

Good Afternoon Representative Lippert and Representative Donahue,

Thank you for having the VSC in yesterday to share information on our scholarship programs and our nursing programs. The committee asked several questions that I'd like to follow up on (please see below). Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have additional questions for us.

With kind regards,

Katherine

## **NURSE EDUCATOR SALARIES**

VSC's nursing faculty, like all the system's full-time faculty, are covered by a collective bargaining agreement. This means that nursing faculty are subject to the same terms and conditions as all other faculty.

In accordance with the full-time faculty collective bargaining agreement, most faculty are hired as Assistant Professors, other than those who do not yet have the required minimum degree. In their sixth year of service, a faculty member may be considered for tenure and promotion to Associate Professor. Faculty may be considered for promotion to full professor after six years of service as an Associate Professor.

For the 2021-2022 Academic year, the minimum salary levels, as set by the bargaining agreement, are:

- Assistant Professor: \$47,000
- Associate Professor: \$57,500
- Full Professor: \$67,000

In addition, the faculty collective bargaining agreement outlines a complicated points system for compensation. Faculty are awarded "points plus base" in accordance with a formula set forth in the contract. The value of the "base" and the "points" is set by the faculty and can vary from year to year but each point is typically worth a little over \$1,000. Under the contract, nursing faculty do receive an automatic six points. Then, as with all other faculty, they are awarded additional points for advanced degrees, instructor rank, and teaching experience.

Because of the way that faculty salaries are determined, nursing faculty salaries have a wide range. The minimum degree needed to teach is a MSN. DNP and PhD are needed to teach Masters programs and for higher-level faculty positions. Below are a few salary examples:

- Assistant Professor in their first year with the minimum degree requirement, MSN: \$53,000/year at VTC
- Associate Professor with 10 years of experience and a DNP: \$75,000/year at VTC

For those positions that are strictly clinical positions that are not full time but are paid hourly, we pay the following: BSN \$35/hour (BSN nurses can fill some clinical positions for our Practical Nursing program); MSN and above \$40/hour.

Even with the six additional points Nursing faculty receive in the compensation calculation, the salaries we are able to offer are not competitive and we face significant recruitment and retention challenges.

To the Committee's question regarding how much higher salaries need to be competitive, I offer the following:

We are struggling to hire PhD and DNP level nurses to teach our Master's program at Castleton, as the starting salary (based on the experience and degrees needed to teach, and an estimate of how that translates in our points system) is \$65,000. A more competitive salary would start at \$90,000. Our ability to recruit faculty has a direct impact on our ability to accommodate more students. As we shared today, the more nurses we can bring through Masters programs in Vermont, the greater the pool of nurses with the needed credentials to teach and oversee clinical placements.

For our Associates and Bachelors programs, we struggle to recruit and retain Masters and above prepared nurses. For an Assistant Professor with a few years of teaching experience making \$60,000 under the points system, a more competitive salary might reflect the 25% increase Dr. Sarah Billings-Berg mentioned yesterday, and start at \$75,000.

### **CRITICAL OCCUPATIONS PLUS**

The Committee also requested the Critical Occupations program in writing. For reference, Act 74 funded Critical Occupations Scholarships for Vermonters enrolled in certain essential career programs at the Vermont State Colleges.

It provided: \$5,000,000 to provide free last dollar tuition (applied after state and federal gift aid to ensure no out-of-pocket tuition expenses for students) for one year of undergraduate studies for critical occupation careers, including the certificate programs identified as ["Best Bets"](#) for a good paying job within 18 months by the McClure Foundation.

The McClure Foundation "Best Bets" include:

- Bookkeeping Certificate
- IT Service Desk Specialist Certificate
- Certified Production Technician
- Graphic Design Certificate
- Computer Software Development Certificate
- Web Development Certificate
- Practical Nursing Certificate
- Electrical and Plumbing

Other programs funded include:

- Proficiency in Accounting Certificate
- Small Business Management Certificate
- Early Childhood Education (Certificate, Associates, Bachelors)
- Radiologic Science Associates
- Respiratory Therapy Associates

- Dental Hygiene Bachelors
- Paramedicine Certificate
- Nursing (Certificate, Associates, Bachelors, Masters)
- Masters in Clinical Mental Health Counseling

The Vermont State Colleges have awarded \$7.35 million to our students and prospective students in these programs in Academic Year 2021-2022 to meet student demand.

H.679, the Budget Adjustment, under consideration by the legislature, contains language to both provide the additional \$2.35 million needed to fund the full \$7.35 million expended in Academic Year 2021-2022, and funds the program again for Academic Year 2022-2023.

As you heard from Representative Fagan last week, the CO scholarship originated as both an economic tool for the state to assist Vermonters pursuing degrees in these essential fields, as well as an enrollment tool for the Vermont State Colleges.

We recognize that this is the first time that the state – and the Vermont State Colleges – have ever run a last dollar tuition program. While we tried to anticipate the challenges in advance, we inevitably ended up with a few lessons learned this year.

First, we recognize that there is overlap between the students who received a Critical Occupations Scholarship and those who received the state Nursing Scholarship through VSAC. As outlined in Act 74, while we encouraged students to accept all of their state and federal aid, we had no mechanism to hold them accountable to that this year. Now that we've seen the program run for one year, we could add a rule that students must apply for and accept, if offered it, the VSAC nursing scholarship before receiving a Critical Occupations Scholarship. The amount of the VSAC nursing scholarship would then be deducted from the Critical Occupations Scholarship regardless of whether it is applied for or accepted. In the event VSAC's nursing scholarship program runs out of funding, this provision would be waived.

A second lesson learned is that while we have *very few* students with a very large family adjusted gross income, we do have a few. In our FY2023 ask, we proposed income limits to match the income limits on the federal stimulus payments of 2021.

A final lesson learned truly brought to light an issue that impacts a significant number of our students, which is that those students seeking a second bachelor's degree are ineligible to receive federal financial aid. Many of our nursing students are second-degree seeking students who are paying significant tuition out-of-pocket with limited financial assistance. Our FY2023 proposal increases the VSC Critical Occupations funding to fully cover those students.

## **STRENGTHENING NURSING EDUCATION**

The Strengthening Nursing Education proposal reduces in-state nursing tuition at Vermont Technical College and Castleton University (soon to be unified as Vermont State University) to the national average of state institutions, or \$4,500 per semester.

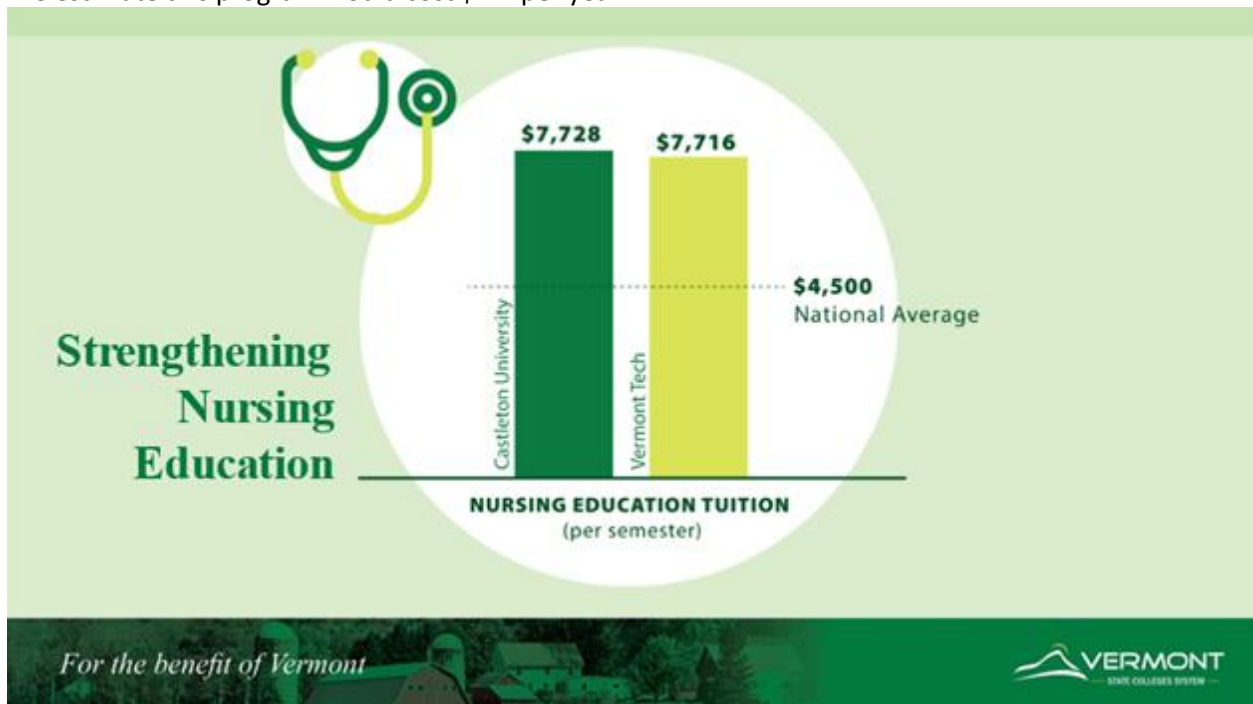
Nursing program affordability is one of the key barriers to increasing the pipeline of Vermonters seeking nursing credentials. Recognizing our key role in addressing the nursing workforce shortage in the state and acknowledging the sticker price of our nursing programs is a barrier to entry for many Vermonters, we seek to lower the overall price to attract Vermonters into this vital field of study.

With fifteen nursing sites statewide and online, our programs are accessible to Vermonters in every corner of the state and our ladderred credentials offer multiple opportunities for upskilling Vermonters at every point in their career.

Our goals are to incentivize Vermonters to pursue this career field, reduce their student debt, and assist the state in meeting this essential workforce need.

Additionally, this program would enable the VSCS to compete more readily with regional peer institutions for nursing students, encourage students to stay in-state to receive their nursing education and, through their clinical work, develop connections to Vermont health care providers.

We estimate this program would cost \$7m per year.



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