

Note: This is proposed to be a new chapter within the Regional Plan, and will ultimately be merged with the Childcare section of the Utilities and Facilities element (both Education and Childcare were previously contained within the Utilities and Facilities element).

I. EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES

As we approach the end of the final decade of the 20th century, the public mission of our educational system becomes more relevant to the region's citizens. Access to a system of quality education is required to achieve social and economic goals throughout the Two Rivers Region. According to Vermont Statute, the right to public education is key to guaranteeing political and civil rights to constituents. Indeed, "[t]o keep Vermont's democracy competitive and thriving, Vermont students must be afforded substantially equal access to a quality basic education."

¹ Three fundamental economic changes are necessary to achieve equal opportunity and engender to prosperity. One is that aggregate wealth must be increased to improve financial security. Second, the wealth of the State must be spread into more rural and remote areas where incomes are well below state medians. Third, financial and geographical barriers to post-secondary education need to be eliminated.

Sustained regional and economic development will be impossible in the region unless financial and geographic access to education is affordable and geographically convenient. Without a well-educated work force, the region, like the rest of Vermont, will be unable to compete with other states for well-paying jobs. Further, education and child care are necessary to community vitality. Education institutions make towns attractive to residents and employers alike.

Investing in education contributes greatly to the overall economic health of the Region. Investing in infrastructure and workers raises productivity. Similarly, investments in education promote economic achievement that also boosts the economy.² Throughout the late 1980s and 1990s, The economic downturn that began in 2008 has further recessions emphasized the relationship between economic development and an educated work force. Economic restructuring has resulted in a shift away from jobs in manufacturing to service sector employment. Many of these new jobs are at lower wage levels, as is true of such work in our regional growth centers. Education serves as a driver of local economic development. As workforce skillsets increase and improve, so, too, do job and wage growth in local economies.³ Personal income levels increase with gains in educational attainment. The earning gap between college graduates and high school graduates remains significant, with college graduates earning seventy percent more. Poverty decreases with educational attainment.

Challenges to Educational Attainment

- It is anticipated that the Region may see population growth of up to 6.2% between now and 2030, placing increased strain on the education facilities that currently exist.⁴
- Declining enrollment numbers in certain towns and villages threaten the future of local schools, which, if closed, would increase burdens placed on schools in adjacent municipalities. Over the past decade, there have been three school closures in the Region:

Hancock, Granville, and Plymouth, and many other are in active discussions about consolidation.

- The cost of publicly educating children places significant financial strain on many municipalities.
- Continuing and adult education programs are few throughout the Region, and are increasingly important as the elder population grows in coming years in order to promote lifelong learning, societal engagement, mental health, and well-being.
- Lack of access to wireless internet in portions of the region hinders access to educational materials for many in the region, irrespective of age or level of education.

A. Elementary and Secondary Schools

Sound planning for educational facilities and programs is necessary to support the social, economic, and cultural welfare of a community. There is a positive correlation between levels of higher education attainment and higher earnings; lower unemployment and poverty rates; decreased reliance on social welfare programs; and higher levels of civic engagement.⁵ Further, higher levels of education positively correlate to improved health, well-being, and lower crime rates.⁶ A quality education provides the foundation for a child's productive future, enabling the child to make positive contributions to business, civic affairs, and family life.

Quality educational facilities are expensive investments to construct and maintain. Schools require careful and diligent long-range planning by school officials, administrators, and citizens. Overall state aid to local and regional districts has declined, placing even greater burdens on towns to fund school costs through property taxes. ~~Starting in March, 1995, the State Capital Construction Aid Program, administered by the Vermont Department of Education, was available only to school districts with local voter approved construction projects.~~ Despite many attempts by the Vermont General Assembly and Executive Branch to reform property tax/school aid, Vermont has been unable to adopt a reform package that provides relief from high property taxes, as experienced in many towns.

All public schools are governed by a district school board elected by the voters of their respective municipalities; and administrative support to the district board is received from supervisory unions. In ~~20013/20014~~ there were a total of ~~forty-seven-five~~ educational facilities within, or serving, the region. Total enrollments amounted to approximately ~~9,905~~ 7,888, covering grades K through 12 and special programs. Some school districts and municipalities accept, on a year-to-year basis, tuition-paying students from neighboring communities that do not provide elementary or secondary education, or lack adequate facilities. (See Table 25 below, which depicts individual school facilities and enrollment totals for the ~~20013/20014 school~~ academic year).

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, school enrollments experienced slow to moderate growth, but this trend has reversed in recent ~~years~~ decades. Declining enrollments have brought staffing, programmatic, and financial planning challenges to schools throughout the region. It has resulted in the closure of three schools in the Two Rivers region in the past decade in Granville, Hancock, and Plymouth. If this trend continues, additional schools and municipalities will have to make

the decision whether to down-size their staffs and programs, or investigate the idea of regional schools.

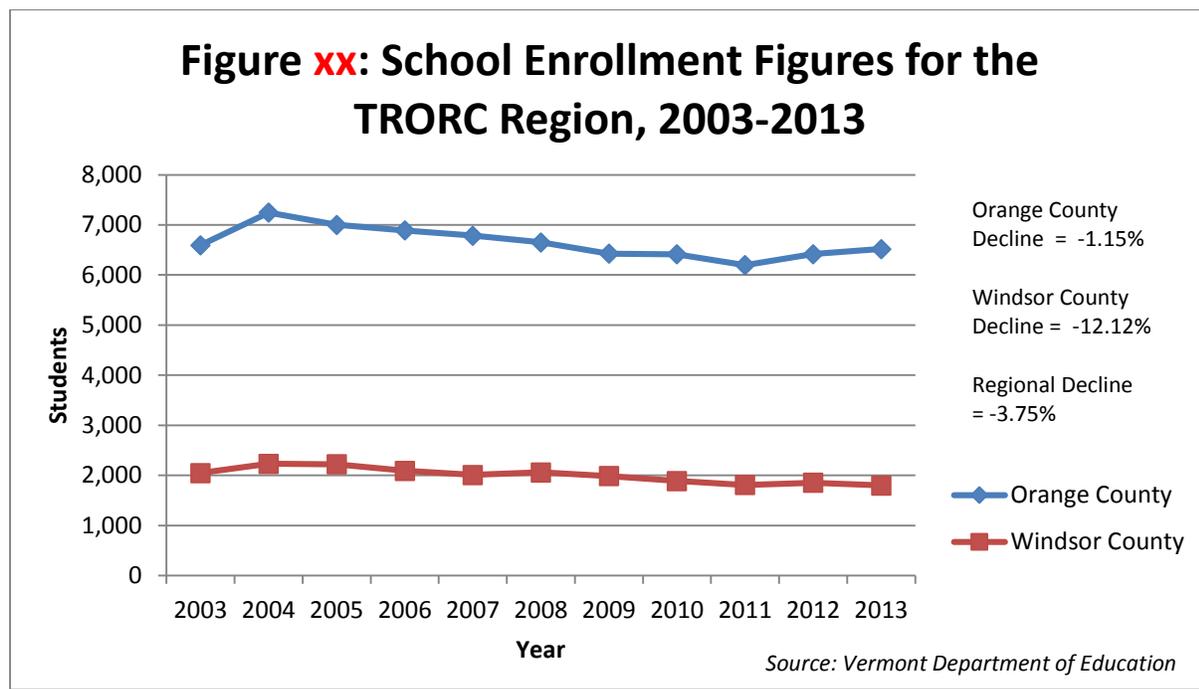
Table 25: Regional School Facility Enrollment Totals, Academic Year 2013-2014

			0	K P/T	K F/T	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th	AW	Total	
Blue Mountain SD	Blue Mountain USD #21 (District)	Blue Mountain USD #21 (School)	44	-	29	27	44	34	36	30	29	24	22	27	29	29	26	-	430	
Orange East SU	Bradford ID	Bradford Elementary School	32		35	36	26	32	31	34	16								242	
		Riverbend Career and Tech	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
		Connecticut River Academy	-	-	-	1	1	1	3	2	4	3	-	1	4	4	2	-	26	
	Oxbow UHSD #30 (District)	Oxbow UHSD #30 (School)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	49	49	74	84	68	66	-	390	
	Newbury	Newbury Elementary School	19	-	18	24	17	16	17	10	22	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	143	
	Thetford	Thetford Elementary School	8		22	28	27	26	32	33	34									210
		Thetford Academy	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	31	38	66	46	52	62	-	295
		Open Fields School	-	4	1	1	2	2	7	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	23
Waits River Valley USD #36 (District)	Waits River Valley USD #36 (School)	26	-	28	32	25	14	26	20	29	20	27	-	-	-	-	-	-	247	
Orange Southwest SU	Braintree	Braintree School	2		23	9	9	11	11	7	15								87	
	Brookfield	Brookfield School	1		8	8	8	6	7	11	9								58	
	Randolph	Randolph Elementary School	5	50		47	38	56	42	38	52								328	
		Vermont Academy of Science and Technology	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	56	-	56
	Randolph UHSD #2 (District)	Randolph UHSD #2 (School)										74	68	69	98	71	65	1	446	
Orange Windsor SU	Chelsea	Chelsea Elementary High School	2	23		11	13	11	11	13	10	18	10	18	27	19	8		194	
		Brookhaven Learning Center	-	-	-	1	1	3	2	2	2	3	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	16
	Strafford	Newton Elementary School	4		7	11	15	7	17	13	16	13	18						121	
	Tunbridge	Tunbridge Central School			14	15	14	12	13	16	10	16	11						121	
	Vershire	The Mountain School	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	45	-	-	45	
Rivendell Interstate School District	Rivendell Interstate School District	Samuel Morey Elementary School	17		24	22	24	16	21	19	36								179	
		Westshire School	24		17	14	9	17	13										94	
Hartford SD	Hartford	Dothan Brook School	43		43	37	37	35	37	49									281	
		Hartford High School												148	138	127	145	8	566	

			0	K P/T	K F/T	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th	AW	Total
		Hartford Memorial Middle School									114	92	115						321
		Mid Vermont Christian School	-	5		9	4	11	6	6	7	4	9	5	8	16	11	-	101
		Ottawaquechee School	28		51	38	36	33	34	30									250
		Potter's House	-	9	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	10
		White River School	38		36	28	33	30	35	28									228
Orange Windsor SU	Royalton	South Royalton Elementary/High School	15		32	18	22	21	25	24	23	22	21	38	41	28	32		362
	Sharon	Sharon Elementary School	34		15	15	14	20	22	14	13								147
-	-	The Sharon Academy	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	17	19	33	33	32	32	-	166
Sau 70	Norwich	Marion W Cross School	7		38	51	45	52	47	46	46								332
Windsor Central SU	Barnard	Barnard Central School	10		7	8	3	8	9	14	3								62
	Bridgewater	Bridgewater Village School	2		5	7	5	5	6	5	3								38
	Pomfret	Pomfret School			8	4	8	9	10	13	11								63
	Woodstock	Woodstock Elementary School	2		17	29	26	18	31	23	27								173
	Woodstock UHSD #4	Woodstock Senior UHSD #4												95	107	81	93		376
		Woodstock Union Middle School										74	63						137
-	-	Upper Valley Waldorf School	-	30	-	8	12	14	13	20	17	11	13	-	-	-	-	-	138
Windsor Northwest SU	Bethel	Bethel Elementary School	28		33	15	26	19	24	12	21								178
		Whitcomb Junior/Senior High School										27	19	26	21	22	15		130
	Rochester	Rochester School	14		13	13	11	7	8	9	10	8	8	12	15	16	12		156
	Stockbridge	Stockbridge Central School	4	8		10	5	6	8	9	4								54
Windsor Southeast SU	Hartland	Hartland Elementary School	7		34	29	26	44	27	38	34	33	26						298
-	-	Regional Totals	372	129	529	579	542	562	595	564	588	515	516	585	623	581	599	9	7888

In the decade from 2003 to 2013, schools in the Two Rivers region saw a 3.75% decline in the number of enrolled students. Where once there were 8,650 students for academic year 2003-2004 and 47 educational facilities, there were just over 7,888 enrolled students in 2013 and a loss of 2 schools. Viewed by counties as a whole, the decline in student enrollment was most pronounced in the towns in Windsor County, which saw student numbers fall by over 12% in one decade. The largest gains and declines in individual school enrollment numbers were seen in Orange County schools. The student body at Vermont Academy of Science and Technology in Randolph increased by 133%, whereas Potter's House in Hartford declined by 53%. Meanwhile, in Windsor County, the Bethel Elementary School's enrollment numbers increased by over 24%, and the Rochester School's student numbers declined by nearly 38%. Sustained levels of decline

may have untold social and economic impacts for towns in the TRORC Region, and are therefore and area of vigilance and concern for the future well-being of the Region.



Determinants of Education Funding

In 1997, the Vermont Supreme Court ruled that total state funding would be provided to school districts. Prior to this judgment (the Brigham decision), the state would provide aid that augmented local property taxes to fund the school districts through a state aided local tax system. Per Act 68 of 2003, the state Education Fund disperses money to school districts via categorical grants and education spending toward school district budgets. Together, these funding opportunities totaled more than \$1.35 billion in 2012, and were supplemented by the homestead property tax.⁷ The latter tax varies proportionally with each district's education spending per pupil, with different weighting used for different types of pupils.

Poverty and Education

It is important to note that the region's school system provides the main avenue of support for children living in poverty. In Orange County, 18.8% of children under 18 live in poverty, and, in Windsor County, 13.3% of children under 18 live in poverty. For those children who attend school, the school provides them with the supportive care they require, including providing them with important nutritional supplements through the free and reduced lunch program, access to case managers and counselors, and providing them with a safe and supportive environment. Schools also have a strong impact on children living in poverty by providing them with the opportunity to form strong, positive relationships, either formally through mentor programs or informally with teachers, coaches, and fellow students. Finally, the small class sizes in the region allow observant teachers to act as an early warning system, and to intervene on behalf of a

child whose circumstances might warrant greater attention and support. Schools can have a positive impact on students; however, the level of impact is possibly greatest with students from lower-income families. As a consequence, schools play a critical role in combating regional poverty.

Provision of Free Appropriate Education

Under Section 504 of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, no disabled individual “shall, solely by reason of her disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance,” irrespective of the nature or extent of the individual’s physical or mental disability.⁸ Generally speaking, all school-age children with disabilities are covered under Section 504, with “appropriate education” encompassing the provision of regular classes and all necessary aids and services that support a child’s learning needs, including services such as speech, occupational, physical, psychological, and/or diagnostic medical services.⁹

For all intents and purposes, the educational programs designed for disabled students must meet the needs of those designed for nondisabled students to an equal extent, be that through the creation of an individual education plan or otherwise. Students must be allowed, to the fullest extent possible, to be educated with a cohort of nondisabled students, unless it is demonstrated that their needs can be most effectively served in a different setting. Student tuition is to be free of charge to disabled students, with no additional financial burden placed on families or guardians; therefore, fees are to be borne by the school district. This federal act warrants consideration by all school districts, particularly at a time when some educational institutions specifically designed to meet the educational needs of disabled segments of the state’s population have closed or are facing closure (for example, the Austine School for the Deaf in Brattleboro).

B. Higher Education

Vermont Technical College

In 1962, the Vermont School of Agriculture and the Vermont Agricultural and Technical Institute merged to form Vermont Technical College (VTC). VTC is part of the five-member Vermont State Colleges System. Located in Randolph Center, the 600 acre college consists of thirty-one buildings, which includes a farm and home and automotive learning center. The school supports a current enrollment of roughly 700 1,650 students. The student body size has increased by over 135 percent in the past decade. The school also has campuses in Williston, Brattleboro, and Bennington, and it also has satellite campuses elsewhere in the state.

Vermont Technical College offers both two and four year programs certificate, associate degree, and bachelor degree programs in engineering technology, architectural and building technology, agribusiness, and computer technology agriculture, business, applied technologies, allied health and nursing, and sustainable practice. Additionally, the school provides continuing education opportunities for the region’s residents. Most students are primarily from Vermont and other New England states. VTC retains an excellent placement record for its graduates, many of

which find employment within the region. VTC also maintains a Center for Business and Industry (CBI) which provides outreach programs and services to business and industry clients.

Vermont Law School

Founded in 1972⁰, Vermont Law School (VLS) offers legal education to approximately 450 students throughout the United States and internationally States, internationally, and via online distance learning programs. Located in the village of South Royalton, the school offers three multiple advanced degrees: Master of Studies in Environmental Law and Policy (MELP), Master of Energy Regulation and Law (MERL), Master of Food and Agriculture Law and Policy (MFALP), Master of Laws in Environmental Law (LLM), Master of Laws in Energy Law (LLM), Master of Laws in American Legal Studies (LLM), and Juris Doctor (JD). VLS is a private institution and includes the Environmental Law Center and the Institute for Energy and the Environment, which oversees the environmental and energy M.S.E.L. masters and L.L.M.LLM programs while also and offering education on the issues and values underlying environmental law and policy. Additionally, the Center and Institute provides training opportunities for mid-career professionals, and serves the region by conducting extensive programs on current environmental issues.

VLS is the home of the South Royalton Legal Clinic, where second and third year law students work under the supervision of professors and practicing attorneys, offering legal services to low-income clients. Also, the Environmental Law Center operates the Environmental and Natural Resources Law Clinic, where students gain experience by working on actual environmental law cases under the auspices of professors and attorneys.

Community College of Vermont

The Community College of Vermont is an accredited college offering a range of associate degrees in the arts and science as well as certificate programs that help further employment goals or pave the way for continued studies at the bachelor degree level. The school has no main campus. Instead, services are delivered through a network of twelve site offices around Vermont and in online classrooms. The College is part of the Vermont State College system, and it provides degree and non-degree programs to 9,0005,918 students statewide as of the 2014/2015 academic year. The CCV has a facility in Wilder, which serves 350 part-time and full-time students; other sites close to the region include Montpelier, Rutland, St. Johnsbury, and Springfield.

Other Institutions

Although not located within the region, the following nearby institutions serve the region's residents:

- Champlain College – Burlington
- College for Lifelong Learning – Lebanon, NH
- Dartmouth College – Hanover, NH
- ~~Lebanon College – Lebanon, NH~~
- Middlebury College—Middlebury
- New Hampshire Technical College – Claremont, NH

- Norwich University – Northfield
- St. Michael's College – Winooski
- University of Vermont – Burlington
- Vermont State Colleges – Castleton, Johnson, Lyndon
- Woodbury College – Montpelier

C. Continuing Education

The availability of adult education services is critical to the social and economic well-being of the region and its residents. The Vermont Agency of Education defines adult learners as: “persons 16 years of age and older, who may or may not be enrolled in school, and lacking essential skills or a credential equivalent to high school completion.” The Agency funds continuing education through its Adult Education and Literacy Program. In the region, the Agency of Education funds three adult learning centers: the Vermont Adult Learning Center in Hartford, and the two Central Vermont Adult Basic Education Centers in Randolph and Bradford. These centers offer classes free of cost to adults in basic skills, General Educational Development (GED) certification, English as a second language, work readiness skills including WorkKeys (ACT) certification, and college transition skills. Additionally, The Family Place, a family support center, offers courses to young mothers with the aim of helping them earn their GED and acquire basic employment skills.

While both of the Community Action Agencies covering the Two Rivers region have adult education and job skills programs, neither of them have centers that offer their services within the region. This limits access of the regions lower-income residents to this specific avenue for educational services. Through accessing adult education services, lower income residents have the opportunity to improve their financial security by removing educational barriers to higher-level employment.

As Vermont’s senior population significantly increases in coming years, the State will be confronted with the need for both new educational and recreational opportunities that can help fulfill the intellectual and emotional needs of the state’s retirees and elders. There are a number of opportunities for seniors to be involved in continuing education programs throughout the Region, but distance, lack of safe and reliable transportation, lack of access to high speed internet, and a lack of understanding of the basic facets of information technology may preclude many from enjoying the opportunities available. Currently, with respect to in-person instructional classes within the Two Rivers Region, residents can participate in classes at Artistree in Woodstock and Vermont Technical College in Randolph. Dartmouth College also offers continuing education course in nearby Hanover, NH through its ILEAD program, and Riverbend Career and Tech and the Oxbow High School, both in Bradford, also offer adult programs. Additionally, there are opportunities to take classes online through public libraries (purchased from L@ad) and the University of Vermont. Some continuing education opportunities may be free for residents, while others may be fee-based.

D. The Future of Education in the Region

Many of our Region's communities have a school. Schools are often seen as the center of a community or at the very least a location that brings the townspeople together. But declining enrollments and an aging population are making the traditional model of one school in every town less sustainable. Surveys in many of our communities tend to show a growing frustration with the cost of education in Vermont. As a result, many communities are considering ways that they can work together to decrease costs and maintain the quality of education desired by everyone.

Some communities have opted to close their schools or merge schools with other communities. If the trend toward smaller classes and fewer children continues, more communities will need to engage in these discussions. However, the closing or merging of schools is not a simple decision. For towns with no defined community center, a school often acts as the central focus of the community. Schools provide a place where members of the community can join together to support common themes, provide opportunities for citizens to connect and create a sense of unity.

E. Infrastructure

Many schools throughout the state face the constant threat of repair or renovation, with rehabilitation efforts being a harbinger of increased costs for residents. The Two Rivers region is not an exception to this rule, and this can be a daunting prospect for towns to consider. Inadequate insulation, accessibility issues, aging electrical wiring systems, and crumbling infrastructure plague many a school, compelling principals and superintendents to defer repair work in some instances. Providing a safe, secure, and suitable environment for the region's children is a key concern for the region's well-being. A healthy school environment that affords children a chance to thrive intellectually and socially attracts families to the region, creates jobs, and helps create vibrant communities. The threat of repair is one element of many that has been considered when determining whether schools ought to be consolidated.

In the event that communities choose to close or merge schools, how to manage vacated infrastructure should be part of the discussion. For many communities, the closure of a school can present new opportunities. Because schools are often located within villages or town centers, they can become prime locations for reuse in areas that are otherwise built up. Possible options for reuse of existing school buildings could include:

- Town Offices and other Municipal services
- Elderly housing
- Senior Centers
- Light industrial development
- Business incubator or office park

In addition to the existing school building, facilities that have land which had been utilized for athletic purposes, may now be available for new development.

F. Goals

1. Promote accessible and affordable educational facilities and services throughout the Region that meet or exceed statewide standards, including life-long learning opportunities.
2. Support the sustainable management and use of the Region's educational system at a level that supports student-aged population fluctuations, and ensure that appropriate measures are taken to consider the reuse and repurposing of facilities in the wake of closure.

G. Policies

1. The construction of primary educational facilities shall occur in or within close proximity to existing or planned regional growth areas, so as to maximize their convenience and accessibility to people, infrastructure, and to contribute to the vitality of communities.
2. Coordinate with the supervisory unions and the Agency of Education to create a Regional approach to planning that considers the need for new school facilities and programs.
3. Towns in the Region shall consider the need for educational facilities and services within their capital budgeting and programming that promotes flexible facility use in anticipating the need for future growth and improvements.
4. Promote the expansion of continuing education and vocational education opportunities.
5. Encourage school construction and renovation opportunities that promote the use of existing municipal infrastructure and multi-model transportation access routes for the enhancement of designated downtown areas.
6. Support coordination between town and school authorities to create and maintain safe pedestrian access and transit opportunities to educational facilities, in line with Safe Routes to School efforts.
7. Encourage the adaptive reuse of vacant school buildings in a manner that enhances villages and downtowns and stimulates the local economy.
8. Support municipalities' efforts to evaluate the sustainability of existing school systems.
9. Ensure towns assess and incorporate the needs of disabled children into educational facility and budgetary planning efforts to ensure the provision of free and appropriate education for all children.

H. Recommendations

1. Support local efforts to assess capacity issues in our Region’s schools, and, conversely, that explore opportunities to consolidate where appropriate.
2. In assisting towns with capital plan and budget formulation, ensure that member towns anticipate and plan for improvements to public school facilities.
3. Work with local communities to determine which locations are most desirable for and best suited to the growth of new or relocated educational facilities throughout the region.
4. Encourage the development of school-business partnerships to promote valuable and sustainable employment opportunities in the Region.

¹ 16 V.S.A. § 1.

² Berger, Noah and Peter Fisher. “A Well-Educated Workforce Is Key to State Prosperity.” *Economic Policy Institute*. August 2013. <http://www.epi.org/publication/states-education-productivity-growth-foundations/>.

³ Bartik, Timothy. “Why education is important to the economy, especially the local economy, and how business can help improve education.” June 2012. <http://investinginkids.net/2012/06/14/why-education-is-important-to-the-economy-especially-the-local-economy-and-how-business-can-help-improve-education/>.

⁴ Jones, Ken et al. “Vermont Population Projections – 2010 – 2030.” *Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development*. August 2013. <http://dail.vermont.gov/dail-publications/publications-general-reports/vt-population-projections-2010-2030>.

⁵ Driscoll, Elizabeth. “Higher Education: A Perspective of Administration, Access, Affordability and the Policy that Drives It.” May 2013. https://etd.ohiolink.edu/rws_etd/document/get/ksuls1366481730/inline.

⁶ Berger, Noah and Peter Fisher. “A Well-Educated Workforce Is Key to State Prosperity.” *Economic Policy Institute*. August 2013. <http://www.epi.org/publication/states-education-productivity-growth-foundations/>.

⁷ “Vermont’s Education Funding System.” *Vermont Department of Education*. June 2011. http://education.vermont.gov/documents/EDU-Finance_Education_Funding_System_2011.pdf.

⁸ 29 U.S.C. § 794.

⁹ U.S. Department of Education, *Free Appropriate Public Education for Students with Disabilities: Requirements Under Section 504 of The Rehabilitation Act of 1973*. (2010). <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/edlite-FAPE504.html#textnote1>.