AN ACT
RELATING TO EDUCATION -- REGIONAL VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS [SEE TITLE 16  
CHAPTER 97 -- THE RHODE ISLAND BOARD OF EDUCATION ACT]

Introduced By: Senators Satchell, Pearson, McCaffrey, Gallo, and Conley

Date Introduced: January 22, 2020

Referred To: Senate Education

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

SECTION 1. Section 16-45-6.1 of the General Laws in Chapter 16-45 entitled "Regional
Vocational Schools [See Title 16 Chapter 97 - The Rhode Island Board of Education Act]" is
hereby amended to read as follows:


(a) The general assembly finds that career and technical education ("CTE") programs that
meet rigorous industry standards and prepare Rhode Island's students to succeed in a wide variety
of employment settings are a critical component of the state's public education system and a
necessary element of the state's economic development. Regional career and technical education
centers and state CTE board-approved programs that align with industry standards serve this vital
need. These programs are to be offered in a system focused on program quality and delivery
efficiency.

(b) The general assembly further finds that the proportion of students now enrolled in
such programs is inadequate. Therefore, all Rhode Island school districts shall file a plan with the
Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education no later than January 1, 2006 setting forth
the means through which no fewer than forty (40) percent of their students enrolled in grades nine
(9) through twelve (12) shall be provided the opportunity to enroll in career and technical
programming that is certified by the Rhode Island Department of Education as meeting industry
standards by September 2007. The general assembly further finds that career and technical
education programs approved by the state CTE board of trustees and which programs are housed in regional career and technical education centers and in comprehensive high schools are best equipped to provide career and technical education to the students of Rhode Island.

(c) To facilitate the development of additional career and technical program offerings for Rhode Island students that meet industry standards the department of elementary and secondary education shall, in furtherance of the reports and studies that have been developed since 2000 setting forth recommendations for an updated system of career and technical education for the State of Rhode Island, develop a system design that includes site assessments of all current career and technical programs and sets forth standards and procedures for the department of elementary and secondary education to approve programs that are developed in cooperation with business, industry and postsecondary institutions. The department shall also develop a system design for three additional state operated career and technical schools, in addition to the William H. Davies School and the Metropolitan Career and Technical Center, including recommendations for a model for the siting, building costs, operational costs and program design for each such school. The general assembly shall appropriate funds to the department for purposes of their completion of the system design for the statewide program approval process to industry standards and the development of the models, siting and program design of the three additional state operated career and technical schools.

(1) To advance the economic development of our communities, all students retain the right to access career and technical education and to attend state CTE board-approved programs in other districts. This right to attend CTE programs in other districts does not include locally approved CTE programs and CTE programs that are not approved by the state CTE board. Students may request access to state CTE board-approved career preparation programs outside their school district if their home district does not provide a substantially equivalent or same ("substantially equivalent") state approved CTE program. If a discrepancy exists as to whether two (2) state approved programs are substantially equivalent, the state CTE board shall use state CTE board program quality criteria and other relevant factors to determine if the two (2) state CTE board-approved programs are substantially equivalent programs. Students are guaranteed access to state CTE board-approved career preparation programs. Students requesting access to state CTE board-approved career preparation programs outside their established school transportation region may enroll in such programs, but the resident local education agency shall not be responsible for the costs of the transportation.

(2) A student's request to enroll in a state CTE board-approved career and technical program at a recognized regional career and technical center (the "center") shall not be denied.
provided that:

(i) The student meets any other criteria required of all students for admission to the program and the center; and

(ii) The student is applying to the center which is geographically the closest center to the student's residence.

(d) All state CTE board-approved programs shall align to industry standards or be associated with a nationally recognized CTE board-approved program.

(e) On or before January 1, 2021:

(1) The state CTE board shall implement a process based on CTE board-identified criteria for determining whether two (2) state CTE board-approved programs are substantially equivalent; and

(2) The department of education shall establish approval and rating systems based upon program quality for career and technical education programs. No district shall be required to pay tuition or provide transportation to a program with a less than satisfactory rating.

(f) Students enrolled in, accepted to, or attending a state CTE board-approved program outside of the student's district (the "program of choice") as of January 1, 2021, shall be exempt from the substantially equivalent provisions of this statute and may continue to matriculate in grades nine (9) through twelve (12) in their program of choice so that students and parents who made educational decisions prior to January 1, 2021, shall retain the rights that were in place when they made those decisions. If a substantially equivalent state-approved program is established in a student's home district after the student has enrolled in a program of choice, the student may continue to matriculate in grades nine (9) through twelve (12) in the student's program of choice. The provisions of this subsection shall also apply and extend to other siblings in the family who apply to attend the same program of choice.

(g) On or before January 1, 2021, the state CTE board shall implement a process based on CTE board-identified criteria for determining whether two (2) state CTE board-approved programs are substantially equivalent.

(h) Career and technical funds allocated under § 16-7.2-6 shall be used solely for the purpose of funding improvements to state CTE board-approved career and technical programs and facilities or for funding related to the establishment of new career and technical programs in our state.

SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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This act would amend the career and technical education program laws to provide the process by which students could access career and technical education and attend state CTE board-approved programs in other districts. The act would also direct the state CTE board to implement a process based on CTE board-identified criteria for determining whether two (2) state CTE board-approved programs are substantially equivalent. This act would further provide that students who have enrolled in, been accepted to, or are attending a state CTE board-approved program outside of the student's district as of January 1, 2021, would be able to continue to matriculate grades 9 through 12 in that program.

This act would take effect upon passage.