Written Testimony to House Commerce & Economic Development Committee
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)
March 18, 2025

Good afternoon, my name is Jody Emerson and I am the Superintendent/Director of the Central Vermont Career Center School District, and the President of the Vermont Association of Career and Technical Education Directors (VACTED).

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. We are willing to collaborate to support education funding and governance changes that will allow all Vermont students to access CTE.

CTE is inextricably linked to the entire public education system of Vermont. Without understanding the shifts that may occur in regular education, VACTED cannot determine whether being part of newly formed districts or becoming a single CTE School District would best serve students. We recommend no decisions regarding CTE be made without a full understanding of the changes to the overall system.

There are 17 CTE centers in Vermont. 11 are part of a larger school district, 4 are independent technical education districts and 2 are private comprehensive high schools. All of the centers co-exist within a host high school. It is presumed that the buildings belong to the host district. There is no separation of phone lines, camera systems, electrical lines, heating systems, etc. We all endeavor to work collaboratively with our host school to schedule daytime and evening events, align emergency operations plans, and emergency drills, and share resources such as cafeterias, bathrooms, and libraries.

Our students are sometimes forced to make difficult decisions. These decisions generally require choosing between a specific course, a CTE program or early college, often based on graduation requirements, scheduling conflicts, or the inability to attend both early college and CTE.

Given the general uncertainty around the future of education in Vermont, perhaps across the country, I'm grateful that we are having these discussions and concerned about rushing forward without considering all of the possible implications of change.

VACTED

Vermont Association of Career and Technical Directors

March 18, 2025

Dear Vermont Legislators,

We continue to be honored by the opportunity to work with you to ensure more Vermont students have opportunities to participate in Career Technical Education as part of their high school experience. As we re-think public education in Vermont, we have a once-in-a-generation chance to strengthen students' pathways toward high-wage, high-skill, high-demand careers. If we do this well, we can also strengthen Vermont, by creating authentic choices for young people who might then want to stay, and make a life for themselves, here in Vermont.

However, we have concerns about proceeding with a single CTE district without understanding the overall transformation of education in Vermont. We are inextricably connected to the broader system, and it's difficult to predict the impacts of a change to CTE without considering the system as a whole. Every CTE center in Vermont exists on a host campus, and the relationships between centers and host districts vary almost as much as the graduation requirements across the state.

**VACTED Recommendations**:

- Provide funding modeling based on the current structure compared with any other district modeling being proposed. This will provide us with the information we need to make an informed decision
- In an attempt to have one tuition rate for all CTE centers, some centers will experience funding cuts. If CTE centers will lose funding in the chosen model, design a gradual, multi-year progression to the new funding model, or ensure these CTE centers are grandfathered in at their current per-student formulas. For FY 26 we ask that the base rate, which dropped by 3%, be level funded for the upcoming fiscal year.
- Students cannot learn industry-ready skills unless they are taught 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 purpose-built CTE center construction and renovation.
- As statewide graduation requirements are implemented, ensure CTE is included as either a stand-alone requirement for all students or as an acceptable substitute for other required graduation requirements. CTE should not be an afterthought as students plan their high school careers, and should not be considered an elective.
- 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 statewide calendar, with common vacation days, common holidays, common professional development days, and common half-days (if needed).
- Where CTE centers share students with other high schools, and require aligned daily class schedules (same period times, same alternating schedules, etc.) to ensure students can easily move between institutions.
- Establish state-wide graduation requirements, which include CTE.
- Establish non-negotiable CTE embedded credits/proficiencies through either a new workgroup or through updating the current language in Rule 2370.
- 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.
- Funding for any additional AOE staffing must be funded from a separate funding stream other than CTE centers' funding. Funding for this staffing should not reduce, or come out of, the foundation formula for CTE nor should it reduce any of our grant funding.
- We agree that CTE exploration in middle school is essential to ensuring Flexible Pathways for students and increasing nontraditional students entering needed industry. As these would be new programs in the Vermont public education landscape, they would need new, dedicated funding streams, and new, dedicated staff, which would be in addition to the established foundation formula and staffing for high school CTE, and adult education programs.
- CTE is inextricably linked to the entire public education system of Vermont. Without understanding the shifts that may occur in regular education, VACTED cannot determine whether being part of newly formed districts or becoming a single CTE District would best serve students. We recommend no decisions regarding CTE be made without a full understanding of the changes to the overall system.

Our state's CTE system graduates are becoming increasingly vital as career opportunities expand across the pathways we serve. The recommendations outlined in this letter are based on over a decade of studies, white papers, and testimonies aimed at enhancing the impact of Vermont's Career and Technical Education at a crucial time. ***It is our priority to enhance student access to Career and Technical Education*** and we are committed to doing so in a manner that maintains the identity of Vermont CTE.

Respectfully,

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