

Vermont CTE: A Path Forward

By Vermont Association of Career and Technical Education
Directors with Collaborators

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Vermont faces a significant workforce shortage. According to the Vermont Futures Project, the State's needs are projected at 11,000 skilled workers per year for the foreseeable future.

Vermont S. 135 / Act 69 legislation seeks a thoughtful evaluation of Vermont's Career Development System with recommendations to address systemic workforce issues including Career and Technical Education (CTE); a much under-utilized resource which could assist in addressing this need. The Vermont Career and Technical Education Centers have an excellent reputation but have been an afterthought for too long. Currently, only 29.8% of Vermont high school students access CTE programming statewide.

In order to impact the future workforce needs of the State of Vermont, change is necessary.

S. 135 / Act 69 contains two specific CTE references:

- (F) expands access and accelerates Career and Technical Education to Vermont students in grades 9–12 and to Vermont adults.

- (11) advise the Career Technical Education Directors on the funding, governance, and access to career technical education in Vermont.

Last winter, the Vermont Association of Career and Technical Education (VACTED) Directors crafted a legislative proposal to address some of the issues facing technical education in Vermont. The proposal contained several suggestions that can be compressed into two simple recommendations:

- The creation of a non-competitive funding system for Vermont CTE.
- To become fully integrated into the Career Development System in Vermont.

Challenges

Demographics - Vermont, like many other states, has experienced a demographic shift which has, and will continue to, limit the availability of a workforce for the foreseeable future. This is further complicated by young people leaving Vermont to pursue education and/or careers outside the State. The available workforce has a skills gap, in both the hard and soft skills area, even when workers can be found. Positions may go unfilled, leaving businesses and organizations unable to grow or meet current obligations.

Availability of Resources – The current funding system for Vermont’s Technical Education places technical education

centers in direct competition with the high schools they serve. When a student enrolls in a technical center program, the student's sending high school district loses tuition dollars to the technical center. This comes in the form of unrealized tuition, since funds flow directly to the technical center, which is a direct charge to the district. While one would hope that the monetary impact of a student choosing technical center pathway wouldn't negatively affect the support that a student receives in making this choice from a sending school, that sometimes is currently the case. This "competition" is more acute as Vermont looks to find ways to reduce spending on education and as communities have seen a reduction in student enrollment. These factors are more prevalent in rural communities who are struggling to support a small high school.

Current rules and regulations regarding access to Technical Education are generally supportive but somewhat complicated. These rules limit full access to students in grades 11 and 12, while students in grades 9 and 10 have very limited access.

Vermont does not have a truly local Community College System which is focused on Technical Education. The Vermont Technical College (VTC) offers programs with a main campus in Randolph Center, a large regional site in Williston, and several smaller regional sites around the State. VTC also offers Apprenticeship (Plumbing and Electrical Classes) in several

locations around the State. The Community College of Vermont also offers programs at sites around the State of Vermont, which is primarily academic in focus, but has offered career-specific training in partnership with VTC.

Recommendations

1. Non-Competitive Funding System or Tech Requirement –

The current funding system creates a competitive situation between sending schools and technical centers; smaller schools are more impacted as they try to offer a variety of programming to their students. By instituting a **Non-Competitive or Incentivized Funding System** for Career and Technical Education this would hopefully eliminate local sending school budgetary pressures from influencing the process.

Additionally, the state should allow career and tech education centers which serve students from **border states**, to offer a **competitive tuition** with the in-state option for career and technical education. Any additional revenues from out-of-state students would be beneficial to the reduction of costs to Vermont sending schools.

2. Access to Technical Education - Current Career and Technical Education rules limit full access to students in

grades 11 and 12, while students in grades 9 and 10 have much more limited access. **Access to Career and Technical Education should not be limited in any way**, and should be regarded as important as all other required classes in high school. The current funding system is like a toll when students choose to access the technical education pathway. At a minimum, all students should have **access to Pre Technical Programs** if the program: 1) is aligned with Personal Learning Plan goals and 2) access to students in grades 9 and 10 if they are capable of being successful in the program. Current rules and regulations limits the access of 9th and 10th grade students. Schedule and transportation are barriers which need to be overcome. An option would be to partner with **Vermont Virtual Learning Collaborative to deliver Pre Technical Foundations Programming with Vermont CTE Centers**. This will enable student to access programming which will allow them to explore Career Pathways to inform decisionmaking in the student's Personal Learning Plan.

3. Outreach Coordinator - Several CTE centers have recently employed **Outreach Coordinators**. Coordinators have worked to provide **middle school programs** and have been involved with high school recruitment activities to insure students are getting a complete and accurate description

of CTE. Middle school programs have included middle school tours, participation in job fairs, after-school programs, and summer tech camps, often in collaboration with many service providers. These activities can help students make informed decisions when creating their Personal Learning Plan. Outreach Coordinators also participate in **high school outreach activities**, this provides potential students an orientation to what CTE programs are about and accurate details of student experiences in the programs. All students should be involved in CTE outreach activities as 10th grade students, even if the student doesn't eventually become a CTE student. Career and Tech Centers should be viewed as an asset for all students in the centers' service region.

CTE Centers should be actively involved in the Personal Learning Plan (PLP) process as early as 5th or 6th grade. This will build awareness at the middle school level that CTE is a viable option for graduation for students entering 9th grade.

4. Coordinated Curriculum – The current Vermont CTE curriculum is a mix of competency lists, a variety of Industry Recognized Credentials, Dual Enrollment/Articulation Agreements, local Advisory Board

recommendations and teacher interest. This has created a diverse range of programs in the state. Since all programs are intended to help a student become “Career and College Ready” more consistency is needed. Focused work to **create a unified curriculum on a statewide basis** is needed. With a unified curriculum, which informs a statewide program of studies, students can leave any Vermont CTE Program with the standard set of Industry Recognized Credentials, and Dual Enrollment/Articulation Agreement Credits which are easily connected to other activities in the pathway.

To coordinate this work, resources could be pooled from the Perkins Grant, much like resources are pooled now within a consortium structure. Each Center would pay a prorated amount based on Center size. The S 135/Act 69 legislation has created a **Pathways Coordinator position** at the Agency of Education to coordinate much of this work; the pooling of resources would be a way of extending the life of this position. This position has many similarities to a Curriculum Coordinator. A **Statewide Advisory** made up of employers from the various cluster areas appointed or recommended by the Workforce Development Board, and CTE Directors would also have a role in the oversight of the position and

recommended “Power Standards.” For example, entry level technical, employability/transferable and academic skills for a given career should be very similar across the state. After determining consistent statewide standards for CTE programs. Local Advisories would still advise on local employer training needs and local standards but become more focused on student outcomes, and placements. A pronounced shift to a “Talent Pipeline” type approach at the local level, where students have a destination after graduation or completion of the program.

5. Pathway Integration – The current Workforce

Development System for Vermont isn’t really a system.

This doesn’t mean many wonderful programmatic elements don’t exist in the State with much of the strength of the programs based on local relationships rather than a statewide system. Oversight of all of these elements needs to be consistent and coordinated. The Workforce Investment Board structure offers some oversight but it lacks the legislative influence to coordinate all of the partners, and not all partners consistently participated in WIBs; a similar structure which would carry out the vision of the State Workforce Development Board. The makeup of the WIBs would change to include all service providers

including High School WBL Coordinators, CTE Outreach Coordinators, Tech Center Directors and Cooperative Education Coordinators, Adult Ed Providers, Department of Labor, Department of Human Services, Local CCV/VTC Representatives, Regional Development Corporations, Apprenticeship Program Representatives, Chambers of Commerce, and any other Workforce Development Partner Representatives of significance. Each Local Workforce Investment Board would have a full time **Regional Career Pathways Coordinator** to coordinate activities and have responsibility to develop a Regional Plan, with partners input, which would need approval from the State Workforce Development Board. The plans would be focused specifically on addressing five priority pathways areas. All Workforce Development related grants from the Department of Labor, Agency of Education and others would have to address priority pathways in the regional plans. These plans would be outlined for each pathway with specific roles of all service providers described.

6. Technical Center Governance – Currently, three different governance models exist for Career and Technical Education in Vermont. Local Regional Advisory Boards and Technical Center Boards would continue to provide

governance but Regional Career Pathways Coordinator would be required to serve on the RAB or Technical Center Board. As mentioned, curriculum related decisions and oversight will be made on a statewide level with some local decision making authority. Local school boards and superintendents, which host a technical center would have limited authority over the curriculum decisions but would be focused on administrative functions. Technical Center governance may be revisited, at a later date, based on the delivery of outcomes.

7. Miscellaneous Suggestions

- Create a minimum Career and Technical Education requirement for all high school students
- Increase public relation on a statewide basis, stigma still exists around “vocational” schools. More promotion and outreach to parents statewide and to directly challenge the negative rhetoric fed to students
- A true statewide calendar and high school schedules which are fully coordinated with technical centers and supports students accessing technical education but maintain the 120-minute time block, this supports project work and workplace expectations. This extended time creates a learning community within

which students thrive. CTE students never complain the class period is too long.

- Develop a cluster Program Completer to allow students to take multiple programs, for example accounting for students in Carpentry and Natural Resources. Current measures are weighted to program completers and concentrators.

The Vermont Association of Career and Technical Education Directors looks forward to collaborating with all stakeholders with an interest in growing Career and Technical Education. In order for Vermont to continue to be economically viable, there is a need for a well educated workforce. VACTED looks forward to systemic changes that supports equity and access for students in grades 9 through 12, in order to expand our workforce, to protect jobs, to retain employers and to grow Vermont's economy.