

Notes of Meeting with AOE, Legislature on
Tuesday, October 19, 2021

- Gave testimony twice to House Education, once with Senate Education, and then met with Deputy Secretary Bouchey and Kendal Smith with Dana Peterson - HANNAFORD in mid-July, Followed by meetings with staff members from Senator Leahy, Senator Sanders, and Representative Welch's offices. Queried about the use of ESSER Funds to help with the situation but was told that is not legal because we are not an LEA. Provided input to the State ESSER hold back funds through the AOE ESSER feedback portal. I believe some other CTE centers might have done the same thing. It was suggested that there is a possibility that GEER II funds may also be used.
- I spoke with Dave Keaton, former Director of the Technical Center in Houlton Maine (he retired this year, but I caught him in the office in July), and the former President of the Maine Tech Directors Association. I know Dave through some conferences that were held a few years ago. He said, "I don't know how they (Maine Agency of Education) did it but they did it." Talking about using state ESSER to hold back funds to help with the impact of the pandemic on Maine CTE.
- Proposed the idea of holding harmless on FTE counts for Vermont CTE due to the unique impacts of the pandemic. Some legislators thought a hold harmless already made it through the session.
- Jay Ramsey and Ruth Durkee from the AOE testified, showing the impact of enrollment. One of their slides shows that RVTC was trending upward prior to the pandemic as far as student enrollments.
- RVTC was facing a \$70K shortfall for FY22 but we were able to realize some savings through a group effort and then with just plain luck because of insurance elections from new staff members resulting in us being able to bring our budget in line.
- But our very early budget projections for FY23 show about a \$250K short fall predicted. This is with many unknowns, statewide health negotiations, increase in the base rate and local contract negotiations.

RVTC Numbers - Enrollments are increasing with more normal operations but outreach and recruitment efforts have been significantly impacted by the pandemic with no full school visits. We believe the environment is our biggest draw, facility (most of you have seen our building) and relationships with staff.

Programming	FY 21	FY 22	Enrollments +/-
Pre Tech Exploratory	13	18	+5
Pre Tech Foundations	43	74	+31
Regular Programs Level I/II	207	211	+4
Regular Program Level	102	124	+22

Our enrollments are trending up since things are starting to get back to “normal” but we are working against the impacts of the six semester average which will include the three semester counts that are pandemic impacted with these impacts lagging into the fall of 2025, if we have a normal recruitment season this spring. But who knows right now. RVTC had a drop of 66 students in regular programming from FY 20 to FY21.

Act 189 delay, the RVTC Act 189 work sought to address some of the barriers to access CTE statewide, funding, proficiencies and schedule, and greater middle/early HS programming. Additionally, a proposal to work across state lines would assist RVTC in working in partnership with our NH sending school, Fall Mountain. RVTC sought a change in State Rules and Regulations to allow Vermonters in the RVTC service region access to CTE Programming at FM. Vermont students' access to out of state CTE programming is not currently allowed. This would also allow RVTC to pursue a closer partnership with greater access to RVTC for NH students. Ruth Durkee and Jay Ramsey have been helpful with conversations to their peers in New Hampshire.

Without a level of assistance RVTC will be faced with a significant increase in our assessment of the sending schools. Which is counterproductive to access for students. Or we reduce personnel which just doesn't make sense given we are trending upwards with enrollment with the likelihood of that continuing as we get back to more normal conditions.

Sometimes I wonder if the folks I have been talking to about the impacts of the pandemic think “Oh he’s just whining and looking for a handout because they are looking to maintain staffing levels in an environment of declining student populations.” Well that's not true.....RVTC has been very responsible to our regional taxpayers over the last 15 years as we see declining student populations in our service region. We have reduced or combined staff FTE which resulted in a 27%+ decrease in staffing over those years. Our ask has been and is about only the unique impacts of the pandemic on our center and about a third of the Vermont CTE centers. It's hard to understand why with all of the relief funds that have been made available to public and private entities, as a result of the Covid-19 Pandemic, that RVTC is somehow not eligible for any sort of assistance.