

October 10, 2024

Council on Elementary and Secondary Education

Rhode Island Department of Education

255 Westminster St.

Providence, RI 02903

Via Email

Dear Members of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education,

The National Education Association Rhode Island (NEARI) is writing in opposition to the proposed New England Tech Academy Charter School.

The New England Tech Academy Mission Statement submitted with the proposal does not speak to any innovative curriculum, culture, or programming that is not currently found within existing Career and Technical Education offerings across the State of Rhode Island.

Instead, the NETA proposal actually seeks to replicate what is already occurring at other CTE sites. The proposal states the intention of drawing 75 percent of its students from the urban core where historically marginalized communities have often been underserved by their public school systems.

Specifically, the proposal overlaps with CTE programming currently offered at Davies Career and Technical High School, which has received a Blue Ribbon School designation from the U.S. Department of Education. Davies serves Pawtucket and Central Falls students, from which NETA proposes to draw. The NETA proposal duplicates programs already offered at Davies. NETA plans to offer career tracks in pre-engineering, computer science, and health sciences—all areas that Davies already covers through its comprehensive programs, which range from health careers to pre-engineering.

Additionally, the NETA proposal overlaps with programming at other CTE programs across the state. Significant investment has been made to improve offerings within our urban core districts.  In January of this year, the state recently approved a $50 million contribution to the new unified high school in Pawtucket, which will house high-demand career and technical education programs. The proposed NETA would put further undue strain on the urban core districts and would jeopardize the sustainability of these investments.

Rhode Island has made an incredible investment over the past decade plus in expanding Career and Technical Education opportunities within LEAs and through the statewide Davies Career and Technical High School.  Modern facilities such as Providence Career & Technical Academy, East Providence High School, and the soon-to-be finished Rogers High School in Newport were built with the specific intention of housing and expanding CTE programming for students.

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As demand for CTE seats increases, it is clear that parents and students are looking for expanded opportunities within existing structures. If the seats in current CTE offerings in district high schools across the state are full, the answer is to invest and expand within these programs and offerings, not divert those resources to another school. The goal should be to support and expand programs that are already working and successful.

Our opposition to this proposal is not to stifle or pause increases in opportunities for additional seats for Career and Technical Education in Rhode Island public schools, but rather a plea to expand on existing systems that are showing successful results.

Sincerely,

The undersigned officers of NEA Rhode Island:

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