age limit on the right to a publicly supported high school education in Vermont, this group has a legal right to a CHSVT diploma program. They, however, are not required to attend.
- 3) Individuals of any age who have a high school diploma, but lack the basic skills, job specific skills and/or the life skills necessary for holding a job and being a productive citizen. Providing this group with such skills is Vermont’s best weapon against recidivism. Furthermore, including this population in CHSVT does not significantly add any cost to the operation of the high school as

“space is available” while meeting the legal requirements of providing for those in groups 1 and 2 above.

It is also important to point out that for a number of years CHSVT allowed others of any age who were not high school graduates and who were not under the supervision of DOC to enroll in the school at the street sites. This was never a large population and did not add to the cost of operating the school. Many in this population had not been successful in other high school or GED programs prior to coming to CHSVT. However, over a year ago the then Secretary of Education ordered that the school no longer continue this practice and to refer such students to the local Adult Basic Education Program. While CHSVT has followed this directive there has been no feedback as to whether individuals have actually enrolled in ABE. If CHSVT was again able to accept this group of students, this would make a fourth category of enrollees. This group consists mainly of young people who for whatever reasons have been unsuccessful in education programs to date and tend to be disenchanted with traditional school/program settings. Allowing them to attend CHSVT would not increase the school’s budget as they would be enrolled on a “space available” basis.

#### **COMPARATIVE COSTS:**

Comparing the per student cost of operating the Community High School with the typical Vermont high school is near impossible. Complicating any comparison in the past was the fact that CHSVT’s only student data system was both antiquated and cobbled-together over a period of years. Beginning with the FY ‘14 school year, CHSVT has utilized a sophisticated student data system comparable to that used in most public schools in Vermont and beyond. Thus, there certainly is data to consider when making such a comparison.

Much of the per-student data computed by the Agency of Education is calculated on an “equalized pupil bases.” Given the student population, CHSVT really cannot calculate equalized pupil counts. AOE does make some calculations based on “average daily membership”, ADM. One of these is “allowed tuition rates”. This is the rate one school district can charge another for educating a regular student. This memo will use the average allowable tuition rate as a comparison to the cost of operating CHSVT on a per membership basis.

The *2012-2013 Allowable Tuition Calculations, Secondary 7 – 12* (The 2013 – 2014 data is not posted on the AOE website.) list two possible comparative costs. Under *Net Regular Current Instructional Expenditures*, the *Per Pupil w/0 Debt* average per pupil cost is listed as \$12,958 and the total average per pupil cost is listed as \$13,438. Again, these are the “allowable per pupil costs” from the 2012 – 2013 school year. The first is unquestionably the best comparative number to use as it excludes debt expenditures. Thus, it is reasonable to state that the average per pupil cost for the typical Vermont high school for school year 2013 – 2014 was at least \$12,958, the 2012 -2013 allowable tuition cost.

The calculations on the attached, *Community High School of Vermont – Per Pupil Costs for Instructional Services*, documents that the CHSVT comparable cost as \$5,391. This amount is based on the funds from the Education Fund and does not include federal funds, which is similar to the calculation for allowable tuition. Clearly on a per pupil bases the cost of instructional services at CHSVT is less than one-half the

cost of same at the average high school in Vermont. This will unquestionably remain to be true even when the \$12,958 is adjusted to remove facility costs which are not in the CHSVT figures. (The data to make this calculation does not appear to be on the AOE website; however, AOE can probably complete this calculation, if needed.) CHSVT provides all the other services typically found in a Vermont high school, with the exception of extra-curricular.

**FY'15 BUDGET ISSUE:**

The following is taken directly from the Big Bill, H.885, for FY'15:

“Sec. B.337 Corrections - correctional education

“Personal services \$3,809,009  
Operating expenses \$530,774  
Total \$4,339,783

“Source of funds  
Education fund \$3,804,425  
Interdepartmental transfers \$535,358

“Total 4,339,783” *(It is important to point out that this is a reduction of \$340,899 from the FY '14 budget. Plus the budget has to “eat” any personnel raises in salary or increases in benefits; and this reduction comes on top of a reduction of about \$400,000 going from FY '13 to FY '14. )*

The amount from the Ed Fund is \$3,804,425. The interdepartmental transfers would be the federal funds transferred from the AOE. That amount is \$535,358. These amounts are the ones voted by the legislature and agreed to by the Governor. These amounts are directly from the final Act 179, Page 55 of 236, Sec. B 337.

Recently CHSVT has been told that the \$535,358 will need to be reduced substantially as the earlier estimate of available federal funds provided by the AOE to the administration when preparing the budget was not correct. Hopefully, between AOE and AHS funds can be found to negate this additional reduction in the CHSVT budget. Any other option would seriously jeopardize CHSVT programs.

**CONCLUSIONS:**

In conclusion, CHSVT is unique in the country. It is a major component of Vermont Department of Corrections and has the potential to contribute substantially to the reduction in recidivism. Reducing recidivism is one of the prime goals of every corrections department in the country. DOC has worked diligently for a number of years and is currently significantly involved with programs designed to combat recidivism. This important effort is strongly supported by CHSVT and Vermont Corrections Industry. The two operations CHSVT and VCI form Corrections Education and work in concert with various other DOC programs.

It is important to properly fund the school so that it will maintain its accreditation through NEAS&C. CHSVT has been able to struggle along with recent reductions in budget allocations. It has reorganized its teaching programs by eliminating part time instructors, eliminating one administrative position and cutting 3 full-time teaching positions over the last few years. At the same time CHSVT has both provided on-going professional development for full-time teachers and carefully hired new teachers who have multiple teaching licenses; thus being able to offer a full range of programs so as to execute the mission of the school as set out by the legislature. While it has been difficult, the school is probably better organized to serve the needs of its student population that it was some time ago. However, continued budget reductions will unquestionably begin to eat into the good work that has been accomplished. Providing a diploma granting program with numerous industry certifications is perhaps Vermont's best path to continue its work to prepare those under the supervision of Corrections for life in the communities of the state.

Hopefully, this memo and the included data will help to inform the various legislative and administrative committees/groups working to clearly understand the role and place of CHSVT in the complex world of both AHS/DOC and AOE. While CHSVT is a high school, it is unlike any other high school in Vermont and serves a unique and special population. CHSVT and its companion programs in Vermont Corrections Industry is a national model created by the Vermont Department of Corrections over a period of years which deserves the continuing support of the Vermont Legislature and the citizens of the Green Mountain state.

I am most willing as I am sure the full CHSVT Board and staff would be, to discuss this memo and the work of the community high school with anyone or any group at your/their convenience.

**COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL OF VERMONT – Per student cost for instructional services**  
 PREPARED BY GEORGE C. CROSS - JULY 15, 2014  
 ALL CALCULATIONS ARE FOR FISCAL YEAR '14 - JULY 1, 2013 THROUGH JUNE 30, 2014

**A. 20 DAY AVERAGE  
 DAILY MEMBERSHIP,  
 May 1, 2014 -May 28, 2014:**

A.1	Days Present	Days Absent*	Total Membership
	9646	2220	11866

A.2 **Average Daily Membership 593.3**

\* CHSVT identifies 10 different reasons for absences from class and can provide that data if appropriate.

**B. INSTRUCTIONAL BUDGET FOR FY '14\*\***

B.1	From the Education Fund	Federal Funds	Total
	\$ 3,929,242	\$ 751,440	\$ 4,680,682

\*\* These budget figures include small expenditures for rent, electricity, internet connections and similar for some of the street site campuses.

**C. Average Pupil Expenditure for FY '14**

C.1	Education Fund	Total
	\$ 6,623	\$ 7,889

**D. Adjusted for comparison with public high schools\*\*\***

D.1	Education Fund	Total
	\$ 5,391	\$ 6,421

\*\*\* Given that CHSVT operates 215 days each year, any comparison with pupil schools which operate for 175 days per year requires an adjustment to the computations in C. above. The adjustment calculation is  $(\$6,623/215) \times 175 = \$5391$ .

