

# The Connecticut General Assembly



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## **Rep. Cook, Speaker Aresimowicz Support Vo-Ag School Programs**

*Education Committee bill would increase funding*

**State Rep. Michelle Cook** (D-Torrington) held a press conference Wednesday with **Speaker of the House Joe Aresimowicz** (D-Berlin/Southington) and current and former vocational agricultural school students in support of Vo-ag programs. The press conference at the Capitol coincided with Agriculture Day, an annual event highlighting Connecticut's agriculture industry.

Rep. Cook is sponsoring [HB 5451](#), An Act Concerning Funding For Regional Agricultural Science And Technology Education Centers, which would bring the funding level for vocational agricultural programs in alignment with that of other school choice programs, such as charter and magnet schools.

“Just like technical high schools, Vo-ag programs are critical to preparing students to succeed in today’s job market. Instead of placing an unfunded mandate on the sending school district, we should be funding Vo-ag programs in the same way we do other school choice programs,” **Rep. Cook** said. “The programs at Wamogo, Housatonic Valley, and Northwestern High Schools have been a great resource for students from Torrington and the surrounding area. It is crucial that we continue to invest in programs that fuel our state’s economic growth. This is about fulfilling our promise of a free and public education. It was never the intention to put an undue burden on the sending school districts, and we need to do our best to level out the funding.”

Currently, the state provides only \$2,950 in funding per Vo-ag student, meaning school districts may have to pay upwards of \$6,000 in tuition for each student they have attending a Vo-ag program. In contrast, school districts pay no tuition for students who attend technical high schools in another town.

“Connecticut’s Vo-Ag program is a proven career pipeline for skilled employment in a wide variety of industries that are important to our state’s economy,” said **Speaker of the House Joe Aresimowicz** (D-Berlin/Southington), noting Southington High School has a vibrant Vo-Ag program. “Vo-Ag stands as a model for how a career curriculum should work, and Rep. Cook is a great advocate for the program and its students.”

“These agriscience programs change students’ lives for the better. They not only allow students to pursue their passions in agriculture, but they inspire students to find their voices and develop themselves into strong leaders of American agriculture,” said Megan Davenport, a senior at the Nonnewaug High School agriscience program. “This is why we need to support agriscience programs and more equitably fund these time-tested, result-based school choice programs at the same level as the state's charter, magnet and vo-tech programs.”

“Agriscience programs throughout Connecticut teach students the value of hands on learning through a supervised agricultural experience, the importance of classroom involvement, and the crucial need for youth leadership,” said Zachary Duda, state president of the Connecticut FFA Association and a freshman student at UConn. “Put those three aspects together, and we build individuals who are ready to lead others in all facets of life. These students are trained to enter agricultural jobs that are waiting for them throughout our state's \$4 billion agricultural industry.”

Connecticut has 19 agricultural science and technology education programs, known as Vo-ag programs, at high schools across the state. Agricultural science and technology education prepares students for careers in the areas of agriculture mechanics, animal science, aquaculture and marine technologies, natural resources and environmental systems and plant science.

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