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TO: Chairman Baruth and Senate Education Committee members
FROM: Jay Ramsey, State Director for Career Technical Education and Dr. Heather Bouchey, Deputy Secretary, Agency of Education
DATE: March 21, 2017
RE: H. 504 – An act relating to career technical education, special education, and education weightings

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. We appreciate the General Assembly's interest in career technical education (CTE), both as a flexible pathway toward high school graduation for students and also as a bridge to a well prepared workforce for Vermont. We know that CTE engages students differently than other forms of education; it helps them connect the theories they learn in an academic context to direct application in a technical context. This makes it easier for some students to see the connection between the learning they are doing and their goals beyond school. CTE has demonstrated growing success at supporting students not just to graduation, but on to postsecondary education, training, and high skill jobs after graduation.

Context

The goal of the Agency of Education is to provide Vermont with high quality educational opportunities, with the best value per dollar, in the most equitable way possible. In the area of career readiness, the AOE supports this goal by:

- developing a robust, high-quality **career advising and guidance system** that is aligned with high-wage, high-growth sectors;
- focusing existing personnel and financial resources on the development of employer-led **rigorous programs of study** that include **both secondary and postsecondary elements** and are embedded within transparent **career pathways** for high-skill, high-demand occupations (career pathways);
- expanding student participation in **postsecondary programs** that lead to industry-recognized credentials or degrees that signal higher levels of skill

These actions are aligned with Governor Scott's priorities regarding affordability, fostering growth in the economy and attending to the needs of vulnerable populations.

Our CTE action plan is funded and shaped by our federal Carl D. Perkins grant funds, which support all three of the AOE's positions dedicated to CTE. The Perkins program has very specific purposes – many of which align with the Agency's goals for CTE. Our CTE team coordinates with our Personalization and Flexible Pathways team to determine how to best leverage personalized learning plans and work-based learning that introduces students to career options and CTE exploration.

In addition, the AOE is collaborating with colleagues at both the Department of Labor and the Agency of Commerce and Community Development, as well as the Vermont Business

Roundtable, on a project to engage business and industry experts in defining industry needs and workforce expectations. This partnership with employers will guide our development of robust, state-endorsed career pathways in three high-wage, high-growth economic sectors: healthcare, construction/green building design, and advanced manufacturing. Career pathways and CTE programs of study will connect middle and secondary students to postsecondary education, stackable credentials connected to technical fields, and good jobs with Vermont employers.

Governor's proposed investment in CTE

Governor Scott is a strong advocate of Career Technical Education and has built a budget that supports beefing up this work in Vermont. Specific aspects of this targeted budgeting proposal include:

- \$150,000 to support a staff member and local educational grants at AOE to advance development and piloting of Career pathways, in conjunction with SWIB, DOL, VBR and the state colleges. This staffing is critical; without this support we have no state capacity to advance state CTE goals. [Sec E.517(e)]
- \$200,000 investment in summer or after school coding camps, including a focus on introduction to STEM. These camps are targeted specifically for elementary and middle school students, allowing young students to practice and explore their interest in technical fields. (Note: CTE is currently offered for 10-12 grade students statewide). [Sec E.517(d)]

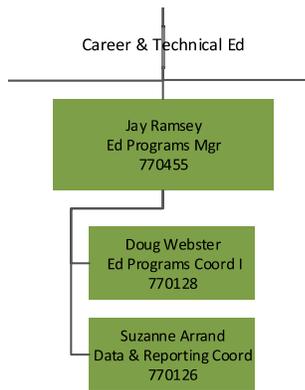
Given the Governor's strong support of CTE, as well as capacity at the AOE to move a state CTE agenda, we are in favor of linking any budget components to his proposed use of funds.

Current H.504 proposal

The current bill proposes to:

1. Create a grant program providing \$100,000 grants to 16 regions for development of CTE programming for students in grade 7;
2. Move \$1.6 million from special education funds to fund this grant project;
3. Create a summer study committee to examine the weighted long-term membership of school districts

The CTE team at the Agency would be charged with (a) designing the grant program parameters, (b) putting together a RFA (request for applications) and reviewing the submitted applications, and (c) monitoring and supporting the grants that are awarded. The CTE team is funded solely with federal Perkins funds, and there are only three of us:



General comments on H. 504

With respect to the grants, note that regions vary in size and the number of schools with middle grades varies greatly by region. Some schools would receive a lot of money while others would not. It may also be worth adding that regional collaboration between high schools and CTE centers can be difficult; the same difficulty may exist with middle schools. In addition, we don't yet have models for how these funds might be used. It might be worth addressing how to establish relationships between CTEs and middle schools and how dollars could be used effectively to advance state goals prior to pushing such a sum into a grants program.

Second, all grant making comes with granting and monitoring responsibilities under state guidelines. The Agency has some concern about the impact of any new initiatives on our thinly spread CTE staff. This is particularly important, given that cuts to Perkins are under consideration in Congress. We feel it is advisable to be very strategic in current investments, given the possible need to prioritize in response to action in Congress. We recommend our ambitions not exceed capacity.

In general, the Agency supports the notion of a Weighting Committee so that the current funding formula can be examined thoughtfully and deliberately. We appreciate that the General Assembly is planning on gathering more evidence from a well-crafted committee in order to best decide which student or community factors, as well as what potential weighting criteria, should be ultimately built into the formula.

In thinking through the current proposal, the Committee may find it helpful to consider the following questions.

Proposed CTE investment

1. What testimony supports the theory of action: that investing in applied seventh grade opportunities will necessarily lead to lower special education spending?
2. What evidence do we have that schools are or are not currently providing some of these activities, and if not, why not?
3. What is the advantage of creating a new investment stream, rather than fully funding and targeting existing streams?

Funding with reductions to special education budget

The bill proposes to pay for the investments in seventh grade career technical education experiences by reducing the amount budgeted for special education. The rationale is, in part, that as suggested by the Picus report, Vermont is spending much more than necessary on special education. The bill assumes sufficient special education savings will be realized in the current year through any opportunities created in seventh grade to fund those seventh grade opportunities.

1. What is the proposed mechanism to ensure sufficient special education savings are realized in the current year to offset the cost of the seventh grade investment?
2. What are other drivers of special education costs that may make services indifferent to the seventh grade investment? For example, one question the AOE has is that with class sizes as small as they are, what can and should districts be doing to personalize instruction and create supportive classroom environments so that more expensive special education investments are not necessary?