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Contact: Amanda Chaulk
(802) 879-2373

Op-Ed - Earning and Learning: Apprenticeships and Access

By President Patricia Moulton

Vermont has one of the highest high school graduation rates in the nation. We also have one of the lowest rates in the country for high school grads entering college. At a time when 2/3 of jobs will require some form of education after high school by 2020, Vermont needs to make sure that more than 60% of its high school students are getting more education. Perhaps even more important to improve, the rate of economically disadvantaged students going on to college is currently less than 40%.

There are reasons students stop their education with a high school diploma, but it is not always by choice. There are many high school students who say they plan to go to college that never make it. In the most recent VSAC study for the Class of 2012, 26% of high school students who had aspired to go to college did not. That was 1,795 Vermont high school grads whose plans changed, taking them off the college path.

But education beyond high school does not always have to mean a four-year college degree. There are many meaningful options that line up with good-paying Vermont-based careers, like two-year associate degrees, certificates, industry-recognized certifications, and apprenticeships. People who are apprentices are earning while they are learning. For the numbers of high school grads that are willing to get more education but cannot afford to pay for it, an apprenticeship means access. Access to that education they aspired to in high school. Access to a career and not just a job. Access to employers who value them by investing time and training.

The employers also benefit from providing access with apprenticeships. They are often rewarded with greater employee loyalty, reducing turn-over and lowering hiring costs. Employers are able to create a pipeline for new skilled workers by having their more experienced workforce train the next generation. Rather than losing the knowledge of seasoned employees to retirement, apprenticeship programs let knowledge transfer easily through hands-on training.

In an ongoing effort to provide more educational choice to Vermont high school grads and Vermont employers, Vermont Technical College and the Community College of Vermont both have apprenticeships that align with growing careers in the state. They are also developing new industry sector partnerships with employers for even greater options. Working with Vermont's Department of Labor, Agency of Commerce, State Apprenticeship Council and Agency of Education, Vermont Tech and CCV will align these programs to the state's career pathways model and embed industry-recognized credentials in each.

Vermont Tech and CCV make sure apprenticeships programs line up to their degree programs, giving apprentices college credits that help them make progress toward a degree. CCV is developing three apprenticeship programs in Allied Health, Certified Production Technician, and Certified Public

Bookkeeper. In partnership with the Vermont Department of Labor, Vermont Tech's Continuing Education and Workforce Development department offers Registered Electrical and Plumbing apprenticeship programs. The new apprenticeship programs Vermont Tech is developing are in construction, manufacturing, and practical nursing.

For more information about Continuing Education and Workforce Development programs, please visit the website: vtc.edu/cewd.

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