

Memo

To: Legislative Committees

From: George Cross, Chair, CHSVT State Board

Date: March 17, 2015

Re: Recommendation to Legislature Re: CHSVT

Last Friday the House Ways and Means Committee included in its memo to the House Appropriations Committee the following:

*"Although our committee does not have jurisdiction over the appropriation to Community High School of Vermont, individual members expressed support for the program and concern about the negative impacts of proposed reductions. Community High School of Vermont is funded through the Education Fund and we believe there is sufficient money in the fund to continue to support it. The committee also recognized that costs may be high and we support efforts to explore ways to reduce the costs per pupil without compromising the services offered."*

I am writing to you today to strongly support the position set out by the House Ways and Means Committee. You all know the contributions CHSVT makes to Vermont by working day in and day out to help those under the supervision of Corrections reenter society.

As you know CHSVT serves three very distinct populations; those under 23 who do not have a high school diploma, are under the supervision of DOC and required by law to attend CHSVT; those who are older than 23, but do not have a diploma, thus have a right to a high school education in Vermont; and those with a diploma, but are not prepared to enter the job market for whatever reason. The majority of these individuals will reenter our towns and cities at some point. Thus, it is the best interest of all Vermonters that they are ready to find and keep a job.

W&M suggests that CHSVT be continued to be funded from the Education Fund. I believe that is the proper funding source as all Vermonters have a right to a high school education. Those under the age of 22 who have special needs have both a federal and state right to special education services above and beyond the regular school program. As is the case with all other Vermonters these programs should be paid for from the Ed Fund.

While level funding will mean reductions as there are salary increases and benefit increase that need to be covered, it is acceptable given the financial situation in our state. Also, it has become clear as has been explained to us at Board meetings that the Title I funds that have been available in the past are probably not available at least in this next year. This alone requires a reduction of five limited service positions.

I also agree with W&M's suggestion that there needs to be a careful exploration of how in the long term CHSVT can become more efficient and effective. To this end, we all need to consider how CHSVT might cooperate and coordinate with other programs, both in DOC and outside of

Corrections, so as to provide the needed services to the adult learners of Vermont who need high school diplomas and other career skills to obtain and keep a decent job. I believe that the CHSVT Board and Administrative Team is ready and willing to work with all groups to accomplish this. In fact, much has been already accomplished in the NEK along these lines.

Reducing Education Fund dollars to CHSVT does not help close the gap in the General Fund. Plus, as the attached chart shows the Ed Fund has sufficient funds to level fund CHSVT. The Education Fund is the correct source for high school completion programs. Proper funding for CHSVT is the right thing to do.