

# State Vocational Federation of Teachers

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Testimony of Eric Sawyer, Related Education Department Head at  
Henry Abbot Technical High School  
State Vocational Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 4200

## **SB 379 An Act Concerning Vocational-Technical Schools**

Education Committee  
March 8, 2010

Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann, and Committee members;

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today concerning Connecticut's Vocational Technical High School System and the issues of funding that face our system. My name is Eric Sawyer. I am the Related Education Department Head and a science teacher at Henry Abbott Technical High School in Danbury. I have been a teacher at Abbott Tech for the past twenty years. I have also served in the position of Related Education Department Head (RDH) at Abbott Tech for the last seven years.

As the RDH at Abbott Tech, I am responsible for the following areas: science, math, math lab, and art, twelve department teachers, two support services teachers, and half the academic education for approximately 675 eager students. I am responsible for all my teachers meeting the content standards and expected performances set forth by the State Board of Education. For example, science teachers have 45 expected performances to meet for grades 9-10 (preparation for CAPT). These standards, many dealing with scientific inquiry (performing laboratories), all have to be met on an annual budget of approximately \$3,000. Actually that's not true; the \$3,000 is the annual budget for my entire department (science, math, math Lab, and art) for grades 9-12, not just grades 9-10 in science.

In any given year, I can easily spend one half of my budget on Art, based solely on the nature of the discipline and its use of consumable items. This then leaves me with \$1,500 to purchase materials for science (including lab

materials), math and math lab. I have not even taken into consideration books. A portion, if not all, of my annual \$3,000 budget may be needed to purchase books, especially for new or elective courses. With the cost of many new science and math books reaching approximately \$100 per copy, an elective course with fifteen students can easily use up half of my annual budget. Why should I, or any other person in my position, have to make the decision as to who will or will not get the materials they need to better teach our students because of a disgracefully small annual budget?

I am grateful the committee has heard our plea and recognized the desperate need for maintenance and equipment funding. I would ask you to consider language that would also include funding for much needed classroom supplies.

I appreciate and support the committee's efforts to make the Technical High School system's budget more transparent and accountable with SB 379. One would hope that the process will reveal the inadequate funds our system has faced for years and as I have described above. However, I do have reservations about making the individual school budgets available online. I feel it could invite criticism from those who are uniformed about our system. Surely those budgets could be made available to members of the General Assembly and others who need them without posting them online.

Having been a part of the teaching profession, in this system, for the past twenty years, I am well aware of the demands and rewards it has to offer to teachers and students alike. It is my hope that this bill and its call for a more transparent budget will bring to light the struggles we face for adequate funding. We as teachers need to be able to teach and, within reason, have the tools we need at our disposal to do our jobs.

I thank you for your effort to help our system and for allowing me this opportunity to speak with you. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.