

## Written Testimony to Senate Education Committee

From: Melissa Connor, Director of Stafford Technical Center – Rutland, Vermont

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### My Background

Good afternoon. My name is Melissa Connor and I am the Director of the Stafford Technical Center in Rutland, Vermont. Thirty years ago, I began my work in CTE here in Vermont. I have served as a teacher of Business Education and Assistant Director at the Technical Center at Springfield, now the River Valley Technical Center, and for the past 10 years as the Assistant Director and Director at Stafford. While working in Springfield I experienced two governance models – a host district with Springfield School District and the transition to an Independent CTE School District. Stafford operates under the host district model with Rutland City Schools being our host district.

I appreciate the shift in focus on what would make a successful CTE district.

### Recommendations for a Successful CTE System

#### Curriculum

1. Common high school graduation requirements so that students that choose to attend a CTE center are not faced with unnecessary barriers in meeting graduation requirements.
2. Statewide recognition of the credits that are offered as part of a state approved CTE program by our partner high schools. CTE centers currently recommend credit and the partner high school has the final decision. We do not question the credits their students come to us with and they should not be questioning ours as part of a state approved program.

3. All CTE programs in the state have state approved standards for their technical program. We need additional alignment, in my opinion, on how we are assessing proficiency for each of these standards through a calibration process.

## Funding

1. Modeling of the proposed funding system for each CTE center so that we can make thoughtful decisions on how our centers will be funded and the possible impacts of this change. We need a system in which our partner high schools are not negatively impacted when a student chooses CTE as their path. The foundation formula may work but I need to see the actual impact on our existing budget – what would it look like if we switched for the FY26 budget and what impact would it have on our partner high school budgets.

## Staffing

1. A salary schedule for our CTE instructors/staff that are comparable to the industry standard so that we can hire and retain highly qualified instructors for our programs.
2. Middle school career exploration that is planned, purposeful with clear expectations & outcomes, and with roles, CTE staff vs middle school staff, clearly defined.

## Governance

1. A CTE focused “central office” that truly understands the ins and outs of CTE , CTE funding, and CTE regulations.
2. Regional work on the Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment that allows for the personality and needs of each center/region to be highlighted. This should be a self-reflective process that is part of the fabric of what we do

each year at our centers so that we are in a constant cycle of reflection and improvement.

3. Center-based Regional Advisory Boards, or the like, that are regionally focused and have a clear purpose. The RAB at Stafford has 24 members plus 3 student representatives. Our by-laws require that we have 51% industry representation, a post-secondary rep, Superintendents and school board members from each of our partner high schools, along with 3 student members. We have 4 sub-committees (Program, Finance, Outreach, and Adult Education) that are work & goal oriented and align with the work needed through the CLNA and our strategic plan for our school. While this may seem like a large board, it is manageable because of the committee structure where the real work happens and is then brought back to the full board for consideration and conversation.

## Calendar

1. Common statewide professional development days for all CTE staff to allow for professional development that is role specific and does not compete with student learning days.

## Physical Space

1. A plan for how to expand high demand programs in centers that are at capacity. Is this new construction, standalone satellite campuses, or an alternative schedule?
2. With the desire to have each CTE center have both Pre-Tech Exploratory programs and Pre-Tech Foundations courses, we need a plan as to how to do this within the confines of our existing space and staffing levels without significantly increasing costs.

## Adult Education

1. An adult education system that allows flexibility for adult learners to learn a new trade or update their existing skill set that works collaboratively rather than competitively with the Vermont Adult Learning, CCV, Vermont State University, Vermont Department of Labor and other training/educational organizations.