

Memo

To: Joint Legislative Corrections Oversight Committee
From: George C. Cross, Chair, CHSVT State Advisory Board
Date: 8-11-2014

Re: Comments about CHSVT Per Student Cost

Both Brad James and I have calculated a per pupil cost of educating a student at the Community High School. While we approached the process somewhat differently our end product is to some degree similar.

But first let me repeat the definitions of the CHSVT student population I used in my previous memo:

- 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.

Basically, I used all three categories of students when doing my calculations, while Brad did not include the third category above. There can be debate about whether this group should be included or not. For the purpose of this memo I will ignore discussion of that question.

I suspect that the oversight committee is trying to determine if the current cost is reasonable and how does it compare with public high schools. The comparison part of this equation is very difficult. CHSVT educates individuals who are under the supervision of the Department of Corrections. This population tends to be older and has a different set of life experiences than the typical high school student. Thus, any comparison is truly an apples and oranges one. However, one can understand the political need to ensure that tax dollars are wisely expended. Thus I will attempt to reconcile the differences in the two calculations. I also hasten to point out that we both used the data available and that data is not always perfect.

Brad James calculated a per student cost of \$9,334. However, he did not adjust the cost for the difference in the length of a school year. CHSVT has a 215 day year and public high schools have a 175 day year. **When that adjustment is made his per-student cost is \$7597.**

I calculated a per student cost of \$5,391. However, I included 106 students not included in Brad's work. **Thus, if my calculation is adjusted to remove those 106 students, my per-student cost is \$6,567.**

I suspect the best estimate of actual cost is between \$6,567 and \$7,597. The 106 additional students in the school which are not in either of these calculations should offset any additional expenditures itemized in Brad's memo related to the 8 areas he identifies that public high schools fund and are not generally in the CHSVT budget.

Again, computing a per student cost in a corrections' setting is extremely difficult. Individuals under the supervision of corrections have numerous obligations on any given day. Education is only one of them. The Vermont Department of Corrections has been working to ensure that all the components of an individual's day are working together. Those "assigned" to a facility don't get to go home at the end of the school day. Thus individuals are passed-off from one arm of Corrections to another through-out the day and night. Breaking out costs has to be most complicated.

In conclusion let me take the liberty to suggest that there are a few questions that need further consideration:

1. Is CHSVT appropriately funded for the expectations we all have for the school? Historically, CHSVT has evolved from a group of volunteers, mostly retired teachers, working with individuals within Corrections' facilities and programs to a fully NEAS&C accredited high school with 17 different sites across the state.. Recently DOC has combined CHSVT and Vermont Corrections Industries to form Corrections Education. Nationally speaking this is a unique school and skills development program. Many believe that it is Vermont's best weapon against recidivism.
2. Given Vermont's desire to reduce recidivism, should the law be changed to empower CHSVT to accept students under the supervision of Corrections who have a high school diploma, but still need job and life skills?
3. Should CHSVT be allowed to enroll "street-folks" who have not been successful in regular schools and/or Adult Learning programs and who are not under the supervision of Corrections? Should this be on a space available standard or should it be a budgeted item in the CHSVT budget? Again, an individual with a high school diploma has greater opportunity than one without and thus a better chance at being a productive citizen.

Please understand that while I am not available for the meeting on August 14, 2014, I am most willing to meet with the committee to further discuss all of this at another date.