

Chapter 10: Education

INTRODUCTION

Sound planning for educational programs and facilities is necessary to support the Rutland Region's social and economic welfare. The challenge of education within the Rutland Region is to meet the needs of elementary and high-school aged students, young adults entering the workforce or continuing education, adults who have varying backgrounds and educations, and businesses which are seeking to hire and promote individuals with specific skills.

Schools are the largest employer in, and social focal point of, many of the towns in the Region. At the same time, because many serve small communities, their enrollments are susceptible to changes in the population and economy.

This chapter of the Rutland Regional Plan focuses on these key aspects of education and their relationships with the Region's economy, its residents, its services, and its infrastructure. While this chapter makes note of the current educational system and illustrates broad areas of concern, it does *not* attempt to provide direction in this area. This chapter *does* identify the need for greater links between the education system and the community, and between students and prospective employers.

CURRENT CONDITIONS

Kindergarten – High School (K-12)

Elementary and secondary educational facilities have long served as backbones of the Region's communities. Historically, most communities had several primary schools; over the last century, though, the numbers of schools have declined (from a statewide high of 1700 in the late 19th Century to 311 today (source: The Governance of Education in Vermont 1777-2006). Today 22 of the Rutland Region's 27 cities and towns still have at

least one public school, and education remains a key social, economic, and political issue throughout the Region.

Elementary and High Schools

The Rutland Region is home to 30 public schools: 22 elementary and middle schools, seven high schools, and one K-12 school. Together they served a total of 9,581 students during the 2004-05 school year. An additional 17 independent schools operate within the Region.

Enrollment at public schools is varied; the smallest primary schools have as few as 30 students while others near 350. High schools range from under 200 to over 1,100 students. The opportunities and challenges faced by these schools vary equally. The schools provide instruction and extra-curricular activities for their students and are often centers for community events outside school hours.

Condition of schools

In general, schools throughout the Region are in good physical shape. Several have undergone major renovations



FAST FACT

SCHOOLS IN VERMONT:

In the late 19th Century, Vermont was home to 1,700 schools! That number has declined to 311 today, an average of a little over one per town and city in the state.

(source: The Governance of Education in Vermont 1777-



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Fair Haven Grade School sits across from the Green in downtown



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

CHANGES IN SCHOOL ENROLLMENT in the Region have not been uniform. The 10-year compound annual growth rate for 1998-2007 shows that 21 schools had declines in enrollment; seven saw steady figures, and four saw increases. The 5-year compound annual growth rate, for 2003-07, however, shows increased enrollment in nine schools, relatively even figures in seven, and declines in 17. Those schools seeing increases varied by geography and size.

note: Mettowee Community School was not open in 1998, so is only counted in the 5-year data.]

in the past decade, a reflection of the fact that most of the buildings are older or were built during Vermont's population boom of the 1970s.

School Enrollment

A general trend across the Region has been a slow but steady decline in school enrollment over the past 10 years.

Total enrollment has dropped from 10,646 Rutland County students in 1997-98 to 9,608 in 2005-06 (Source: VT Department of Education: FY 2006 School Enrollment Report). This decline has mirrored statewide trends as our population continues to age.

While the majority of the schools in the Region have witnessed declines in enrollment of between five and forty percent, several have maintained roughly even enrollment rates and three, Barstow Memorial School in Chittenden, Benson Village School, and Mettowee Community School in Pawlet (opened in 1999) have seen increases.

For those schools facing declining enrollment, facilities are operating at below capacity and some are contemplating closure. For those schools witnessing increasing enrollment, though, communities are addressing potential expansion needs.

Technical and Specialized Schools

The Region's eight high schools are complemented by a handful of institutions providing complementary services, the largest of which is Stafford Technical Center. Stafford Tech offers those seeking to acquire hands-on trade skills the opportunity to take a portion of their junior and senior years' classes at their facility in Rutland. Stafford Technical Center is designed to open doorways for students wishing to explore an alternative to college.

Smokey House Center, a Danby-based outdoor educational facility serving at-risk and other youth, offers schools the opportunity to partner by providing intensive courses for small groups of middle and high school students throughout the year. Killington Mountain School is a five-month specialty school offering students the opportunity to both attend school and focus on competitive skiing and snowboarding.

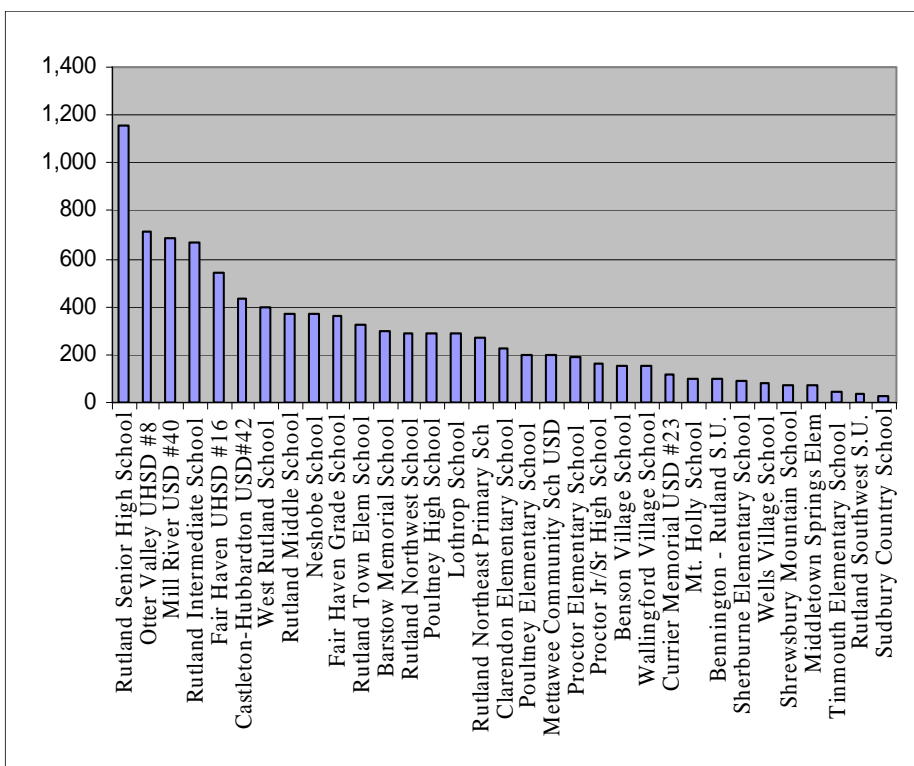
Home Schooling

As an alternative to traditional, in school education, parents have the option to provide home schooling. Vermont law stipulates that home school students be affiliated with a school and may receive assistance where appropriate.

School Curriculum

Teachers in the Region's public schools have limited flexibility in their coursework. The focus in the Region – and, in fact, across the State and Country – is in meeting State and Federally established goals in key subject areas. Vermont, with the Rutland Region serving as no

RUTLAND COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL ENROLLMENT, 2007



Source: Vermont Dept of Education FY 2007 Public School Enrollment Report

exception, is among the country's leaders in meeting standardized testing standards.

Rutland County Schools perform at or above the state average on the statewide assessments of reading, math and writing. Rutland County schools average score was the same as the state's in reading and writing, and higher than the state average in math. And as mentioned before, Vermont is in the top tier of schools (always in the top five and usually in the top three) for scores in the nation on the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

Dropout rates

Statewide, the middle and high school dropout rates have seen dramatic declines in the past ten years. The chart to the right illustrates data from 1995 and 2005. At local high schools, cumulative dropout rates for grades 9-12 ranged from 1.59% to 3.31%. Three of the region's schools had rates below the State average of 2.40%, while four others had slightly higher rates.

School funding & spending

The Vermont Legislature has enacted a number of educational funding programs seeking to provide all students with a equal opportunity for education regardless of the tax base of their local community while at the same time containing costs.

This equalization system was first introduced in 1997 under Act 60. The current program, Act 68, sets statewide residential and non-residential tax rates that provides a base level of funding per pupil in each of the State's 284 school districts. Each district then may (and generally does) request additional funding from local taxpayers. Budgets that exceed a certain level are then assessed a punitive additional amount to discourage cost increases.

Specifics of the programs are not addressed in this Plan as they are remain under considerable debate among the

State's Legislature. The overall philosophy set forth by Act 60 appears to be broadly supported, however.

In fiscal year 2007, school spending per pupil ranged from approximately \$9,000 to \$12,000 depending on the community and school district arrangement. [Source: VT Dept of Ed, FY 2007 Per Pupil Spending by School Type]

School Management and membership

Eight supervisory unions and one supervisory district serve residents within the Region. They are generally divided along municipal borders, geography, and social and economic ties. Each has a superintendent responsible for overall administration. Among the supervisory unions, the superintendent is responsible to multiple locally-elected school boards; the supervisory district is made up of just one board, from Rutland City.

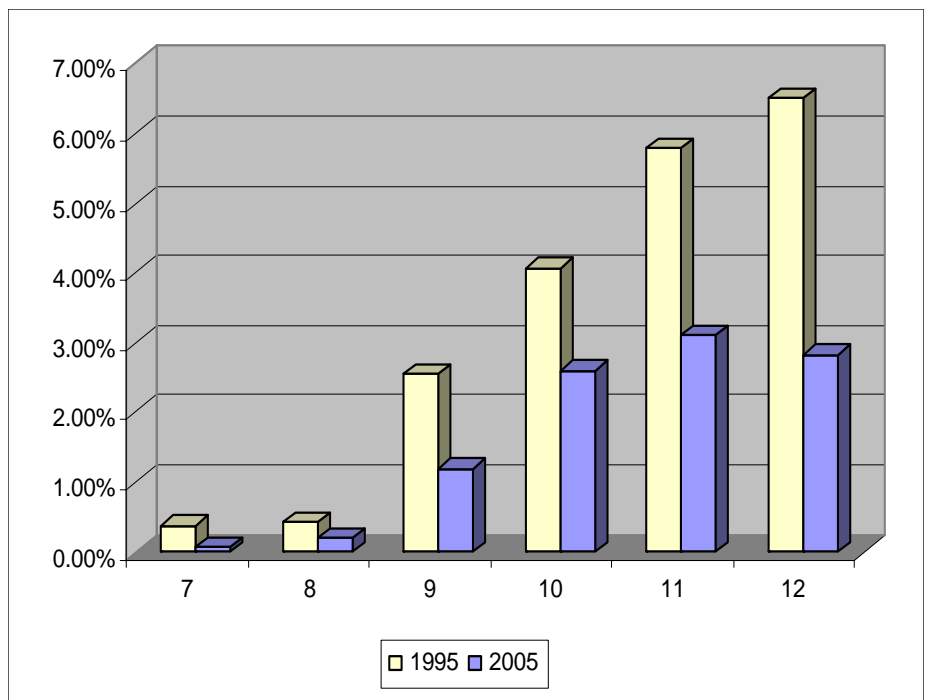
Each individual school has a principal responsible for management, overseeing curriculum, day-to-day operations, and in some cases, teaching classes within the school.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

It is difficult to isolate the reasons for the increase or decline in school enrollment figures. The most critical determining factor, of course, is the increase or decline in the population of the community. Factors that likely impact both include: perceived quality of educational facilities and programs; local tax rates; local land values; services available within the communities. In some communities, the rise in population and enrollment may be a factor of the rising cost of housing in nearby communities.

STATEWIDE DROPOUT RATES, 1995 AND 2005



Source: VT Dept of Education, Vermont Public School Dropout and High School Completion, 2004-05 school year



FAST FACT

The amount needed in the education fund to pay for categorical grants and education spending is about **\$1.2 billion** in FY 2007. Revenues estimates for the education fund:

- Nonresidential Education Property Tax \$449 million
- General Fund Transfer \$269 million
- One-third Sales & Use Tax \$113 million
- One-third Purchase & Use Tax \$27 million
- State Lottery \$22 million
- Medicaid Reimbursement \$9 million
- Vermont Yankee \$2 million
- Homestead Property Tax 312 million (varying proportionally with a district's education spending per pupil.

Source: VT Dept of Education: Overview of Vermont's Education Funding System Under Act 68 & Act 130, Dec. 2006

The majority of the Region's communities are members of a specific school or union district and their children attend the elementary and high schools associated with those districts. In a handful of the Region's communities, parents have multiple choices of where to send their students.

Relationship to the Community

Elementary and high schools are the predominant binding force in most communities in the Rutland Region. They offer the primary facilities and programs that draw residents from across town together and, in some cases, are the only mechanism by which disparate citizens feel an attachment to their community.

These programs and facilities, from school board meetings and budget votes, to community activities and fundraisers, serve an important function. It is important to keep this in mind when considering unmet needs within the Region.

In many schools, teachers have tapped local resources to enhance local education. This has included working with planning commissions, historical societies, business professionals, local and state officials to enhance the classroom experience.

Post-Secondary Education

Post secondary education takes a number of forms for the Region's youth. These include trade schools, colleges and junior colleges (in-state and out-of-state) and, to a limited extent, apprenticeships. See food for thoughts below for details regarding the Region's post-secondary institutions.

Funding for post-secondary education

Post secondary education is funded by a combination of tuition, research grants, state, and federal support. Cost per student for undergraduate education ranges based on each school's curriculum,

facilities, and educational offerings. Tuition at local schools in 2006-07 varied widely, from approximately \$7000 to \$24,000 per year for tuition and fees to local residents. Individual schools offer a range of scholarships and other financial support. In addition, the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation (VSAC) offers low-interest to students.

Lifelong Learning

Education is not something that can or should be *completed* at any given point. Lifelong education is a critical element of vibrant and creative communities and workforces.

A number of educational opportunities – some through courses offered by schools such as Stafford Technical Center, local libraries, non-profit organizations, and places of worship. Greater detail on these programs and their roles can be found in the Historic and Cultural Resources chapter.

UNMET NEEDS

Education is an ever-evolving facet of our society and, as such, must be able to adapt as circumstances, knowledge, and challenges change.

K-12 Education

Because K-12 costs and spending account for such a large proportion of all tax monies received and spent the State of Vermont, education costs are of concern to all Vermonters. The quality of education provided to students in the State, however, is of equal importance, and to a large degree, that is reliant upon consistent substantive financial support.

Educational Needs

- Though drop-out rates for high school students show substantial decline, a

small proportion of the student population (between 1.5 & 3.3% in 2004-05) left school before completing high school.

- Declining school enrollments have meant that some schools have had to drop elective non-core classes such as second languages, music, art, and others. Students are missing opportunities to learn some of the skills proving most essential in the development of creative and engaged communities and workforces.
- Students in many schools do not have adequate access to computers and the Internet. The limited budgets of small schools presents many challenges in the area of technology.
- Students continue to graduate without clear plans for the next steps – trade school, apprenticeships, or colleges. These are the students most likely to be forced to work at minimum wage positions with little possibility for advancement.
- The classroom educational model has not worked effectively for all students. More opportunities for alternative methods of education are needed, particularly in more rural school districts.
- The Rutland Region Worksite Investment Board reports that employers are concerned that students graduating from high school are lacking in the “soft skills” needed for future employment – the ability to communicate effectively, work in groups, work in a professional workplace environment, cope with superiors and manage others.
- There is a need for more curriculums that establish connections with the community. As the population becomes increasingly transient, it is critical that students understand the history of their towns and their role as citizens.
- As has long been the case, State and Federal objectives for standardized score results create a tight realm for teachers to work within, making community engagement programs difficult.

Funding and Taxation

- Education costs are outpacing growth in incomes, despite steady or declining enrollments.
- Though the rising costs for education are of widespread concern, the causes of these cost increases have not been fully researched at the local or state level.
- Though the current equalized property tax rate system for education funding provides for an “income sensitivity” reduction in property taxes for property owners’ homesteads, there is some concern that lower income households with larger land holdings in communities with high property values are facing difficult choices about retaining the land.
- Seventy percent of households Rutland County have no school-aged children. Garnering support for school budgets that support high quality education is a substantial challenge.
- Unanticipated costs for special education can dramatically affect local taxes. Fifty-seven percent of the costs of special education are financed by the State and Federal Governments, with the remainder falling to the local community. Random fluctuations in the



FAST FACT

Of the Region’s 27 cities and towns, only five, West Haven, Hubbardton, Ira, Mendon and Mt Tabor, have no public schools located within their boundaries.



Rutland High School enrolls approximately 1150 students in grades 9 through 12 and is the only public high school within the city.

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number of special needs students in a small school can dramatically alter local taxation and may create an air of animosity among voters.

Educators and administration

- School districts—which often include just one or two schools—hire teachers individually. As a result, teachers employed in part-time positions must negotiate with multiple school districts to put together full-time jobs.
- Supervisory unions, and their respective superintendents, are responsible to multiple elected boards, creating challenges for administration.
- The structure of school funding for specialty schools, such as the Technical Centers, makes it financially challenging for high schools. Currently, there is a loss in funding at the local school for students who choose to attend courses at the technical schools.
- Wages for K-12 educators, which averaged \$31,267—mirroring the median income—is low given the schooling most educators are required to have. Administrators have difficulties attracting teachers to the Region.

Post High School Population

The unmet needs for young adults after finishing high school are broad. They include challenges in finding well-paying employment, good educational experiences, and places to live.

From the graduate’s perspective:

Students completing high school have many choices to make about whether, how, and where to continue their education. Among their unmet needs:

- The cost of post-secondary education for many families remains prohibitive.
- The Rutland Region does not offer all of the opportunities that many young people desire. To some extent, this is the fault of schools, businesses, and services within the Region. To an equal extent, however, it is simply a cultural fact. Many young people across the Country have a strong urge to leave their homes to explore other options. The Rutland Region, as a small, rural area, has faced this issue for over a century.
- Because of the geographic displacement of each of the Region’s colleges, there is no sense of a vibrant “young” community. In part due to this, the



A LOT OF FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Five post-secondary schools offer formal programs in the Rutland Region. Each has its own specialty and target audience.

- **Green Mountain College**, located in Poultney, was founded in 1834. Its 750 students are spread among 25 undergraduate programs. The College’s focus is on environmental liberal arts and pre-professional studies.

- **Castleton State College** was recognized as a Vermont State College in 1962. Currently there are 2,000 students enrolled in various undergraduate and graduate programs, ranging from liberal arts to forensic psychology. The College offers two Masters programs, in forensic psychology and nursing.
- **Stafford Technical Center**, located in Rutland

POST-SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN THE RUTLAND REGION

City, offers programs for high school juniors and seniors and adults interested in applied trade skills. The school partners with local businesses to provide training for certifications in several fields which vary from year to year.

- **The College of St. Joseph**, located in Rutland City, had 500 students in its 32 undergraduate and graduate programs. Their

programs range from arts and sciences to psychology and human services, and include a Masters in Business Administration.

- **The Community College of Vermont’s Rutland branch** has an enrollment of approximately 650 students. It offers 12 associate degree programs, and five associate of applied science degree programs to students of all ages.

Region is not attractive to younger people to stay and work.

- For those that are not in a position to pursue a traditional two or four year program, options are limited. The State's technical centers have stepped in to provide evening courses and accreditations. There is, however, no State funding for any of the technical centers' evening programs. They must essentially be self-funded, which leads to affordability problems and limited availability of courses.
- Limited opportunities within the Region's businesses have created, in many cases, a stagnant workforce. People are not able to find new and exciting opportunities and as a result stay in their current positions with little drive.
- There is a lack of opportunities for student internships. There are only a few employers in the Region that are large enough to take on many interns. Most small and mid-sized employers struggle to offer internships that attract young people to the area. It is apparent that hiring interns can be beneficial to a company, but still many employers are hesitant to take them on. A consequence of having few available internships is a graduating student body with few connections to the Region and little to entice them to stay here in the future.

From the Community Perspective

Input into the Rutland Region Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, developed over the past several years by the RRPC and Rutland Economic Development Corporation, revealed several issues related to education. They included:

- The programs that post-secondary schools are offering are not always meeting the needs of the major employers in the Region. Employers have expressed that local accredited programs do not support the kinds of skilled individuals they are looking for.

- There are limited non-traditional educational opportunities (i.e. adult education etc.) in the Region. Employers have expressed an interest in having employees with more background in intra-personal skills, workplace education and math.
- The Region shares the national crisis of a nursing shortage.
- The Region, in general, is "exporting" its young people to other areas that offer higher wages and a more apparent range of opportunities. Many have cited the cost of education as a factor. Vermont ranks very low in affordability of higher education and when combined with wages that may not support such debt, the cost of living may be difficult for many in their 20's and 30's.
- There is a shortage of people skilled in manufacturing, construction, information technology.
- There is a lack of training available (and time to dedicate) for employers to send staff to acquire skills for managerial positions.
- As with K-12 education, there is a need for more curriculums that establish connections with the community. As the



See the Economic Activity Chapter for a Case Study of the Workforce Investment Board



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One of the 12 learning centers for the Community College of Vermont is located in Downtown Rutland.



Education is closely linked to many of the other chapters of this *Plan*. These connections include:

- Economic Activity – the opportunity for residents to find suitable employment, and for businesses to find the workforce it needs, is inextricably linked to the local education system;
- Regional Libraries provide the opportunity for lifelong education;
- Regional Profile presents a picture of the current and future population trends in the Region
- Health and Wellness, especially its affordability, is linked to residents being qualified for well-paying jobs.
- Historic and Cultural Resources are, in some ways, the continuation of an education system that fosters creativity and community.

population becomes increasingly transient, it is critical that students understand the history of their towns and their role as citizens in the function of their communities.

FUTURE TRENDS

Two key sets of economic and demographic trends are likely to affect education in the Rutland Region in the coming years. In brief, they are:

- A level, or continued decline in school aged population Region-wide, because of the aging of the Region’s population, low birth rates, and limited in-migration of young families.
- A need for professional unskilled workers in the coming years – but not of well-paying, manufacturing-type work – because of the retirement of baby boomers in the next five to ten years and the continued outsourcing of manufacturing work abroad.

These two trends will create opportunities for current students who acquire needed skills and education, but also leave those without skills with few opportunities outside of low-paying service jobs.

Balancing quality education with spending will continue to play an important role in local and statewide debate.

MEETING CURRENT AND FUTURE NEEDS

- Foster greater links between education and the local community. These links will give the public a greater sense of belonging to the community, encourage civic engagement, and assist in the retention of the State’s youth.
- Initiate and sustain programs that will help to better network the colleges. “RutBusters” has helped to create better networking for college students and

offering them opportunities to congregate. The challenge will be to reverse the feeling/reputation that there is little to do for college-age people.

- Create a “Workforce Development Center” where training would be provided in the summer and evenings so that those already working could receive more training and career development.
- Local elected officials, school faculties and administrations, and the public as a whole must address the issues of school curriculum and budgeting with the knowledge that local action can have an impact on statewide and national education policies.
- Attracting teachers needs to be made more simple and competitive, especially for part-time positions.

RUTLAND RPC ACTIONS

- Offer assistance in developing visions for education, e.g. by soliciting input from the business community regarding its needs for graduates, and providing that input to school officials.
- Assist communities in the development of capital budgets.
- Involve schools and teachers in local town plan updates.
- Solicit student perspectives and involve students in all planning projects, including the development of local and regional plans, regulations, and special studies and programs.
- Provide staff time and RRPC resources (such as data and maps) to interested teachers to help students learn about their communities and planning issues.
- Provide internship opportunities for college students from the Region or studying in the Region wherever possible.