

Testimony from Lisa Ventriss, President of Vermont Business Roundtable
House Education Committee
January 24, 2018

Good afternoon and Happy New Year. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

For the record, my name is Lisa Ventriss, President of Vermont Business Roundtable. I am a native of Addison County, a product of the University of Vermont, and have been the President and chief spokesperson of the Roundtable since 2002.

Today I am joined by my colleague, Mary Anne Sheahan, Executive Director of the Vermont Talent Pipeline Management initiative.

During my testimony last year, I indicated that the Roundtable was initiating some new work along the college/career progression spectrum by creating a new College and Career Readiness Task Force to create a forum for the exploration of strategies that address Vermont's skills gap, by studying the opportunities and challenges for business along the entire K-12 landscape in the era of Act 77: Flexible Pathways. The Task Force includes members from private industry, secondary and higher education, Work-based Learning Coordinators, workforce training and economic development professionals.

At that time I also mentioned that we, along with the other members of our statewide team, were preparing to convene the Vermont Talent Pipeline Management project; a new employer-led, data-driven model created by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, to address the skills gap and talent needs of today's employers, by leveraging supply chain strategies.

I'd like to provide an update on the work of our Task Force, as it relates to college and career readiness, and then invite Mary Anne to provide an update on the work of Vermont TPM in 2017 and what lies ahead in 2018.

College and Career Readiness Task Force

During 2017 we undertook some very hands-on work in an effort to mobilize our members to engage more actively with the college and career readiness of Vermont's students; if only to use our members as guinea pigs as we built a "bridge" between the employer and education communities.

- We surveyed members on ways in which they are currently engaging with schools and students to assist with career awareness, exploration, preparation, and training. As well as ways in which they have strengthened their company's practices to support this activity.

- We engaged a consultant to convene two training sessions this past summer, in NW and Central VT, to orient 50 employers (not only our members) around Vermont’s Work-based Learning Standards and the expectations and opportunities for involvement by the business community.
- We engaged individuals from Agency of Education, secondary schools, and others, mapped regional resources and created a database of CTE centers and WBLCs, for use by our members to partner with schools and students as they prepare for college and career.
- And, we also introduced a New Medallion Award, which includes a \$5,000 monetary prize, to highlight one of Vermont’s leading work-based learning coordinators or other educators who demonstrating tremendous innovation and dedication in linking students with businesses to experiential learning. In 2016 and 2017, respectively we recognized work-based learning coordinators at Harwood Union High School and Hazen Union High School. We hope to leverage our relationships with these committed people to inspire other schools and businesses throughout Vermont.

In effect, we built “the bridge” that we envisioned, with multiple on-ramps for business participation in our schools.

Along the way, we made a few observations:

1. There is a lot going on in this space to address Vermont’s workforce skills gap. And with a new record set again for lowest number of births, government, private sector, and NGOs are mobilizing to ensure that every...
 - a. Economically displaced or employment challenged Vermonter
 - b. Current worker with training needs
 - c. New American
 - d. Early retirees and seniors
 - e. Graduates of higher education, and
 - f. High school students

...have adequate preparation to be productive in college or career.
2. Roll-out of Act 77 has been challenging for schools, and implementation is not consistent throughout all of Vermont. Not all Work-based Learning Coordinators are the same; not all schools have them, and not all are able to embrace the opportunities presented by the new Act.
 - a. Fortunately, in 2018, the Vermont AOE’s Personalized Learning Team is offering courses to provide participants with core knowledge about operating under the WBL educator’s license endorsement.

3. Transportation continues to be a barrier to participation in work-based learning, especially in rural or economically-distressed areas. Kids with cars have more opportunities than kids without cars.
 - a. Our prize to Hardwick was, among other things, going to be used to offset the cost of gas for students to travel to their businesses.

And in addition to our own work, representatives of the Roundtable are also involved as advisors to other important, related initiatives such as 70X2025vt, Vermont Futures Project, and the State Workforce Development Board.

In 2018, the College and Career Readiness Task Force will be focused on increasing the engagement and collaboration of our members with our New Medallion recipients and CTE directors as a way to expand into more schools; communicating to employers and students through storytelling; and championing investments in Birth to 5; supporting the equitable implementation of Act 77; and making CTE available to all secondary students beginning in 9th grade.

And with that I will conclude my remarks and turn it over to Mary Anne. Thank you.