



The
UNIVERSITY
of **VERMONT**

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

February 24, 2015

Greetings,

I understand that the Vermont Governor's budget under consideration has cancelled funding for Vermont Interactive Technologies (VIT), and I urge you to reconsider and restore full funding to the budget line item.

While the state is facing a large deficit, it seems to be counterproductive to decimate existing programs that benefit educational support for the Vermont workforce. If indeed we are to bring new learning and technologies to all corners of the state, we need to have equitable access to distance education and training. The services of VIT support the mission of training and retaining a nimble and flexible workforce, not just in the urban areas of Vermont, but in rural areas where the need is most critical. There is no other technology organization that can provide these services across the state, and it was designed to combat the isolation of rural communities and citizens. As you look at the list of organizations using the various VIT sites, you will see that the range of users includes many state agencies. If VIT is disbanded, does this mean that the travel budget for state agencies will increase? What are the tradeoffs if this service is suspended? What will happen to the investment in equipment and networks, not to mention the livelihoods of the employees?

I am the Coordinator for the School Library Media Studies at the University of Vermont, and our sequence of courses leads to educator licensure in Vermont. The graduate program has been preparing library media specialists for leaderships roles in Vermont schools for over 30 years, but in the last 15 years, the courses have been delivered in a hybrid format, thanks to the technology services of VIT.

The opportunity to have face to face meetings at several VIT sites throughout the semester enables students from all areas of the state to participate without having to travel to Burlington. On average we have 20-22 people in our classes each semester. We have students in the Northeast Kingdom, southwestern, southeastern, northwestern, and central Vermont who drive less than 45 minutes to a local VIT site. We seldom cancel class, even in the winter. The students at each site collaborate on projects and connect with other students and the instructors who are at other sites. As a result, the students develop relationships with a network of colleagues who can support each other when they enter jobs across the state.

Our program will be severely disrupted if we lose the services of VIT. There is no way to replace the successful teaching and learning that results from access to face to face meetings through interactive technology. Online learning alone can't replace the meaningful experiences that happen when people

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collaborate in real time. Skype and Google Hangout can't handle the large numbers of participants, and are unreliable as venues for face to face learning, especially away from Chittenden County. Throughout rural areas, many people are connected through DSL, and are unable to access video technologies easily in homes.

While UVM School Library Media Studies is just one example of the benefits of VIT, it is representative of all the other programs and organizations that truly need access to technology services that work so well for citizens from all walks of life across the state.

Once again, I urge you to reconsider and restore funding for Vermont Interactive Technologies.

Sincerely,

Judith L. Kaplan

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