

Subject: Addressing Critical Challenges in Vermont's Career and Technical Education System

Dear Senate Education Committee,

My name is **Scott D. Farr**, and for the past 21 years, I have served as the Assistant Director and Superintendent/Director of the **River Valley Technical Center** in Springfield, Vermont. We serve students from **Springfield High School, Green Mountain Union High School, Bellows Falls Union High School**, and **Fall Mountain Regional High School** in New Hampshire, along with private school and homeschool students.

Our center provides Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs to approximately **350 students in grades 9-12**, including **Pre-Technical Foundation and Pre-Technical Exploratory Programming** to maximize early access for 9th and 10th graders. Additionally, we run a **comprehensive middle school program** featuring:

- On-campus visits for **7th and 8th graders**
- A **summer tech camp**
- **After-school CTE awareness and exploratory programming** ("Tech Time")
- A thriving **robotics club**, "River Valley RADs," which has grown from **5 students to nearly 40** in just over two years, competing in **FIRST Robotics** and aerial drone competitions.

Additionally, our students, like most centers, report a very high degree of student satisfaction with their experience with us. With more than 90 % positive feedback on our Annual Student Satisfaction Survey that is part of Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment.

I have been asked by legislators in my region, what can we do now to support Vermont Career and Technical Education. So, I have list informed by correspondence the Vermont Association of Career and Technical Education Directors has put together to our stakeholders.

Key Challenges Facing Vermont's CTE System

The **Vermont Association of Career and Technical Education Directors (VACTED)** has raised serious concerns about recent policy and funding changes that jeopardize the sustainability of CTE programs across the state.

1. Decrease in Base Education Rate

The recent **3% reduction** in Vermont's base education rate has introduced significant financial challenges for CTE centers. This change impacts the funding formula, leading to **reduced allocations from the Education Fund and increased tuition costs for sending schools**. As a result, CTE centers are facing **budget shortfalls, potential program cuts, and financial strain on sending schools**.

At **River Valley Technical Center**, we are now confronting:

- A **20% increase in assessments** for our sending school partners or
- The need to **reduce programs** to address a **\$190,000 revenue loss**

Over the past decade, we have already **reduced staffing by 27%** due to declining enrollment and have used **reserves and Budget Adjustment Act funds** to mitigate the pandemic's financial impact. Additionally, the **six-semester average enrollment calculation**—which still reflects lower student numbers from the COVID-19 period—limits our ability to bill for current, **higher enrollments**.

A seemingly **arbitrary 3% decrease** in the base rate has forced difficult decisions, despite our efforts to operate efficiently and follow prior **recommendations from Governor Scott**, such as reducing staff through attrition.

2. Increased Administrative Burdens for Dual Enrollment

VACTED is concerned about new dual enrollment requirements under Vermont's Perkins V quality measures, which add significant administrative burdens for students, teachers, and counselors. Students must now align their dual enrollment courses with their Personalized Learning Plan (PLP) and demonstrate preparedness, while school coordinators must provide additional documentation of their academic and social-emotional readiness. Though intended to support student success, these requirements strain CTE centers, which process 65 to 300 dual enrollment courses annually, especially given the inconsistency in PLP management across high schools.

3. Exclusion of Adult Students from CTE Programs

Recently, Vermont's Agency of Education ruled that students in adult education programs cannot enroll in CTE while earning a diploma outside of high school, citing federal regulations. However, this contradicts Vermont's own CTE rules and regulations, and disregards the long-standing practice of serving students over 16 in ungraded settings, and predates both Acting Secretary Saunders' tenure and the Trump Administration.

4. Early College Students Barred from CTE Enrollment

Another policy decision by the **Agency of Education** prohibits **Early College students from simultaneously enrolling in CTE programs or high school courses**. This **all-or-nothing approach** prevents students from blending Early College with CTE coursework, even when both align with their postsecondary goals. The Community College of Vermont, from meetings I have had with them, is open to the concept of more flexibility for students.

For example, we recently **lost six students** from our **Health Sciences Program** because they chose Early College but still wanted to complete their CTE training. This **rigid policy** forces students to choose between two valuable educational pathways when they should be able to pursue both.

VACTED's Recommendations

To support Vermont's CTE students and programs, we propose the following:

1. **Freeze the Base Education Rate**
 - Maintain last year's base rate to **prevent financial instability** and avoid unnecessary program cuts or tuition increases for sending schools.
2. **Simplify Dual Enrollment Processes**
 - Introduce a **streamlined option** in the dual enrollment system (e.g., a simple dropdown menu for "CTE center") to **reduce unnecessary administrative burdens**.
3. **Allow Adult Students to Enroll in CTE Programs**
 - Students **should be permitted to take CTE courses** while working toward their diploma in an adult education program.
4. **Permit Early College Students to Enroll in CTE Programs**
 - Allow students to **split their course load between Early College and CTE/high school classes**, enabling them to pursue career-aligned education.

Conclusion

Vermont's CTE system is essential to workforce development, student success, and economic growth. Addressing funding and policy challenges will ensure that CTE centers continue providing high-quality, career-focused education to Vermont students. I urge the legislature to closely examine the initial recommendations from the APA Study of Vermont CTE and use them as a foundation for legislation that expands access to Career and Technical Education. At a time when our graduates are in high demand across the state, strengthening CTE is more important than ever.

Thank you for your time and attention to these critical issues.

Respectfully,

Scott D. Farr

Superintendent/Director

River Valley Technical Center