

## BAKER PUSH FOR VOCATIONAL SCHOOL AID WINS BACKING

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STATE HOUSE, BOSTON, MARCH 29, 2016...Advocates pushing for more resources to help move vocational students into careers are aligned with Gov. Charlie Baker as they seek budgetary increases this year and \$75 million in bond authorization to buy school equipment and pay for expansions.

Rep. Alice Peisch, a Wellesley Democrat who is co-chairwoman of the Education Committee, said "there is an appreciation for the value" of vocational education and business and education can team up for a "win win." There is also a need for vigilance as public institutions partner with business so that schools don't become "a state-funded satellite of the business," she said.

Peisch, who attended an Alliance for Vocational Technical Education event at the State House on Tuesday, said she supports increasing funding for the recruitment and placement of high school students in internships.

"As a general rule, I support most of the education line items," Peisch said.

The fiscal 2016 budget funded that line-item at \$3 million and the governor's fiscal 2017 budget would push that up to \$5.4 million. The House budget, due to be unveiled April 13, is expected to hit the floor in late April.

On that and two other funding requests, the alliance supports Baker's request and isn't asking for any more.

The alliance and Baker both support doubling to \$2 million the fiscal 2017 funding for qualified high school students to take college courses and the authorization for state government to borrow \$75 million to buy equipment for vocational schools. The additional borrowing is contained in Baker's proposed jobs bill.

David Ferreira, the executive director of the Massachusetts Association of Vocational Administrators, said regional vocational schools have difficulty using debt to finance capital purchases because each community that makes up a district must agree to a borrowing.

Ferreira said there are 26 regional vocational schools and another two county agricultural schools. He said state education funding known allocated under the Chapter 70 program cannot be used to fund equipment purchases.

Although private industry can benefit through professional development and a pipeline of skilled workers, corporations do not have the resources to fund all the capital needs of vocational schools, Ferreira told the News Service.

"A computerized, numerical-controlled lathe - one of them alone is \$50,000. So if you need to start a program, \$2 million worth of those machines, no one's going to give you that," said Ferreira, who also said the private sector "needs to be partners" with the schools.

Peisch noted the state is approaching its borrowing limit, but said she supports "the intent" of a \$75 million bond authorization to help vocational schools.

Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce President Tim Murray said corporations have made contributions for vocational schools, highlighting Worcester Technical High School as an example.

"The business community contributed millions of dollars to help fully build out and then create trusts to continue to modernize the equipment," the former lieutenant governor told the News Service.

Murray said \$1 million in planning grants could be used to study whether the wait-list for vocational schools could be lessened by sending students to school at different times of day. Murray also suggested keeping the schools open longer to help unemployed workers and boost summer programs.

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