

# Vermont's Independent Schools

***Who We Are***  
***What We Do***  
***Our Vision for the Future***

*presented by*

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# *Who We Are: The Fundamentals*

- **School Size:** Most independents are very small and operate on small budgets.
- **Mission-driven:** Most have narrower missions than do the public schools. A few large independents voluntarily have taken on the mission to fulfill public school obligations in their home community and to accomplish other independent goals.
- **Support:** Independents rely on public and private tuition and on fund-raising. They do not have taxing authority. Percentage of tuitioned students does not necessarily equate to percentage of total revenues, due to availability of private resources.
- **Choice:** Attendance is by family choice. Students may, and sometimes do, withdraw without notice and choose another option—public or independent.
- **Governance:** Governed by Boards of Trustees which manage finances and ensure the schools are fulfilling their mission. Successful boards provide long-term stable leadership that can be flexible and responsive to changing student needs.

# *The Fundamentals*

- Diverse schools, with diverse missions and goals, created to serve diverse student needs.
- Committed to optimal educational opportunities & outcomes.
- Committed to serving every student within our mission who desires to attend.
- Committed to a “best fit” for **every** student educational model.
- Independent schools see themselves as part of a continuum of options within the educational landscape.

# Who We Are: Size

- 46 approved independents are eligible for public tuition.
- Most of these schools are small, even by Vermont standards:
  - Median enrollment of 66 students.
    - 23 schools (50%) greater than 66
    - 23 schools (50%) fewer than 66
    - 19 schools (41%) have ***fewer than 50 students***
- The five largest approved independents have enrollments of 252, 314, 549, 664 and 949 respectively.
- The five smallest approved independents have enrollments of 3, 4, 11, 12, and 13 respectively.

# *Who We Are: Enrollment*

- Independents enrolled 2,712 students on public tuition in 2015-16 (excluding therapeutic sped-only schools):
  - 2099 of the 2719 (77%) attend one of the four historic town academies or the two comprehensive elementary schools, each approved in **all** sped categories.
  - 2347 of the 2719 (86%) students attend an independent school approved in three or more sped categories.
    - Roughly two-thirds of all special education students' disabilities are in one of the three largest categories.

# *Who We Are:* Enrollment

- 372 publicly tuitioned students attend an independent school without any special ed approvals.
- These students are 14% of all publicly-tuitioned students.
- Many small independent schools successfully accommodate IEP-eligible students without need to label the student or to bill the LEA for added services.

# *What We Do*

Town Academies & Comprehensive Elementaries

General Education Schools

Winter Sports Academies

Religious Schools

Therapeutic Special Education Schools

# *Town & Comprehensive Academies*

- Six independent schools, including the four historic academies and two comprehensive elementary schools, voluntarily have chosen to adopt open enrollment, comprehensive education programming and special education in all categories, as part of their mission to support their communities.
- These schools are large enough, strong enough and conveniently enough located to succeed in this role.
- They are paid 10% to 23% more per-student in public tuition than are other independent schools.
- Two of these schools operate a regional technical education center.



# *Town & Comprehensive Academies*

<b>School</b>	<b>Town</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>Tuitioned</b>
St Johnsbury Academy	St Johnsbury	949	65%
Burr & Burton Academy	Manchester	664	87%
Lyndon Institute	Lyndon	549	86%
Thetford Academy	Thetford	314	88%
Village School of No. Benn.	Bennington	118	96%
Mountain School	Winhall	57	79%
		<u>2,651</u>	<u>79%</u>

# General Education Schools

Lake Champlain Waldorf	Charlotte	252	5%	The Schoolhouse	S. Burlington	48	0%
Vermont Academy	Rockingham	236	4%	Mtn. Sch. of Milton Acad.	Vershire	45	0%
The Putney School	Putney	226	4%	Green Mtn Montessori	Montpelier	39	0%
Long Trail School	Dorset	171	66%	Neighborhood Sch'se.	Brattleboro	35	6%
Orchard Valley Waldorf	E. Montpelier	169	1%	Hiland Hall School	Bennington	33	21%
The Sharon Academy	Sharon	155	87%	Aurora School	Middlebury	33	9%
Upper Valley Waldorf	Quechee	140	5%	Bridge School	Middlebury	31	18%
Hilltop Montessori Sch.	Brattleboro	125	2%	Vermont Waldorf HS	Plainfield	21	0%
Maple Street School	Manchester	116	41%	Mary Johnson Children's	Middlebury	19	0%
The Grammar School	Putney	112	5%	Southshire Com'ty. Sch.	Bennington	13	54%
Vermont Commons Sch.	S. Burlington	92	20%	Downtown Sch.	Manchester	12	33%
Thaddeus Stevens Sch.	Lyndon	87	25%	Avalon Triumvir. Acad.	Fairfax	12	20%
The Riverside School	Lyndon	72	63%	Sugarwood School	Rutland	4	25%
Saxon Hill School	Jericho	60	28%			<u>2,408</u>	20%
Vt Acad. Sci. & Tech.	Randolph	50	100%				

# Winter Sports Academies

<b>School</b>	<b>Town</b>	<b>Students Tuitioned</b>	
Green Mtn. Valley School	Waitsfield	114	2%
Stratton Mountain School	Stratton	103	46%
Burke Mountain Academy	Burke	66	20%
Killington Mountain School	Killington	66	15%
Okemo Mountain School	Ludlow	49	1%
Mt Mansfield Winter Academy	Stowe	47	0%
Mount Snow Academy	Dover	22	4%
		<hr/> 467	16%

*Vermont has seven winter sports academies, five more than any other state. Their mission is to educate students while training them to national or international-level proficiency.*

# *Religious Schools*

<b>School</b>	<b>Town</b>	<b>Students</b>
Rice Memorial High School	S. Burlington	417
Mater Christi School	Burlington	242
Christ the King School	Burlington	216
St Francis Xavier School	Winooski	145
Sacred Heart School	Bennington	134
Christ the King School	Rutland	126
Grace Christian School	Bennington	122
Bishop John Marshall School	Morrisville	106
Mid Vermont Christian School	Hartford	96
Good Shepherd Catholic School	St Johnsbury	88
St Monica St Michael School	Barre	88
St Michael Elementary School	Brattleboro	84
St Paul's Elementary School	Barton	69
Mount St. Joseph Academy	Rutland	62
Rutland Area Christian School	Rutland	45
Champlain Valley Christian School	Vergennes	40
Caledonia Christian School	St Johnsbury	11
Brownell Mountain School	Williston	6
Forrest Ward Memorial School	Bennington	3
		<u>2,100</u>

# *Therapeutic Special Ed Schools*

## **Therapeutic Special Education Schools**

- Every year approximately 900 special education students are referred out of their home public school because their disabilities cannot be accommodated there.
  - Many independent schools serve this need. The public schools system relies on the availability of these independent schools.
  - Approved in some, but not all categories of special education.
  - Highly specialized staff and facilities.

# *Therapeutic Special Ed Schools*

## **Therapeutic Special Ed Schools**

Soar Learning Center	St Albans	61	Jean Garvin School	Burlington	27
Greenwood School	Putney	56	New School of Montpelier	Montpelier	22
Kindle Farm School	Newfane	52	Maplehill School	Plainfield	20
Vt School for Girls	Bennington	51	Arlington School	St Johnsbury	17
Centerpoint School	S.Burlington	46	INSPIRE for Autism	Brattleboro	16
Baird School	Burlington	45	Sheldon Academy	Rutland	16
Meadows Ed. Center	Brattleboro	43	East Meadow School	Morristown	13
Conn. River Academy	Bradford	38	East Valley Academy	Randolph	13
Laraway School	Johnson	35	Brookhaven Learning Ctr.	Chelsea	11
Community Schoolhouse	Brattleboro	35	Manchester Vlg. School	Manchester	10
LiHigh School	Poultney	32	Fay Honey Knopp School	Rutland	8
Cornerstone School	St Johnsbury	29	Foundations Program	Windsor	8
Bellcate School	Essex Jct	28	Mosaic Learning Center	S.Burlington	4
CHOICE	Barre	28			<u>792</u>
Turning Points School	Morgan	28			

# *Focus on Struggling Students*

- Many small independents successfully enroll struggling students and IEP-eligible students, without special education approval or reimbursement.
- Parents sometimes become dissatisfied with traditional schools or special ed services and reject special ed labeling.
- Independent schools enroll significant numbers of students who need an alternative setting in which to thrive, often with financial aid, to support low- or moderate-income families. They do this despite no financial support that flows from an IEP.
- Small independents succeed at this because their size and philosophy fosters very individualized-learning practices.

# *Focus on Struggling Students*

<b>School</b>	<b>Town</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>Tuitioned</b>
East Burke School	Burke	12	87%
Compass School	Westminster	66	43%
LEARN	Lyndon	17	67%
Rock Point School	Burlington	24	0%
Kurn Hattin Homes	Westminster	102	8%
		<hr/>	
		221	26%

*These five schools, each of which has a unique program that addresses various background or academic deficiencies, are examples of services not available in the public sector.*



*Challenges to Expanding  
Special Education Services*

# *Special Ed Challenges*

- Average 18-month AOE/SBE approval process for any given category (12 months is fast).
- Expense and time associated with staffing, training & administrative requirements. Difficult to recover these costs. Difficult or awkward fit to the independent school model.
- After qualifying in a category, an individual school may see few or no students with such needs. Meanwhile the school is challenged to develop necessary expertise and retain staff.
- Scarcity of qualified staff.
- SU-to-SU inconsistency in reporting or billing practices is a burden.
- Effect of financial and student enrollment impacts on SU are a disincentive to referral.

# *Special Ed Challenges*

## **The small school challenge:**

The 29 approved independents now *without* SPED approvals are very small and have few publicly-tuitioned students

- 19 of these schools have fewer than 10 publicly-tuitioned students each
- Another 4 schools have fewer than 15 publicly-tuitioned students each.
- These 23 schools are very small. Median total enrollment is 32. Their median publicly-tuitioned enrollment is only five!

# *Summary — Who We Are*

- Town academies and comprehensive elementaries, which provide SPED services in all categories, enroll 77% of all publicly-tuitioned students,.
- 86% of all tuitioned students attend independent schools with SPED approvals that cover approximately two-thirds of all students with special needs.
- We have 32 schools that provide only SPED services, enrolling 810 students.
- We have several schools that successfully meet specialized needs in an alternative, non-IEP manner.
- Those schools currently not approved for SPED services are mostly very small.

# **Our Vision for the Future**

*Special Education*

*Financial Capacity*

*Enrollment Policy*

# *Expanding Special Education*

## **Vision for a New Collaborative Model:**

- Incentivizes special ed expansion in independent schools.
- Collaborative model in a public-private partnership.
- Focus on ensuring a **System of Care** is available for students.
- Employs a “best fit” approach.
- Acknowledges independent school missions.
- Modifies existing processes but does not create new mandates.
- Recognizes the role of independent schools with a “struggling student focus.”
- Addresses & acknowledges parental preferences.
- Addresses costs, administrative burden, scarcity of licensed personnel, need for greater flexibility & opportunities to innovate.

# *Expanding Special Education*

- Modify *SBE Rule 2368* for publicly-tuitioned students with special education needs seeking admission to an independent school. Broadly conceptualized as follows:
  - Independent schools within the LEA boundaries participate in a placement process with the local IEP team.
  - If the IEP team concludes an independent school is the appropriate location the LEA shall provide and fund all resources required by the IEP, including licensed staffing.

# *Expanding Special Education*

- Modify *SBE Rule 2368 ...*
  - Where an independent school determines, through those discussions, that it is not the appropriate placement but the LEA disagrees, the dispute would be submitted to a panel for resolution. The panel would consist of a representative of the LEA, a representative appointed by Council of Independent Schools and an agreed upon neutral. Mission and best-fit are criteria to be considered.
  - Independent schools will not be required to obtain SPED approval. The LEA is legally responsible for providing the service and will provide the licensed resources.



# *Expanding Special Education*

- Modify *SBE Rule 2368 ...*
  - Independent schools may voluntarily choose to obtain SPED approvals in one or more categories, as a reflection of mission or desire to distinguish their programming—but it should not take 12-18 months.
  - Independent schools may choose to hire or contract directly with licensed SPED personnel.
  - SPED-only schools and winter sports academies do not need to participate in the placement process.

# *Demonstrating Financial Capacity*

Conceptually, one of the following will demonstrate financial capacity (*i.e.*, adequate resources to fulfill mission), submitted on a periodic basis, with due process and public disclosure protections:

- Financial statement by an accrediting agency, *i.e.* NEASC.
- A statement of financial capacity or letter by a licensed certified public accountant (LCPA) or licensed certified public accounting firm (LCPA firm).
- An audit from the present or prior fiscal year performed by a LCPA or LCPA firm;
- IRS Form 990.
- A statement of financial capacity by a peer review team or independent reviewer

# *Anti-Discrimination Enrollment Policy*

- Current federal and state anti-discrimination laws adequately protect and ensure access to independent schools.
- **Current SBE Rule 2113 Federal and State Entitlements; Nondiscrimination:** *“No student in a public school **or independent school** shall be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subject to discrimination under any educational program or activity as the result of, or based upon, the student's race, gender, color, creed, national origin, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability, or any other reason set forth in state or federal non-discrimination requirements.”*
- Federal ADA Title III prohibitions against discrimination apply to independent schools, as does Vermont Public Accommodation Law.

# *Vision Summary*

**Special Education:** Adopt a collaborative public-independent model that builds on incentives, avoids mandates and employs a best-fit approach.

**Financial Capacity:** Multiple options are available to demonstrate credibly a school's capacity to fulfill its mission.

**Enrollment Policy:** Current federal and state anti-discrimination laws plus SBE Rule 2113 protect students fully.