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CTE Board 'Excited' About DOE's Curriculum Standardization Project, Concerned About Apprenticeship Funding

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Despite the lack of a quorum for most of its meeting on Wednesday, the V.I. Career and Technical Board was still able to engage in robust discussion on a number of key issues affecting technical and vocational education in the territory.

Dr. Monique Faulkner, state director of Career, Technical and Adult Education for the Department of Education, apprised CTE board members that a project to standardize the career and technical education curriculum had just been launched.

Speaking to Senator Genevieve Whitaker's concerns about the CTE board being left out of key decision-making processes when it came to educational policy in that area, Faulkner reassured

board members that they and the Board of Education will be included during this curriculum development exercise. Noting that a contractor for the standardization process was on the verge of being secured, Faulkner urged collaboration among stakeholders. “We need everyone to the table and a meeting of the minds so that we can guide [the contractors] in the best way that we want them to go,” she said.

Responding to a concern from CTE Board chair Joane Murphy about timelines, Faulkner estimated that the new curriculum would start to be implemented at the beginning of “the next school year,” and would serve to harmonize learning across institutions in the territory so that students who may transfer from one school to another will not miss out on key information. The curriculum will also be designed to ensure that learners moving up to post-secondary institutions will have the base knowledge needed to smoothly transition without gaps or needing to repeat credits.

“I’m excited about that,” said Ms. Murphy.

Board Secretary Dr. Suzanne Magras provided an update on apprenticeship programs, noting that out of 38 current employers that are participating in the apprenticeship program, 11 entities have at least one registered apprenticeship. “We’re seeing growth, it’s not as robust as we would like, but at least we are seeing steady growth,” she said. However, the Skills For Today program, which for the past year has provided 100% funding for apprentice wages, is coming to an end. This is causing some anxiety among the apprentice sponsor companies, who are concerned about their ability to continue with the program without the wage support that was being provided. Magras did note the existence of a potential alternative source of funds that might be able to be used, and promised to follow up on that possibility.

The use of apprenticeships to train instructors in the career and technical field was also discussed as a pathway for newly certified young people to fill the huge demand for CTE instructors. Chairwoman Murphy suggested finding out whether money appropriated to D.O.E. for vacant positions could be converted into funding for an apprenticeship program for young, prospective CTE instructors. However, for more experienced tradesmen and women, a more flexible approach to instruction was needed, Faulkner argued. Working professionals did not “want to be in a classroom all day” teaching, she said. “They want to work in the field. Just come in as needed, and then leave again.”

The need for collaborative action was raised again, this time in reference to the development of a state plan for CTE. Although Faulkner noted that the territory did not have to have a state plan in place, both she and Ms. Murphy agreed that one was desirable. Even so, Faulkner warned that stringent requirements from the Division of Academic and Technical Education made the development of a state plan for career and technical education a “heavy, heavy lift.” Ms. Murphy pledged the assistance of the CTE Board, and acknowledged the need to convene townhall meetings in furtherance of this particular goal.

The late arrival of board members provided a quorum just in time for the approval and adoption of outstanding minutes before the meeting was brought to a close.