

Hi, I gave testimony to the committee via the VIT videoconference, but wasn't able to share all of my thoughts. Please share with the committee if possible.

As a CHSVT teacher with more than 12 years of experience in this type of work, I'd just like to offer some very quick points that I'm hoping the committee will keep in mind:

Regarding "Duplication of Services"

CHSVT is not a "duplication of services." That argument is flawed on a number of levels. CHSVT is a high school, composed of licensed teachers, with an innovative and ever-evolving mission to serve this state's most difficult students in a meaningful way that benefits every Vermonter. It is **not** an adult education program. It is **not** a GED program. It is **not** a high school completion program. It is **not** "alternative education." The only "alternative" about it is that CHSVT serves this state's most difficult students well and appropriately, doesn't expel them, and does what many other schools have failed to do, including so-called "alternative" schools.

No other school, agency, or organization is currently equipped to do what CHSVT does.

Regarding Community Campuses

Our community campuses (or "field campuses") are important to our overall mission, and whether we like it or not, the school has to find a way to reach its students outside of prison walls. It's just a reality – our students leave us, often unexpectedly, and the work we're doing with them simply cannot end on the inside. Can you imagine being a high school student and having to go to jail in order to engage with your school? Where there is no worthy alternative outside of a few locations behind bars? CHSVT has a basic need to maintain contact with our highly transient students for very logical educational reasons, regardless of any policy or school restructuring. Students cannot begin a program in jail that they have no ability to complete out of jail – it just doesn't make sense and would degrade the work done inside our facilities. Helping them complete their education is, quite simply, our job. This is what we do and will continue to do because it would be reckless and impractical to do otherwise.

The work that we do inside the prisons CANNOT end there. People get released for probation, parole, furlough, or simply because their sentences end. Closing our sites, most of which are exceedingly inexpensive to operate, simply means that the work we have to do will become extremely difficult and much less efficient.

Regarding the Number of Diplomas

Some people in power are harping on a single data point: that there were only 41 CHSVT graduates last fiscal year. While that is true, it doesn't tell the whole story, and I would hope that anyone who truly understands what it means to educate this type of student sees that.

You have heard all of the arguments about that number and why it's lower than some people might like, and I see no need to repeat them at length. What I will ask, however, is that you take time to think about CHSVT's mission as both a high-quality high school *and* a recidivism-reducing tool.

Quite simply: CHSVT is *not* in the business of churning out diplomas for the sake of flaunting meaningless outcomes. Many – MANY – alternative and adult education programs, not just in Vermont, *are* in that business, and quite frankly, it's a waste of time and money and very few students benefit from that sort of structure. As a school, we have been working tirelessly for many years to refine and improve the quality of our program and the value of our diplomas and to purge areas of weakness. Unlike some programs who are beholden to the number of their superficial outcomes in order to generate funding, Community High School does what it says it does and does it well, because it's necessary and important. Anything less than that would be a slap in the face to Vermont taxpayers.

So that's our job. We educate first, graduate second. Trust me – I've worked with many, many students in our correctional facilities and in the community who have a high school diploma, issued in Vermont, but who can barely read, write, or comprehend basic mathematics. At this school, we do NOT want to begin pushing students like these to graduate before they are legitimately functioning at an appropriate level. 41 students graduated in FY14 because 41 students met our rigorous standards and completed their high school educations. But hundreds – HUNDREDS – were educated, despite the numerous barriers facing both students and teachers.

Regarding Budget

There is roughly \$160,000,000 in the budget proposed by Mr. Pallito and pushed by Mr. Shumlin. There are no other cuts in the Corrections budget except at the detriment of CHSVT. In fact, taking CHSVT out of the equation, the commissioner is proposing a comfortable net gain for himself and the rest of the DOC.

We ask for a relative pittance in order to run our nationally-renowned, innovative school. By cutting 25 teachers, closing 14 sites, and slashing our budget in half, the school as we know it will die.

Again, \$160,000,000. We're willing to do our part, of course. But can't we find some of that money elsewhere in the budget so that a great school doesn't have to die?

Conclusion

Community High School of Vermont is a whole different animal. It's difficult to quantify and easy to target. It has very little support in its own department and faces challenges of ignorance and indifference every single day it operates, yet manages to effectively educate the most difficult students in this state.

Thanks for reading, and if you take nothing else away from my testimony, please let this stay with you:

Community High School of Vermont is a school that really gets it.