

House Commerce and Economic Development Committee testimony

02/02/22

Good morning,

My name is Sonya Spaulding and I am the chair of the Barre Unified Union School District, which currently includes the Central Vermont Career Center. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today regarding Career and Technical Education.

As you may know, our career center has seven sending school districts and currently operates as part of our school district, under our BUUSD governance. There is an item on the ballot in the 18 communities that those sending districts represent to create their own governance structure after being approved by the State Board of Education in December.

It has been an honor to be a part of the governing body to CVCC, but as we look at how CTE is growing and changing, I hope that all the sending communities can see the benefits from creating a separate governance structure for CVCC to continue to grow and thrive providing career and technical education to more students in the future.

Which brings me to my concerns regarding the impediments for students to access CTE. For the 231 spots or seats that we have available to students, we had 350 applicants. The interest in our Career Center is growing and we were not able to offer a seat to every student that applied, partially because some programs generate more interest than others. For instance, the Automotive program had 64 applicants for 16 open seats. Space and class size are definitely limiting factors in how many students can be served.

The principal and guidance counselor at our high school also noted the following concerns regarding students' ability to access CTE:

1. There is no guarantee to enrollment. While students in our community can access their core education at our high school, prospective CTE students must apply and interview for access to CTE. The applications are reviewed by the technical center, who then determines what applicants are accepted or not. Students are allowed to choose their top-2 programs of interest, and typically interview for both. While I expect this is for a variety of reasons, it may be limiting the number of students that are able to participate in CTE.
2. Career centers are evaluated, and incentivized for, enrolling students who are "non-traditional" to that trade (i.e. female students in Automotive Tech). Naturally, this gives an advantage to non-traditional students to take up limited spaces in programs. While this may be helping to grow students who are not traditionally in a given field, it limits the space available to others.
3. Students can be exited from the program at any time, and for any cause, by tech centers. Sending high schools do not have "a say" in due process or rationale for discharge. The student that has been removed has to return to their sending school, who is expected to put together an academic program for that student to keep them academically engaged and directed towards a high school diploma. As you can imagine, that can be challenging.

4. Students who are interested in tech center programs not offered at their assigned Technical Center can apply to other Tech Centers, but are responsible for transportation to those centers. This is an inequitable system.
5. Students who move into district during the school year, and who were formerly in a different tech center, are not guaranteed acceptance to transfer into the local tech center program. In fact, it was noted that Spaulding has not had a mid-year transfer student from a different tech center be allowed to attend a similar program at CVCC mid-year. I imagine this may be due to a variety of factors, but is unfortunate for students who may be excelling in CTE, but have to move during the school year.

In addition to these concerns, there is a great amount of confusion about how students will finish their graduation requirements at their sending schools to be able to attend CTE. The students in our school are in the same building and our counselors may have a different level of knowledge regarding how these requirements can be met. In addition, because our students are in the same building and there is no travel time between the sending school and CTE and back, our students at Spaulding High School can access the core classes and courses for graduation after their CVCC program has ended for the day.

I appreciate the consideration for CTE and the current issues facing students in accessing a career and technical education. I do hope we can find solutions to some of these issues that would allow more students to participate in the amazing programs that CTE offers.

Thank you.

Sonya Spaulding

Barre Unified Union School District