

TESTIMONY

Testimony To: The Vermont General Assembly

Respectfully Submitted by: The Vermont Agency of Education

Subject: Career Technical Education Transformation

Date: January 14, 2026

Aspirational Vision

Vermont aspires to a future where every young person—no matter where they live—can discover their strengths, pursue their interests, and graduate ready for college, careers, and life. We envision an education system where learning is meaningful, hands-on, and connected to the real world; where students feel purpose and belonging; and where the pathway from school to adulthood is clear and full of possibility.

To achieve this future, Career and Technical Education (CTE) will evolve from a specialized experience available only to a few into an integrated, statewide opportunity available to all. CTE will not be something students “opt into” if they are lucky enough to live near a center. It will be part of the foundation of Vermont’s public education system: embedded in middle schools, expanded in high schools, and deeply connected to postsecondary learning and Vermont’s economy. Students will no longer be forced to choose between “academic” or “technical” identities. Instead, they will have access to rich pathways that blend rigorous academics, applied learning, and authentic experiences in classrooms, labs, studios, job sites, and college campuses.

In this future, Vermont’s public schools evolve into state-of-the-art regional comprehensive high schools, where technical centers are infused into the school experience itself. Students no longer need to rely on physical proximity to a tech center to access high-quality learning. Instead, technical programs, advanced labs, and industry-aligned pathways become embedded in the daily life of the school—expanding opportunity for students across the state. This is how Vermont moves toward a system where every student can participate in relevant, future-oriented learning regardless of geography.

To ensure that physical access does not determine opportunity, transportation will become part of a larger regional district approach under new statewide equity parameters. This ensures students can reliably reach learning sites even before comprehensive regional high schools are fully built. In the near term,



transportation will be incorporated into existing regional and district systems so students can access labs, internships, college programs, and technical coursework. Over time, as the state transitions toward comprehensive regional high schools where academic and technical programs are co-located, transportation demands will shift from moving students between sites to supporting deeper employer and postsecondary partnerships.

In this future, a seventh grader in the Northeast Kingdom can tinker with robotics or explore the science of agriculture and food systems; a ninth grader in Brattleboro can learn about cybersecurity or clean energy; and a junior in Rutland can earn college credits, credentials, and industry seals that signal readiness for high-demand careers. Students graduate not just with diplomas, but with future-ready skills—communication, collaboration, problem-solving, digital literacy, technical proficiency, and the confidence that comes from doing real work in real spaces.

As students gain exposure to different industries and ideas, they begin to imagine futures they may never have known existed. Engagement increases, attendance improves, and learning feels purposeful. Teachers benefit from higher motivation and deeper learning. Families see their children come home excited about school. Employers meet young people who are curious, capable, and prepared to contribute. And Vermont benefits from a stronger connection between its schools and its future economy.

Of course, building this vision will take time. **State-of-the-art regional comprehensive high schools require thoughtful infrastructure planning and investment.** But that is precisely why Vermont must **stage the work now:** by implementing a **coherent governance model, quality standards, and delivery framework** that expand opportunities immediately—while we plan, design, and build the facilities and systems that will serve Vermont for generations. We cannot wait for buildings to be finished before we create pathways. Students need access now, and we have the ability to begin that work through smarter organization, stronger program quality, and deeper alignment with employers and postsecondary partners today.

Policy Components to Support the Vision

To move from vision to reality, Vermont will need a set of coordinated policy components that modernize CTE delivery, ensure quality and coherence statewide, and expand opportunity for students now while infrastructure planning unfolds. These components are mutually reinforcing and designed to evolve over time.

1. Statewide Governance and Delivery Through a CTE Education Service Agency (ESA)

Vermont will establish a statewide Education Service Agency (ESA) for CTE to provide unified leadership, high-quality program delivery, and system design that is focused on students, statewide needs, and coherence across learning environments. Under this model:

- The ESA will be responsible for delivering high-quality CTE educational programs statewide, ensuring that every learner—regardless of setting—has access to rigorous, relevant, and well-supported applied learning experiences. The Agency of Education will be authorized to create the ESA and will be responsible for ensuring the quality of the CTE system in Vermont.
- The ESA will employ CTE educators and manage professional learning, curriculum design, instructional support, and program oversight to ensure consistent quality and alignment to Vermont's workforce and postsecondary goals.
- The ESA will oversee CTE programming across all delivery settings, including CTE centers, regional high schools, and middle schools, ensuring access to high-quality applied learning for all students.
- CTE programs co-located at independent schools will be determined by school choice parameters and approved programmatic need.
- Because the ESA functions as a statewide delivery system, students will no longer depend on geography, district capacity, or standalone technical centers to access high-quality CTE opportunities.

In short, the ESA provides the delivery and governance backbone that makes CTE a truly statewide system—ensuring that quality, access, and alignment do not vary by region or delivery model.

This governance shift is essential to ensuring that students do not depend on geography or local capacity for access.

2. Quality, Curriculum, and Accountability Framework

To ensure students receive high-quality applied learning experiences regardless of location, the ESA will establish and oversee a coherent statewide quality framework that addresses curriculum, instruction, program approval, and continuous improvement. Under this framework, the ESA will:

- Ensure that curricula are aligned to industry standards, current labor market needs, credentialing pathways, and postsecondary expectations so that students graduate with relevant and future-ready skills.
- Provide professional learning, instructional coaching, and technical assistance to educators to support high-quality program delivery in middle schools, high schools, and CTE centers.
- Conduct program review, approval, and closure decisions in coordination with state policy to ensure offerings remain high-quality, up-to-date, and responsive to Vermont's economic sectors.
- Coordinate student services—including special education, multilingual learners, and equitable access—to ensure that all students can participate fully in CTE pathways.
- Convene statewide, program-specific advisory boards (e.g., aviation, advanced manufacturing, healthcare, cybersecurity) to advise on curriculum relevance, equipment and safety standards, credential and certification opportunities, and emerging sector needs
- Partner with employers, colleges, and sector leaders to validate program relevance, expand work-based learning, and align credential and credit opportunities.

This quality framework ensures that a student's educational experience is rigorous, industry-informed, and transferable, no matter where they access CTE.

3. Expansion of Middle School & Early High School Exposure

A modern CTE system must begin earlier, providing students with opportunities to explore careers, develop interests, and understand pathways before making critical postsecondary decisions. To support this, Vermont will expand CTE exposure in grades 6–10 with a clear division of roles and responsibilities:

- The ESA will be funded to provide statewide training and curriculum support to ensure that middle schools and high schools can offer high-quality CTE exposure experiences aligned to labor market needs, emerging sectors, and graduation requirements.
- The instructional and staffing positions in middle and high school associated with CTE exposure will continue to be funded through the statewide foundation formula, ensuring that districts maintain responsibility for delivering exposure experiences as part of the core educational program.
- The ESA will design and disseminate curricular resources, model units, and instructional supports that integrate applied learning, career awareness, and foundational technical skill development.
- To support informed student decision-making, the ESA will provide training for school counselors and career coordinators to strengthen career navigation,

advising, and pathway planning, ensuring students and families understand postsecondary options, credentials, and emerging local workforce opportunities.

This model ensures that early exposure becomes consistent, high-quality, and accessible statewide, while preserving district responsibility for delivery and integrating CTE into the broader PK–12 foundation of Vermont’s education system

4. Integrated PK–12 Delivery Model

While comprehensive school facilities take time to plan and build, Vermont will begin transforming systems now by:

- Infusing CTE programming into all high schools and middle schools, expanding access to applied learning, career exposure, and technical pathways wherever students are enrolled—not only at current tech centers.
- Positioning the CTE ESA as agnostic to any future changes in PK–12 district structure, ensuring the statewide CTE system remains coherent, consistent, and student-centered regardless of local governance reforms.
- Evaluating the budgetary needs required to outfit and maintain lab spaces, technical classrooms, and equipment, and aligning Perkins and other federal/state resources accordingly to support modernization, industry relevance, and safety in learning environments.
- Coordinating transportation so that students can seamlessly access work-based learning, early college, industry credentials, and specialized programs, even as physical infrastructure evolves over time.
- Partnering with postsecondary institutions and employers to create a regional ecosystem of labs, studios, dual enrollment opportunities, and credential pathways that connect students to future education and careers.

This approach reduces reliance on proximity to stand-alone centers and lays the groundwork for state-of-the-art regional comprehensive high schools where academic and technical learning coexist.

5. Statewide Funding Model to Support Universal Access

To support a statewide CTE delivery system, Vermont will establish a coherent, equitable funding model that stabilizes current operations and enables phased improvement over time. Under this model:

- The CTE ESA will receive a unified statewide appropriation, replacing fragmented per-pupil or tuition-based funding and providing predictable system-

level financing consistent with current statewide CTE spending levels (estimated at \$70–\$75M)

- In consultation with districts and centers, the ESA will develop program-aligned budgets based on actual instructional, equipment, and workforce priorities rather than enrollment-based mechanisms, ensuring consistent access for students and reducing financial pressure on districts.
- Federal resources—including Perkins funds—will be strategically aligned at the statewide level to modernize labs, equipment, credentialing, and work-based learning infrastructure in support of Vermont’s workforce priorities.
- Districts will not be required to pay individual CTE tuition or reallocate local budgets to provide access, reducing inequities created by geography, enrollment, and fiscal capacity.
- Funding for transportation will be contemplated as part of a larger preK-12 education system to maximize resources and increase efficient delivery of services. Considerations for transportation equity and access are outlined in [Legislative Report: Transportation Reimbursement Guidelines](#).
- This model is transitional, not permanent: as the system matures, Vermont retains the option to integrate CTE into a broader foundation formula or adopt alternative models without destabilizing student access or employer partnerships. An initial evaluation of the ESA and funding model could be conducted in concert with the 5-year evaluation of the foundation formula’s base and weights required in Section 35 (h) of [Act 73](#).

In short: statewide funding enables Vermont to improve service delivery now, expand equitable access, and support long-term facilities planning while avoiding increased burdens on local districts.

6. Transition Pathway and Implementation Timeline

A staged implementation approach will ensure stability for students, consistency for educators, and clarity for employers and postsecondary partners. This approach recognizes that governance, quality, and delivery reforms must begin **before** new infrastructure can fully materialize.

Legislative and Organizational Timeline

- Fall of 2026:
The General Assembly directs the Agency of Education to establish the statewide CTE Education Service Agency (ESA), including development of governance, staffing plans, quality frameworks, and transition protocols.

- Fall of 2027:
The Executive Director (ED) of the ESA is hired. Upon hire, the ED will immediately:
- Convene statewide, program-specific advisory boards (e.g., aviation, advanced manufacturing, health sciences, cybersecurity) to validate curriculum standards, equipment needs, credential pathways, and sector priorities.
- Launch system design, stakeholder engagement, and operational planning.
- December 2027:
The Executive Director hires ESA central office staff, builds organizational capacity, finalizes quality and curriculum frameworks, and initiates coordination with CTE centers, LEAs, postsecondary partners, and employers.
- July 1, 2028: “Go live” date on which the ESA takes legal and operational responsibility for CTE education.

Phased Approach to Budgeting, Management, and Service Delivery

To ensure orderly expansion and continuous improvement, Vermont will implement a phased rollout across two school years:

Phase 1 — School Year 2028–2029: “Stand-Up & Strengthen”

During SY 2028–29, the ESA will:

- Manage its first unified statewide CTE budget, reflecting current system costs and aligned program delivery.
- Strengthen and standardize program quality, curriculum alignment, and professional development.
- Improve student services coordination, equitable access, and data collection.
- Utilize advisory board guidance to update program standards and equipment priorities.

This year focuses on standing up the ESA as an operational statewide delivery and quality system and improving current service delivery.

Phase 2 — School Year 2029–2030: “Expand & Modernize”

During SY 2029–30, the ESA will:

- Expand pre-technical exposure and coursework to middle schools and non-center high schools, with training, curriculum support, and counselor development for career navigation.

- Launch new or modernized programs at existing CTE centers based on advisory board input and workforce needs.
- Evaluate future program needs, emerging sectors, and regional capacity to inform long-term infrastructure planning.
- Align workforce sector strategies, credential opportunities, and postsecondary pathways in partnership with employers and colleges.

This phase focuses on expanding access upstream (grades 6–10), adding new programs, and planning future infrastructure needs.