

Testimony for House Education Committee  
By  
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Good morning, legislative representatives, my name is Dana Peterson and I am the Superintendent/Director of the Patricia A. Hannaford Regional Technical School District in Middlebury, VT. I am sure that you are well aware of the impact that the COVID-19 health emergency has had on schools over the past year. I am here this morning to share some of the impact that the current pandemic has had on Career and Technical Education in our state. Scott Farr has compiled a list of examples from a variety of centers, so I will limit my testimony to the experience of our regional center.

I will begin by saying that we have worked hard to partner with our member high schools in our county and reached out beyond the local area to serve students in Rutland, Chittenden and Windsor counties based on the uniqueness of some of our programs. We had also built up a strong representation among the home study population. In spite of our recent success, we lost 70 students between the end of school in June and the start of school in September. 31 students were unenrolled in the last week before school. The difference of 31 students alone represents approximately 10 (9.833) FTEs. We had 140 FTEs around August 15. This drop in number in a short period of time was approximately three times the normal attrition rate we see at the start of school. The total impact in a month before school started was 14 FTEs. The count for us this fall was 126 FTEs compared to the 140 FTEs we had only a month earlier. By comparison, in the fall of 2019, we had 147 FTEs which amounted to 399 students served in our region. **Last year, PAHRTSD served the second largest number of students statewide, and we were building on that success.** This accomplishment was achieved through close collaboration and significant outreach including developing relationships with our industry partners and our home study families in addition to our work with our partner high schools.

A drop in 10 FTEs is the equivalent of \$230K and 20 FTEs equates to approximately \$460K. The impact of this is significant in terms of the cost per student. It also has an impact on the equitable distribution of the tax burden based on the student participation model. Scott Farr has addressed the work that has been done on implementing a possible new funding model (based on our Act 189 work group) in his testimony. I will advocate for future consideration of that proposal.

Some of the areas that contributed to this unusual drop in participation are listed here:

1. Lack of Coordination – With the focus on health and safety with the reopening guidance from AOE each district came up with its own reopening plan and schedule to address local needs. For our Career Center that meant that all the good work that had been achieved through developing a common countywide schedule was lost.
2. Scheduling Conflicts – As a result of the introduction of different plans by each district to address the local needs of their systems, we experienced a dramatic shift in enrollment patterns due to:

- a. Multiple different schedules such that the only remnants of the originally agreed upon common schedule was PAHRTSD's. We ended up having some students only come once a week for pre-tech programming.
  - b. Individual schedules – We saw a number of student make different choices based on the complexities of their situation including the need to access learning remotely.
3. Transportation Needs – The Career Center conducted a survey of families to determine needs to access CTE programming when the multiple schedules emerged. We learned that we would have to design a solution to get some of our students to the center in order to access programming. We have been doing this since the beginning of the year. We determined early on that we could meet the Safe and Healthy Start Guidance with a lot of planning and reconfiguring our seating arrangements to accommodate our students, and this was an important focus for us to serve the students in our region. Even with this flexible approach and offering in-person instruction four days a week, we still saw a dramatic decrease in student enrollment. This need was the direct result of the schedules that participating districts were implementing and choices that students had to make around their comfort level with being in school. I am happy to report that over 80% of our families responding to our survey opted for 4 days a week instruction in person with others opting to follow a more hybrid schedule.
4. Outreach impact – Our ability to offer practical experiences for visitors to come to the Career Center and speak with instructors and current students has been eliminated. We have undertaken virtual meetings to present to families and the community, but a handful of participants cannot make up for 400 plus attendees at a showcase event that has helped us in recent years expand both awareness of our programs and direct access to students interested in joining our programs. At this point in time, I would say that our applications are down by about 20 – 25%.
5. Student attrition examples – students un-enrolling
  - a. One full section of pre-tech students was eliminated due to scheduling conflicts (14 students)
  - b. Lost students in the second semester due to scheduling challenges in spite of our efforts to provide greater support to help students attain proficiency in program learning targets aligned with PBGRs
  - c. The impact of COVID on our partners has also impacted access to our programs
6. Impact on the six-semester average – When a significant drop such as the one we have just experienced occurs, it has an impact on the per student FTE calculation for the next three years. This drop has already impacted our FY22 per FTE calculations and will do so for FY23 and FY24.

I would like to thank you all for listening to this testimony, and I hope that you find it helpful as you deliberate next steps in addressing the unexpected needs of CTE centers throughout Vermont, as you did in taking action with respect to the general education pupil counts.