

Written Testimony to House Commerce and Economic Development Committee

From: Jody Emerson, Superintendent/Director of the Central Vermont Career Center School District (CVCCSD) and President of the Vermont Association of Career and Technical Directors (VACTED)

February 19, 2025

Good afternoon, my name is Jody Emerson and I am the Superintendent of the Central Vermont Career Center School District, a role I was given when the district was created in the Spring of 2022. Previously, I was the Associate Principal of U-32 for 8 years, and before that, a History teacher at Spaulding High School for 14 years, both sending schools to CVCC. My son is a graduate of the Randolph Technical Career Center and I, like many parents, watched my son bide his time until he could access the education that was most engaging to him.

Until my son attended a Career and Technical Education (CTE) program, I didn't really know the opportunities that exist for students in CTE, despite working in education and 14 years of working in the same building as a CTE center. The number of Industry Recognized Credentials (IRCs) and college credits that students have access to, due in large part to Perkins requirements, don't get enough recognition. That said, there could be more opportunities for our kids. Of critical importance is to find a method of funding CTE that allows collaboration and doesn't continue to pit CTE centers against high schools and CTE centers against colleges or CTE centers against each other.

The Vermont Association of Career and Technical Directors (VACTED) understands that change is needed in Vermont education. It is our priority to preserve and increase student access to Career and Technical Education and we are committed to doing so in a manner that maintains the identity of CTE in Vermont. We are willing to collaborate in support of changes to education funding and governance that support opportunities for all Vermont students to access Career and Technical Education (CTE).

Our state's CTE graduates are becoming increasingly vital as career opportunities expand across the pathways we serve. As noted in the Agency of Education's (AOE) *Listen and Learn Tour*, CTE students have higher graduation rates than our sending schools. In addition, our students have a greater likelihood of staying in Vermont and building our State's workforce. The Report regarding *Key Themes from the Listen and Learn Tour*, highlights several of our ongoing concerns regarding the barriers that students face in accessing CTE and clarifying a need to expand student access to flexible pathways such as CTE, early college and concurrent enrollment. Currently students are often forced to choose between CTE and early college or CTE and the Adult Diploma Program instead of having the capacity to access both and strengthen their future opportunities which in turn impacts programming at CTE centers.

Key Themes From the Listen and Learn Tour (Vermont Agency of Education Listen and Learn Tour). (2025, January 8). Vermont Agency of Education.

Study on the funding and governance of career technical education in Vermont. (2023, March 31). Augenblick, Palaich and Associates, Inc. and National Center on Education and the Economy.

Several VACTED members are participating in the AOE CTE Policy Sprint Team in the hopes of learning the details of the Governor's Proposal for Education Transformation, awaiting the final report from Augenblick, Palaich and Associates, Inc. (APA) and helping to inform the work with expertise from the field. The recommendations outlined in the documents accompanying this letter are based on over a decade of studies, white papers, and testimonies aimed at enhancing the impact of Vermont's CTE at a crucial time and in direct response to the 2023 APA study. APA accurately identified key areas for improvement within Vermont's CTE system. However, despite these clear areas for improvement, we still await the official report and recommendations of APA, as the consultants have been brought into the larger AOE discussion of the Governor's Proposal for Education Transformation.



Vermont Association of Career and Technical Directors

February 17, 2025

Dear Vermont Legislators,

We are excited to have the opportunity to work with you to give more Vermont students, more opportunity, to take more Career Technical Education, in their high school careers.

As we re-think public education in Vermont, we have a once-in-a-generation chance to strengthen students' pathways toward high-wage, high-skill, high-demand careers.

If we do this well, we can also strengthen Vermont, by creating authentic choices for young people who might then want to stay, and make a life for themselves, here in Vermont.

The Department of Labor projects almost 15,000 retirements a year from Vermont, with only 5,300 high school graduates across the state each year. If we do not provide strong pathways for the next generation to take up great paying jobs in Vermont, we will continue to lose them to out-of-state futures.

The Vermont Futures project recently coined the term, 'Vermont needs more people. More people need Vermont,' to support the goal of attracting 150,000 people to Vermont, to meet the goal of 802,000 Vermonters by 2035. This is the sweet spot where we begin to reduce citizen tax burden, while also maintaining what makes Vermont so special.

We at VACTED believe our own graduates need Vermont too.

Let's take this opportunity to reshape public education to ensure our graduates can thrive in our fast-growing trades, and allow our graduates to choose Vermont.

We, at VACTED, want to work with you, at this exact point in time, to ensure that Career Technical Education drives this change.

Although we are still waiting for the final report, the 2023 APA study identified key areas for improvement within Vermont's Career and Technical Education (CTE) system to do just that.

Below we detail the APA recommendations, how they relate to the Governor's currently proposed plan, and how we, at VACTED, anticipate capitalizing on the recommendations to ensure all students have access to high-wage, high-demand, high-skill careers in Vermont.

Develop Non-Competitive Funding - APA Recommendation #3

APA Recommendation: Implement funding mechanisms that foster collaboration and reduce tension between CTE programs and traditional high schools by avoiding competitive funding structures that disincentivize CTE. CTE funding should be managed independently, rather than being included in the budgets of sending schools.

Alignment: The Governor's Proposal for Education Transformation appears to pay for CTE Directly from the Ed Fund thus taking away the tuition billing directly to the sending districts, this is a move toward non-competitive funding though we are not sure how sending districts will feel about it or how it will impact competition between centers.

VACTED Recommendations:

- Provide modeling for funding based on current structure in comparison with the BOCES model being proposed to provide us with the information we need to make an informed decision.
- For those CTE centers which will lose funding in the chosen model, design a gradual, multi-year progression to the new funding model, or insure these CTE centers are grandfathered in at their current per-student formulas.

Infrastructure Plan for Facilities and Equipment Growth - APA Recommendation #2:

APA Recommendation: Develop a comprehensive plan for facilities and equipment that addresses the reduction of student waitlists and supports future growth, ensuring a robust infrastructure for Career and Technical Education (CTE).

Alignment: The Governor's Proposal for Education Transformation does not provide for school construction, and with a lack of modeling, the current finance proposal barely appears to allow our current programming to continue. Based on our current understanding of the plan, it does not provide access to more students. In order to keep up with inflation and industry needs, we need to increase the funds available for equipment growth - more TIME grant funds and/or opportunities for industry sponsorship.

VACTED Recommendation: Students cannot learn industry ready skills unless they are taught in industry aligned workspaces and on current industry equipment. Establish an annual budget, and revenue stream, for equipment purchase and refresh, and a construction budget for purpose-built CTE center construction and renovation.

Funding for Specific Programming and Distribution - APA Recommendations #1 and #9:

APA Recommendation: Effective coordination among various educational entities is crucial, demanding additional time allowing for the intricacies of implementing broader systemic changes. Programming within schools in the service region should avoid duplication and form an integral part of a well-considered, progressive career pathway—spanning from Career Awareness and Career Exploration to Career Preparation.

Alignment: While mentioned in the Governor's Proposal for Education Transformation, it requires collaboration between the CTE governance structure and the sending districts. This is a big task which relates to the Middle School component below. Currently there are no clear details on how this will occur and what it might look like.

VACTED Recommendations:

- As statewide graduation requirements are implemented, ensure CTE is included as either a stand alone requirement for all students, or as an acceptable substitute for other required graduation requirements. CTE should not be an afterthought as students plan their high school career, and should not be considered an elective.
- Ensure CTE courses are taught by licensed CTE instructors. It is critical that students exploring careers are taught by technical experts in the field, and that all industry safety protocols and expectations are affirmed throughout instruction.

Common Statewide Calendar - APA Recommendation #4:

APA Recommendation: Establish a unified professional development calendar for Career and Technical Education (CTE) staff that aligns with the statewide common school year calendar and regional schedules, ensuring equitable access for all Vermont students. Currently, many calendars do not align Professional Development Days and "Half Days." This initiative should include the implementation of common Professional Development Days across the system. Additionally, bell schedules and daily class schedules are misaligned in some CTE service regions and should be coordinated to support consistency.

Alignment: This is not part of the Governor's Proposal though it appears that the Vermont Superintendents Association was able to collaborate to develop a statewide

calendar for the 2025-2026 school year in which all vacation weeks are aligned.

VACTED Recommendations:

- Establish a statewide calendar, with common vacation days, common holidays, common professional development days, and common half-days (if needed).
- Where CTE centers share students with other high schools, require aligned daily class schedules (same period times, same alternating schedules, etc.) to ensure students can easily move between institutions.

Recognition of CTE-Embedded Academics Towards Graduation - APA

Recommendation #4:

APA Recommendation: Acknowledge and fully integrate embedded academics in technical programs as designated by the Vermont Agency of Education, including the recognition of CTE-embedded academic credits and proficiencies toward graduation. Remove barriers to access for high school students by implementing changes to the State Board Rule. Consistency in graduation requirements across the system remains a significant challenge.

Alignment: The Governor's Proposal for Education Transformation identifies this as a priority. The details for how this will happen have either not been developed or not been shared yet.

VACTED Recommendations:

- Establish state-wide graduation requirements, which include CTE.
- Establish non-negotiable CTE embedded credits/proficiencies through either a new workgroup, or through updating current language in Rule 2370.

CTE Teacher Preparation Programming and Compensation - APA

Recommendation #5:

APA Recommendation: While recent changes to the current CTE teacher preparation program have been positively received, it is crucial to maximize flexibility and creativity across all teacher preparation programs to address the looming teacher shortage, which will affect the entire system. Greater flexibility is especially needed in licensing requirements, particularly concerning the Praxis exam. Additionally, CTE teacher compensation remains a significant challenge, as it is determined through locally bargained agreements. Many educator contracts do not offer compensation that is competitive with current industry standards.

Alignment: The Governor's Proposal for Education Transformation identifies this as a priority. The details for how this will happen have either not been developed or not

been shared yet. We look forward to learning more about compensation for all CTE staff. There would need to be Collective Bargaining Agreements for paras/lab assistants, office staff, Directors & Teachers, including compensation, benefits, etc.

VACTED Recommendations:

- Establish a CTE teacher pay scale which recognizes industry experience and training, in lieu of formal college degrees.
- Establish a teacher preparation program which can be accomplished, with any level of incoming academic preparation, in two school years or less. Ensure the program requirements are limited to what a reasonable person, working full time in a new career, and with a family, can meet. Ensure programming is paid in full for all CTE instructors.

Agency of Education Staffing - APA Recommendation #6:

APA Recommendation: Adequate staffing at the Agency of Education is crucial to supporting Vermont's CTE and the broader education system. Federal requirements are consistent across states, regardless of size, which underscores the need for the AOE to maintain sufficient staffing levels.

Alignment: The Governor's Proposal for Education Transformation identifies this as a priority. The details for how this will happen have either not been developed, or have not yet been shared. We do understand that a position has been added to the CTE Division of the Agency of Education, which is a positive step forward.

VACTED Recommendation: Funding for any additional AOE staffing must be funded from a separate funding stream than CTE centers funding. Funding for this staffing should not reduce, or come out of, the foundation formula for CTE, and would be in addition to the \$25,000 per student foundation formula.

Coordination with Middle Schools and Post-Secondary - APA Recommendations #7 and #8:

APA Recommendation: To facilitate seamless coordination among various educational entities, the CTE Center must deploy skilled personnel who can strategically develop integrated pathways extending from CTE programs to middle schools in sending districts. This initiative includes enhancing early high school career awareness and exploration, representing a significant recommendation for systemic change. The position(s) should be fully funded as essential roles within Vermont CTE, supporting the smooth transition of students from Career Awareness to Career Exploration and Career Preparation.

Alignment: The Governor's Proposal for Education Transformation identifies this as a priority, and indicates that the Funding formula provides additional weight for MS students to receive Career Exploration activities using curriculum resources created &

provided by the BOCES.

VACTED Recommendation: We agree that CTE exploration in middle school is essential to ensuring Flexible Pathways for students, and increasing nontraditional students entering needed industry. As these would be new programs in the Vermont public education landscape, they would need new, dedicated funding streams, and new, dedicated staff, which would be in addition to the established foundation formula and staffing for high school CTE, and adult education programs.

Coordinated Governance Structure - APA Recommendation #10:

APA Recommendation: Thoroughly investigate and evaluate governance structures for Vermont CTE with input from stakeholders to determine the most effective CTE delivery model. The governance structure should preserve the distinct identity of CTE within the Vermont education system to maintain a strong focus on its unique mission.

Alignment: The Governor's Proposal for Education Transformation indicates a potential BOCES model for CTE governance, the details of which have not yet been released. VACTED is very concerned that without a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities in this model, CTE in VT could lose its identity and ability to be responsive to the needs of our region.

VACTED Recommendation: Until the design and funding model for this governance structure becomes transparent, it is difficult for us to craft a recommendation. At a minimum, creating a governance model which is agile and responsive to local economic needs, labor drivers, and industry trends, is essential. It is also essential that foundation formula monies are used to support CTE centers to develop and fund programs and program needs. In addition, sufficient time is needed to ensure a multi-year transition from current practice to any new structure to ensure we minimize the loss of talent, and to minimize disruption to the career pathway progression of current students. VACTED would not be in favor of moving from current practice to an interim structure, to again have to transform to a third structure in a number of years.

In response to what we know about the proposal thus far, here are the areas of benefit and challenge we have identified thus far:

Benefits:

- Common calendar and PD days
- Statewide Perkins with regional CLNA plans
- Curriculum Alignment
- Central Office focused on CTE
- Business Office focused on CTE and the related Federal Requirements
- Alignment in Admissions Process

- Alignment in outcomes/graduation requirements met by CTE

Challenges/Concerns:

- Competition for resources amongst CTE centers
- Alignment across 17 centers may be significant changes
- Reporting structure? Reporting to BOCES Executive Director or Comprehensive High School or ...
- Transportation and transportation resources (deliberate design & resources requirement)
- CBA for paras, lab assistants, office staff, Directors - Teachers compensation, benefits, etc.
- Lack of definition of Comprehensive High School
- Location of Central Office
- Loss of programs at CTE centers
- Poor labor relations during transition, or as a result of this plan, which cause centers to lose technical experts
- Concern about ability to hire experts to deliver on promised services
- Skepticism about cost savings in this model

Questions:

- Will the funding for education change from property tax to something else?
- Double transition if moving to BOCES and then Comprehensive High School?
- Defining a Comprehensive High School and how to transition to that?
- How do we maintain the identity of CTE?
- How are funds distributed by the BOCES?

Our state's CTE system graduates are becoming increasingly vital as career opportunities expand across the pathways we serve. The recommendations outlined in this letter are based on over a decade of studies, white papers, and testimonies aimed at enhancing the impact of Vermont's Career and Technical Education at a crucial time.

VACTED eagerly anticipates collaborating with all stakeholders to shape the future of CTE in Vermont and we await the details of the Governor's Proposal for Education Transformation, the final report from APA and the next steps from the Legislature. ***It is our priority to enhance student access to Career and Technical Education*** and are committed to doing so in a manner that maintains the identity of Vermont CTE.

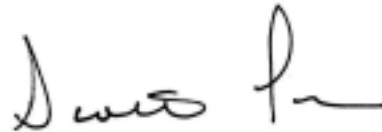
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Respectfully,



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