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OFFICE OF THE HEADMASTER

March 11, 2019

Dear Senator Baruth and Members of the Senate Education Committee,

I write today to comment on the bill that has recently come before your committee to require the Vermont Technical College (VTC) to study how to best deliver VTC certificate and degree programs at career and technical education (CTE) centers in Vermont. Though I have some significant concerns about the early college and dual enrollment aspects of the draft bill, I fully support the aspects of the bill that would enable working adults to access accredited college-level programs. I ask that you carefully consider not only the data regarding the effectiveness of existing dual enrollment and early college programs, but also the data used in making a case for this bill. I also ask that you consider expanding the scope of this bill so that it might allow non-working adults access to these programs.

I have voiced my concerns regarding early college and dual enrollment to your committee before and have stated that, while St. Johnsbury Academy has a multitude of dual enrollment courses offered to its students, I do not believe that the program is helping those for whom it was designed. My understanding is that a large part of the impetus for this program was to encourage students who may not have considered college—or who may not have been able to afford college—a pathway to post-secondary education. While dual enrollment has most certainly made college more affordable for those enrolled in the courses, my experience has been that the students in those classes were already considering college and had shown they were capable of college-level work. This phenomenon is even more evident in the early college program, in which those capable of college work (taking accelerated and AP courses already) do fine but those who see early college as a way to avoid senior-year graduation requirements (e.g. our Capstone program), fail to complete the year. In these cases, taking the early college option is a recognition that our graduation requirements—which help students develop transferrable skills for life beyond high school—are more rigorous than the college programs in which these students chose to enroll. Furthermore, when they either choose to withdraw from the early college program, or are required to do so, they cannot meet the graduation requirements within the short time left and often have to complete a modified program over the summer in order to graduate.

St. Johnsbury Academy's experience may indeed be an exception, as, in addition to our mission-based graduation requirements, we have a plethora of offerings for our students across our

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comprehensive curriculum and our post-secondary enrollment rate is annually between 80-90% on average. I ask that the Committee investigate the degree to which these two programs (dual enrollment and early college) are successfully serving Vermont's high school students before expanding it further. I also encourage the Committee to investigate why St. Johnsbury's post-secondary education rate is so much higher than the state average. As a school in one of Vermont's most rural and economically disadvantaged areas, I am particularly concerned about the draft bill's explicit focus on "rural regions and regions with declining populations."

The most attractive part of this bill is its mention of "enabling working adults the opportunity to access accredited college-level programs". As you may know, St. Johnsbury Academy is a key collaborator with the Northeast Kingdom Collaborative and is playing a key role in the revitalization of Depot Square in the heart of downtown St. Johnsbury. As part of those efforts, St. Johnsbury Academy plans to rent space on the first floor of the renovated building to provide continuing and adult education as part of our Career and Technical Education Center. The goal is to make that facility an education hub where adults—working and non-working—can gain skills to make them employable in the local job market and beyond. Should VTC, in alignment with this bill, become a partner in helping this education become more affordable and accessible to this underserved population in downtown St. Johnsbury, we see multiple opportunities to improve not only the local workforce, but our local economy and community spirit as well.

I am happy to come speak to your committee at greater length about this bill, but I know time is short and you will need to take action soon. I hope this letter will help your committee by encouraging you to study the existing programs carefully before expanding or continuing them. More importantly, I hope my comments will encourage a greater focus on the adult population, especially those for whom continuing education is difficult to afford and/or access.

Sincerely,



Thomas W. Lovett
Headmaster