

S.220 – ELIMINATE BOND DEBT FROM SPENDING CAP CALCULATIONS

Introduction:

Good afternoon. My name is Nicole MacTavish. I am the Superintendent and Director of the Patricia A. Hannaford Regional Technical School District.

Our district is one of 4 independent Regional Technical School Districts.

We operate 3 campuses, 2 in Middlebury, and a satellite campus in Vergennes.

We serve approximately 350 high school students in pre-technical and Technical programs, and hundreds of Adult Learners in our evening and weekend programs, mostly through our strong partnership with the University of Vermont Health Network, and Porter Hospital.

I would like to talk to you today about the spending caps being discussed in S.220, and the unintended consequence this might have.

Background:

In March 2022, our voters approved an \$8M bond, to renovate our main campus, bringing it into compliance with safety requirements, to enhance energy efficiency, to install a viable IT backbone, and to align our shops with industry regulations.

Our district's FY26 budget is \$5.7M, which is less than 5% of the public education spending in Addison County, even though we serve 1 in 3 high school students.

This year, FY26, salaries and benefits account for \$2.7M, 70% of our budget.

Debt service is \$825K, roughly 15% of our total budget.

If bond debt isn't excluded from spending caps, this non-negotiable debt will result in elimination of full CTE programs in order to meet the needed reduction in spending.

CTE Technical School Districts do not have redundancy in positions, like more than one high school math teacher, or multiple 3rd grade teachers.

For the most part, in CTE we have 1 teacher for each technical field: 1 Medical Professions teacher, 1 Manufacturing teacher, 1 Auto teacher, etc.

Ramifications:

If we have to cut staff, it really means we cut entire programs, as each program is taught by a technical expert, and their areas of expertise do not overlap.

Additionally, many of our positions at CTE centers are required. We cannot cut them.

- The Director
 - Adult Education Coordinator
 - Career Counselor
 - SPED Coordinator
 - Work Based Learning Coordinators
- are all required by the state of Vermont.

Given these limitations, and with labor and healthcare costs rising, we have limited ways to meet a spending cap without cutting actual CTE programs.

As you know, that is a downward spiral for CTE because when we cut a program, we also lose the revenue earned from tuition to that program.
That means we have to cut many programs to achieve any real savings.

Since 2022, when our bond payments began, we have already made deep cuts each year - in staffing, programs, equipment, and supplies, eliminating all but the essentials to operate, in order to support debt repayment.

However, our 3-year labor agreements and healthcare costs alone account for an average 8% increase in cost year over year.

A cap on spending, then, would mean eliminating CTE programs.

Conclusion:

To put this in context:

- We serve 350 high school students, and hundreds of adult learners each year, for less than 5% of the public education spending in Addison County.
- We consistently graduate over 98% of our students, despite serving more than double the number of special needs students.

- Our programs are directly aligned to Vermont's high-wage, high-skill, high-demand careers.
- 50% of our students go on to 4-year colleges, with the rest entering trade school or the workforce.
- Our students leave us with not only a high school diploma, but also Industry Recognized Credentials, college credits, and workplace experience; giving them an advantage in the collage and the workforce.
- Our community invested \$8 million to make a 50-year-old campus safe, efficient, and aligned with industry standards.
- That debt is now a fixed 15% of our budget. If it counts toward the spending cap, we will have to cut CTE programs just to pay for the improvements voters already approved.
- Safe, industry aligned buildings were the investment.
- Impressive student and industry outcomes are the return.
- Please do not cause us to cut critical CTE programs like welding, manufacturing, electrical, nursing, and construction because we had to fix our buildings.