

FRANKLIN NORTHEAST SUPERVISORY UNION
MEMO From the Desk of Jay Nichols
Superintendent of Schools
Serving the School Districts of:
Bakersfield, Berkshire, Enosburg, Montgomery, Richford

DATE: March 22, 2016

TO: Senate Education Committee

FROM: Jay Nichols

SUBJECT: Education Bill

Good afternoon, my name is Jay Nichols. I am the Superintendent of Schools for Franklin Northeast Supervisory Union (FNESU) serving the school districts of Bakersfield, Berkshire, Enosburg, Montgomery, and Richford. We are very proud to have the Cold Hollow Career Center (CHCC) as one of our schools in FNESU. CHCC is governed by the Enosburg School District Board. Our Career Center primarily serves students from Enosburg Falls High School and Richford Junior-Senior High School. Students regularly attend Cold Hollow Career Center from Franklin Central and Franklin Northwest Supervisory Unions.

Our Career Center is a great source of local pride. Currently, we offer six full programs at Cold Hollow: Medical Careers, Business Leadership, Forestry, Construction Technology, Automotive Technology and Digital Media Productions. Next year we are adding a new program: Sustainable Agriculture. We are committed to providing our students with high skill programs that will lead to high quality careers. In addition to our full programs, we also provide an agricultural science and a pre-tech class. During the 2016-17 school year, Cold Hollow is partnering with our two high schools to provide a Technical English course. On average, better than 40% of the juniors and seniors at our high schools attend Cold Hollow Career Center each year. We encourage students to attend the CHCC and our Leadership Team works collaboratively on scheduling and course offerings to make sure students have access to the Career Center.

I am very appreciative that the House Education Committee understands the importance of Career and Technical Education. Across the state, I feel we should be serving more students in these centers. I have heard stories of principals at some high schools who have actively discouraged students from attending because of funding issue worries. This saddens me and I know must be a concern for your committee. I truly believe that unification under Act 46 and eventual forced unification for school systems that ignore the necessity of us working together to better serve all students regardless of where they live will greatly benefit our Career Centers and

increase student access. I am all in favor of reviewing governance, funding, and higher education pathways. I also enthusiastically support adding a position at the Agency of Education dedicated to Career and Technical education. My concern is that the language in this bill makes it seem as though a conclusion has already been arrived at in terms of governance.

Although partnership with the Vermont State Colleges (VSC) is important for our Career Centers, I worry about what appears to be a foregone conclusion that governance of the Centers should be under the direction of the VSC. The Cold Hollow Career Center is governed by a local School Board that has invested many resources in developing a center that is a great source of pride for the local community. CHCC strongly supports local interests and needs for our students, businesses, and the regional workforce. Our School Board and local business partners would be strongly opposed to VSC taking over governance of CHCC. A governing body that doesn't possess local understanding of our unique context cannot govern the Center effectively. Further, the partnerships between our two high schools and Cold Hollow is a tremendous asset that cannot be understated.

I recognize that there are places in the state that do not run as smoothly as our system in Franklin Northeast does in regards to governance decisions and access for students. That said, I hope that you will be very cautious before pushing for a one-size-fits-all remedy that could actually hinder the effectiveness of programs in Northwestern Vermont. As always, thank you for your commitment to Vermont students.

Yours in education,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jay Nichols". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jay Nichols