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MEMORANDUM

TO: Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing & General Affairs
House Committee on Commerce & Economic Development

FROM: Michael Harrington, Commissioner, Vermont Department of Labor
Sarah Buxton, Workforce Development Director, Vermont Department of Labor

DATE: January 19, 2023

SUBJECT: Act 183 of 2022, Sec. 5a & 13 Reports

Act 183 of 2022 required the Vermont Department of Labor to lead or support several initiatives and report back to the General Assembly on activity related to this work. This memo serves to meet the reporting requirements of the Department as outlined in Act 183.

Sec. 5a. REGIONAL WORKFORCE EXPANSION SYSTEM

The Department of Labor was directed to launch and lead a two-year pilot program to coordinate workforce expansion activities at the regional level. The Department was provided with four positions and funding to collect, develop, organize, and share information related to *regional* career pathways with workforce development partners to connect more available workers with available jobs that support their career growth goals. The specific outcomes of the workforce expansion system (WES) are to:

1. Create new capacity to address and support state activities related to workforce development, expansion, and alignment,
2. Make investments that improve and expand regional capacity to strengthen networks who assist jobseekers, workers, and employers in connecting,
3. Spotlight overarching goal of helping workers find jobs and employers find workers,

4. Support employers in communicating and tailoring their work requirements, conditions, and expectations to better access local workers,
5. Collaborate with local education and training providers and regional workforce partners to create and regularly distribute data related to local labor force supply and demand,
6. Develop systems for coordination, information sharing,
7. Support regional partners by hosting regional meetings (see 9 below), developing regional plans, and providing localized resources (see 10 and 11 below) (including labor market information (see 8 below), training and development opportunities, and support services),
8. Develop labor market information reports to support discussion and decision making that will address local labor market challenges and opportunities and support a regional approach to solving local or unique labor supply challenges,
9. Convene regional meetings of education, training, business, and service provider partners (service provider partners shall include community partners who directly serve mature workers, youth, individuals with disabilities, individuals who have been involved with the correction system, Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color Vermonters, New Americans, and other historically marginalized populations)
10. Coordinate local workforce information collection and distribution; in efforts to align service delivery, share information, and achieve greater employment outcomes for Vermonters, and
11. Assist in developing localized career resources, such as information for career counseling, local job fairs, and career expos, that will be available to a wide range of stakeholders.

The Department was asked to provide a narrative update on the progress made in hiring staff, establishing interagency agreements, and developing regional information exchange systems, and supporting state-level work to expand the labor force by January 15, 2023.

Activities Initiated and Completed

1. On September 19, 2022 Vermont Department of Labor's Economic & Labor Market Information Division released updated regional data that provides information on the distribution and concentration of jobs by career and technical education region. This is important regional data because it supports decision making about whether the education and training opportunities available at the local level match with needs of



local employers. The information was widely distributed and can be found at <http://www.vtlmi.info/cteind2022.pdf>.

2. Four workforce expansion (WE) positions were successfully requested, created, and assigned to the Department this fall. They include one WE Program Administrator and three WE Regional Coordinators. Recruitment for these positions is anticipated in early 2023. The job descriptions are as follows:

Workforce Expansion Program Administrator

- Build and oversee a statewide Workforce Expansion System (WES)
 - The WES consists of a network of regional Workforce Expansion Teams (WET) led by a regional Workforce Expansion Coordinators (WEC), whose work aligns with and carries out the workforce strategies outlined in the State Workforce Plan (SWP), the priorities of the State Workforce Development Board (SWDB), and the Department of Labor (VDOL).
- Support and supervise regional WECs.
- Provide technical assistance to the WETs.
- Facilitate state and federal level subject matter expertise to WETs.
- Represent the regional WES at statewide convenings and meetings.
- Facilitate the development and delivery of labor market information to support regional discussion, strategic planning, and decision making in addressing regional workforce expansion issues.
- Develop consensus methods of collaboration, information sharing, and stakeholder engagement as outlined in the statewide WES MOU.
- Contribute capacity to address and support state activities related to workforce development, expansion, and alignment.
- Recommend and promote investments that improve and expand regional capacity to strengthen networks who assist jobseekers, workers, and employers in connecting.
- Champion the state's overarching goal of helping workers find jobs and employers find workers.

Workforce Expansion Regional Coordinator

- Regularly convene the regional Workforce Expansion Team (WET) to develop, implement, update, and assess a regional Workforce Action Plan (WAP)
- Survey regional education and training providers to determine what state and regional information is needed to better align education and training offerings with regional employment demand and share findings with regional and statewide stakeholders



- Survey regional employers on current and projected employment demand, in coordination with statewide and regional stakeholders and share findings accordingly
- Lead the development of a regional Workforce Action Plans (WAP) that will identify methods for:
 - Gathering and sharing information about regional workforce supply and demand
 - Identifying regional barriers to employing and supporting workers
 - Creating regional strategies to mitigate barriers to employment
 - Prioritizing activities that regional partners and stakeholders wish to address collectively
 - Coordinating resource distribution to support regional priorities
 - Providing administrative, logistical, and staff support in implementing regional strategies
 - Supplying regular regional and state reports on regional workforce initiatives and action plan progress
- Facilitate activities that implement the regional plans, including projects that pilot or advance efforts to reduce barriers to employment for new or returning workers.
- Lead efforts to align the delivery of regional workforce education and training with available employment opportunities in the region, such as:
 - Identifying and assisting in meeting regional labor market information needs that will support discussion, strategic planning, and decision making in addressing regional workforce expansion issues,
 - Assisting in developing regional employment resources, such as information for career counseling, regional job fairs, and career expos, that will be available to a wide range of stakeholders,
 - Facilitating the exchange of information between regional workforce service delivery providers and employer to share information about available workers and current employment opportunities, including limited time work-based learning and training opportunities, with service providers and their clients.
 - Assisting employers in communicating and tailoring their work requirements, conditions, and expectations by connecting them subject matter expertise and resources about evolving best practices.
 - Regularly share information by newsletter, website, meeting, or other methods related to state workforce expansion efforts or other topics relevant to the WET.



Matters for Consideration

While the Department will continue to move forward with recruitment of the four positions, it is important to note that, within Act 183, the General Assembly also created the Special Oversight Committee on Workforce Expansion and Development (SOCWED) to “identify the optimal organizational structure for the Vermont workforce development system, under which a single government entity, office, or executive position is charged with the authority and duty to coordinate workforce development efforts across State government.” This work is currently underway. SOCWED testimony and findings have revealed that viable possible changes in governance responsibilities are likely to include duties currently assigned to the future staff of the Department under the WES pilot. What comes out of that work may further inform the direction of the workforce expansion pilot program, including potential for restructuring the entire program.

Sec. 13. SECONDARY STUDENT INDUSTRY-RECOGNIZED CREDENTIAL PILOT PROJECT

Section 13 directed the Department of Labor, in consultation with the Agency of Education to design and implement the Secondary Student Industry-Recognized Credential Pilot Project to provide funding for an eligible secondary student to take an eligible adult career and technical education course.

A student is eligible for funding if the student is a Vermont resident attending a Vermont public school or an independent secondary school that is eligible for public funding; has completed grade 11 and has not received a high school diploma; and the student’s secondary school and the regional CTE center determine that the student is prepared to succeed in the course, meets the prerequisites for the course, and has exhausted other sources of available funding prior to submitting an application.

A course is eligible for funding under this Pilot if it is offered at one of Vermont’s regional CTE centers as one of their adult courses, is offered during the summer, evening, or a weekend while secondary school is in session or during the summer and is included as an element of the student’s personalized learning plan (PLP) and reasonably related to the student’s career goals.



Act 183 requires that the student's secondary school complete and submit the application and a copy of the student's PLP to the Department of Labor on behalf of the student. The Department will review the application and, if appropriate, meet with the student to determine eligibility for existing federal and State programs, including Title I Youth (in-school) and the Vermont Youth Employment Program. The Department provides a copy of the application and student's PLP to the Agency of Education, who will advise the Department on other sources of funding that may be available. If the Department is not able to secure funding for the student through other sources, the Department will provide funding for the tuition cost for one course to eligible students on a first-come, first-served basis, not to exceed \$100,000 or \$20,000 to any regional CTE center.

The Department of Labor and Agency of Education are directed to report on the use of funds, information on student circumstances, levels of participation, and how local school districts are able or unable to meet the career preparation and training needs of secondary students using the program.

Interim Pilot Report

In consultation with the Agency of Education, the Department prepared and released an application of funding under this section. A video conference training was conducted in early September to help stakeholders understand the program and application process and answer any questions. The Department published a webpage with links to the bill, application, and video of the training. It can be located at <https://labor.vermont.gov/workforce-development/secondary-student-industry-recognized-credential-pilot-project>.

This program is designed as "funding of a last resort." The Department anticipated that in most cases, students will be eligible for funding outside of this pilot program. No Pilot IRC funding was used to support the students who applied. Students are either supported with Vermont Youth Employment funds, Hireability (VR funds), or WIOA funds. In several cases, applications did not meet the requirements for the Pilot IRC funds anyway, but the Department still assigned a case manager to meet the student and help them enroll outside of the parameters of this pilot. To date \$50,419 has been requested; but funds have only been released for students who have completed their course. To date, three students have either withdrawn or have not responded to case managers reaching out to help enroll and pay for their course.



In addition to its use in determining individual eligibility for funding to meet a student’s need, information collected from the application process is used to report on related policy matters and informs future decisions about use of state and federal funds related to occupational skills training for secondary students.

As of the submission of this report, 26 applications have been received. One has withdrawn and two have not responded to a VDOL case worker. Of the 26, 19 were enrolled in a secondary CTE program, seven disclosed that they had an IEP or 504 plan. Over half of the applicants came from the Cold Hollow and Northwest catchment area. No students were from the Northeast Kingdom, Greater Burlington, and Southeast Vermont areas.

- Richford High School (6)
- BFA St. Albans (4)
- Missisquoi Valley Union (4)
- Hazen Union (3)
- Hartford High School (3)
- Mount Anthony (1)
- Windsor High School (1)
- U-32 (1)
- Peoples Academy (1)
- Burr & Burton (1)
- Fair Haven UHS (1)

The receiving adult CTE centers and programs are as follows:

PROGRAMS	Adult CTE Receivers
Northwest/Welding (6)	Northwest (12)
Northwest/CDL (5)	Green Mountain (4)
Green Mountain/Welding (4)	Hartford (4)
Hartford/LNA (4)	North Country (2)
Essex Tech/ Welding (1)	Stafford (2)
North Country/ LNA (1)	Southwest (1)
North Country/ Clinical Dental Assistant (1)	Essex (1)
Northwest/ Paraeducator Training (1)	
Southwest/ LNA (1)	
Stafford/Phlebotomy (1)	



Stafford/Welding (1)

Observations

The percentage of applications for funding from Franklin County is striking. The perceived need for funding suggests that the area lacks a comprehensive understanding, strategic planning process, and resource management leadership to meet student need. For example, a well-constructed comprehensive local needs assessment (CLNA) might reveal that Northwest or Cold Hollow should consider restructuring daytime CTE programs to provide the credentials that secondary students are seeking and would be the mechanism for use of Perkins V and other local funds.

Except for three applications, most districts could have anticipated and planned to meet the resource needs of students by examining personal learning plans, surveying students themselves, and examining the comprehensive local needs assessment (CLNA). With proactive planning, most districts in the state are better positioned to use ESSA (Title II and IV), ESSR, IDEA, Perkins V and local funds more innovatively as allowed under their governing statutes. This is evidenced by a statement made in two applications for funding, when asked whether the CLNA process addressed the need for secondary students to be able to take adult CTE courses:

“Northwest Career and Technical Center CLNA did not assess the need for secondary students to access adult CTE courses so Perkins funding at NWTC does not currently allow funds to be used in this way.”¹

Almost every student was unable to submit a meaningful Personal Learning Plan (PLP) that had been developed with thoughtful consideration of their educational needs, career interests, and applicability of their secondary course choices to their post-secondary plans. Some districts noted that they didn’t have or require PLPs – despite the nearly 10 year mandate that all students grades 7-12 have one. Most applications simply included a statement from the student about why they wanted or needed the course for which they were seeking funding. Here are two examples of PLPs submitted:

“i want to be an auto mechanic after school. and to get a lot of money to do this i need to work my butt off in [name of CTE center] be on time work every time i am assigned to work. i can co-op out of school when

¹ As of the submission of this report, Northwest Career and Technical Education Center has yet to submit a Perkins V plan that is able to be approved by the Agency of Education.



i I'm a senior. I want to take a wielding class at northwestern tech i want to get experience to help me with auto" [sic]

"My career goal is to get my CDL, take over my [relative's] business, and expand. The welding course would help me in the future because I will become better welder and know more about welding." [Note: Applied for welding (not CDL) course.]

Further, at least four of the six students who disclosed a disability, IEP, or 504 plan were either not enrolled or not accessing Hireability (vocational rehabilitation services) according to their application. Importantly, when VDOL reaches out to the student for eligibility in any of our programs, we work with the student and Hireability case managers to ensure that all services are maximized. That the students with disabilities are relying on a funding source of "last resort" (i.e., this pilot program) to meet their career goals is alarming when federal and state requirements demand extensive planning, support, and funding be made available - especially in these cases. One school counselor wrote:

"I'm not sure if [Student] has a full VR case open. If so, we can look at Hireability as a funding source for [student]. If [they] don't have a full case open, multiple steps and meetings would need to take place for that to happen, and I'm not sure if there would be enough time to do so before the start of the class."

While this statement speaks to the pilot programs underlying requirement that all funding sources are exhausted, it also demonstrates that some students who need intensive supports are not getting them in a timely manner. In the case of this pilot program, at least half of the graduating (12th grade) students with disabilities who applied did not have ready access to the career access supports they are entitled to as they prepare to transition to out-of-school in a matter of months.

Conclusion

This pilot program should not be extended or made permanent. While more data will be collected in the next six months, it's already becoming clear that the existing policy and funding framework for meeting secondary students' occupational skill needs is not presently being adhered to by districts citing a need for this *new* program. By engaging in robust system planning to strengthen and reinforce continuity of services, programs, and supports, districts citing a need for new funding are likely to discover available ways to better use existing funds in a way that truly matches community needs. Creating a new, distinct program would further



disrupt the connected learning and planning processes that successful districts and regions have worked hard to achieve. The answer to the problem statement is not to standardize uncoordinated, ad hoc funding, but to promote more comprehensive and higher quality strategic coordination to ensure that available resources are used to meet the actual and real-time needs of students in the district.

