

Beth Cobb, Superintendent of Essex Westford School District, Center for Technology, Essex
Topic: House Commerce and Economic Development Committee Meeting, 02/02/2022
Date and time: Feb 2, 2022, 09:00 AM

Re: Career Technical Centers and Workforce

The time could not be more crucial for the conversation workforce development and career pathways through Career Technical Centers. The response to the pandemic shows the dire need for a workforce trained in a multitude of STEM fields; research, caring for the sick, developing a vaccine for Covid and other diseases. It also has shone a light on education and the need for people to go into teaching. The need for entry-level workers trained in basic skills has increased. Prior to the pandemic, there was a critical shortage of skilled trades such as electricians, plumbers, and other licensed workers. This has grown through the pandemic.

Staffing Industry Analysts reported in September 2021, that “68% of tradespeople have struggled to hire skilled workers and more than one-third, are slightly or extremely understaffed. In addition, 27% of skilled trade works are within 10 years of social security retirement age of 62”.

This is the time to discuss how we build and sustain career pathways that connect high-quality education with career training that leads to great job opportunities. We need to think about pathways for students where they can master skills necessary to succeed beyond age 18, whether it is directly entering a career or furthering their education in a two or four year college path. Career and Technical Centers provide a pathway for students. We need to make sure that barriers are not placed in the way of students wanting to attend a Tech Center. The stigmatization around Tech Centers is one barrier this has a significant impact on enrollment of our tech centers. Often times it is the student who is challenged to succeed in the traditional high school setting that educators, parents, and society, alike feel a tech center would work for them. Often is students on Individualized Educational Plans are “sent” to a tech center because it is thought of as a more hands-on approach and lower expectations and this is far from reality, Career Tech Centers are hands-on but have high expectations and standards. This thinking needs to change if we want to grow our workforce. We have students who attend tech centers that are receiving dual enrollment and graduate high school with 3 - 9 college credits. They are participating in engineering programs and continuing on to college with significant credentials.

Center for Technology at Essex has Industry Recognized Credential (IRC), Work-Based Learning, College Connections

- 80% of CTE Students earn IRC
- 2020-2021 64% of CTE students were placed in Career Work Experiences (81% 2019 - 2020 pre-Covid)
- About 60% of CTE earned college credits last year.

A pathway into WorkForce - Center for Technology, Essex offers *skill tech programs* for adults:

- Our facility is an excellent resource for businesses, students, and individuals seeking high-quality, affordable adult technical education. Courses/workshops are taught in the evenings, weekends, and summers.
- Custom classes can be created for businesses or schools.
- Training classes and programs include everything from health care, such as a Dental Assisting certification to HVAC/R to Information Technology.
- Our mission is to consistently provide job-enhancing training that improves career opportunities, increases wages, and creates pathways to more learning.

There are financial assistance programs available through VSAC, the Department of Labor, and the Workforce Investment Act (specifically for LNA and HVACR tech training), and the Vermont Department of Labor has a \$1000 scholarship program for adults.

It would be beneficial to have more funding resources for adults.

Meeting the workforce needs:

- Offering internships for Career Tech Students (paid and unpaid)
- Encouraging our communities to change the way Tech Centers are thought about
- Help promote tech centers as a way to grow our workforce
- Create a source of funding for adult learners to attend Skill Tech
- Create a source of funding for a thirteenth year for a student to get extra credentials/certificate
- Streamline hiring the process for Career and Tech Center student applicants
- Visit the tech centers
- Companies could offer courses through Career and Tech Center's Skill Tech Programs
- Change how Funding for the Career and Technical Centers