



To: Senate Committee on Education

From: Jay Nichols, Executive Director

Date: February 27, 2024

Subject: S. 304 Changes to Career and Technical Education

For the record, Jay Nichols, Executive Director the Vermont Principals' Association.

CTE directors are almost always members of the Vermont Principals' Association. In fact, per our bylaws we have one CTE leader on our Executive Council governing board. Most years, we in fact, give out a Career Center Director of the Year award and honor that individual at our Annual Leadership Academy. Further, as a superintendent, I had oversight of a career center that had two high schools from separate school districts at the time sending students to it.

Obviously, funding CTE's appropriately to provide the best access to our students as possible comes with a cost. Given the current financial education spending realities, I would be remiss if I did not mention that we need to also consider the cost we contribute from the Education Fund to private businesses, day care organizations, private schools, and religious schools, that don't all serve all children. These are all factors we need to remember when we are discussing resources in the state of Vermont.

Interim Secretary Bouchey mentioned that the AOE and CTE directors as an association statewide feel addressing financial issues before governance is the best approach. She also mentioned that the goal is to get away from actual tuitioning and look for a model that would come off the top of the Education Fund. Subject to details, we support this concept and think that is the preferred approach moving forward.

Given that background, I will provide some specific testimony to S. 304 as introduced and I thank the Committee for looking at our CTE delivery system in Vermont:

Section 1:

In terms of 16 V.S.A. § 1552, I'm not convinced that moving from a three year average to a one year average of FTE student enrollment from a school district to a CTE is the right approach. At least at this time. Typically, when you move to a year to year system there is much more vulnerability and this could adversely affect CTE's and some smaller high schools and districts. If, as a state, we are going to look thoroughly at how we fund public education, as has been discussed in this body at large, any changes to CTE funding should be part of that discussion.

Section 2:

Same thoughts as above.

Section 3:

Brief commentary on current law. I often ask myself what does "*Provide students enrolled in grades 11 and 12 with a genuine opportunity to participate fully and to benefit from career technical education.*" This is certainly a laudable goal but logistics, graduation requirements, student wishes, scheduling concerns, availability of high school staff and CTE schedules all can conspire to make full participation an elusive goal. E.G. AP biology conflicting with Medical Careers between a sending high school and a CTE. It is unlikely that the high school is going to have more than one AP biology section and the CTE just can't change its Medical Careers program based on one school's schedule ... and remember, that AP biology teacher is teaching other high school kids in other courses the rest of the day. This is an area where our very small high schools serve as a disadvantage.

The changes to law contemplated as new points 4 and 5 are fine provided the CTE's can actually make it happen. To wit, will the larger CTE's be able to handle a dozen or more middle schools visiting their designated career and technical center? How will this impact the programming of the students already there? Exposing middle school students to CTE programs is a great idea, but I'm not sure what it will look like across the state and as always I worry about passing a law, or parts of a law, that may not be implementable and/or may have an adverse impact on current CTE students. That said, getting the kids on the campus of a middle school sometime during their middle school experience is a laudable goal that we should try to accomplish.

I have similar concerns in regards to 9th and 10th graders and pretech programs. I want these students to be able to be at the Career Center. In fact, there are a number of students that would greatly benefit from CTE programming immediately as they enter high school. However, I hear all the time about CTE centers having waiting lists for the most popular programs, lack of space or financial resources to increase capacity, and lack of staffing. I would love to see a model in which 9-12 grade students would have access and opportunities to career centers - right now we don't seem to have the physical infrastructure and staffing resources to make this a reality. If systems have the staff, space, and resources to *Provide students enrolled in grades nine and 10 a genuine opportunity to participate fully in pre-tech and exploratory career and technical courses*, we fully support that goal.

Sections 4 & 5:

I would be interested in the Vermont School Boards Association thoughts on this provision of the bill as they assist school boards in developing policy. I note that in testimony earlier this month, the Agency of Education provided written testimony that they felt the timeline for many of the recommendations from Augenblick, Palaich and Associates (APA) report were unrealistic to implement and that the deadlines of August and September called for in this section were specifically problematic as pertains to the development of a comprehensive policy and report. The AOE expressed the importance of a cohesive and comprehensive approach to CTE restructuring in VT and we agree with that approach in general.

Section 6:

We agree wholeheartedly. CTE centers, along with all necessary school structures should be included in future updates to any State construction aid program.

Section 7:

I have testified recently in this committee about the desire of many in the field to move back to an independent State Board that oversees a Commissioner of Education. That said, I do think CTE oversight should belong at the Secretary or Commissioner level. This is especially true in the current context in which the State Board has very little resources to utilize to provide oversight and support for our CTE system.

We agree with point 8 of this section that would provide *alignment of the program, and other center operations, to the Agency of Education, District Quality Standards.*

Section 8:

We are OK with this transfer of duties, again with the caveat that a commissioner model with a Department of Education answering to the State Board rather than the Governor's office; is a better model than an Agency answering directly to the Administration.

Section 9:

We support the articulation agreements as set forth in this section and if anything would like to see them expand. The VPA believes that the ability to earn college credits at secondary CTE Centers is a critical tool in assisting our students in pursuing further training and/or education post high school graduation. Earning college credits and training certifications while in high school has been demonstrated to increase successful economic outcomes for students throughout their lives.

Finally, as we consider the CTE delivery system and the education delivery system in general; Vermont needs to move toward a common school calendar. We have heard from CTE Directors over the years that some students end up with as many as 20 plus missed days of school because of competing calendars. This will take leadership at the state level to accomplish as most everyone thinks a common calendar makes sense - provided it is their calendar.

