

**Vermont CTE: A Path Forward 2.0**  
**By the**  
**Vermont Association of Career and Technical Education Directors (VACTED)**  
**With Collaborators**  
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Vermont continues to face an immediate workforce shortage which has been predicted to exist for the foreseeable future. Last November's Vermont Association of Career and Technical Education Directors "White Paper" was focused on improvements for the overall Workforce Development system from the CTE Directors perspective. The intent was to have a voice from the Career and Technical Education (CTE) Directors as the Vermont Workforce Development Board gathered information and developed a report to the legislature with recommendations which eventually became much of the language contained in H.919. The effort and energy behind the H.919 recommendations have already produced results. Positive results will grow exponentially as all entities in the system have clearly defined roles when combined with a collaborative spirit. As an organization, VACTED recognizes that CTE in Vermont must have a larger role to support the training and education needed to ensure a viable workforce into the future.

First and foremost, to any growing role for CTE in Vermont, is addressing the barriers which reduce student access. **A student's involvement in thoughtful and progressive career awareness, exploration, and development activities throughout middle and high school are as important as any other middle and high school curriculum; each student must develop a relationship with a career pathway without the existence of barriers of any kind.** A **non-competitive funding model** is addressed in H.919 by the creation of four funding system pilots to develop different funding models. Currently, the funding of CTE doesn't reflect the systemic philosophy created by Act 77. Funding pressures to the system are real; particularly in the most rural of our high schools where student enrollments have dropped more drastically.

**Extending the entitlement to appropriate CTE programming for students in grades 7th through 10th is necessary** to provide experiences which will shape the student's changing Personal Learning Plan (PLP). Middle School PLP development, when informed by student involvement in **Career Awareness** activities facilitated through experiences provided by CTE, in coordination with middle schools, can include: summer tech camps, after school programming, CTE center tours, Virtual Career Awareness/Exploration Programming, guest speakers, job shadowing, field trips and more. While the student is in 9th and 10th grades, **Career Exploration** activities can consist of a variety of Pre Technical Programming available to all

students both virtually (statewide or regionally) and in traditional ways, job shadowing, guest speakers, field trips; all of which could contribute to the student's exploration of multiple Career Pathways. These will be coordinated efforts between the CTE center and the high schools. Through Work Based Learning Coordinators and Home School Counselors, further Career Exploration activities for students in 9th and 10th grade help inform **Career Preparation** in 11th and 12th grade. Career Preparation can occur not only as a traditional CTE experience, but also provided in an online or blended learning format to provide broader accessibility. This can lead to internships/apprenticeships for students that are coordinated and supported by CTE centers on a regional basis.

Participation in middle school career technical education experiences will contribute greatly to the development and **execution of meaningful Personalized Learning Plans (PLPs)**. In any student-centered initiative, all work should start and end with the student. Thus, the creation of a PLP should strongly influence the middle and high school experience. The execution of a Personal Learning Plan should be viewed as equally important as meeting Proficiency-Based Graduation Requirements (PBGRs). All too often students are forced to make the hard choice between what the student's sending high school states is required to graduate, when this local requirement may not directly connect in any way to the student's chosen Career Pathway. Both have an important place in a student's high school experience for the student to be prepared for what comes next. Currently, most PLP's are developed without input from Vermont CTE, which is the most informative programming in the system for PLP development. Vermont CTE also has the most established relationship in the education system with industry in the State of Vermont. It makes no sense for Vermont CTE to have no defined role in the development of PLPs. Vermont CTE must have a **meaningful role in the student Personal Learning Plan development and shaping**, starting in the middle grades and continue throughout the middle and high school experience.

Vermont's seventeen CTE centers have a presence in every corner of our state; the consistency presented by this existing structure must be leveraged and serve as a hub for all regional workforce development activities. This structure would serve as a **coordination point for providers and stakeholders, with each center employing a full time Regional Workforce Development Coordinator to ensure a coordinated effort in all workforce development activities in the regions**. This position would be the growth of the existing Adult Technical Education Assistant Director position that centers are required to have, and work under an advisor structure, maybe titled Regional Workforce Development Board. This Board would consist of regional representation from the CTE centers, Vermont State Colleges, Department of Labor, Department of Human Services, the Regional Development Corporations,

Vocational Rehabilitation, regional Chambers of Commerce, the sending High School Work Based Learning Coordinators and Technical Center Cooperative Education Coordinators, other workforce development entities, and regional employers. All Workforce Development Grants, both federal and state, would be reviewed by this entity to ensure a coordinated and committed effort by all Workforce Development entities.

A cornerstone of Vermont CTE is the ongoing relationship and involvement of business, industry, and post-secondary via CTE Program Advisory Boards. This practice lends credibility and brings local awareness to CTE. This type of awareness must grow on a statewide basis with a **coordinated public relations effort to reduce the stigma which still exists around “vocational” schools**; directly challenging the negative rhetoric which has existed for too many years. The recent focus on CTE has brought many organizations and governmental agencies to the table. This is a very good thing but simply having folks at the table is not enough. Planning and organization of all workforce development resources is needed on all levels, regionally and statewide, to ensure that there is no duplication of efforts, equitable dispersion of resources, and to ensure clear messaging of priorities with **all Workforce Development Partners working in a coordinated manner**.

A tenet of Act 77 is the creation of the Work Based Learning in high schools throughout the State. Lots of good work has been done in this area with some outstanding networking between high schools and Vermont CTE Cooperative Education Coordinators to benefit students and employers. But this hasn't happened consistently because no clear role definition exists from Act 77. New language introduced in H.919 relating to general cooperation has been helpful but lacks clear role definition. In many cases students who might be best served by programming offered at a regional technical education center are diverted to Work Based Learning activities coordinated by the sending high school. **Students are placed in Work Based Learning experiences rather than being enrolled in a CTE program**. Another emerging challenge is when a student has completed one year of CTE programming and the following year the sending high school will place the student in Work Based Learning, rather than returning for the second year of the CTE program. The student's high school Work Based Learning placement may be in a career pathway and related to the student's PLP but the Regional CTE center has a program which is also in the career pathway and provides the benefit of technical and academic training along with the opportunity for a Work Based Learning placement via the CTE Cooperative Education Program. **Work Based Learning provided by a high school must not be used as an alternative to CTE programming**. What is also concerning is worksite safety because the student is being placed without safety training. Work Based Learning Program Coordinators at CTE centers are trained to perform worksite

inspections and insure that there is proper paperwork in place for work sites. Again, this practice is an unintended result from Act 77 and influenced by the competitive funding system.

Enrollment at a Vermont CTE center will ensure the students receive industry training under the supervision of a certified teacher with industry experience, opportunities to earn Industry Recognized Credentials, industry related Dual Enrollment Credit, and then move on to a Cooperative Education experience. Additionally, **students who choose not to access CTE need to have Work Based Learning Experiences to help further shape and inform post-secondary career preparation.** Involvement in Work Based Learning experiences, including internships for all students, for the college bound student, CTE or not, can lead to greater student commitment and focus post-secondary training of all kinds with less attrition, thus ensuring the financial commitment to post-secondary training is well spent.

The lack of coordination between high school Work Based Learning and CTE Cooperative Education Coordination has resulted in employers becoming confused due to multiple school personnel approaching them to place a student in a Work Experience. Coordination of this work should be built into the greater Workforce Development system. **High School Work Based Learning Coordinators should be employed under the supervision of the regional CTE center,** with the responsibilities of coordination of Career Awareness, Career Exploration and Career Preparation activities and experiences throughout the system to assist the student in executing PLP goals and all workplace experience including shadowing, work placements/internships. Resources at the students' high schools and regional CTE center would be available for the Work Based Learning Coordinator. As stated previously, the Work Based Learning and Cooperative Education Coordinators would all be members of the Regional Workforce Development Board. This position, along with the structural changes outlined earlier, would extend the "Talent Pipeline" all the way to middle school students, through the high school experience and on to post secondary/employment; whatever the Personal Learning Plan is designed to do. Again, our goal should be for every student to leave the system armed with a start of a plan, ownership of the plan and a level of confidence because they have an idea where they fit and can bring value.

Act 77 has created a multitude of options for students. For high schools the Act created a requirement to move to Proficiency Based Graduation Requirements (PBGRs). Inadvertently, this has, or has the potential to, increase the complexity of navigating high school graduation requirements for Vermont's CTE centers and CTE students. This is compounded based on the number of sending high schools a given CTE center serves. As embedded academic credits become a part of the past, where does this leave a technical center as far as how to contribute to their students' high school's PBGRs? It seems that two paths exist for Vermont CTE: should

each of Vermont CTE centers negotiate these graduation requirements with each of its sending schools, or should each Vermont CTE program have embedded academic proficiencies where they naturally occur within the CTE curriculum which are common? Additionally, what is the decision point for a student who is accessing a CTE center in order to execute their Personal Learning Plan (PLP) but may have local PBGRs they need to show mastery on to meet local graduation requirements? Universal minimum graduation requirements are needed, followed by **clarification of Vermont CTE's contributing role in PBGR requirements.**

One stated outcome of Act 77 was for an increased enrollment of students in CTE programming; not to serve as a barrier because of differing or increased local graduation requirements. Once we gain clarification of CTE's role in contributing to a common baseline of statewide high school PBGRs, then it must be clear that graduation requirements earned at a CTE center can't be altered or changed by the student's sending high school. The Vermont Association of Career and Technical Education Directors are committed to collaborating with each other and industry/post-secondary partners to have common programming statewide for programs, with an ability to add additional requirements based on local industry advisory input and need. Program specific **common academic proficiencies, along with common technical skills/proficiencies, Industry Recognized Credentials and Dual Enrollment can all be part of this collaborative work.** The Academic Proficiencies gained in CTE should be much like the "Embedded Credit" practice which has been in place for years and serves to decrease barriers to student access to CTE. VACTED is open to considering the pooling of Perkins funds to support a Curriculum Coordinator position to do this curriculum coordination work.

Due to the **project-based nature of CTE, it is necessary to have extended instructional time.** Currently instructional times are set at a **minimum of 120 minutes per day** for regular CTE programming. This must be maintained as it allows students to see a project through and more accurately represents a workplace environment. Around the State, employers state that while technical skills are important, employability skills related to dependability and work ethic are a baseline requirement. Time structures must replicate workplace conditions whenever possible to prepare our students for these realities. For Pre Technical Foundations programming, the current minimum is to have instruction take place for an average of 200 minutes per week or 40 minutes a day. Again, due to the nature of CTE instruction, longer instruction times are necessary. Making a **minimum of 80 minutes per class session for Pre Technical Foundations programming necessary.** Vermont's CTE Directors can universally say that a CTE student has never complained that their CTE class was too long. This coupled with a true statewide calendar would also maximize student learning and collaboration between Vermont's CTE centers and high schools.

Much like the Work Based Learning Coordinator duplication of services issue raised earlier, another challenge for CTE is duplication of courses already offered by the regional career center in our programs. This could be an unintended consequence of Act 77 or the competitive funding model which incentivizes high schools to keep students in-house. This practice hurts the ability of Vermont CTE to offer a program in the region, simply because smaller high schools don't have the resources or population to offer such programming. When one school, usually a larger school, offers a program or similar program already offered at the CTE center, it creates an inequity in the system for all the other sending schools. This duplication has the potential to hurt all high school students in a CTE center service region. Additionally, when a CTE center offers a new program, multiple levels of approval must be obtained along with documentation of supporting labor market statistics, while a high school can simply add a course with very little approval beyond the walls of the high school. **The duplication of CTE Programming by sending high schools must be approved by the Regional Advisory Board or the CTE Technical Center District Board.** Partnerships between CTE and high schools should be encouraged to avoid duplication and inefficiencies in the system.

The Vermont Association of Career and Technical Education Directors looks forward to working with all stakeholders with an interest in growing Career and Technical Education experiences for students. VACTED also looks forward to systemic changes which support equity with increased access to programming resulting in young Vermonters matching their talents and interests to well-paying, sustainable careers which help growth and strengthen Vermont's economy and communities whether they decide to go on to college, enter a fulfilling, in-demand career in one of Vermont's many growing industries, or both.