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Testimony S.257
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Thank you for the opportunity to express the concerns of St. Johnsbury Academy with respect to the challenges of licensing our career and technical education teachers. We value these individuals and the exceptional work they do with our students every day. We want to ensure that our students have access to the best teachers we can find. You've heard the challenges the licensing process brings from Patrick Guckin, our CTE Director. The Praxis exam and the requirement for bachelor level education are barriers.

This morning, I would like to focus on barriers and the processes we have used to overcome those barriers at St Johnsbury Academy. As I was planning my testimony this week I was reminded of the personal barriers that entering a work force can present. When I was a middle school student at Williston Elementary I watched my mother go back to work, to become certified as a public-school teacher, a librarian. The example she set for me in doing that, facing her fear, tackling her doubt in taking those courses and following that process to attain a goal, was invaluable for me as a young person. And those fears and doubts are very real, and while she made it over that hurdle, there are many outstanding people who would like to become teachers and see these hurdles as not only too high to mount but also disrespectful of their experience. In the case of CTE teachers, based on our current pathway to licensure, we are sending them the message that we disregard their professional expertise and experience, in favor of a set of courses and a score on a Praxis exam.

Our CTE teachers are industry experts. In our effort to ensure teacher quality and provide valuable programming to students in the Northeast Kingdom, St. Johnsbury Academy proposes that our school-based teacher certification program, which is part of our NEASC accreditation, be permitted as a substitute to licensure.

School-based teacher certification is centered on the belief that those administrators and supervisors who are most responsible for assuring teacher quality are in the ideal position to evaluate, assess and improve teacher quality. Through direct observation, careful and deliberate professional development planning, individually tailored to the teacher, these supervisors can affect the greatest change in the quality of teaching faculty thus assuring quality a license does not.

I am confident that all administrators in schools are concerned with the quality of their teachers and in turn the quality of the educational product that is delivered in their

classrooms. Having helped to build this school-based teacher certification program, delivered workshops in New England and presented at a national conference on its merits, I know that building a faculty of qualified, enthusiastic and dedicated professional educators is a difficult and worthwhile process. What we are proposing today is a well thought out, rigorous system, recognized and supported by NEASC, that any school can follow to develop outstanding faculty at their school. As all of us know, new teachers are not a finished product and their degrees earned and praxis scores do not guarantee they will be good teachers. We are suggesting that the emphasis of assuring teacher quality should be placed on the process that happens with the teacher over their career. If the process is robust and complete as the School-Based Teacher certification program, then the barriers to entering this profession should be removed and similar alternative pathways to teacher certification should be embraced.

The process of hiring faculty in schools begins with interviews that covers educational experience, career goals, pedagogical philosophies and best assessment practices. After an extensive New Teacher Orientation program that addresses the school's philosophies, policies, and practices, teachers begin their process of development. Observation, mentoring and goal setting are begun with the supervisor to build a 5-year personalized development plan.

This plan is the central component to the teacher certification process. It forms the pathway for the educator's professional development, it includes observations, reflections on best practices, and opportunities for growth. Successful completion of this plan, meeting these goals, will help set the path for developing a quality teacher in their school. The assessment of this plan is made through multiple observations, written feedback, an accumulation of artifacts and professional reflections in a portfolio. The contents of this portfolio are agreed upon by the supervisor and contain records of all observations of professional activities, samples of lesson and unit plans, evidence of student achievement, evaluations and a carefully crafted reflection by the teacher on their professional development.

I can certainly see there may be a variety of solutions to this challenge, which faces many of our peer career and technical education centers. I find it discouraging that as we move toward proficiency based assessment across the state, our licensing program for those most expert in proficiency based work, our CTE teachers, does not recognize their expertise and professionalism as an alternative pathway to becoming a teacher. I have seen first-hand that a portfolio-based system that acknowledges and reflects the professional and industry level credentials, as well as relevant training and experience helps build outstanding teachers and I believe that this may help others who would be excellent teachers.

Thank you for your consideration.