

## Testimony Regarding H.480

*Prepared for the Vermont Senate Committee on Education*

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)

Date: May 19, 2025

Chair Bongartz and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on H.480, particularly as it relates to its implications for regional Career and Technical Education (CTE) centers. While I appreciate the intent behind the bill to expand access to CTE programming across the state; I have several concerns regarding transportation, student placement, and inter-center coordination that I respectfully submit for your consideration.

### 1. Transportation Responsibilities and Associated Costs

One of the most pressing concerns relates to the provision in Section (c), which states:

*"Beginning in the 2025–2026 school year, a regional CTE center may provide transportation to and from the technical center for students residing outside the technical center's service region..."*

The word "may" suggests this is optional; however, the broader context implies that centers may be expected to assume this responsibility. This is not a service we currently provide, nor do all centers have the infrastructure or funding to do so.

- Budgetary impact: FY26 budgets are already finalized. Adding new transportation obligations now would result in a significant unfunded mandate.
- Operational challenges: Many districts have limited transportation fleets and a shortage of qualified drivers. In rural regions, distances can be vast, and extending daily routes would be extremely difficult.
- Cost concerns: Contracting private transportation services is often cost-prohibitive and introduces safety concerns, especially if providers are not thoroughly background-checked.
- Illustrative example: BTC currently has students from Lamoille and Randolph attending their Aviation program. While they manage attendance because of flexible schedules, if they were required to transport them, the cost would exceed the tuition they receive for each student.

### 2. Student Placement: Denials, Waitlists, and Timing

Another area of concern relates to the provisions around student movement between centers, specifically when students are denied entry or are on waitlists:

*"...students were denied entry to their assigned CTE center..."*

It's important to clarify that being denied entry is not the same as being waitlisted. In our experience, students who are denied admission often do not meet the academic, behavioral, or attendance expectations required for successful participation. It is unlikely that these students would meet the criteria for other centers, either.

- Waitlists are dynamic: They shift significantly throughout the summer. For example, programs that had long waitlists in April may now have only a few students remaining due to changes in student decisions.
- Program stability: Some programs (e.g., Electrical & Plumbing, Health Careers, Cosmetology) rarely see movement and may be appropriate for this policy. Others change daily until the school year begins.
- Suggested revision: Consider aligning the timeframe with that used in Adult Education programming, allowing students on waitlists near the start of the school year to enroll in another center with available space. This would be a more practical and equitable approach.

### 3. Need for Common Admissions Practices and Communication

In discussions from the CTE Admissions Work Group, there was support for establishing shared admissions practices across centers. I want to emphasize the importance of transparent communication between centers regarding student applications.

- Communication between centers for students who have not yet enrolled may constitute FERPA violations.
- For example, centers have declined to admit students with excessive absences, sometimes missing 30+ days in a semester, due to concerns about reliability and readiness. Without a communication system in place, such students could be admitted elsewhere without that history being known.
- A statewide admissions portal or tracking system could help ensure consistent decision-making and student accountability.

### 4. Clarification on Private School Students

Finally, clarification is needed on how this legislation applies to students attending private high schools that are located closer to one CTE center but are officially assigned to another based on their town of residence. It is unclear how transportation, enrollment, and funding mechanisms would function in these cases.

### Conclusion

I fully support increasing access to high-quality CTE programs across Vermont. However, I urge the Legislature to consider the fiscal, logistical, and equity implications of H.480 as currently written. Without additional resources and clear implementation guidelines, this bill could place unsustainable burdens on regional centers and create unintended inequities for both students and programs.

Further, none of what has been proposed in H. 480 was part of VACTED's recommendations, presented as recently as March 27, 2025, where we stated:

The Vermont Association of Career and Technical Education Directors (VACTED) understands that change is needed in Vermont education. Our priority is preserving and increasing student access to Career and Technical Education (CTE) while maintaining its identity. Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts regarding how to make CTE the most successful possible.

### **Recommendations:**

- Provide a non-competitive funding model.
- Provide students the opportunity to learn 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 the purpose-built CTE center construction and renovation.
- Establish state-wide graduation requirements, which include CTE.
- Establish a statewide calendar with common vacation days, holidays, and professional development.
- 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.
- Establish a CTE teacher pay scale that recognizes industry experience and training, instead of formal college degrees.
- Establish a teacher preparation program that 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.

Thank you for your time and attention to these concerns. I would be happy to answer any questions or provide further clarification.