
TESTIMONY

Testimony To: Senate Education Committee

Respectfully Submitted by: Zoie Saunders, Secretary of Education

Subject: Career Technical Education and proposed amendments to H.480

Date: May 20, 2025

Background

The Agency of Education has reviewed Senators Hardy, Collamore, Heffernan, Weeks, and Williams' amendment to H.480 relating to Students Attending a CTE Center Outside Their Service Region.

The Agency shares the Senators' goals of increasing access to CTE programs for students who are unable to enroll in a CTE program in their designated CTE service region. We will provide context about why portions of the proposed amendment are not needed, given existing provisions in statute and rule. We will also share recommendations for strengthening Vermont's CTE funding and governance systems that were first articulated in a study that the Joint Fiscal Office contracted for, at the request of the General Assembly, in 2023 and that have been further expanded upon in a second study report issued in February 2025. The goals that we believe underlie the proposed amendment are ones that we share and look forward to addressing together.

Statutory and Regulatory Provisions that Inform AOE's Response to the Proposed Amendment

Currently, 16 VSA §1541(a) provides that "A school board of a sending district that offers public education in grade 11 or 12 shall: (3) If the career technical center for the region does not offer a course of study desired by a student, pay tuition on behalf of that student who applies and is accepted to another career technical center that does offer such a course of study. The district of residence is not responsible for providing transportation for a student attending a career technical center under this subdivision."

State Board of Education Rule 2374.3.A. further provides that "Secondary students may apply for enrollment into programs offered outside their service region when the center in their service region does not offer the program in which they wish to enroll or they are not able to enroll in the program of their choice. The school district of the student's residence shall pay tuition



for that enrollment. Districts shall not be required to provide transportation to and from the technical center selected by the student.”

16 VSA §1563 addresses transportation assistance:

“(a) It is the policy of the General Assembly to encourage Vermont students to enroll in career technical education courses. In furtherance of that policy, transportation assistance is provided for in this section to facilitate the enrollment of Vermont students in career technical education programs.

(b) Transportation assistance shall be paid from the Education Fund to school districts that provide transportation to and from career technical education programs, regardless of whether the program is offered in a career technical center in the district’s designated service region or regions or is offered within the career technical center region at a location other than at a career technical center. Assistance shall be \$1.50 per mile for actual number of miles traveled, in 1998 dollars adjusted annually by the annual price index for state and local government purchases of goods and services. Payments shall be made on or before December 10 and June 10. Requests submitted on or following May 15 shall be reimbursed in the next payment.

(c) The State Board may adopt rules necessary to implement this section.”

The Agency of Education has determined that §1563’s provisions apply to CTE centers that provide transportation to students within and/or beyond their designated service region. This information was most recently shared with Orange Southwest School District/Randolph Technical Career Center and Central Vermont Career Center District, as they plan for the 2025 – 2026 school year.

In light of these provisions, the Agency maintains that items (b) and (c) in the proposed amendment are not needed, as the existing statutory and regulatory framework provides the access this amendment seeks to ensure.

Item (d) in the amendment refers to the tuition reconciliation process set forth in State Board of Education Rule 2393. Rule 2393 addresses deficits and surpluses in excess of 3% of net costs:

“1. Surplus

If sending districts have paid tuition in excess of 3% of net costs for the prior year they shall be credited that amount toward their current year assessment in proportion to their contribution or, if they do not have an assessment sufficient to use the credit, the board of the receiving district shall refund that amount to the sending districts by July 31 of the current fiscal year. Interest shall begin to accrue on the refund on December 1, at the rate of one-half percent per month.

2. Deficit

If the receiving district has under-assessed tuition by 3% or more of net costs, the sending districts shall pay the amount of the underassessment. If payment is

not made by July 31 of the year following the year of the underassessment, interest shall be owed the sending district at the rate one half percent per month starting the next day, August 1.”

As currently written, it does not appear that State Board of Education Rule 2393 provides a mechanism to reconcile differences in tuition charged by the CTE center in a sending district’s designated region and the tuition of a CTE center outside of the designated region.

Those differences in tuition can be significant. For example, for the 2024 – 2025 school year, the announced tuition for Patricia A. Hannaford Career Center is \$31,936 per full time equivalent student. The announced tuition for Stafford Technical Center is \$21,306.

More broadly, CTE tuition for the 2024 – 2025 school year ranges from \$13,900 at Northwest Career and Technical Center to \$31,936 at Patricia A. Hannaford Career Center.

We further note that the amendment seeks to require districts that maintain secondary schools to provide directory information of enrolled students to a CTE center outside their designated service region when their designated CTE center has a waitlist for enrollment, when students were denied entry to their assigned CTE center or a program operated by their assigned CTE center, or when a student has interest in a program not offered at the student’s assigned CTE center. While that may be a requirement that the General Assembly could impose on LEAs, it is not a requirement that could be imposed on CTE centers directly. Students who apply to the CTE center in their designated service region and are not accepted are not enrolled at the CTE center, and therefore, their information would not be directory information for the CTE center and could not be directly shared between CTE centers without parent/guardian permission.

Strengthening Vermont’s CTE System and Increasing Student Access to CTE

Vermont’s CTE system has multiple regional governance structures and a rather complex funding model. Multiple studies of the state’s CTE system have been conducted over the past several decades, including those required by Act 51 of the 2015 session, Act 189 of the 2018 session, and Act 80 of the 2019 session.

Augenblick, Palaich and Associates, Inc. (APA) has conducted the two most recent studies on the governance and funding of CTE over the past two years:

- March 2023 Act 127 report, *Study on Funding and Governance Structures of Career Technical Education in Vermont*¹, conducted for the legislature.

¹ <https://lifo.vermont.gov/assets/Uploads/f97d32b9a4/Final-CTE-Study-Report-3.31.23.pdf>

- February 2025 report, *Vermont Career and Technical Education Governance and Funding Recommendations*², conducted for the Agency of Education.

The 2023 report, contracted for by the Joint Fiscal Office at the request of the General Assembly, identified 10 recommendations in three overarching areas: **CTE system governance, funding, and larger systems changes**. The recommendations assume CTE is a key part of the workforce development system to meet evolving state workforce needs:

- The recommendations focused on reducing barriers to enrollment and improving the quality of CTE, along with meeting Vermont's workforce needs;
- Many of the recommendations are related to two overarching themes identified in the study team's work that impact not only CTE, but other areas of Vermont's K-12 system: alignment and economies of scale; and
- Recommendations included options for a more centralized CTE governance system and potential changes to the CTE funding system.

The 2025 report provided specific implementation recommendations to AOE based on the 10 recommendations from the 2023 legislative study, with considerations after additional reviews and analysis. The two primary recommendations in this most recent study are:

- Vermont should shift to a **single CTE district** to oversee CTE programs across the state; and
- Vermont should provide **student-centered CTE funding that eliminates tuition from sending districts**, through a Per Student (CTE FTE) Cost or weight.

The extent of study related to Vermont's CTE system over the years highlights the opportunity to explore making changes to the CTE governance system. The most recent studies have recommended **re-thinking Vermont's CTE governance and funding systems to better support students, CTE centers, and state workforce needs**.

As the state considers transformation of the overall K-12 system, both how the system is constituted and funded, it is important to incorporate CTE as it is an integral part of that system, while also a bridge to workforce and postsecondary education.

A critical next step is to focus on how to re-think the governance of CTE to provide more equitable access, improve program quality and better enable strategic alignment with state workforce priorities across the system.

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<https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2026/Workgroups/House%20Commerce/Technical%20Education/Agency%20of%20Education/W~Zoie%20Saunders~Vermont%20Career%20and%20Technical%20Education%20Governance%20and%20Funding%20Report~2-27-2025.pdf>

Given the complexity of the existing system, the findings of the two APA Consulting studies, and the concerns that led to the creation of the amendment being discussed today, the Agency looks forward to working with the General Assembly during the 2026 session to create systemic and holistic changes and address the current inequities and inefficiencies in our CTE system to more fully support our collective shared goal of increasing student access to CTE programs. The Agency started this conversation with the House Commerce and Economic Development Committee this session, and we look forward to expanding on that work, in collaboration with you, to address the barriers that we all recognize need to be overcome.