



Woodbury School Study



December 31, 2009

Vermont School Boards Association

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	1
School and Community Leader Contact Information	2
Report Authors	3
Glossary	4
Executive Summary	8
Governance Study Mission and Introduction	10
Woodbury History	11
Research Assumptions	12
Focus Group Feedback	14
Individual School District Analysis	21
Summary of Governance Research Findings	32
Impact of Possible School Closure on Economic and Community Viability	35
Next Steps	37
School Board Representation	37
School Choice and Governance Comparisons	38
Appendix	
Appendix 1 - Supervisory Union Efficiency Comparisons	39
Appendix 2 - Examples of Joint Contract Schools and Union Districts	40
Appendix 3 - Elementary Enrollment Trends	41
Appendix 4 - Secondary Enrollment Trends	42
Appendix 5 - Elementary School Announced Tuition Costs	43
Appendix 6 - Secondary School Announced Tuition Costs	44
Appendix 7 - Elementary NECAP Assessment Comparisons	45
Appendix 8 - Secondary NECAP Assessment Comparisons	46
Appendix 9 - Elementary and Secondary Student/Teacher Ratios	47
Appendix 10- Secondary School Program Opportunities	48
Appendix 11- Elementary School Financials	49
Appendix 12 - Secondary School Financials	50
Appendix 13- Woodbury Resident Homestead Property Tax Reduction	51
Appendix 14- Joint Contract and Union Expenditures and Tax Rates	52
Appendix 15-School Comparisons in Windham Central Supervisory Union	53
Appendix 16- Designating Elementary and Secondary Schools.....	54
Appendix 17- Joint Contract School	57
Appendix 18- Union and Unified Union School Districts	59
Appendix 19- Withdrawing from a Union School District	63
Appendix 20- Changing Supervisory Unions	64
Appendix 21- Recent Changes in School Funding Law	65
Appendix 22- The Evolution of Supervisory Unions in Vermont	66

School and Community Leader Contact Information

School Study Committee:

<i>Name</i>	<i>Email Address</i>	<i>Phone Number</i>
Vera Batchelder	thestoreismylife@aol.com	472-5719
Dan Brush	dbrushwoodburyschooldirector@gmail.com	472-8804
Chris Casey	cjohncasey@gmail.com	456-8848
Paul Cerutti	pcwoodbury@gmail.com	472-6181
Retta Dunlap	mountainfold@comcast.net	472-5491
Patrick Flood	pflood001@aol.com	456-8787
Steve Freihofner	steve.selectboard@live.com	456-1251
Vail Leach - Chair	vailleach@aol.com	456-7027
Peter Peltz	peter@peterpeltz.com	456-6524
Darwin Thompson	par3@earthlink.net	456-7458
Joe Wood	joe@woodburymountainfarm.com	472-6729

Select Board Members:

<i>Name</i>	<i>Email Address</i>	<i>Phone Number</i>
Brian Shatney	bshatney@aol.com	472-6224
Steve Freihofner	Steve.Selectboard@live.com	456-1251
Elizabeth Stratton	et4string@yahoo.com	472-8761

School Board Members:

<i>Name</i>	<i>Email Address</i>	<i>Phone Number</i>
Chris Casey	cjohncasey@gmail.com	456-8848
Dan Brush	woodburynet@gmail.com	472-8804
Monty Shatney	mshatney@milessupply.com	456-8146
Lindsay Whalen	lindsayw29@yahoo.com	456-1833
Dana Maxfield	dmaxfield@wildblue.net	456-1606

Report Authors:

Winton I. Goodrich, Associate Director
Vermont School Boards Association
2 Prospect Street, Suite # 4
Montpelier, Vermont 05601
wgoodrich@vtsba.org

David Cyprian, Legislative Analyst
Vermont School Boards Association
Vermont Superintendents Association
Vermont Principals Association
2 Prospect Street, Suite # 4
Montpelier, Vermont 05601
david@vtsba.org

Kieran M. Kileen, Ph.D., Associate Professor,
Department of Education, College of Education and Social Services
University of Vermont
499B Waterman Building
85 South Prospect Street
Burlington, Vermont 05405
kieran.kileen@uvm.edu

Glossary of Terms

Act 68 - Vermont school quality and funding law, originally referred to as Act 60 when passed in 1997.

ADM - Average Daily Membership count of resident and state-placed students who receive an elementary or secondary education at public expense. Resident students are counted during the period from the 11th to the 30th day of the current school year

Allowable Tuition - Allowable tuition is calculated by dividing actual allowable expenditures by the number of students. Vermont law requires publication of these data on or before November 1st each year.

Announced Tuition - An estimate of allowable tuition reported by districts receiving tuitioned students. Vermont law requires that any increases over a previous year's announced tuition rate must be reported to sending districts and the Department of Education by February 1st each year.

Approved Independent School - An elementary or secondary school, other than a public school, which undergoes the school quality standards process and meets the requirements of law. This is one type of private school and does not operate with a publically elected board of directors. Upon parent request, towns that do not operate a public school can pay tuition, at the average union school rate, to an approved independent school.

AYP - The federal law No Child Left Behind Act mandates that all students become proficient in mathematics, reading, and writing by school year 2013-2014. The rules require appropriate annual testing of all students in grades 3-8 and in one high school grade, annual determinations of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and accountability for subgroups, such as economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and limited English proficient students.

Charter School - Elementary or secondary schools in the United States that receive public money but have been freed from some of the rules, regulations, and statutes that apply to other public schools.

Circuit Breaker - Term used to define a category of resident taxpayers who pay school property taxes based on income rather than the full value of their homestead property; taxpayers who make less than \$90,000 are referenced as the single circuit breaker or those who make less than \$47,000 in the category of super circuit breaker.

CLA - The Common Level of Appraisal is an adjustment to listed property values that the state calculates annually for each town to adjust the listed value of properties to reflect fair market value as nearly as possible. Explanation of the CLA calculation is printed on the back of the property tax bill.

Designation - Voters in a school district not maintaining an public school may vote to designate a public secondary school (grades 7-12) or pay tuition to one or more public elementary schools, within or outside the supervisory union.

Dual Enrollment - Rigorous courses that provide both high school and college credits for students who complete them.

Education Spending - The amount of the school district budget, technical center payments made on behalf of the district, and any amount added to pay a deficit, which is paid for by the school district, but excluding any portion of the school budget paid for from any other sources such as endowments, parental fund raising, federal funds, nongovernmental grants, or other state funds such as special education.

Equalized Pupils - In the Act 68 funding formula, students are assigned different weights/priorities that trigger receipt of additional services. Services include factors of poverty, English as a Second Language, and special education..

Excess Spending - Law that encourages districts with high per pupil costs to examine why costs were so high; excess spending is defined as 125 percent of the statewide average district education spending per equalized pupil in the prior fiscal year.

FTE - Full-Time Equivalent is a term used to communicate full or part-time status of a student or staff member.

Governance - The relationship between school district voters, school boards, school administrators, and the legislative and executive branches of state government, and the assignment of roles and responsibilities to each of those entities, and the organizational structures created to allow each entity to carry out its responsibilities.

Hold Harmless - Limits annual equalized pupil decline in schools to 3.5% for state aid payment purposes, regardless if the drop in the number of students was greater than this factor. Creates more funding stability for school planning and budgeting.

Homestead Tax Rate - The rate of tax on the value of principal dwelling and parcel of land surrounding the dwelling, owned and occupied by a resident as the individual's domicile.

Joint Contract School - Ten school districts have created five different joint contract school boards. Each town maintains its own school board as well as sending voting representatives to the joint contract board. Jay-Westfield, Chittenden-Mendon, Athens-Grafton, Newfane-Brookline, and Whitingham-Wilmington are examples.

Magnet School - Public schools with specialized courses or curricula that generally draw students from outside customary school district boundaries.

OSSU - Abbreviation for the Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union, the entity that provides administrative and management services for Woodbury, Hardwick, Greensboro, Craftsbury, Stannard, Wolcott, Lakeview, and Hazen School Districts,

Private School - Another term for an elementary or secondary school, other than a public school, which does not meet the Vermont school quality standards requirements. A private school does not operate with a publically elected board of directors and has no requirement to

hire licensed teachers The closest legal definition in Vermont law is a Recognized Independent School.

Public School - Means an elementary school or secondary school for which the governing board is publicly elected. A public school may maintain evening or summer schools for its pupils and it shall be also considered a public school.

Recognized Independent School - Another term for an elementary or secondary school, other than a public school, which does not meet the Vermont school quality standards requirements. A Recognized Independent School does not operate with a publically elected board of directors and has no requirement to hire licensed teachers; sometimes referenced as a private school.

School Choice - When a town does not operate a public school, students are able to enroll at any in-state public school and the district pays the full tuition; students can enroll in Vermont approved independent schools or private schools outside Vermont and the local district will pay up to the statewide average union elementary or union secondary school tuition rate.

School Quality - Indicators such as school drop-out and attendance rates, assessment scores, student/teacher ratio, enrichment programs, and online courses, to name a few

Secondary School - Legal term used for students educated in grades 7-12.

Small Schools Grant - Annually awarded to small schools that have a two-year average combined enrollment of fewer than 100 students or an average grade size of 20 or fewer; maximum grant \$2500 per student.

Special Education - To the extent required by federal law, specially designed instruction, at no cost to parents or guardian, to meet the unique educational needs of a child with a disability, including classroom instruction, instruction in physical education, home instruction, and instruction in hospitals and institutions.

Supervisory Union - An administrative, planning, and educational service unit created by the state board, which consists of two or more school districts. Supervisory Unions are often referenced in this report as an "SU."

Title I - The federal government disburses money to school districts based on the number of low-income families in each district as determined by census data. Each district uses its Title I money to supplement and improve regular education programs offered to help students meet state standards.

Transportation Reimbursement - A school district which incurs allowable transportation expenditures shall receive up to a 50% state transportation reimbursement grant each year.

Union School District (USD)- A union school district is established when voters from two or more school districts agree jointly to own, construct, and operate schools (Harwood & Brattleboro Union Schools are examples).

Unified Union District - A unified union school district is a union school district that serves grades K-12. When two or more towns form a unified union school district, each town elects representatives to form one school board (Blue Mountain Union and Twinfield Union Schools are examples).

V.S.A. - Vermont Statutes Annotated are the state laws that govern the delivery of education services.

VAST - For motivated high school seniors, the Vermont Academy of Science and Technology (VAST) is a program for seniors to complete their last year of high school and the freshman year of college simultaneously; plus, two semesters of free college tuition for Vermonters at VTC (Vermont Technical College).

VTC - Vermont Technical College

Executive Summary

Study Purpose and Overview

At the 2009 Woodbury Town Meeting, voters unanimously approved the appropriation of \$7,500 to hire a consultant to prepare a study report for the Select Board that analyzes and justifies all economical options to educate Woodbury K-6 students. The Woodbury Select Board then charged the School Study Committee to work with a consultant to research how education services might be delivered in a more cost-effective manner and to communicate to citizens the benefits and challenges of the many available school options.

This study investigates concerns and issues related to the maintenance of a centralized public elementary school in the town of Woodbury. Cost and quality considerations therefore revolve around various scenarios that the School Study Committee sought to better understand. School options were examined and their viability reported in this study, including the implications of closing the elementary school and providing full school choice for all students, closing the school and designating a particular school or schools where the School Board would pay tuition, creating a joint contract school between Woodbury and another elementary district, and/or establishing a union or unified union governance system with another town or towns.

Students in grades 7-12 are educated at Hazen Union School. Woodbury has been a member of the Hazen Union School District since the late 1960s. This study also examined Woodbury's current governance relationship with Hazen Union and found it is unlikely that voters from the other member districts and the state board would support Woodbury leaving Hazen Union or the Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union and transition to another governance entity.

At the heart of the study is a key concept for Woodbury residents to understand. The primary cost-driver that has the most impact on the budget for any school is the student/teacher ratio. This study examines current student/teacher ratios in detail and in comparison to other Vermont districts. For example, in FY2009, Woodbury compared favorably to six other Vermont elementary school districts that enrolled a similar number of students. Woodbury's education spending per equalized student last year was \$11,859. Guildhall and Plymouth spent less; Ripton, Barnard, Sherburne, and Waterville all spent more in FY2009. Woodbury's education spending increased dramatically in FY2010, to \$13,860. The education spending figure is arrived at by dividing the school budget, less off-setting revenues, by the number of equalized pupils.

This study shows that for the Woodbury Elementary School to continue to operate, with a lower cost per pupil, class sizes would need to be enlarged. Grade sizes at Woodbury generally average 7 to 8 students with 4 students enrolled in grade four and 11 in grade five. With the exception of kindergarten, which has 9 students, the three other classrooms each contain two grades in a multi-age instructional environment. If voters wish to lower school costs, and are willing to balance that change with a potential diminishment of school quality, then the school could reduce one classroom and teacher. The new configuration next year might combine K-1 (15 students) grades 2-3-4 (21 students) and grades 5-6 (15 students).

The study presents two scenarios related to closing the Woodbury School. One involves unrestricted school choice, where families decide to enroll their children in any public school; the other, voters

designate one or more public elementary schools, where the School Board will pay tuition expenses. In both scenarios, parents can request the board to also pay tuition to an approved independent school. The closest approved independent school is Orchard Valley Waldorf in East Montpelier. However, with these options, there is no formal school board representation at the school(s) receiving Woodbury's tuition payments.

A fourth option, creation of a joint contract school is more complex than closing the school and either providing full school choice or designating one or more schools, but still requires in-depth analysis and a structured legal approach outlined in state law 16 V.S.A. §571. Likely partner districts could be Hardwick, Cabot, or Calais. Creating a joint contract school could mean a newly created school board could keep the Woodbury School open or send all students to the partner school. Again, voters make the final decision on whether to enter into a joint contract governance relationship.

In options five and six, if the Woodbury School Board, after studying the report, decided to recommend the formation of a union or a unified union school district, a comprehensive study would have to be initiated and completed in accordance with state law 16 V.S.A. §706. This is a longer and more in-depth process than creating a joint contract school, identified above. Creating a union or unified union school district could mean the newly created union school board could keep the Woodbury School open or send all students to the partner school. Voters would also have the final say about the results and recommendations outlined in the 16 V.S.A. §706 union school study.

What is different between closing the school and paying tuition and creating either a joint contract school or union/unified union district is, in the latter, costs/savings are divided equitably between the joint contract/union partner districts, based on ADM (student enrollment). See Appendix 14 for the financial analysis associated with these two options.

Educating 7th and 8th grade students in Woodbury was studied. The findings showed minimal benefit in pursuing this option further, given limited classroom space at Woodbury, program quality issues, and the difficulty in altering the existing Hazen Union articles of agreement.

The report provides information that town/school leaders and citizens can use to analyze the most economical and effective way to educate Woodbury students in the future. Once the report was completed by the Study Committee, it was reviewed by the Select Board and then delivered to the School Board to schedule a public hearing for January 11, 2010, where Woodbury residents will have an opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback about the future direction for delivery of education services for Woodbury students. Paper copies of the report are available for advance review at the Town Clerk's Office, the School, the Woodbury Village Store, and at Shatney's Garage. The report is also posted on the Woodbury School web site located at www.woodbury.ossu.org and the Vermont School Boards Association web site at www.vtvsba.org.

In summary, as you read this report, keep in mind that residents share many different values and points of view about what the best options are to educate students. Many of these values and views were expressed by Woodbury residents in three Focus Groups of randomly selected citizens. The Study Committee considered all points of view as they diligently guided research and the overall study process.

Contact members of the Study Committee above for more information, attend the public hearing and remain engaged in the process. Education is too important for all of us to not be involved.

School Study Mission

It is the mission of the Vermont School Boards Association to research the possible benefits and challenges for the town of Woodbury to continue delivering education services in the current configuration as well as explore the creation of a formal governance relationship with another school district or districts. The school study explored options for improving student learning opportunities, containing education costs, and improving the efficiency of school operations for the Woodbury School District. Given the pressure on school boards to reduce per pupil spending, while demonstrating increased levels of student achievement, it is imperative that boards take a proactive planning approach. The school study examined the key issues that will need further exploration to determine if there is interest in continuing to operate the Woodbury Elementary School or to create a new governance relationship with another district or districts.

Introduction

The demographic, economic, and political landscapes for Vermont's schools have experienced substantial changes over the past decade. There has been an increase in the overall population in Vermont but a substantial decline in the number of students in most schools. In addition, both state and federal departments of education have imposed numerous policy requirements, standards, and accountability measures beyond what has ever been experienced in the history of education. The work of school leaders is increasingly complex. Future trends for the United States and world are calling for new content and strategies to educate students of all ages. These factors have resulted in the need for local school boards to look carefully at how they deliver education services. What are the options? How viable are they? What are the benefits and challenges and how will they impact education cost, quality, and efficiency.

Before embarking on a school study that may involve a governance change it makes sense to explain what the term means. Education governance, as defined by the Vermont School Boards Association is:

“In the context of the relationship between school district voters, school boards, school administrators, and the legislative and executive branches of state government, it means the assignment of roles and responsibilities to each of those entities, and the organizational structures created to allow each entity to carry out its responsibilities.”

Interpreted in this context, governance means the relationship shared between the Woodbury School Board and voters, other school boards and administrators within and/or outside the Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union, as well as the State Board, Commissioner of Education, and the Legislature.

The goal of this study is to provide base-line data that will assist the School Board and voters to develop a sound plan that will provide direction for educating current and future Woodbury students. To this end, the study generated data on regional enrollment trends, area school capacity to accept Woodbury students, school budgets, costs per pupil, quality of programs, and applicable state laws.

In summary, we congratulate Woodbury voters, the Select Board, School Board, and School Study Committee for taking proactive steps to prepare for the future needs of students and the School District. The data collected reveals that this work is very timely and necessary. If a decision is made to move

forward with a governance change, the work ahead will require future-focused, courageous leadership by the School Board.

We are most appreciative of the ready assistance and cooperation extended to us by the Study Committee, Administrators, and School Board members from Woodbury as well as area school district leaders. Special accolades go to Vail Leach for chairing the Study Committee and for his endless hours behind the scenes to provide background information, support, and report proofreading. All of these people were instrumental in enabling the Vermont School Boards Association to conduct the necessary research for a thorough study. We thank you for the opportunity of engaging in the work important to this school study.

Recent Woodbury Education History

"Woodbury lies in the northeastern corner of [Washington] County ...and is bounded northerly by Hardwick in Caledonia County, easterly by Cabot, southerly by Calais, and westerly by Elmore in Lamoille County. It was chartered August 16, 1781, by the legislature of Vermont, to Colonel Ebenezer Wood, William Lyman, Esq. and sixty associates. In 1880 Woodbury had a population of 856. In 1888 it had ten school districts and as many common schools. Attended by 195 scholars, and fifteen attended private schools. The common schools were taught by five male and fifteen female teachers, at an average weekly salary of \$6.35 for the former and \$4.21 for the latter. The entire income for school purposes was \$1,246.11, and the amount expended for all school purposes was \$1,539.43.

The Woodbury Granite Co. was organized and commenced business in the fall of 1878. The Quarry is located about one and a half miles east of Woodbury Center, and one mile from the railroad [that linked] Marshfield to Hardwick. The J. Ainsworth quarry, opened about 1876, [and was] operated by the St. Johnsbury Granite Co." (Excerpts from the Gazetteer of Washington County, Vermont 1783-1889, Hamilton Child Publication, Syracuse, New York.)

The Woodbury community has experienced dramatic demographic changes over the past one hundred years. From the late 1880s through roughly 1910 the town was a major quarrying center. Hundreds of men boarded in town and worked in the quarries, shipping huge chunks of granite throughout the world. The Rockefeller Libraries were constructed using Woodbury granite during this era. In the 1980s, Nelson Rockefeller paid to have the Woodbury quarry reopened to assure the same granite was used to construct an addition to one of the libraries.

The current school in Woodbury was built between 1911 and 1914. Previously, students attended smaller rural schools in South, East, and West Woodbury as well a building in the village that now houses Shatney's Garage. At one point, the Woodbury School educated elementary and high school students. However, during most of the 20th century, older students were tuitioned to neighboring high schools in Cabot, Hardwick, Barre, Montpelier, and Springfield. In the 1940s there were approximately 50 students for eight grades.

From the mid-1940s to the late 50s, Woodbury rented high school classroom space from Hardwick and Calais prior to the creation of Hazen Union. Woodbury is a member town in the Hazen Union District with Hardwick and Greensboro; Greensboro and Stannard created Lakeview Union Elementary. The Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union (OSSU) consists of all of the above plus Craftsbury. The OSSU provides administrative services, special education, and general education support for these member

districts. Three School Board members represent the Woodbury District on the Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union Board.

The OSSU is a member of the Northeast Kingdom Education Service Agency (ESA), a regional school business management organization comprised of eight supervisory unions. The mission of the ESA is to increase the economy of scale for delivery of management services by jointly planning and contracting for professional development, special education, and related services that maximize resource utilization.

Research Assumptions

Research assumptions are beliefs or understandings that create a foundation for communication, information gathering, and areas of general mutual agreement on facts.

1. Woodbury voters have directed the Study Committee, Select Board, and School Board to study ways to continue operating the existing school as well as alternative governance options for delivering education services.
2. Residents bring many different views, levels of experience in public policy, and diverse values to the table when deciding about education issues.
3. Voters have the final say before any school governance change or school closure can occur.
4. The Woodbury Study Committee, the Select Board, and the School Board will analyze education cost, quality benefits, and the challenges of keeping the current school open, compared with options associated with closing the school and creating choice, designating a school(s), creating a joint contract school, or establishing a union or unified union school district.
5. The most significant cost driver in public education is the student/teacher ratio. Eighty per cent of all school budgets are driven by combined employee salary and benefits.
6. Under the Vermont Act 68 education funding system, developing a new governance relationship with another school district may reduce Woodbury voters' education tax liability.
7. Creating either a joint contract school or union district will enable Woodbury voters to elect a board member to serve on the new joint contract school or union school board.
8. Not all area districts will be interested in developing a joint contract or union district with Woodbury.
9. There is sometimes a substantial difference between a receiving districts' announced tuition rate and the allowable tuition rate that can legally be charged. The financial assumptions in this report are primarily based on announced tuition rates that were established in February, 2009. The allowable tuition report is not available yet from the Vermont Department of Education to more accurately refine the true tuition charge.

10. If voters close the existing school the School Board has no control over rising tuition costs charged by schools in the region in a school choice scenario. However, the Vermont Department of Education does regulate the amount receiving schools can charge, proportionally linking allowable tuition fees to each district's adopted budget. Receiving and sending school districts can enter into tuition agreements that set tuition rates lower than those calculated by the Vermont Department of Education, provided the receiving district makes the same offer to all other sending districts (16 V.S.A. §824-826). The school designation contract could limit tuition increases to an agreed upon annual percent rate change.
11. If the Woodbury voters elect to enter into a joint contract or union district outside the Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union, the Woodbury School Board will need to weigh the benefits and challenges for changing supervisory unions. The State Board of Education also has decision making authority in this process.
12. Receiving districts can include building construction/renovation expenses (16 V.S.A. §825) within their allowable tuition rate. They must exclude local district transportation and special education but may charge additional sending district per diem special education expenses.
13. The Common Level of Appraisal (CLA) has a dramatic affect on property tax bills but is not directly influenced up or down by local school spending.
14. School quality is very difficult to evaluate and compare across district boundaries. Quantitative measures include, for example, NECAP assessments, high school drop-out rate, access to online courses, and student/teacher ratios, to name a few. Qualitative analysis is far more subjective, making it difficult to understand the influence that variables like school culture, supportive learning environment, and educator or principal experience have on parent or student perception of quality.

Focus Group Overview

Dr. Kieran Killeen, Associate Professor at the University of Vermont and Kevin Hytten, a UVM doctoral student, facilitated three Focus Groups with citizens from Woodbury who were randomly selected from the voter checklist. The goal of convening Focus Groups was to learn what citizens know about the education system and to gather feedback that can be generalized about the future vision for the delivery of education services for Woodbury students. Three meetings were held that involved a total of nine residents. Participants each received a \$25 gas card and a light meal that was paid for through a federal Parent Information Resource Center (PIRC) grant. The remaining grant funds will be used by the School and the PTO to engage parents and citizens in other education partnership initiatives.

Description of Focus Group Planning

Development of Focus Group Format and Questions

During September of 2009 the Woodbury School Study Committee adopted a Focus Group strategy with two overlapping purposes. The first purpose was to better understand the governance issues and options for the future of Woodbury's elementary school program. The second purpose was to identify key language that could inform the development of a broader and more public deliberation over Woodbury School options presented by the Study Committee.

The Study Committee developed a set of seven research questions for the Focus Group exercise. The stated purpose for asking these questions was to identify potential efficiencies in the current management of Woodbury Elementary School and the relationship to improved learning opportunities, and cost-containment options. These research questions were as follows:

1. What critical educational services must Woodbury provide to ensure a quality K-6 educational system in Woodbury?
2. What programs/functions would you like to see improved at Woodbury Elementary School? Should students have additional learning opportunities that don't currently exist at the Woodbury Elementary School?
3. What's most important to you when considering supporting the Woodbury School budget and why?
 - a. The size of the budget
 - b. The quality of education provided
 - c. Local control of the budget
4. How important is it that Woodbury continues to operate an elementary school in town?
Critically Important - Important - Not That Important - No Opinion
5. If the Woodbury School Board had to reduce elementary education costs to maintain a reasonable budget, what would you suggest be eliminated?

6. Will offering transportation affect your attitude when considering whether students might attend schools in other communities?
7. What are the options the Committee should be considering as part of their research in addition to maintaining Woodbury Elementary School?

Selection of Focus Group Participants

The Woodbury School Study Committee adopted a strategy for a randomized selection of possible Focus Group participants in order to improve the scope of the Focus Group responses. This sampling strategy had several elements. Approximately 85 names were randomly drawn from the complete list of registered voters in Woodbury. This random selection was conducted by the Vermont School Boards Association. The VSBA then mailed a recruitment letter to the selected individuals, as well as follow up reminder post-cards or telephone calls requesting participation in a Focus Group. Of those randomly selected, sixteen residents scheduled themselves into one of three possible Focus Group sessions planned during October and November of 2009. Of the 16 people scheduled to participate in the Focus Groups, a total of 9 people actually attended a scheduled meeting.

Additional strategies were adopted to encourage broad and considerate participation during the Focus Groups. Various confidentiality procedures were introduced, including privacy shielding at the Focus Group site. Further, at the start of each Focus Group, a statement of informed consent was provided that detailed confidentiality procedures, including a request that participants not repeat what they heard others say nor publicly identify them.

Focus Group Findings

For ease of presentation and clarity, the findings for the Focus Group are organized in two steps according to the purposes desired by the Woodbury School Study Committee. The presentation of findings format follow the sequence of Focus Group questions themselves. Major and minor themes are further distinguished in bold lettering. This latter step is designed to highlight the specific ideas and expressive language used by Woodbury area residents to discuss their elementary school program and related governance issues.

Question 1. What critical educational services must Woodbury provide to ensure a quality K-6 educational system in Woodbury?

Question 2. What programs/functions would you like to see improved at Woodbury Elementary School? Should students have additional learning opportunities that don't currently exist at the Woodbury Elementary School?

Question 1 and 2 were developed to broadly engage Focus Group participants in education quality discussion, prior to considering more critical and perhaps opinionated questions regarding education budgeting.

Of interest here is that Question 1 and 2 elicited two types of responses from Focus Group participants, both equally relevant.

In the first generalized response, **participants clearly articulated very limited knowledge of specific Woodbury Elementary school programs. Participants who were elderly, attended Woodbury as a child, and or those who do not have school aged children all struggled to describe current**

programmatic offerings at Woodbury Elementary. One offered, in quite straightforward fashion that they have “no idea what programs are at the school.”

The second generalized response indicates how participants and therefore Woodbury residents think about quality educational programming. **Participants affiliated *critical and necessary educational programming with broad extra-curricular offerings at Woodbury Elementary School, such as after-school programming or non-core academic courses like art or physical education.***

Discussion during the Focus Group demonstrated concerns over cutting extra-curricular programs like after-school activities, art, physical education, or technology activities. One resident summarized from the group, “I think they said that they cut back as far as the gym, [or] the exercise program. I think that's important. I think the music program they cut back. This is what I'm hearing. And I think that's really important.”

Another argued “I'm talking about after-school programs like theater or something that the kids can get involved with and do something for the community like if they have a theater after-school program, they can do a show for the community. Just things to keep them safe and happy. Not home watching T.V. or at the sitters' being bored. Both parents have to work now, it's not an option, for the most part.” Another resident stated that basic reading, writing and arithmetic must be offered, but balanced across other important programs. They said “In this day and age, gym class you know. And then also community values, respect. Just things that get them ready to be good adults I guess. Other things are important. Art. That's not necessarily way up there, but music being art. Those can be after-school. But yeah, basic reading, writing, getting ready for high school type thing.”

Question 3. What's most important to you when considering supporting the Woodbury School budget and why? Is it a, the size of the budget, b. the quality of education provided, or c. local control of the budget?

When making budget decisions, a minority of Focus Group participants discussed budget concerns, but the majority articulated concerns over the provision of a high quality local education program. Reconciling these two issues was difficult for the interviewed participants. One participant stated “My neighbors are all older, elderly, retired. Whenever they talk, they're talking about money because they don't have kids going to school. A lot of them say “why are we paying, we don't have kids”... type thing. That's the only conversations I've had about the school is that, and that I kind of agree with them.”

Budget concerns were also expressed in vague terms, as in this representative exchange between the interviewer and interviewee:

Responder: The size of the budget would be my first.

Professor: And what do you mean when you say the size of the budget? What does that mean to you?

Responder: I was shocked at how few children go to this school, and the amount of money spent for the amount children. It seemed a little high to me. That's what I thought..... Only because of hearing neighbors throwing out a number about how much the school budget was and then thinking how many kids were going here. It just seemed like a lot of money for that many kids.

Professor: Do you have any sort of comparison that you use when you think about that? It's perfectly fine to say it's high, I'm trying to feel out how...

Responder: The only thing I have besides a, not a gut feeling, but just that everything's expensive nowadays you know? It's hard not to say that but, I think like private school, it's like oh my goodness some of these kids could be going to private school for that amount of money.

Despite the prior theme of limited knowledge around specific educational programs at Woodbury, Focus Group participants generally answered Question 3 with concerned statements about the quality of education provided locally.

Responder: I always look at the quality of education as more important. I know some people here would disagree, but my children had really bad quality of education here. It lived through them through the rest of their lives. My daughter never finished the tenth grade here. She was a hellion, I can admit that. My son was, he wasn't getting educated at all here or in Hardwick so we sent him to a private school in Maine, at our cost. It was very expensive to do that. We saw that this school and the one in Hardwick wasn't giving him the education that he needed.

..... in fact, just coming here [tonight], I heard parents arguing with their daughter out in the parking lot....saying that this is it, you can only get educated here!, and I'm like what is she talking about? But the little girl is complaining about some other kid and what he said, and the only thing I can think of is, these kids aren't getting educated again, here. Here we go.

Question 4. How important is it that Woodbury continues to operate an elementary school in town?

The importance of operating Woodbury Elementary School as is or in a future configuration, for the majority of respondents, consistently revolved around questions of how to sustain the school in the face of low enrollments. Across three Focus Group interviews, this theme emerged consistently. This immediate affiliation is evident in the participant that restated the question and identified the common low enrollment critique. They stated “At what point, how many kids are at the school and at what point do we need to close the school? Could those kids...when our kids were at school, we were over one hundred. Now, there's what, Forty or fifty something kids?”

The perception of low enrollments of Woodbury Elementary guided this question of keeping the facility open. Participants had a variety of “hard” figures for current school enrollments that guided their responses. Respondents thought between 3-5 dozen students enrolled in the school at present. Regardless of the actual figure, the sentiment remained the same, however, as evidence by this statement:

If there are only 36 students, in my opinion there is up-keep, running the school, electricity, paying the teachers, paying the principal, heat, paying the salaries, and the maintenance of the building to keep it operating if there is only that many students. The 7th and 8th graders and the high-schoolers are bussed down from Hazen, if there are only that many students, why can't we bus them to Hardwick and save that expense of running a building with that amount of kids?

There was an obvious sense of loss expressed by several Focus Group participants when they considered the implications of closing a school or altering the school's central role in Woodbury. Others were resigned to the idea that closing the school made some sense.

Responder 1. I just want to say one thing before...I don't have any children in the Woodbury School so I have a somewhat different perspective on it, but I think that as far as local control goes, there's to some degree a tension there, but I think it's important to keep some of it locally, and a good amount. And not just because there are children in school now but because what we do here locally now affects what happens fifteen, twenty, seven generations from now. And so, my emphasis is certainly on quality and perhaps next local control not in a dug in sort of way, but in a community way. In a community-centric kind of way.

Responder 2. One of the ways children learn community, is growing up in a community that's community focused. Then when they go out and live in Woodbury, or somewhere else, they know what that is. They know what community is. That it's not sitting in front of a computer on the Internet. That it's actually gathering around a table and talking about stuff like this.

Responder 3. I actually went to Woodbury, I believe it was in first grade. It was a combined first-second grade classroom. It was sheer torture. I then went to East Montpelier Elementary School where all of a sudden I could read. I wasn't being yelled at because I couldn't. That sort of thing. This was, granted, thirty-two years ago, but I just have a bad feeling about that. The way I was treated. That's part of my thing about this school. That's part of my thing about this school. Also, I hear people who live in Calais, the next town down, talk about their school and how wonderful it is. That's why I think it's not critical to have a school here if we have very good schools not far down the road. Whether they could take more kids or not, of course.

Question 5. If the Woodbury School Board had to reduce elementary education costs to maintain a reasonable budget, what would you suggest be eliminated?

Focus Group participants, as in Question 1 and 2 earlier, had great difficulty specifying answers to this question due to a lack of detailed information. This is an inferred finding given the wide variety of discussion that ensued from this very question. Some respondents stated encouragement to seek alternative, and lower cost management strategies such as reducing facility costs (e.g. heating, maintenance, etc.) or closing the school altogether. Most however expressed a lack of knowledge about key areas of the budget, and limited information as provided in the annual school budget report. Three statements from participants exemplify this finding:

They should look at an economical way. If it costs \$10,000 to educate a child here and \$5,000 in Hardwick, why educate them here? They could save some money for the taxpayer. There is no reason to raise the taxes in this town. I think it is outrageous.

I think they could try to look at the broad arrangement[to a solution of budget reduction]. If it lowered the income taxes or the school taxes by closing the school, it should be looked into.

See, that's something I can't answer without seeing[Budget]...I haven't been privy to that. We've seen the bottom line and kind of big groups of where spending goes but that goes back to my process thing. If we looked at...I just feel as if we haven't done due diligence to the processes to make sure that we're, and I don't mean that we just cut corners and ten percent here and ten percent there and that if we do due diligence to the quality aspect and the processes and figure out...so to answer that, we could say what do we cut, I wouldn't even want to without looking at the cost standards and where it's going and how exactly we're spending it.

Question 6. Will offering transportation affect your attitude when considering whether students might attend schools in other communities?

Transportation issues were not a large concern for Focus Group participants relative to related questions about Woodbury Elementary School quality, costs or governance. Individuals spoke in a matter of fact fashion about living and driving in and around in rural Vermont. A variety of respondents had no qualms about longer bus rides or children being bused to adjacent towns.

We are paying for bus transportation anyways for the other kids and we are sending two school buses out here anyway. That is my concern. We could bus those 30-36 kids to Hardwick. This is my opinion. I know it is important if it was a lot of kids, like what it was when our kids were going here. To have a home school in their own town. You see so many schools closing because they can't make it. If they can't make it and they have to go to Hardwick, the middle school and high school kids, why not school the elementary?

A number of respondents identified a concern however that transportation MUST be provided on equal education opportunity grounds or was otherwise the responsibility of the community to provide. These issues were discussed but left unresolved in the Focus Group and probably warrant more attention by the Study Committee. The following dialogue illustrates this point:

Responder 1: I would definitely take out transportation. My kids had terrible times on the buses. Transportation is a big line item I think and expensive [unclear] and the buses. Many times I brought my kids to school whether they were in Hardwick or here. I don't see why other parents can't do that either but...

Responder 2: There are some kids that parents don't have a car or...I mean it's to get educated in this rural State, in this town, bussing is major. You have to have it, you have it.

Responder 3: But, if you saw the line items, you'd see that the bussing is also reimbursed a whole bunch. Isn't it?

Question 7. What are the options the Committee should be considering as part of their research in addition to maintaining Woodbury Elementary School?

Responses to this final Focus Group question fell under two main categories. The first was continue to examine the broad picture about schooling in the Woodbury community, particularly the number of children eligible to attend the elementary school. The second is if the school remains open is to examine ways the building could be used more efficiently. Two general questions frame this latter statement (a.) Do we need to be operating the full building for the number of children that are in it? (b.) Can we use less of the building and reduce costs that way. Specific suggestions under these two categories are listed below:

Consider the broad picture about schooling in Woodbury, including demographic trends of elementary aged populations.

How many children will be here in future years? Maybe there won't be enough children next year or in five years.

Does the building need to be used in full for the number of children in it, or may costs be saved by using less of the building?

Create senior housing. I mean, I love this community and I plan on being here for the rest of my time. I wouldn't mind spending it on the bottom floor there. Have some little kids come around, put a puppy on my lap.

Expand the grade levels and offer older students from neighboring towns the enrollment opportunity here.

How about the possibility of looking at what a charter school is. If you take all of those mandates [public school requirements] out, what are we left with? We still want quality teachers. Does that mean there's no gym, there's no art? I don't know what a charter school is really.

The Waldorf School is done on a sliding scale. I work with people whose kids go there and they say that some of the poorest people in the area have their children going there and I know they make a lot of money, so I know that it works out. Everybody's happy.

They just keep certain sections, they don't need to maintain the whole building for 30 students. They need one room or two rooms.

I don't know if they continued that study, but they were looking into having a wood/gas boiler. I don't know if they have done that study or not to change the heating system at the school.

Individual School District Analysis

What Woodbury Would Need to Do to Continue Operating an Elementary School in Town

Moving now to the mechanics of school funding, there are many misconceptions about how taxpayers are impacted by school budgets. Act 68, Vermont's school funding law, is complex and difficult to understand. As taxpayers weigh cost and school quality options, it is important to note that only resident property tax bills are directly affected by local school spending decisions. Non-resident and business owner property tax bills are not linked to the costs to educate Woodbury students.

The Common Level of Appraisal (CLA) often causes greater tax increases to voters than the school budget does. The School Board has no control over the CLA and the continual appreciation of property values that is a key driver of tax increases.

The state returns \$900,610 in property tax payments to fund the Woodbury k-6 budget and \$812,232 for the grades 7-12 portion of the Hazen budget. This state payment includes reimbursements for special education, small schools grant (Woodbury Elementary only), and transportation aid. Woodbury is considered a "sending town," paying \$20,221 more to the state than is needed to fund education and municipal operations.

In Woodbury's case, the 2009 homestead property tax rate that residents pay is \$1.33; non-residents and business owners pay a rate of \$1.32 per \$100 of property valuation. If Woodbury did not operate a school and, hypothetically, actually had no students at all to educate, the resident education tax rate would be \$.84, including the CLA adjustment. Thus, for FY2010, school spending in Woodbury caused the education tax rate to increase by 49 cents per \$100 of property valuation.

Research on individual property tax payers surfaced an interesting dynamic. Roughly 61% of Woodbury taxpayers pay less than the full amount of their annual property tax bill. State law enables a household with less than \$90,000 adjusted gross income to receive an income sensitivity adjustment on their property tax bill. This means that Woodbury education spending and budget increases do not have the same impact on two-thirds of Woodbury's residents. For this and other reasons, property tax liability cannot be compared between residents and across town boundaries.

Furthermore, Act 68 is a statewide property tax. If Woodbury were to reduce the education tax rate by 10 cents, that change would not proportionally reduce the tax liability for every Woodbury resident. There are several state controlled variables that affect local tax rates such as the State-wide Property Tax, Base Education Amount, Income Sensitivity, and Common Level of Appraisal. Just because a decision is made to save money at the local school district, doesn't mean the tax rate will automatically reduce as well. In other words, there are too many other variables affecting your tax rate that are controlled by the state. The only variables controlled by the town are the local and union school budgets, which have less impact on resident property tax bills than the other state variables listed above.

School Closure Options

Shifting to a statewide focus, Vermont spends 1.4 billion dollars to educate about 95,000 students. If the statewide student/teacher ratio increased from 11:1 to 12:1, Vermont taxpayers would see a 40 to 50 million dollar budget reduction. National research identifies an ideal class size ratio of between 15 and 25 elementary students (Picus and Oden, 2009, *Review and Analysis of Ohio's Evidence-based Model*). Vermont has a 10.7:1 licensed teacher to student ratio; the total adult to student ratio in Vermont is 5:1. To accomplish a similar scale of savings, Woodbury would need to substantially increase the current 8.3:1 student/teacher (often called class size ratio because all licensed educators are counted) ratio and 3.3:1 total adults to student ratio.

There are two ways that a local school district can increase this ratio; one is to cut staff - the other, combine students from two or more towns by creating a different school governance relationship.

Currently, there are four classrooms in the Woodbury School with grade level configurations as follows:

Grade Levels	Number of Students
K	9
1 & 2	14
3 & 4	11
5 & 6	19

If voters wish to lower school costs, and are willing to balance that change with a potential diminishment of school quality, then the school could reduce one classroom and one teacher. This configuration would create a 17 to 1 class size ratio for FY 2011; a substantial increase from the current 8.3:1 ratio now in place. If the Woodbury School Board were to reduce one teacher, the savings would reduce the education spending per pupil from \$13,860 to roughly \$12,870. This assumption lowers the FY 2010 budget by \$68,000, dropping the current tax rate by 3 cents. If the Board brought forward a level-funded budget in FY2011, without reducing a teacher, the tax rate would have gone up 4 cents. Thus, eliminating a teacher has a 7 cent impact on the tax rate. However, this decision would dramatically increase the student age range in each classroom and substantially impact the remaining three classroom teachers' ability to teach effectively (see Appendix #14).

The new configuration next year might combine K-1 (15 students) grades 2-3-4 (21 students) and grades 5-6 (15 students). To balance out class sizes equitably, two second grade students could remain in the K-1 classroom and two fourth graders could work with the 5-6 multi-age class. However, that is a decision that should be left to the educators and principal to make. The difficulty with a three-grade multi-age classroom is the dramatic differences in learner abilities and each teacher's challenge to provide individualized instruction based on diverse student needs.

If Woodbury school leaders combined three grades as referenced above, it would open up additional classroom space. Orchard Valley school leaders have expressed interest to explore leasing one classroom at the Woodbury School. Currently, 20% of Orchard Valley students either reside in Woodbury or travel through the town from points north each day. A win-win option such as educating Orchard Valley students in Woodbury could benefit both schools, with few negative consequences. However, if Woodbury didn't reduce one classroom, educators would have to change how instructional space is currently being used before offering a classroom for lease to Orchard Valley. Any money

generated from a lease agreement would be counted as revenue, thus reducing Woodbury voters' tax liability. Woodbury voters currently spend about \$106,000 on operations and maintenance of the school facility. Lease of a classroom or the entire facility ought to at least be cost neutral, if not generate a small revenue stream that would potentially reduce taxes.

Another variation for further study would be to reduce classroom para-professionals rather than a licensed teacher. Similar budget reductions could be realized and still maintain four classrooms with this option. More study is required before considering this alternative.

School Closure and Full School Choice

If voters discontinue offering public school in Woodbury, two dynamics would emerge. The first change is students would have full school choice and could attend any public or approved independent school, within or outside the boundaries of the state. The second option in this scenario is the existing school building might provide additional space for the Orchard Valley School to open a satellite facility in town. Otherwise, if the Woodbury School was sold, the State of Vermont would be entitled to receive 30% of the sale price as reimbursement for previous school construction aid (16 V.S.A. §3448(b)). Or, if an interested party wished to open an approved independent or private school, it would be financially advantageous for Woodbury voters to ensure the School continued an education mission, thus, not requiring reimbursement of state aid funds.

School Closure and Designating Other Public Schools

Another way to increase the class size ratio, thus lowering costs, is to close the existing school and designate one or more elementary schools for Woodbury students to attend. The process for school designation and paying tuition to other elementary schools is guided by state law 16 V.S.A. § 821.

In both of these scenarios, Woodbury would no longer operate a public school in town. If the School were closed by voters, Woodbury would lose its State Small Schools Grant, which was \$68,291 in FY 2010. Unless the School was sold or leased, Woodbury voters would be responsible for ongoing facility costs.

If Woodbury voters were to tuition students out, the cost range differences charged by receiving schools are substantial. For FY 2010, Barre City announced the lowest tuition rate in the area at \$7,000; Cabot's is the highest, adjusted to \$12,500. With full school choice, the Woodbury School Board would be required to pay the allowable tuition rate charged by any public school a family chose to have their child attend. If the Woodbury voters designated specific schools based on their cost, available programs, and geographic location, some cost reductions might emerge. A potential elementary school designation scenario is presented in Finding #1.

Woodbury voters would have no authority to determine the educational program or policies if students had full school choice or the voters designated a particular school or schools. However, nothing would prevent the district or individual parents from providing feedback to the board or administration of other public, approved independent school, or designated school(s) on particular issues or concerns. The Woodbury School Board could choose to provide transportation to the tuition receiving school(s), but would not be required to do so.

Schools that receive tuition have the option to negotiate agreements with sending school districts (i.e., Woodbury) to charge less tuition than the maximum allowable under law and make other arrangements, provided that the receiving school offers the same terms to all sending school districts.

If Woodbury chose to close its elementary school and designate one or more area elementary schools in the region, its education tax rate would potentially decrease. Woodbury Elementary School is currently one of the highest-cost schools in this regional governance study. These tuition rates would be inflated by Woodbury-resident special education costs that would be billed back to the town school district, and any transportation costs Woodbury chose to incur. Woodbury would also lose its Small Schools Grant. Nevertheless, the difference between Woodbury's current costs (\$13,860 per pupil) and the tuitions charged by neighboring districts (\$9,000 - \$12,000 per pupil) indicate that some savings could be realized.

School Closure and Parent Choice of an Approved Independent School

Another variable, if Woodbury no longer provided a public school in town, parents could request tuition be paid to the Orchard Valley School or any other approved independent school. Approved independent schools like Orchard Valley can only receive tuition from public school districts at the statewide average union school rate, which is generally less than public school tuition (16 V.S.A. §821(d) and 823(b)). The District would pay tuition if the board approves the request. If the request is denied, parents can appeal the board's decision to the Commissioner of Education.

If Woodbury were to explore withdrawing from Hazen Union, and this initiative were supported by the state board of education, school leaders from area secondary districts may be interested to discuss possible secondary school designation, given the 2009 passage of the public secondary school designation law (16 V.S.A. §827(d)). If Woodbury designated a secondary school district for tuition purposes, there is some flexibility for parents who may want their children to attend a different school district.

"A parent or legal guardian who is dissatisfied with the instruction provided at the designated school or who cannot obtain for his or her child the kind of course or instruction desired there, or whose child can be better accommodated in an approved independent or public high school nearer his or her home during the next academic year, may request on or before April 15 that the school board pay tuition to another approved independent or public high school selected by the parent or guardian.

(d) The school board may pay tuition to another approved secondary school as requested by the parent or legal guardian if in its judgment that will best serve the interests of the pupil. Its decision shall be final in regard to the institution the pupil may attend. If the board approves the parent's request, the board shall pay tuition for the pupil in an amount not to exceed the least of:

(1) The statewide average announced tuition of Vermont union high schools.

16 V.S.A. §827 restricts the existing full school choice option for districts that don't operate a school, swinging the pendulum of cost-containment in favor of voters.

As an example, in a recently completed governance study in Pittsfield, a district that has provided k-12 school choice for 25 years, findings showed that if voters had designated all students attend the Rutland School District, that voters would have saved \$104,000 this year. This is a 16% reduction in their budget.

Joint Contract Options

Shifting the focus beyond reducing education costs with the current school configuration or closing the school and offering full school choice or designating a school or schools, the fourth option is to create a joint contract school. This governance process is complex and requires in-depth analysis and a structured legal approach outlined in 16 V.S.A. §571. Likely partner districts could be Hardwick, Cabot, and Calais. The school boards from each partner district would contribute board members to a new joint contract board, in numbers proportionate to student enrollment. The joint contract board would make education decisions for one or more schools that are party to the joint contract. Again, voters make the final decision on whether to enter into a joint contract relationship (see Appendix 19).

Union and Unified Union Options

Options five and six are similar to the rules associated with creating a joint contract school. If the Woodbury School Board, after studying the report, decided to recommend the formation of a union or a unified union school district, a comprehensive study would have to be initiated and completed in accordance with state law 16 V.S.A. §706. This is a longer and more in-depth process than creating a joint contract school, identified above. Voters would also have the final say about the results and recommendations outlined in the 16 V.S.A. §706 union school study. Creating a union district would dissolve the local district boards, merging all into a single governance entity.

What is different between paying tuition and creating either a joint contract school or union district is the costs/savings are divided equitably between the partner districts, based on ADM (student enrollment). See Appendix 20 for the financial analysis associated with these two options.

Returning 7th and 8th Grade Students to Woodbury

Returning 7th and 8th grade students to Woodbury to be educated was studied. The findings showed minimal benefit in pursuing this option further, given limited classroom space at the Woodbury School, program quality issues, and the difficulty in altering the existing Hazen Union articles of agreement. It would be challenging to provide a similar level of program offerings as those currently available at Hazen Union and, to do so at less cost than the current secondary school assessment. Dramatic staffing and program alterations would have to be made to accommodate enrollment of students in grades 7 and 8 in the Woodbury School.

Possible Governance Options with Other Districts

Cabot School District

Current enrollment: 237

Capacity: With some staffing accommodations, could accept all Woodbury students

Potential Governance : Union/unified union (k-12), designation, or pay tuition.

Cabot School serves students in grades K-12, and is located eight miles from Woodbury Elementary.

Finances:

Cabot's per pupil expenditure is five percent less than Woodbury's, including the Small Schools Grant that both schools receive. However, Woodbury's grant is much larger than Cabot's on a per pupil basis, indicating that Cabot is operated more economically. However, average teacher salaries are \$5,500 more at Cabot than at Woodbury, and the student-teacher ratios are about the same. Also, Cabot has very high special education costs. Therefore, it is clear that Woodbury spends significantly more money than Cabot on costs other than teaching faculty and special education.

If the two schools were to join in an elementary union or joint-contract relationship, Woodbury taxpayers would probably not immediately see a significant change up or down in their education tax rates. Although the consolidated school would be more economically operated than Woodbury is currently, the consolidated school would lose its Small Schools Grants, with a three phase out. Cabot's higher prevalence of special education spending would likely be absorbed by Woodbury taxpayers as well.

Whether the consolidated school would become more economically efficient over time as compared to Woodbury would depend primarily on whether the consolidated school leveraged its larger enrollment into student-teacher ratios that increased from the existing 8:1.

Cabot's education spending per pupil is \$13,188, which is less than Woodbury's per pupil calculation of \$13,860. The Cabot School is 8 miles from Woodbury over a steep back road, so distance is not a factor. This option consists of either a elementary union or a k-12 unified union district. The complication in creating a k-12 unified union is Woodbury would have to secede both from Hazen Union and the Orleans Southwest SU.

The easiest option of the two would be to create a k-6 union elementary district and for Woodbury to continue to be a member of both Hazen Union and the Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union. However, to do so removes advantages of economy of scale and preserving a k-12 continuum with a single school board.

In either option there would not be substantial cost savings.

Student Outcomes:

Both Cabot and Woodbury have made Adequate Yearly Progress to this point, and both have very low student-teacher ratios.

Cabot has very strong math NECAP scores, as well as good reading and science scores. Cabot's NECAP writing scores are about average for the region.

Cabot's high school dropout rate is two percent greater than Hazen Union, which is the secondary school where Woodbury students currently attend.

Calais Elementary School

Current enrollment: 151

Capacity: Can absorb all students

Potential Governance : Union elementary, joint contract, designation, or pay tuition

Calais Elementary School serves students in grades PK-6, and is located 11 miles from Woodbury Elementary.

Finances:

Calais spends nine percent less per student than Woodbury, and does not receive a Small Schools Grant. Excluding Woodbury's grant, Calais spends 12 percent less than does Woodbury per pupil. Calais's teachers earn about \$7,000 more on average than do Woodbury's, albeit with higher student-teacher ratios. Both Calais and Woodbury have low overall special education costs, but Calais does spend significantly more on individual special education students. It is unclear from this data whether this higher spending is a result of particularly needy children, or a more expensive special education program.

If the two schools were to join in an elementary union or joint-contract relationship, Woodbury taxpayers would likely see decreased education tax rates. Woodbury students would join with a lower-cost school system, even before any economies of scale were realized. Although Woodbury would lose its Small Schools Grant (after a three-year out), this loss of revenue would be offset by greater student-teacher ratios at all grade levels, which is the main cost driver.

Student Outcomes:

Both Woodbury and Calais have made Adequate Yearly Progress to this point. Calais has a student-teacher ratio of 11.7:1, which is a little more than the state average and larger than Woodbury's 8.3:1.

Calais students have excellent NECAP scores in all four content areas. Calais's writing and science scores are particularly impressive in comparison to the region.

Calais students attend U-32, a union school that has a dropout rate one-half of one percent lower than Hazen.

Other:

If Calais and U-32 Union became the only schools for Woodbury students to attend, then it would make sense for Woodbury to attempt to withdraw from Orleans Southwest SU and join the Washington Central SU.

Hardwick Elementary School

Current enrollment: 258

Capacity: Can absorb the entire Woodbury population

Potential Governance : Union elementary, joint contract, designation, or pay tuition

Hardwick Elementary School students in grades K-6, and is located 6 miles from Woodbury Elementary.

Finances:

Hardwick doesn't receive a Small Schools grant but spends 22 percent less per pupil than Woodbury. Excluding Woodbury's Small Schools grant, Hardwick spends 33 percent less per pupil. Hardwick's teachers earn an average of \$9,500 more than do Woodbury's, but this is offset by higher student-teacher ratios. Both schools spend approximately \$4,500 per student on teacher salaries. Hardwick has average special education costs, while Woodbury has low special education costs. Therefore, Woodbury is spending significantly more than Hardwick on costs other than teaching faculty and special education.

The option with the least complexities would be to create a union elementary district with Hardwick. Hardwick's education spending of \$11,378, is less than Woodbury's at \$13,860. The inclusion of 51 Woodbury students would substantially reduce per pupil spending, provided that Hardwick didn't have to add staff. The Hardwick facility could absorb the additional students, as their enrollment dropped from 341 in 2000 to 258 this year. At the grade 5/6 level, Hardwick would likely have to add an additional teacher, which somewhat diminishes the cost savings. However, increasing a school's student/teacher ratio will have the most impact on reducing the budget.

If the two schools were to join in a union or joint-contract relationship, Woodbury taxpayers would almost certainly see lower education tax rates. As mentioned in the prior paragraph, Hardwick's true costs are 33 percent less than Woodbury's, while both spend the same per-student on teacher salaries. This dramatic difference would outweigh the loss of Woodbury's Small Schools Grant. In addition, the consolidated school may discover additional economies of scale as the Small Schools Grant is discontinued over a three-year period.

Student Outcomes:

Hardwick has a 10.7:1 student-teacher ratio, which is almost identical to the statewide average and about 30% greater than Woodbury's. Both schools have made Adequate Yearly Progress to this point.

Hardwick's NECAP scores are mixed. The school's students show good results in science and poor results in reading as compared to the region. Hardwick's math and writing scores are a bit below average as compared to the region.

Both Woodbury and Hardwick elementary students attend Hazen; therefore one cannot separate out any difference in their respective high school dropout rates.

Lakeview Union School

Current enrollment: 74

Capacity: Can absorb some students

Potential Governance : Expanded union elementary, designation, and/or pay tuition

Lakeview Union School serves students in grades K-6, and is located 16 miles from Woodbury Elementary.

Finances:

Lakeview and Woodbury have similar spending levels and education tax rates. Both spend about \$13,800 per pupil, and both receive a Small Schools Grant of about \$1,200 per pupil. Lakeview's teachers earn about \$4,500 more on average than do Woodbury's, and both schools have similar, low student-teacher ratios. Lakeview spends significantly more on special education than Woodbury.

If the two schools were to join in a union or joint contract relationship, it is unclear what the effect would be on education tax rates for Woodbury payers. The consolidated school would potentially still qualify for a Small Schools Grant, but it would be drastically diminished from the amount that the two schools now receive. Woodbury taxpayers would also absorb some of the high costs of special education that exist at Lakeview. However, both schools currently have low enrollments and small class sizes, so it is quite likely that significant economies of scale could be recognized in a consolidated school.

To develop a more thorough picture of likely costs at the consolidated school, a specific examination of class, teacher, and staff configurations would be required. If the consolidated school was operated without larger class sizes it would be difficult to reduce education tax rates, because any minor efficiencies that were realized would be offset by the diminishment of the Small Schools Grants revenue.

Student Outcomes:

Lakeview, like Woodbury, has a student-teacher ratio of about 8:1, and both schools have made Adequate Yearly Progress to this point.

Also like Woodbury, Lakeview is currently so small that some of their NECAP scores are suppressed to protect student privacy. The scores that are available (reading and math) indicate that Lakeview students' achievement is about average for the region.

Hazen Union Middle and High School

Current enrollment: 359

Capacity: Can absorb the entire Woodbury population

Potential Governance : Continue as member of the union or secede from the union

Woodbury has been a member of the Hazen Union School District since the late 1960s. Vermont law and the state board of education follow a process that makes it very difficult to withdraw from a union school district but less so to move from one supervisory union to another. Although not impossible, it is unlikely that voters from the other member districts and the state board would support Woodbury leaving Hazen Union or the Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union and transitioning to another governance entity.

Orchard Valley Waldorf

Current enrollment:

Capacity: Can absorb some Woodbury students depending on specific scenarios

Potential Governance :

Orchard Valley Waldorf is an approved independent school which means they are required to only perform some of the functions that Vermont law requires of all public schools. They do not have to offer special education services but are required to provide 504 (federal program for students with physical or emotional disabilities, who don't qualify for special education services) accommodations to learners with qualifying disabilities. Orchard Valley Waldorf, historically, has maintained their announced tuition rate at the statewide average for union districts, and elects not to charge extra tuition to parents from choice towns like Woodbury. All students are asked to pay annual fees, in addition to the tuition paid by Woodbury voters, which can amount to \$300-\$450 per year. These fees include field trips, sport fees, and an "intent to return" fee to hold a student's place for the next year. The school fundraises and writes grants to backfill budget shortfalls necessary to operate the school.

Orchard Valley is an approved independent school (a term for schools that comply with most of Vermont's quality standards required of public schools). The Stevens School in Peacham, The Mountain School at Winhall, and Thetford Academy are other examples of approved independent schools. Approved independent schools do not publicly elect board members, are not required to follow some state and federal regulations and hire licensed teachers; they also are not required to educate all students. Towns that do not operate a public school may only pay tuition to approved independent schools. There are many recognized independent schools in Vermont, but sending districts that do not operate a public school, may not pay tuition to a recognized independent school. The difference between approved and recognized independent schools is they follow fewer regulations and have less state oversight.

The Orchard Valley Waldorf School (OVWS) in East Montpelier is located 12 miles south of Woodbury Village on Route 14. OVWS is an independent Nursery through grade 8 school situated on a beautiful 55-acre property. A renovated farmhouse accommodates the early education programs and a converted apple barn houses the grade school. Classes are small with a maximum class size of 18 students kindergarten through grade 8. Waldorf education is the largest independent educational movement in the world, with over 800 schools and an additional 600 early childhood programs in 35 countries. While all Waldorf schools follow a common method of instruction, each school is unique reflecting the strengths, needs and distinguishing features of their community.

Early Education: OVWS offers a continuum of programs for the young child beginning with a Parent/Toddler program 1/day each week and a 2 – 4 day Nursery program and a 5-day Kindergarten. The Waldorf philosophy promotes imagination and activities for children as they relate to changing seasons. The curriculum provides a rich daily learning experience through music, verse, rhyme, games and movement to engage large and fine motor coordination and stimulate early literacy skill development.

Grade School: The grade school program delivers a rich experience to prepare children to meet future world challenges with an approach that recognizes the phases of child development. The same teacher typically begins with first grade students, staying with the same class through the grades. In addition to the Class Teacher, subject teachers augment the program with French, handwork, earth-crafts, movement, and music. The visual and performing arts – including sculpting, painting, woodworking, drawing, and drama – form an integral part of the academic curriculum.

The school celebrates annual festivals each fall, winter and spring. For further general information, go to www.whywaldorfworks.org for a comprehensive website devoted to Waldorf education.

Twinfield Union School

Current enrollment: 424

Capacity: Can absorb the entire Woodbury population

Potential Governance : Expanded union elementary, designation, and/or pay tuition

Twinfield Union School serves students in grades PK-12, and is located 15.7 miles from Woodbury Elementary.

Finances:

If Woodbury elementary students were to attend the Twinfield Union School, they would be joining a lower-cost school system with excess capacity (Twinfield has seen its enrollment decline by over 100 pupils this decade while its faculty population has remained steady). Twinfield's education spending per pupil is \$2,300 less than Woodbury's (this difference includes the fact that Woodbury's costs are artificially deflated by a Small Schools Grant and Twinfield's costs are not). Adding all Woodbury students would drive this per pupil cost down even further.

Twinfield does have relatively higher special education costs, and its elementary population is larger than its high school population, so there may be an increased cost to absorb 53 Woodbury elementary students in terms of adding a classroom teacher or Para-educators. Nevertheless, it is very likely that costs for Woodbury taxpayers would appreciably decrease. Woodbury's students would be entering a system that operates at a lower cost today, even with a significant number of "empty desks" to fill.

Student Outcomes:

Twinfield has made AYP to this point. It has a relatively high dropout rate. Twinfield student/teacher ratio is 9.51:1 compared to Woodbury at 8.3:1.

U-32 Middle and High School

Current enrollment: 848

Capacity: Can absorb the entire Woodbury population

Potential Governance : Become an additional member of the union, designate, or pay tuition

Woodbury would elect a single board member to represent the district on the union school board if it became a U-32 member district

There would be no interest on U-32's part to create a joint contract school with Woodbury.

Designation of U-32 could be voted on by Woodbury voters.

If Calais and U-32 Union became the only schools for Woodbury students to attend, then it would make sense for Woodbury to attempt to withdraw from Orleans Southwest SU and join the Washington Central SU.

Summary of Governance Research Findings

Finding #1:

Based on cost research alone, taxpayers would benefit somewhat financially if Woodbury voters closed the school and paid tuition for elementary students to attend public schools in the immediate area that offer the lowest tuition rates. Five schools are identified in the chart below that are located within a 20 mile radius from Woodbury:

<i>Hypothetical Scenario</i>					
<i>Designated School Choice Districts</i>	<i>Tuition</i>	<i>OSSU Assessment</i>	<i>Total Per Pupil Tuition</i>	<i>Number of Hypothetical Students</i>	<i>Total School Tuition</i>
East Montpelier	10,039	1,826	11,865	11	130,515
Hardwick	10,400	1,826	12,226	11	134,486
Twinfield (k-6)	11,000	1,826	12,826	5	64,130
Berlin	11,290	1,826	13,116	5	65,580
Calais	11,899	1,826	13,725	11	137,250
					545,686
<p>Parent Requests for Students to Attend an Independent School - The electorate of a school district that does not maintain an elementary school may grant general authority to the school board to pay tuition to an approved independent elementary school upon notice given by the pupil's parent or legal guardian. Orchard Valley is an approved independent school.</p>					
Orchard Valley	8,400	1,826	10,226	10	102,260
Number of Students and Total Tuition				53	647,946
Special Education Bill Back (same share paid by Woodbury taxpayers currently)					67,217
50% Transportation (50% reimbursed by the state)					25,000
Approx. Cost to Tuition 53 Students to Five Designated Elementary Schools and Pay Tuition to Orchard Valley Independent School					740,613
Current Woodbury Elementary Budget					750,121

The cost to maintain the existing Woodbury School in FY2010, less revenues, is \$750,121. Comparing current education costs to the option of designating students attend schools that offer low tuition, Woodbury voters would pay about the same to tuition students out, as they do now to operate a public school in town. This computation includes transportation, 50% which would be reimbursed by the state, and assumes building maintenance expenses might be offset by the sale or lease of the school. A proposed school closure would formally open the door for negotiations with Orchard Valley School leaders, who have expressed some interest in leasing the Woodbury School as a satellite facility for Waldorf education.

If voters support this scenario, and the receiving schools agreed to accept designation, the School Board could provide total transportation for roughly \$50,000, and receive back from the state, roughly, \$25,000 in reimbursements. This would mean that Woodbury Elementary students would ride the existing bus to Hardwick with Hazen students, at no additional cost. Another bus would need to be

contracted for the southern run to the four other schools, with Berlin being the longest trip. This scenario assumes additional special education costs would be \$67,217, the same amount paid by Woodbury taxpayers in the FY2010 budget.

These five schools were selected both because of low tuition but also because of the likelihood that parents might be working near or travel by the schools while commuting to jobs nearby. It is also important to state that, by designating schools, parents and student selection of which schools to attend is a family decision. The hypothetical enrollment numbers used in the above chart to predict costs are totally random and can change dramatically based on family choices.

The downside to this scenario is there wouldn't be the traditional operation of a public education in town and elementary children would have to travel a longer distance to school. It is also predicated on the unknown variable of whether the proposed schools have adequate room to accept additional tuition students and the local board agrees to school designation.

The other down-side to closing the school and designating other schools is there would not be a representative on the receiving schools' board. Other schools address this issue by creating an understanding that a board member from the sending district will serve in an advisory role at all receiving school board meetings. The St. George District developed a ten-year school designation contract with Williston that formalizes this advisory school board agreement and addresses tuition charges, which can be less than the rate allowed by state law.

If the School Board decided not to provide transportation to the five schools, which is optional under the law, a concern about equity of student opportunity arises. Families who possess greater economic resources and commitment to the importance of education would be able to drive their children to the school of their choice; children from economically disadvantaged families would not experience the same .

It is important to note that the Vermont Department of Education regulates what a district can charge for tuition. This announced tuition (February of the preceding school year) rate and the later allowable tuition (finalized in November of each school year) charge is based on each district's school budget. Districts are expected to predict the tuition rate within a plus or minus 3% range. Additionally, schools in the region and the Woodbury School Board could enter into an agreement that would fix tuition costs to be an amount less than the annual allowable rate, provided the other elementary boards makes the same offer to any other tuitioning district (16 V.S.A. §826).

Finding #2:

If Woodbury voters decided to close the existing school and either designate another school or schools, or provide full school choice, two complications would arise. First, "upon the sale by a district of a building, for which state construction aid was awarded, the district shall refund to the state a percentage of the sale price equal to the percentage of construction aid received (16 V.S.A. § 3448). Second, the Woodbury School is categorized as a historic building, which requires specific restrictions on future owner's use.

Finding #3:

The most efficient creation of a formal governance relationship would be with either the K-12 Cabot School District or the k-12 unified union district at Twinfield. Cost savings is dependent on how much additional staff would be required to absorb Woodbury students. If school leaders believe that

Woodbury's student population can be absorbed with relatively few staff increases, the potential to lower education tax rates in both communities would be promising. Otherwise, it is likely that education tax rates would not increase or decrease significantly for Woodbury taxpayers.

Finding #4:

If Woodbury and another town's voters decided to create, either, a joint contract school or union district, the shared development and legal costs to transition and get the new governance entity operational would run between \$18,000 and \$24,000. The Vermont legislature enacted a school consolidation aid program that is scheduled to sunset in June 2010. The Vermont Department of Education will pay districts that create a new union school governance entity either \$150,000 or 5% of the base education payment (\$8,544) multiplied by the combined enrollment of the new district as of October 1st in the year that the vote was taken, whichever is less. This option sunsets on June 30, 2010.

Finding #5:

There is no comprehensive system for fully comparing the quality of one school against others. It is subjective, at best; personal perceptions play a key role. For this study, school quality was assessed based on NECAP (New England Common Assessment Program) scores, meeting AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) measures required by NCLB (No Child Left Behind - federal legislation), high schools offering honors, Advance Placement, and online courses, college dual enrollment programs, dropout rates, and student-teacher ratios.

Further analysis of school quality might look at teacher/administrator experience and longevity in the school district, educator professional development, number of National Board Certified teachers, implementation of a strategic plan, and routine completion of parent satisfaction surveys and school culture analysis.

Finding # 6:

Woodbury voters receive the benefit of the small schools support grant, (16 V.S.A. §4015) provided by the state to districts that operate schools with fewer than 100 students, or where grade sizes are less than 20 each. The maximum reimbursement for districts that do qualify is \$2500 per student. Woodbury's current Small Schools Grant decreases the budget by \$68,291. There is talk by legislative and policy leaders about phasing out the Small Schools Grant over a three-year period.

Woodbury voters also do receive the benefit of transportation reimbursement funds from the state, as the District provides transportation for students. "The grant shall be equal to 50 percent of allowable transportation expenditures provided to districts that do offer bussing for students"(16 V.S.A. §4016).

Finding # 7:

Another option is to discontinue offering public education in Woodbury and create an approved independent school in the existing facility. This is sometimes referred to as privatizing. The Orchard Valley Waldorf School in East Montpelier is an example of an approved independent school; so is the Stevens School in Peacham, The Mountain School at Winhall, and Thetford Academy. Approved independent schools do not have to follow all state and federal regulations or hire licensed teachers; they also are not required to admit all applicants.

Research for the Woodbury study cites two examples of school choice costing district taxpayers more money than operating a local public school or designating one or more elementary schools or a single secondary school for all students to attend. The Mountain School at Winhall is one example (see

Appendix 15). In the Windham Central SU, Stratton and Winhall costs per pupil are 20% higher than their public school counterparts. Winhall closed their public elementary school in 2000; the school reopened the following fall as an approved independent school. Most Winhall students continue to attend this school but are not required to do so; some are enrolled at Park Street School in Manchester - others in Brattleboro schools.

Winhall's and Stratton's education spending is nearly identical to Woodbury's. Neither of the two Windham Central schools have to comply with the same level of legal mandates that Woodbury does. At the Winhall School, families are expected to purchase a notebook computer for each child; the School has made allowances in the past to provide computers for families who lack financial resources. However, the students from economically disadvantaged families are not allowed to take the school computer home. The Winhall School doesn't have to provide special education services but they have complied with federal IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Act - federal special education law) regulations in the past. The school does administer the NECAP assessment process but is only required to do so for students who attend from public districts that don't operate a local school; some parents, from districts that do operate public schools, choose to pay tuition to the Mountain School, which historically has enrolled any student from Winhall who wants to attend the local school. Special education services are provided by Windham Central SU staff with a .4FTE special educator and two full-time para-educators for IEP students.

Impact of Possible School Closure on Economic and Community Viability

The following information is purely anecdotal and is generated in response to questions the Study Committee anticipates may be asked by residents regarding the impact if Woodbury voters decide to close the elementary school. School leaders in Peacham, Hartland, Pittsfield, Brownington, Georgia, and Kirby have stated that some families move to their communities to take advantage of the school choice option, mostly associated with secondary schools. School leaders report an increase in secondary enrollment numbers from what the district experienced during the elementary years. This anomaly has been occurring when overall school enrollment trends in Vermont are declining. Peacham, Hartland, Georgia, and Brownington all operate elementary schools and continue to track in-migration of families that move to their communities and send their children to public and approved independent secondary schools in the area. Kirby closed its elementary school in the 1990s and continues to experience an increase in the number of children the district pays tuition to educate.

Another anecdotal test of Vermont parents' strong interest in school choice occurred at a community forum that the Georgia School Board recently convened, following the passage of the new secondary public school designation law in 2009 (16 V.S.A. § 827). Over 500 residents attended the forum and, when asked to weigh in on giving up school choice and designating BFA Fairfax as the only school where the Georgia School Board would pay tuition, more than 400 people stood up in opposition to the cost-saving concept that would save voters \$500,000 per year. In Pittsfield, a town that provides k-12 school choice, parents on a school governance study committee stated that many families moved to the town to take advantage of school choice, available in a town that does not operate either an elementary or secondary school. The Elmore School Board was contemplating designating a single secondary school for students to attend. Parents convinced the Board to not remove school choice.

However, the major difference between Woodbury and the school districts referenced above who have secondary school choice, is Woodbury is a member of Hazen Union. Withdrawal from Hazen is difficult, with many stakeholders involved who have different and sometimes competing interests.

There is no hard evidence that maintaining a public school in Woodbury would help or hinder the town's economic viability or families' interest in moving to or away from the community. Schools are at the heart of each community and provide the glue that binds residents together. A large portion of Woodbury's tax base is associated with recreational properties on its many lakes. Most camp owners pay property taxes that are not impacted up or down by school spending in Woodbury.

Next Steps

This report should be read in it's entirety and shared broadly with community, staff, and administrators. The report should also be distributed to school leaders from the other districts identified in this school study. The information in the report should prompt honest and in-depth discussions about the potential benefits and challenges of all identified governance.

Residents should attend the January 11, 2010 public hearing to ask questions and provide feedback on the potential school options. The School Board and the VSBA consultant will highlight key study report findings and present an overview of the research at this meeting.

The Woodbury School Board will consider the report findings and resident feedback regarding future benefits and challenges of each option. Information will be provided in the 2009 town report for all residents to read. The School Board will decide whether to seek advisory opinions from voters on a refined list of options or to warn a particular option for a legal vote at a future town or special meeting. Voters have the final say before any option would be enacted.

School Board Representation

Below is a chart that provides a snapshot of what school board representation might look like if a joint contract school or union district were created with other districts. Union school board representation is driven by the constitutional standard of "one person, one vote." There is greater flexibility in board representation on a joint contract school board than a union district board. Regardless of dramatic town population differences, Woodbury would always have at least one elected official on either a joint contract school or union district board.

District	Town Population	Woodbury Population	Joint Board Reps	Union Board Reps
Cabot School District	1213	809	C=3/W=2	C=3/W=2
Calais Elementary	1529	809	C=3/W=1	C=4/W=2
Hardwick Elementary	3174	809	H=3/W=1	H=4/W=1
Lakeview UESD (Stannard/Greensboro)	185/770	809	NA	S=1/G=3/W=3

If the Woodbury Elementary School were to close and the voters support designating one or more elementary schools, there would be no school board representation on the receiving district board. However there is precedent, established by the St. George/Williston school designation contract, for a board member from the sending district to serve in an informal advisory role, attending each receiving school board meeting.

School Choice and Governance Comparisons

	Benefits	Challenges
School choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents believe they are able to match their children’s learning needs with appropriate schools and maintain school quality • Attract families to the town who are interested in school choice • Some schools offer tuition rates far less than actual costs • Sending secondary district not required to address Act 68 excess spending threshold and Act 82 two-vote budget passage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No board representation • Difficult for the school board to plan for the future • No control over escalating tuition costs • Parents may have to provide transportation • No uniform town identity at a single school • Attract families to the town who are interested in school choice
School choice with designation of one or more schools)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board can control tuition costs • All students attend the same grade level school • Title I and special education services easier to deliver 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receiving school must accept designation
Create a joint contract school or union district	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports unified curriculum • Improves equity in distribution of resources • Places an elected board member on the new joint contract/union school board • Begins to respond to declining enrollment in the region • Increases economies of scale for both towns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informing voters about benefits and challenges • New relationships to establish • Initially, cost per pupil may increase • Common Level of Appraisal impacts tax rates differently • Legal process and time involved to complete governance study and community vote • Dealing with community politics

APPENDIX 1 - Supervisory Union Efficiency Comparisons

Vermont is unique in the structure of supervisory unions. There is great variation in the degree to which supervisory unions coordinate their efforts. The following chart compares traditional supervisory union operations with those identified as potentially more efficient in controlling costs and delivering educational services for students. By streamlining supervisory union operations with all districts, there are potential cost savings that don't require changes as adverse as school closure.

Supervisory Union Operations

Current OSSU Operation	Potentially More Efficient
Some local districts negotiate separate contracts; most districts now required by law to negotiate through the SU	Single supervisory union negotiated contract for all districts. Ratification by individual member district boards and teachers.
Local districts develop and adopt policies and procedures	Policies are researched and drafted by supervisory union committee and reviewed for adoption by local district boards. Principals and the superintendent develop procedures/guidelines. Boards may review procedures/guidelines to check for alignment with policies. 16 V.S.A. §564(1).
Centralized book keeping in some local districts	S.U. business manager provides financial services for all districts via joint contracts with member districts. 16 V.S.A. §261a (8).
Special education and compensatory services are coordinated for local districts by S.U.	Special education and compensatory services provided for all districts delivered from S.U. office. 16 V.S.A. §261a (6).
Curriculum is articulated by superintendent	Curriculum director coordinates curriculum development and adoption through supervisory union executive committee. 16 V.S.A. §261a (1) & (2).
Local schools create their own in-service programs	Superintendent/curriculum director oversees professional development within supervisory union or as part of a regional collaborative. 16 V.S.A. §261a (5).
Local districts run their own transportation systems	The supervisory union is responsible for the entire transportation system. 16 V.S.A. §261a (8).
Local districts purchase services, equipment, and materials locally	All contracted services, equipment, and materials are purchased through the central office. 16 V.S.A. §261a (8).
Local districts develop and communicate annual school report independently	The supervisory union coordinates all school report information and distributes in a k-12 context.
Local principals respond independently to the media	Central office coordinates communications with the media.
Principals and the superintendent do not articulate particular roles and responsibilities	School boards, principals, and the superintendent identify appropriate leadership roles and responsibilities.

APPENDIX 2 - Examples of Joint Contract Schools and Union Districts

District	Towns Served	Square Miles	Grades Served	Students Served	Buildings	Year Formed
Athens/Grafton Joint Contract	Athens, Grafton	51.5	K-6	97	1	2003
Flood Brook Union Elementary District	Londonderry, Landgrove, Peru, Weston	117.6	K-8	418	1	1965 [Peru 1970]
Hancock/Granville Joint Contract	Hancock, Granville	90.7	K-6	42	2	2004 (Dissolved 2009)
Mettawee Community Union District	Rupert, Pawlet	87.9	K-6	188	1	1998
NewBrook Joint Contract	Newfane, Brookline	53	K-6	127	2	2009
Rivendell Interstate District	Fairlee, West Fairlee, Vershire, & Orford, NH	125.7	K-12	552	3	1998

Appendix 3 – Elementary Enrollment Trends

Most elementary school districts in the region have experienced decreased student enrollment since 1999. The Orchard Valley Waldorf School has grown its enrollment substantially over the past decade. This general enrollment decline in other Vermont districts challenge school leaders to maximize use of space, staff, and facilities. Unification of the school districts will enhance the new partner school board's capacity for flexible use of school facilities, sharing of staff, and generally maximizing economies of scale. This expanded enrollment opportunity may benefit Woodbury financially and programmatically.

Elementary School Enrollment Trends 1999 – 2008

Secondary School Name	Total 2000	Total 05	Total 06	Total 07	Total 08	Total 09	FY00-09	Can Absorb All Woodbury Students	Potential Governance Partner
							Incr/(Decr)		
Woodbury	61	54	57	65	50	55	-6	NA	NA
Barre City	957	916	905	910	890	861	-96	Yes	Designation
Barre Town	1,062	1,004	956	957	929	908	-154	Yes	Designation
Berlin	261	237	230	232	229	223	-38	No	Designation
Cabot (K-12)	239	212	193	212	212	237	-2	Maybe	Joint Contract/ Union/Designation
Calais	140	102	119	130	136	151	+11	Yes	Joint Contract/ Union/Designation
East Montpelier	228	214	223	231	241	268	+40	No	Joint Contract/ Union/Designation
Hardwick	341	275	295	282	267	258	-83	Yes	Joint Contract/ Union/Designation
Hyde Park	252	228	233	226	237	227	-25	No	Designation
Lakeview UESD	71	57	73	76	65	69	-2	No	Joint Contract/ Union/Designation
Middlesex	178	137	149	158	162	164	-14	No	Choice
Millers Run UES	180	162	155	156	159	160	-20	No	Choice
Morristown	421	357	358	352	370	375	-46	Yes	Designation
Walden	115	131	116	108	107	103	-12	No	Choice
Wolcott	145	144	142	133	141	136	-9	No	Choice
Worcester	82	66	80	77	81	71	-11	No	Choice
Orchard Valley	88	110	122	121	133	140	+52	No()	Parent Request

Number of Woodbury Children by Birth Year												
Year	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
# of Children Born	8	11	4	7	7	7	9	6	7	7	6	14
Grade	Grade 6	Grade 5	Grade 4	Grade 3	Grade 2	Grade 1	K	Pre-School				

Appendix 4 – Secondary Enrollment Trends

Most secondary school districts in the region have experienced decreased student enrollment since 1999. The Orchard Valley Waldorf School added grades 7 and 8 (grades 7-12 considered as secondary school distinction) has grown its enrollment by substantially over the past decade. This general enrollment decline challenges school leaders to maximize use of space, staff, and facilities. Unification of the school districts will enhance the new partner school board's capacity for flexible use of school facilities, sharing of staff, and generally maximizing economies of scale. This expanded enrollment opportunity may benefit Woodbury financially and programmatically.

Secondary School Enrollment Trends 1999 - 2008

Secondary School Name	Total 00	Total 05	Total 06	Total 07	Total 08	Total 09	FY00-09	Can Absorb All Woodbury Students	Interested Governance Partner
							Incr/(Decr)		
Hazen USD	439	401	381	363	359	358	-81	NA	NA
Cabot (K-12)	239	212	193	212	212	237	-2	No	Joint Contract/Union
Montpelier H.S.	488	418	430	411	378	318	-170	Yes	Designation
Peoples Academy	364	397	399	379	352	336	-28	Yes	Designation
Stowe	381	399	412	399	400	387	+6	No	Designation
Twinfield USD (K-12)	559	481	469	441	426	424	-135	Yes	Union
U-32 UHSD	843	876	890	885	856	839	-4	Yes	Union

Appendix 5 - FY 2010 Elementary School Announced Tuition Costs w/ OSSU Assessment

Elementary Districts	FY2010 Announced Tuition	OSSU Assessment	Total Tuition Cost
Woodbury	10,580	1,826	12,406
Barre City	7,000	1,826	8,826
Barre Town	9,300	1,826	11,126
Berlin	(FY 2011) 11,651	1,826	13,477
Cabot (k-6)	12,500	1,826	14,326
Calais	(FY 2011) 11,181	1,826	13,007
East Montpelier	(FY 2011) 9,776	1,826	11,602
Hardwick	10,400	1,826	12,226
Hyde Park	9,148	1,826	10,974
Lakeview USD	10,900	1,826	12,726
Middlesex	11,125	1,826	12,951
Miller's Run USD	9,451	1,826	11,277
Morristown	8,600	1,826	10,426
Walden	10,542	1,826	12,368
Wolcott	9,300	1,826	11,126
Worcester	11,896	1,826	13,722
Orchard Valley	8,400	1,826	10,226

Woodbury town's share of the OSSU and Special Education assessment: \$96,778

Per pupil assessment costs for 53 Woodbury elementary students: \$1,826

Appendix 6 - FY 2010 Secondary School Announced Tuition Costs w/ OSSU Assessment

Secondary Districts	FY2010 Announced Tuition	OSSU Assessment	Total Tuition Cost
Hazen	12,700	2,065	14,765
Cabot (7-12)	13,500	2,065	16,065
Montpelier	12,775	2,065	14,840
Peoples Academy	9,925	2,065	11,990
Spaulding	10,500	2,065	12,565
Stowe	12,900	2,065	14,965
Twinfield (7-12)	12,500	2,065	14,565
U-32	(FY 2011) 13,627	2,065	15,692

- A. Woodbury town's share of Hazen USD OSSU Assessment: \$28,404
- B. Woodbury town's share of Hazen USD share of Special Education costs FY10 (est.): \$56,256
- C. Per pupil assessment costs for Woodbury high school students (i.e., A + B / 41 students): \$2,065

Appendix 7 – Elementary School NECAP Assessment Comparisons

Grades	District Name	Gov. Configs.	S.U.	Student:Teacher Ratio	2008 NECAP Proficiency*				Adequate Yearly Progress Report 2009
					Reading	Math	Writing	Science**	
k-6	Woodbury		35	8.3	68%	46%	++	++	Made AYP
pk-8	Barre City	C.	61	11.3	65%	61%	41%	40%	Yr 3 Corrective Action
pk-8	Barre Town	C.	61	12.7	70%	64%	60%	46%	Yr 1 Corrective Action
pk-6	Berlin	C.	32	11.4	62%	51%	53%	38%	Missed AYP 1st Time
k-6	Cabot	J.U.D.C	41	8.1	76%	70%	54%	60%	Made AYP
pk-6	Calais	J.U.D.C	32	11.7	78%	77%	71%	82%	Made AYP
pk-6	East Montpelier	D.	32	12.5	77%	69%	72%	60%	Made AYP
k-6	Hardwick	J.U.D.C	35	10.7	59%	56%	45%	67%	Made AYP
pk-6	Hyde Park	C.	25	11.1	54%	53%	31%	70%	Yr 1 School Improv.
k-6	Lakeview UESD	J.U.D.C	35	8.1	69%	62%	++	++	Made AYP
pk-6	Middlesex	C.	32	12.9	81%	78%	75%	45%	Made AYP
pk-8	Millers Run UES	C.	08	16.6	72%	60%	50%	42%	Made AYP
pk-8	Walden	C.	09	9.2	75%	66%	39%	50%	Made AYP
k-6	Wolcott	C.D.	35	12.5	70%	59%	48%	71%	Made AYP
pk-6	Worcester	C.D.	32	10.4	70%	50%	++	++	Made AYP
k-8	Orchard Valley	C.D.		12.1	Only assess students who reside in districts that pay tuition - No reporting				

Legend for column headers

* Proficiency means achievement of "Proficient" or better.

** Elementary science assessment is the 4th grade result from 2009.

++ Vermont Department of Education does not report data with class sizes fewer than 10 students

Appendix 8 – Secondary School NECAP Assessment Comparisons

Grades	District Name	2008 NECAP Proficiency* Reading	7th - 12th Grade Math	Writing	Science**	Annual Dropout Rate	Made Adequate Yearly Progress 2009
7-12	Hazen USD	72%	36%	37%	30%	2.6%	<i>Made AYP</i>
<i>k-12</i>	<i>Cabot</i>	<i>63%</i>	<i>37%</i>	<i>32%</i>	<i>32%</i>	<i>4.6%</i>	<i>Made AYP</i>
<i>k-5, 6-8, 9-12</i>	<i>Montpelier</i>	<i>82%</i>	<i>53%</i>	<i>52%</i>	<i>37%</i>	<i>2.1%</i>	<i>Made AYP</i>
<i>k-5, 6-8, 9-12</i>	<i>Peoples Academy</i>	<i>74%</i>	<i>32%</i>	<i>49%</i>	<i>31%</i>	<i>3.8%</i>	<i>Made AYP</i>
<i>k-5, 6-8, 9-12</i>	<i>Stowe</i>	<i>88%</i>	<i>67%</i>	<i>62%</i>	<i>56%</i>	<i>0.0%</i>	<i>Made AYP</i>
<i>pk-12</i>	<i>Twinfield USD</i>	<i>74%</i>	<i>35%</i>	<i>48%</i>	<i>21%</i>	<i>5.0%</i>	<i>Made AYP</i>
<i>7-12</i>	<i>U-32 UHSD</i>	<i>76%</i>	<i>43%</i>	<i>44%</i>	<i>39%</i>	<i>2.0%</i>	<i>Made AYP</i>

Appendix 9 - Elementary & Secondary Student/Teacher Ratio and Transportation

Grades	District Name	Student/Teacher Ratio	Travel Distances	Capacity to Absorb Woodbury Students	Transportation Costs @ \$3/mile
k-6	Woodbury	8.3			
pk-8	Barre City	11.3	21	Yes	\$45,360
pk-8	Barre Town	12.7	22	All	\$47,520
pk-6	Berlin	11.4	20	10 to 15	\$43,000
k-6	Cabot	8.1	8	Most Elem./All HS	\$17,280
pk-6	Calais	11.7	10	All	\$21,600
pk-6	East Montpelier	12.5	15	Exploring Possible School Expansion	\$32,400
k-6	Hardwick	10.7	6	All (possibly hire additional teacher)	\$12,960
pk-6	Hyde Park	11.1	21	NA	\$45,360
k-6	Lakeview UESD	8.1	16	Yes	\$34,560
pk-6	Middlesex	12.9	28	NA	\$60,480
pk-8	Millers Run UES	16.6	32	NA	\$69,120
	Morristown	12.3	20	Yes	\$43,200
pk-8	Walden	9.0	24	NA	\$51,840
k-6	Wolcott	12.5	11	NA	\$23,760
pk-6	Worcester	10.4	12	NA	\$25,920
k-8	Orchard Valley	12.1	12	Exploring School Expansion or Leasing	\$25,920
7-12	U-32	11.6	17	All 7-12	\$36,720

Appendix 10 – Secondary School Program Opportunities

	Travel Distances	Student/Teacher Ratio	Advance Placement Courses	Honors Classes	Online Courses	College Dual Enrollment	Other
Hazen UHSD	6	9.8	4	4	Upon approval	By student	VAST @VTC
Cabot	8	8.1	4	1	Upon approval	N/A	VAST @VTC
Montpelier	21	9.3	6	7	Upon approval	Upon approval	VAST @VTC
Peoples Academy	20	12.3	6	19	Upon approval	Upon approval	Honors means “College Prep” VAST @VTC
Stowe	31	13.3	7	4	Upon approval	Upon approval	VAST @VTC Freshman and Sophomore Honors
Twinfield USD	16	9.5	0	5	no	Upon approval	VAST @VTC
U-32 UHSD	17	11.6	0	0	Upon approval	Upon approval	VAST @VTC
Spaulding	21	11.5	10	11	No	Upon approval	VAST @VTC

Appendix 11 – Elementary School Financials

<i>B</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>G</i>	<i>H</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>J</i>	<i>K</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>O</i>
Elem. Grade	District	School Enroll. FY09	Local & Union Member EqPupil FY10	Ed. Spend. Per Equal. Pupil	Equalized Homestead Tax Rates FY10	Municipal Equalized Homestead Tax Rates FY10	Small Schools Grant Per Pupil FY10	Ed. Spend. Per Pupil without SSG FY10	% over/under Statewide Avg. Spec. Ed. Cost FY08	High/low Sped.Ed. Spenders Per ADM FY08	High/Low Spenders Per SPED Student FY08	Avg. Teacher Salary per FTE FY08
	State Averages			12,036	1.21		72	12,108				49,521
k-6	Woodbury	55	54	13,860	1.40	1.36	1,262	15,122	-32%	low		38,638
pk-8	Barre City - C.	861	868	8,964	0.90	0.93	-	8,964	-20%		low	44,855
pk-8	Barre Town - C.	908	877	9,179	0.92	0.94	-	9,179	-15%			46,874
pk-6	Berlin - C.	223	197	12,851	1.29	1.30	-	12,851	-20%			46,791
k-6	Cabot - J.U.D.C.	237	201	13,188	1.33	1.33	336	13,524	42%	HIGH	HIGH	44,212
pk-6	Calais - J.U.D.C.	151	119	12,727	1.28	1.30	-	12,727	-22%	low	HIGH	45,643
pk-6	East Montpelier - C. D.	268	220	12,328	1.24	1.28	-	12,328	21%	HIGH	HIGH	48,889
k-6	Hardwick - J.U.D.C.	258	277	11,378	1.15	1.23	-	11,378	-5%		HIGH	48,104
pk-6	Hyde Park - C.	227	205	12,006	1.21	1.27	-	12,006	-12%			38,419
k-6	Lakeview - J.U.D.C.	69	67	13,807	1.39	-	1,184	14,991	24%	HIGH	HIGH	43,194
pk-6	Middlesex - C. D.	164	134	13,060	1.31	1.31	-	13,060	-5%		HIGH	45,220
pk-8	Millers Run- C.	160	227	10,936	1.10	-	210	11,146	-48%	low	low	41,258
k-12	Morristown	943	826	10,037	1.01	1.01	-	10,037	-27%	low	HIGH	45,279
pk-8	Walden - C.	103	180	10,542	1.06	1.06	564	11,106	-59%	low	low	35,514
k-6	Wolcott - C.D.	136	271	11,831	1.19	1.19	57	11,888	-46%	low	low	44,833
pk-6	Worcester - C.D.	71	65	13,880	1.40	1.35	1,270	15,150	-16%		HIGH	48,224
pk-8	Orchard Valley - C.D.	142 (FY10)	NA	8,400	NA	NA	-	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

Appendix 12 – Secondary School Financials

<i>B</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>G</i>	<i>H</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>J</i>	<i>K</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>O</i>
Second. School Grade	District	School Enroll. FY09	Local & Union Member EqPupil FY10	Ed. Spend. Per Equal. Pupil	Equalized Homestead Tax Rates FY10	Municipal Equalized Homestead Tax Rates FY10	Small Schools Grant Per Pupil FY10	Ed. Spend. Per Pupil without SSG FY10	% over/under Statewide Avg. Spec. Ed. Cost FY08	High/low Sped.Ed. Spenders Per ADM FY08	High/Low Spenders Per SPED Student FY08	Avg. Teacher Salary per FTE FY08
	State Averages			12,036	1.21		72	12,108				49,521
7-12	Woodbury											
7-12	Hazen UHSD	358	373	13,135	1.32	-	-	13,135	-7%		HIGH	42,326
7-12	U-32 UHSD - U.	839	863	13,014	1.31	-	-	13,014	-11%			48,103
k-12	Cabot - J.U.D.C.	237	201	13,188	1.33	1.33	336	13,524	42%	HIGH	HIGH	44,212
k-5, 6-8, 9-12	Montpelier - D.C.	972	990	12,512	1.26	1.26	-	12,512	8%		HIGH	47,257
k-5, 6-8, 9-12	Peoples Acad.- D.C.	943	826	10,037	1.01	1.01	-	10,037	-27%	low	HIGH	45,279
k-5, 6-8, 9-12	Stowe - C.	652	628	12,917	1.30	1.30	-	12,917	-43%	low		54,921
pk-12	Twinfield USD - D.C.	424	441	11,485	1.16	-	-	11,485	6%		HIGH	47,766

C C = Choice **D**= Designation **J**= Joint Contract **U**= Union or Unified Union

F Number of equalized pupils (adjusted for factors of poverty, English as Second Language...) the district supports financially. In the case of town elementary districts, it includes the number of high school pupils attending union high schools or being tuitioned out.

H Equalized education tax rate attributable to the cost of the school(s). Equalized tax rates are the education tax rates prior to CLA adjustment. Every town's CLA is different, so even if Woodbury partnered with a district on this list, Woodbury would continue to apply its own CLA.

I Equalized education tax rate for the entire town district, including union high school and tuition costs. Union schools do not have a municipal tax rate.

K Estimated education spending per equalized pupil if the district did not receive a Small Schools Grant. If Woodbury partnered with a district on this list, both could stop receiving a Small Schools Grant depending on enrollment and grade size.

L-N These columns examine special education spending. Column L shows the percentage the district spends above or below the state average per all students.

Column M notes whether Column L is plus or minus 20 percent or greater. Column N notes whether costs are plus or minus 20 percent per Special Education student.

Appendix #13 - Woodbury Resident Homestead Property Tax Reduction

Washington County							
Town	Housesites ²	Recipients	School Tax Adjustment	Average School Tax Adjustment	Circuit Breaker Recipients ³	Circuit Breaker Adjustment ⁴	Average Circuit Breaker ⁴
Waitsfield	524	342	553,551	1,618.57	80	34,147	426.83
Warren	520	316	653,055	2,066.63	74	21,999	297.28
Waterbury	1,445	864	927,084	1,073.01	139	40,467	291.13
Woodbury	328	199	151,061	759.10	56	18,702	333.97
Worcester	315	192	157,097	818.21	67	21,119	315.22
Total	16,772	10,350	9,367,678	905.09	3,550	1,880,672	529.77

199 of Woodbury's 328 (61%) resident property tax payers received a property tax reduction

Notes:

1. *Property Tax Adjustments applied for with Personal Income Tax returns for Tax Year 2007. School Property Tax Adjustments (Prebates) are for Fiscal Year 2008 taxes and paid in 2008. Circuit Breaker Adjustments (Homeowner Rebates) are for Fiscal Year 2008 taxes and paid in 2008.*
2. *Housesites are parcels with the residence and up to two acres declared as residential for the 2009 Fiscal Year by September 2, 2008.*
3. *Formerly called "Homeowner Rebate." Cells of 3 or fewer returns suppressed. State totals include suppressed data.*
4. *Circuit Breaker Adjustment is calculated on school property taxes remaining after adjustment and municipal taxes for claimants with Household Income of \$47,000 or less. Also called "Additional Adjustment."*

Appendix #14 - Joint Contract/Union Expenditure and Tax Rate Scenarios

	Equalized Pupils	Original Ed Spending	Ed Spending per Pupil	Additional transport, teacher	SpEd & OSSU Assessment*	Total Ed Spending	Total Equalized Pupils	Union Ed Spending Per pupil	Woodbury CLA	Woodbury-Elementary-Union District Tax Rate	Woodbury Elem. Tax Rate**
Hardwick Union	276.76	3,148,838	11,378	78,000	165,823	3,392,661	330.88	10,253	1.02	1.01	.53
Calais Union	119.13	1,516,134	12,727	86,600	165,823	1,768,557	173.25	10,208	1.02	1.01	.53
Cabot Union	200.53	2,644,631	13,188	82,280	165,823	2,892,734	254.65	11,359	1.02	1.12	.59
Woodbury (FY10)	54.12	750,103	13,860	0	0	750,103	54.12	13,860	1.02	1.37	.72
Woodbury (reduce one teacher) \$68k (FY11)	52.2	682,103	13,067		0	682,103	52.2	13,067	1.02	1.32	.69
Woodbury no change (FY11)	52.2	750,103	14,369		0	750,103	52.2	14,369	1.02	1.45	.76

* Assessment = \$67k (SpEd) + \$1826*54.12 (per pupil OSSU assessment multiplied by pupil count)

** This rate must be added to Hazen's tax rate to find Woodbury resident's total education tax rate.

Appendix 15 - School Choice/Independent School Comparisons in Windham Central SU

FY2010 Proposed District Budgets and Homestead Rates			
<i>Town/Union Schools</i>	Organization Structure	Ed. Spending Per Eq. Pupil	Equalized School Tax Rate
Brookline	Elem k-6	9,383	\$0.96
Jamaica	Elem k-6	12,144	\$1.24
Newfane	Elem k-6	10,848	\$1.10
Townshend	Elem k-6	12,450	\$1.27
Windham	Elem k-6	11,307	\$1.15
Leland & Gray	UHS 7-12	13,293	\$1.35
District/Union Average		11,571	\$1.18
<i>Elementary Schools with Secondary School Choice</i>			
Dover	Choice 7-12	11,932	\$1.22
Wardsboro	Choice 7-12	12,639	\$1.29
Marlboro	Choice 9-12	12,826	\$1.31
District Average w/ HS choice			
<i>Districts with Choice K-12</i>			
Stratton (Stratton Mountain School, Independent School - 98 students 7-12)	Choice K-12	13,862	\$1.41
Winhall (Mountain School at Winhall, Independent School - 64 students k-8)	Choice K-12	13,887	\$1.41
District Average w/ K-12 choice		13,875	\$1.41
Districts w/ K-12 choice % of SU		120%	120%
Districts w/ K-12 choice % of secondary school choice		108%	108%
<i>State Average Union Elementary Schools</i>		\$10,583	
<i>State Average Union Secondary Schools</i>		\$11,576	

APPENDIX 16 – Designating Elementary or Secondary Schools

What does designation mean? Designation of a school occurs when a district does not operate its own school and voters decide to identify the school(s) where the school board will only pay tuition. The receiving school board must also agree to accept tuition from the sending district.

What are the advantages? The sending district school board acquires more control over the quality and costs of the receiving schools where the district pays tuition. The school board may be able to reduce the budget presented to voters by negotiating with the receiving district(s).

What are disadvantages? Parents have limited school choice to send their children to schools that are often in the community where they work, or that, in the parents' view, better meet their children's unique learning needs. Also, if parents want their children to attend schools other than the one(s) that have been designated, parents have to pay additional tuition costs, if the non-designated district tuition charges are greater.

Where are they? Previous to a new public high school designation law, passed in 2009, local districts could only designate an approved independent or secondary school. Currently, no public secondary schools have been designated. Two approved independent secondary schools have been designated in Vermont. The first, Thetford Academy, is designated by Stratford and Thetford. East Haven, Sutton, Miller's Run, Burke, Newark, and Lyndon Town all designate Lyndon Institute; Wells designates Granville, NY. The only elementary district that designates another elementary district is St. George, which sends all its students to Williston Elementary School. North Hero is preparing a vote to close the local elementary school and designate South Hero Elementary School, for all K-6 students to attend.

The Laws that Govern the Designation of Schools and Payment of Tuition

16 V.S.A. § 821. School district to maintain public elementary schools or pay tuition

(a) **Elementary school.** Each school district shall provide, furnish, and maintain one or more approved schools within the district in which elementary education for its pupils is provided unless:

(1) The electorate authorizes the school board to provide for the elementary education of the pupils residing in the district by paying tuition in accordance with law to one or more public elementary schools in one or more school districts.

(b) **Kindergarten program.** Each school district shall provide public kindergarten education within the district. However, a school district may pay tuition for the kindergarten education of its pupils:

(1) at one or more public schools under subdivision (a)(1) of this section; or

(2) if the electorate authorizes the school board to pay tuition to one or more approved independent schools or independent schools meeting school quality standards,

§ 823 . Elementary tuition

(a) Tuition for elementary pupils shall be paid by the district in which the pupil is a resident. The

district shall pay the full tuition charged its students attending a public elementary school. If a payment made to a public elementary school is three percent more or less than the calculated net cost per elementary pupil in the receiving school district for the year of attendance, the district shall be reimbursed, credited, or refunded pursuant to section 836 of this title. Notwithstanding the provisions of this subsection or of subsection 825(b) of this title, the boards of both the receiving and sending districts may enter into tuition agreements with terms differing from the provisions of those subsections, provided that the receiving district must offer identical terms to all sending districts...

- (b) The tuition paid to an approved independent elementary school or an independent school meeting school quality standards shall not exceed the lesser of:
- (1) the average announced tuition of Vermont union elementary schools for the year of attendance; or
 - (2) the tuition charged by the independent school. However, the electorate of a school district may authorize the payment of a higher amount at an annual or special meeting warned for the purpose

§ 822. School district to maintain public high schools or pay tuition

- (a) Each school district shall provide, furnish, and maintain one or more approved high schools in which high school education is provided for its pupils unless:
- (1) The electorate authorizes the school board to close an existing high school and to provide for the high school education of its pupils by paying tuition in accordance with law. Tuition for its pupils shall be paid to a public high school, an approved independent high school, or an independent school meeting school quality standards, to be selected by the parents or guardians of the pupil, within or without the state; or
- (c) The school board may both maintain a high school and furnish high school education by paying tuition to a public school as in the judgment of the board may best serve the interests of the pupils, or to an approved independent school or an independent school meeting school quality standards if the board judges that a pupil has unique educational needs that cannot be served within the district or at a nearby public school. Its judgment shall be final in regard to the institution the pupils may attend at public cost.

§ 824. High school tuition

- (a) Tuition for high school pupils shall be paid by the school district in which the pupil is a resident.
- (b) Except as otherwise provided for technical students, the district shall pay the full tuition charged its pupils attending a public high school in Vermont or an adjoining state or a public or approved independent school in Vermont functioning as an approved area technical center, or an independent school meeting school quality standards; provided:
- (1) If a payment made to a public high school or an independent school meeting school quality standards is three percent more or less than the calculated net cost per secondary pupil in the receiving school district or independent school for the year of attendance then the district or school shall be reimbursed, credited, or refunded pursuant to section 836 of this title.
 - (2) Notwithstanding the provisions of this subsection or of subsection 825(b) of this title, the board of the receiving public school district, public or approved independent school functioning as an area technical center, or independent school meeting school quality standards may enter into tuition agreements with the boards of sending districts that have terms differing from the provisions of those subsections, provided that the receiving district or school must offer identical terms to all sending districts, and further provided that the statutory provisions apply to any sending district that declines the offered terms.

(c) The district shall pay an amount not to exceed the average announced tuition of Vermont union high schools for the year of attendance for its pupils enrolled in an approved independent school not functioning as a Vermont area technical center, or any higher amount approved by the electorate at an annual or special meeting warned for that purpose.

§ 827. Designation of a public high school or an approved independent high school as the sole public high school of a school district

(a) A school district not maintaining an approved public high school may vote on such terms or conditions as it deems appropriate, to designate an approved independent school or a public school as the public high school of the district.

(b) Except as otherwise provided in this section, if the board of trustees or the school board of the designated school votes to accept this designation the school shall be regarded as a public school for tuition purposes under subsection 824(b) of this title and the sending school district shall pay tuition to that school only, until such time as the sending school district or the designated school votes to rescind the designation.

(c) A parent or legal guardian who is dissatisfied with the instruction provided at the designated school or who cannot obtain for his or her child the kind of course or instruction desired there, or whose child can be better accommodated in an approved independent or public high school nearer his or her home during the next academic year, may request on or before April 15 that the school board pay tuition to another approved independent or public high school selected by the parent or guardian.

(d) The school board may pay tuition to another approved high school as requested by the parent or legal guardian if in its judgment that will best serve the interests of the pupil. Its decision shall be final in regard to the institution the pupil may attend. If the board approves the parent's request, the board shall pay tuition for the pupil in an amount not to exceed the least of:

- (1) The statewide average announced tuition of Vermont union high schools.
- (2) The per-pupil tuition the district pays to the designated school in the year in which the pupil is enrolled in the non-designated school.
- (3) The tuition charged by the approved non-designated school in the year in which the pupil is enrolled.

APPENDIX 17 - Joint Contract School

What are they? Joint contract schools are schools that are operated by a board of directors made up of members of school district boards that have joined together to operate a school. Once formed, the joint contract board has “full authority to act on all matters pertaining to finance, location, construction, and operation of (joint) schools...including the selection and hiring of teachers.”

Joint board representation shall consist of members chosen annually from the duly elected school boards of the school districts. Unless a different method of allocating board members that is consistent with law is agreed to, the allocation of the board members shall be as follows. The school district having the largest number of pupils attending the joint contract school shall have three members on the joint board. Each other school district shall have at least one member on the joint board, and its total membership shall be determined by dividing the number of pupils from the school district with the largest enrollment by three, rounding off the quotient to the nearest whole number, which shall be called the “factor,” and then dividing the pupil enrollment of each of the other school districts by the “factor,” rounding off this quotient to the nearest whole number, this number being the number of school directors on the joint board from each of the other school districts. Pupil enrollment for the purpose of determining the number of members on the joint board to which each school district is entitled shall be taken from the school registers on January 1 of the calendar year in which the school year starts.

How are they formed? The electorate of a school district may authorize its board to enter into a joint contract with another school district or school districts. Upon authorization, the board may “enter into a contract or contracts with other towns and parties for the financing, construction, operation and maintenance of a competent school or schools...”

What are their advantages? Joint contract schools have the advantage of being easily formed.

What are their disadvantages? There are several potential disadvantages to a joint contract school. They result in the formation of a new school board, while maintaining the prior existing boards even though those boards may no longer operate a school. The new board can develop and adopt a budget without a vote of the electorates of the member districts. There are numerous ambiguities in the law related to the operation of joint contract schools. The financing and ownership of property by member districts is, for example, not clearly prescribed in the law.

Where are they? There are joint contract schools in Jay/Westfield, Chittenden/Mendon (Barstow), Granville/Hancock (dissolved 2009), Wilmington/Whitingham (Twin Valley), Athens/Grafton, and Newfane/Brookline (NewBrook).

The Laws That Govern the Creation of Joint Contract Schools

16 V.S.A. § 571. Contracts to construct and operate joint schools

By a majority vote of the voters present and voting at a meeting, duly warned for that purpose, a town school district or incorporated school district may authorize its school directors to enter into a contract or contracts with other towns and parties for the financing, construction, maintenance and operation of a competent school or schools to provide means and facilities for the convenient and adequate development, education and training of the youth of such town.

16 V.S.A. § 572. Joint boards for joint, contract or consolidated schools

(a) The control of joint, contract or consolidated schools, set up by two or more school districts, shall be vested in a joint school board from such school districts and such board shall be chosen in the manner hereinafter provided for and for the purpose of this section, a joint, contract or consolidated school board shall be referred to as a joint board.

(b) The joint board shall have full authority to act on all matters pertaining to the finance, location, construction, maintenance and operation of schools set up as joint, contract or consolidated schools, including the selection and hiring of teachers.

(c) The joint board shall consist of members chosen annually from the duly elected school boards of the school districts, each school district board electing a member or members to the joint board from among its own members.

(d) Unless the school districts which are parties to the contract have agreed upon a different method of allocating board members that is consistent with law, the allocation of the board members shall be as follows. The school district having the largest number of pupils attending the joint, contract or consolidated school shall have three members on the joint board. Each other school district shall have at least one member on the joint board, and its total membership shall be determined by dividing the number of pupils from the school district with the largest enrollment by three, rounding off the quotient to the nearest whole number, which shall be called the "factor" and by then dividing the pupil enrollment of each of the other school districts by the "factor," rounding off this quotient to the nearest whole number, this number being the number of school directors on the joint board from each of the other school districts. Pupil enrollment for the purpose of determining the number of members on the joint board to which each school district is entitled shall be taken from the school registers on January 1 of the calendar year in which the school year starts. Such joint board shall annually select from among the members thereof a chairman and clerk. (Amended 1961, No. 79; 1991, No. 173 [Adj. Sess.]).

APPENDIX #18 - Union and Unified Union School Districts

What are they? Union school districts are formed by agreement between participating school districts to operate a single school in certain grades for residents of the participating districts. A union school district has a school board comprised of representatives of the member district, elected on a one-person-one-vote basis from each district. A union school district has its own school district meeting to adopt an annual budget, and member districts pay assessments in accord with the union district's articles of agreement.

As an alternative, the school board can be structured to allow for weighted voting by union school board members, in order to equalize the voting power of its school directors. Under this system the district could have a board of any size between three and eighteen members. Each of the two districts could even have the same number of representatives serving on the board. This allows for an equal representation of voices at the board table. However, to comply with the one person one vote requirement, board member's votes would be weighted in proportion to the census data.

Union schools generally encompass grade levels configured as PK-6, PK-8, 9-12, or 7-12. A unified union means all grade levels are combined into a PK-12 district.

How are they formed? There is a comprehensive statutory process for the formation of union school districts. Formation requires an extensive study process (preceded by vote of the electorate *only if the budget is over \$25,000*), approval by the State Board of Education and final approval by the electorate of each member district to create the new union.

What are their advantages? Union school districts are municipal entities, as are all school districts. As such, union school districts have powers to build, finance, own and operate schools. They are therefore stable entities. The level of public participation in union school districts is on a par with the level of public participation in "town" school districts.

What are their disadvantages? Union school districts are difficult to form and difficult to alter once formed. On occasion, a member district may want to leave a union district, or a new district may wish to join an existing union district. While there are statutory processes to allow these things to happen, a single district will be unable to enter or leave a union without the assent of other members.

Where are they? There are 39 union school districts. Most are high school or middle school unions. Union districts for elementary schools have recently been formed in Waterbury/Duxbury and Metawee Valley (Rupert and Pawlet).

The Laws that Govern the Creation of Union School Districts

16 V.S.A. § 701. POLICY

It is declared to be the policy of the state to provide equal educational opportunities for all children in Vermont by authorizing two or more school districts, including an existing union school district, to establish a union school district for the purpose of owning, constructing, maintaining, or operating schools and to

constitute the district so formed a municipal corporation with all of the rights and responsibilities which a town school district has in providing education for its youth.

§ 701b. APPLICATION OF CHAPTER

(a) Whenever referred to in this subchapter, the term “school district” shall include a “town school district,” “incorporated school district,” “union school district,” or “city school district,” and this subchapter shall accordingly apply to the organization and operation of a union school district of which any school district is a member or prospective member. The provisions of this subchapter shall apply and take precedence in the event of any conflict between those provisions and the provisions of the charter of a municipality which is a member or prospective member of a union district. Upon the organization of a union district under this subchapter, any charter of a member municipality is considered to be amended accordingly without further action.

§ 706. PROPOSAL TO FORM PLANNING COMMITTEE

When the boards of two or more school districts believe that a planning committee should be established to study the advisability of forming a union school district, or if five percent of the voters eligible to vote at the last annual or special school district meeting petition the board of their respective school districts to do so, each of the boards shall meet with the superintendent of each participating district. With the advice of the superintendent, the boards shall establish a budget, and shall fix the number of persons to serve on the planning committee, that prepares the report required by this subchapter. The boards’ proposal shall ensure that each participating district share in the committee’s budget, and be represented on the committee, in that proportion which the equalized pupils (as defined in section 4001 of this title) of the district bear to the total equalized pupils of all school districts intending to participate in the committee’s study. Nothing in this section shall be construed to prohibit informal exploration between and among school districts prior to the formation of a planning committee.

§ 706a. APPROVAL OF PLANNING BUDGET; APPOINTMENT OF PLANNING COMMITTEE

- (a) If the proposed budget established in section 706 of this chapter exceeds \$25,000.00, then:
- (1) The voters of each participating district shall be warned to meet at an annual or special school district meeting to vote on a question in substantially the following form: “Shall the school district of appropriate funds necessary to support the district’s financial share of a study to determine the advisability of forming a union school district with some or all of the following school districts:? It is estimated that the district’s share, if all the above-listed districts vote to participate, will be \$..... The total proposed budget, to be shared by all participating districts, is \$.....” It is not necessary for the voters of each participating district to vote on the same date to establish a union school district planning committee.
- (2) If the vote is in the affirmative in two or more districts, the boards of the participating districts shall appoint a planning committee consisting of the number of persons previously fixed. At least one school director from each participating district shall be on the committee. A district board may appoint residents to the committee who are not school directors.
- (3) The sums expended for planning purposes under this section, shall be considered a part of the approved cost of any project in which the district participates pursuant to sections 3447 through 3449 of this title.

(b) If the proposed budget established in section 706 of this chapter does not exceed \$25,000.00, then the boards of the participating districts shall appoint a planning committee consisting of the number of persons previously fixed. At least one school director from each participating district shall be on the committee. A district board may appoint residents who are not school directors to the committee. The sums expended for planning purposes under this section shall be considered a part of the approved cost of any project in which the district participates pursuant to sections 3447 through 3449 of this title.

§ 706b. PLANNING COMMITTEE; CONTENTS OF PLANNING COMMITTEE REPORT

(a) Planning committee. When a planning committee is appointed, the members shall elect a chair who shall notify the commissioner of education, of the appointment. The commissioner shall cooperate with the planning committee and may make department staff available to assist in the study of the proposed union school district. The committee is a public body pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 310(3). The committee shall cease to exist when the clerk of each district voting on a proposal to establish a union school district has certified the results of the vote to the commissioner of education pursuant to section 706g of this chapter.

(b) Decision and report. The planning committee may determine that it is inadvisable to form a union school district or it may prepare a report in the form of an agreement between member districts for the government of the proposed union school district. In making its determination, the committee may contact additional school districts it believes may be advisable to include within a new union school district. If the committee decides to recommend formation of a union school district, its report shall specify:

- (1) the names of school districts the committee considers necessary to the establishment of the proposed union; provided, however, only districts named in the warning for the vote under section 706a of this chapter may be identified as necessary;
- (2) the names of additional school districts the committee considers advisable to include in the proposed union school district;
- (3) the grades to be operated by the proposed union school district;
- (4) the cost and general location of any proposed new schools to be constructed and the cost and general description of any proposed renovations;
- (5) a plan for the first year of the union school district's operation for the transportation of students, the assignment of staff, and curriculum that is consistent with existing contracts, collective bargaining agreements, or other provisions of law. The board of the union school district shall make all subsequent decisions regarding transportation, staff, and curriculum subject to existing contracts, collective bargaining agreements, or other provisions of law;
- (6) the indebtedness of proposed member districts that the union school district shall assume;
- (7) the specific pieces of real property of proposed member districts that the union shall acquire, their valuation, and how the union school district shall pay for them;
- (8) the allocation of capital and operating expenses of the union school district among the member districts;

(9) consistent with the proportional representation requirements of the equal protection clause of the Constitution of the United States, the method of apportioning the representation that each proposed member district shall have on the union school board. The union school board shall have no more than 18 members, and each member district shall be entitled to at least one representative;

(10) the term of office of directors initially elected, to be arranged so that one-third expire on the day of the second annual meeting of the respective districts, one-third on the day of the third annual meeting of the respective districts, and one-third on the day of the fourth annual meeting of the respective districts, or as near to that proportion as possible;

(11) the date on which the union school district proposal will be submitted to the voters;

(12) the date on which the union school district will begin operating schools and providing educational services; and

(13) any other matters that the committee considers pertinent, including whether votes on the union school district budget or public questions shall be by Australian ballot.

§ 706c. APPROVAL BY STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

If a planning committee prepares a report under section 706b of this chapter, the committee shall transmit the report to the commissioner who shall submit the report with his or her recommendations to the state board of education. That board after notice to the planning committee and after giving the committee an opportunity to be heard shall consider the report and the commissioner's recommendations, and decide whether the formation of such union

school district will be for the best interest of the state, the students, and the school districts proposed to be members of the union. The board may request the commissioner and the planning committee to make further investigation and may consider any other information deemed by it to be pertinent. If, after due consideration and any further meetings as it may

deem necessary, the board finds that the formation of the proposed union school district is in the best interests of the state, the students, and the school districts, it shall approve the report submitted by the committee, together with any amendments, as a final report of the planning committee, and shall give notice of its action to the committee. The chair of the planning committee shall file a copy of the final report with the town clerk of each proposed member district at least 20 days prior to the vote to establish the union.

§ 706d. VOTE TO ESTABLISH UNION SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Each school district that is designated in the final report as necessary to the proposed union school district shall vote, and any school district designated in the final report as advisable to be included may, vote on the establishment of the proposed union school district. The vote shall be held on the date specified in the final report. The vote shall be warned in each proposed member school district by the school board of that district, and the vote shall be by Australian ballot, at separate school district meetings held on the same day and during the same hours. The polls shall remain open at least eight hours. Early or absentee voting as provided by sections 2531 to 2550 of Title 17 shall be permitted. The meetings shall be warned as a special meeting of each school district voting on the proposal.

Appendix # 19 - Withdrawing from a Union School District

§ 721a. Withdrawal from district

(a) A school district that is a member of a union school district may vote to withdraw from the union school district if one year has elapsed since the union school district has become a body politic and corporate as provided in section 706g of this title.

(b) When a majority of the voters of a school district present and voting at a school district meeting duly warned for that purpose votes to withdraw from a union school district the vote shall be certified by the clerk of the school district to the secretary of state who shall record the certificate in his or her office and give notice of the vote to the commissioner of education and to the other member districts of the union school district. Within 90 days after receiving notice, those member districts shall vote by Australian ballot on the same day during the same hours whether to ratify withdrawal of the member district. Withdrawal by a member district shall be effective only if approved by an affirmative vote of each of the other member school districts within the union school district.

(c) If the vote to ratify the withdrawal of a member district is approved by each of the other member districts, the union school district shall notify the commissioner of education who shall advise the state board of education. At a meeting held thereafter, if the state board finds that the pupils in the withdrawing district will attend a school that is in compliance with the rules adopted by the board pertaining to educational programs, the board shall declare the membership of the withdrawing school district in the union school district to end as of July 1 immediately following or as soon thereafter as the obligations of the withdrawing district have been paid to, or an agreement made with, the union school district in an amount satisfactory to the electorate of each member district of the union school district. The board shall give notice to the remaining member districts in the union of its meeting and give representatives of the remaining member districts an opportunity to be heard. It shall then determine whether it is in the best interests of the state, the students, and the school districts remaining in the union district for the union to continue to exist. The board may declare the union dissolved as of July 1 immediately following or as soon thereafter as each member district's obligations have been satisfied, or it may declare that the union shall continue to exist despite the withdrawal of the former member district. The state board of education shall file the declaration with the secretary of state, the clerk of the withdrawing district, and the clerk of the union school district concerned.

(d) A vote of withdrawal taken after a union school district has become a body politic and corporate as provided in section 706g of this title but less than one year after that date shall be null and void.

Appendix # 20 - Changing Supervisory Unions

§ 261. Organization and adjustment of supervisory unions

(a) The state board shall review on its own initiative or when requested as per subsection (b) of this section and may regroup the supervisory unions of the state or create new supervisory unions in such manner as to afford increased efficiency or greater convenience and economy and to facilitate K-12 curriculum planning and coordination as changed conditions may seem to require.

(b) Any school district which has so voted at its annual school district meeting, if said meeting has been properly warned regarding such a vote, may apply to the state board of education for adjustment of the existing supervisory union of which it is a component district. The state board shall give timely consideration to such requests and may regroup the school districts of the area so as to ensure reasonable supervision of all public schools therein.

(c) The state board may designate any school district, including a unified union district, as a supervisory district if it will offer schools in grades K-12 and is large enough to support the planning and administrative functions of a supervisory union.

(d) Upon application by a supervisory union board, the state board may waive any requirements of chapter 5 or 7 of this title with respect to the supervisory union board structure, board composition or board meetings, or the staffing pattern of the supervisory union, if it can be demonstrated that such a waiver will result in efficient and effective operations of the supervisory union; will not result in any disproportionate representation; and is otherwise in the public interest.

Appendix # 21 - Recent Changes in School Funding and Education Law

The current Act 68 funding system is based on per pupil expenditures. The Vermont legislature recently passed cost containment laws designed to keep school budgets in check. In 2009, the legislature made changes to the Act 68 excess spending threshold and Act 82 laws. The new law allows districts to decide whether to exclude or include tuition costs for grade levels for which the district does not maintain a school; it's the district's choice. If the School Board decides not to include tuition costs, the following expenses will not be considered for the purpose of determining whether a district is subject to the excess spending threshold and Act 82 divided question (two-vote) laws (i.e., the expenses will still be part of education spending for determining homestead tax rates):

- Anticipated tuition costs for students in grade levels for which the district does not maintain a school.
- Spending attributable to the cost of planning a merger of a school with an average grade size of 20 students or fewer.

Act 82 is another education cost control law that was passed in 2008. It imposes a complex two-vote requirement on school budget passage by district voters. The legislative intent of Act 82 is to make voters aware of school budgets that increase annually more than inflationary costs plus 1%.

For FY2010, the excess spending threshold, \$13,984, is triggered by high per pupil expenditures. For districts that exceed this per pupil spending level, resident tax payers must pay two dollars for each state property tax dollar that exceeds this annually imposed threshold.

Vermont law allows districts that do not operate a school in the district to designate one or more public schools for elementary students - only a single secondary school can be designated for students in grades 7-12 to attend. The voters have the final say. The school board from the tuition receiving district would also have to agree to accept school designation.

The laws differ somewhat between elementary and secondary in tuition that are available to parents and students. Regarding secondary school designation, parents pay the difference if the Board allows a student to attend a school that charges higher tuition than the one Woodbury voters designated. In addition, the Woodbury School Board can grant general authority to pay elementary tuition to independent schools (16 V.S.A. 821(d))

APPENDIX #22 - The Evolution of Supervisory Unions in Vermont

The Vermont Constitution identifies the role and speaks to the importance of education in each community throughout the state:

“Laws for the encouragement of virtue and prevention of vice and immorality ought to be constantly kept in force, and duly executed; and a competent number of schools ought to be maintained in each town unless the general assembly permits other provisions for the convenient instruction of youth. All religious societies, or bodies of people that may be united or incorporated for the advancement of religion and learning, or for other pious and charitable purposes, shall be encouraged and protected in the enjoyment of the privileges, immunities, and estates, which they in justice ought to enjoy, under such regulations as the general assembly of this state shall direct. The people of Vermont obviously understood the importance of education, even in the early days of the republic, 14 years before Vermont became a state. As indicated by the reference to “low prices,” Vermonters were as concerned about the efficiency of the education system in 1777 as they are today.

The system of multiple school districts within towns persisted for over a century. In 1870, the Legislature passed a law enabling, but not mandating, town school districts. Legislation passed in 1892 making the town system mandatory. This reduced the number of school districts from more than 2,500 to less than 300, a number similar to what we have today. In 1896, State Superintendent Mason Stone advocated “for skilled supervision and the establishment of supervisory unions,”¹ an entity which still exists in Vermont but only in rare instances elsewhere in the nation. Stone argued that, “Local supervision is the supreme weakness of our entire [education] system... There is no school work that skilled supervision does not reach, tone, strengthen and elevate.” In 1896, the Legislature adopted enabling legislation that allowed towns to join together for better supervision of their schools. Hence, the supervisory union concept was born.²

Currently, there are 46 supervisory unions in Vermont with staff and a supervisory union board that provide management services and administrative oversight to small rural districts like those associated with the Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union. Supervisory union boards employ and supervise a superintendent of schools who acts as the CEO for each local district and the supervisory union.

Larger municipalities like Hartford, Springfield, and Burlington are not members of a supervisory union. These districts are large enough to support the employment of their own superintendent of schools. In this supervisory district structure, the superintendent answers to a single school board, unlike the multiple board responsibility associated with a supervisory union.

¹ Vermont Department of Education - The Governance of Education in Vermont – 1777 to 2006

² Ibid,