

Presentation Material - David Luce, Member State Advisory Board
Community High School of Vermont (CHSVT)

My name is David Luce and I am a resident of Waterbury, VT. I am currently a member of the State Advisory Board of CHSVT and am also currently a member of the local advisory education board for Northwest Correctional Facility (NWCF).

I wish to speak tonight about the FY2017 proposed state budget and specifically about possible cuts to eliminate funding for the so-called CHSVT "Street Sites" from the budget.

These street sites are co-located in local Probation and Parole offices, which works extremely well for the individual. The sites generally consist of a classroom which is staffed by a CHSVT teacher. Co-location allows a convenient place for students who has completed their term of incarceration and has been released, but who may not as yet have completed the classroom work required to obtain either a high school diploma or industry certification. As they are no longer incarcerated, but still under control of the Dept. of Corrections (and need to register with P&P), they can no longer attend the regular CHSVT program in the local correctional facility, due to the security restrictions imposed on the general public, of which they would now be considered a part. The only choice they have which would allow them to complete credit work is to attend classroom instruction at a "street site". Let me reiterate; incomplete credit means the individual will have no diploma or certification and, therefore, a limited ability to obtain a job which would allow the individual to earn a living and, hopefully, stay out of jail.

During a prior budget cut the "street sites" were also targeted. At that time, the ability of the sites to enroll people from the community who were not under the custody of DOC, but who lacked a high school diploma. It was felt that those people could always avail themselves of programs available through VT Adult Basic Education. We in CHSVT have always believed the street sites offered an excellent place for these folks because they frequently tend to be those who may have friends who already have experience with the DOC education system provided by CHSVT. In fact, our experience indicates that former inmates were inspirational to convince folks from the community to attend CHSVT, particularly with those who may have had a generally similar bad prior experience with the public school system as the inmate may have had. We at CHSVT are very interested to know if such people have had luck with alternative choices as we can no longer serve them.

We understand the budget crisis the state is in and CHSVT believes we need to demonstrate a willingness to do what we can to save taxpayer dollars. We already do a number of things in our many programs which clearly result in savings. We believe that things which make our instructional process more efficient and readily available to a population which is constantly in transition. The following are some of the cost-saving measures the faculty at NWCF (my facility) implement every day:

- In the automotive shop, the faculty uses educational software to teach and test automotive repair skills to students, who because of the inflexibility of DOC regulations, cannot always attend a regularly scheduled class, and would otherwise require individual instruction. Students operate under rules requiring rigorous self discipline in maintaining credit completion requirements. Also students are responsible for maintaining tool inventories and condition. What is the worth of that?
- The auto shop recently refurbished a van for the Dept. of Fish & Wildlife (in full compliance with VT non-compete law). More of this will be done at little or no cost to the state as soon as vehicles for other agencies are incorporated. What is the worth of that?
- The faculty at NWCF convinced the facility food service personnel to use produce grown, harvested and prepared for storage by inmates, thereby providing both organic and nutritious food in the dining hall. A record 1260 gals of tomato sauce was put up from a recent successful year in the garden. What is the worth of that?
- Long-term faculty at NWCF advise that in those local families where parents with prior prison terms, but who, while incarcerated, successfully acquired either a high diploma or industry certificate, they do not return and, best yet, their children do not enter the prison system. What is the worth of that?

So my question for the joint committee simply is, are we willing to tell any student who has committed the time and effort required to prepare themselves to leave prison and become a productive citizen, that we regret the circumstances, but that he/she will have to take the problem of an incomplete school record elsewhere.

Thank you,

David Luce, member state Advisory Board CHSVT and NWCF Advisory Board NWCF