

6 | Education

6.A OVERVIEW

Providing quality public education for children and youth is among the most important functions of government in a democratic society. Waitsfield has long performed this task extremely well, especially with regard to grades K-6, which are educated at the Waitsfield Elementary School in Waitsfield village.

Middle school (grades 7-8) and secondary (grades 9-12) education is provided at Harwood Union School, located on Route 100 in Duxbury. Waitsfield, together with Duxbury, Fayston, Moretown, Warren and Waterbury comprise the Washington West Supervisory Union, which administers Harwood.

The most critical education-related issues facing the town are maintenance of high quality education standards, and school funding and the growing burden on local taxpayers. This burden increased dramatically with the passage of Act 60 in 1997. Funding issues are addressed in greater detail below.

6.B ENROLLMENT

Grades K-6. Figure 6-1 presents enrollment trends and projections. After peaking at 166 students in 1997/98, the elementary school's K-6 enrollment has declined. In recent years the number of students has averaged around 140 along with approximately 20 children enrolled in the school's pre-K program. Given the number of births over the last several years, K-6 enrollment is anticipated to continue falling and may drop below 120 by the 2012/13 school year.

Grades 7-12. The number of students that Waitsfield sends to Harwood has peaked at around 125 students in recent years. Enrollment over the next several years is expected to decline below 120. Within five years, as the students now in elementary school move on to Harwood, Waitsfield will likely be sending around 110 students.

Future Trends. The reduction in number of students is consistent with the demographic trends presented in Chapter 3. The percentage of the local population within the 18-34 year-old cohort, prime child bearing years, has declined sharply. Although the number of women having children in their mid- to late-30s is much higher than two decades ago, Waitsfield's

ongoing shift to an older population is not likely to result in enrollment growth in the near future.

This could change, however, should the town experience significant in-migration of families with children. Policies to promote greater diversity in the housing stock, including units affordable for young families, could cause enrollments to climb, although such increases are not likely to be immediate.

6.C WAITSFIELD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

The Waitsfield Elementary School is administered by the Waitsfield School Board, a five-member body elected by town voters. The school's educational performance has been excellent. According to the respondents to the last two community surveys, the elementary school was among the highest rated local services.

The school underwent a major renovation and expansion in 1991, which brought the facility's capacity up to 185 students. That expansion, which increased the building from 13,300 square feet to the existing 22,100 square feet, added three new classrooms, a new library, expanded gymnasium and stage area, an art/music room and additional administrative space.

Despite the expansion of the building, the school continues to suffer a lack of adequate land for recreation fields and associated outdoor facilities. At some future time, it may be possible to expand onto the land adjacent to the existing recreation areas, which was not included when a conservation easement was placed on the farmland surrounding the school. From a facility standpoint, the projected decline in enrollment is good news in that additional space will not be needed to accommodate a growing student body. From a program and budgeting standpoint, however, the projected decline in enrollment is a matter of concern. The formalized pre-K program for three- and four-year-old children has helped the Waitsfield school reduce its per-pupil cost, which is significant in light of the declining enrollment and the state's current education funding formula.

6.D HARWOOD UNION HIGH SCHOOL

Facilities. Located on Route 100 in Duxbury, Harwood Union High School was opened in 1967. The school was upgraded and expanded in 1996/97, and now has a capacity of between 900 and 1,000 students, depending upon program configuration. In addition to Waitsfield, the high school serves students from Fayston, Duxbury, Moretown, Warren and Waterbury.

While it appears that enrollment levels will not exceed the facility's capacity for some time, it should be recognized that rapid population change in one or more member communities could place a burden on the school system as a whole. Should capacity become a concern in the future, a possible option to address expanding enrollment would be the establishment of a separate middle school (whether new construction, expansion of the Crossett Brook facility, or other options) that would allow Harwood to serve only high school students.

Programs. Harwood's academic program includes college preparatory, business and limited vocational courses. The school has invested in technology, including the creation of a technology reserve fund. Expanded program offerings are available through various agreements with other educational facilities.

The high school offers special education services through the Learning Resource Center located within the school complex. The Harwood Community Learning Center in Waterbury, an alternative school for students in grades 10-12 provides academic and work experience for students who would benefit from an alternative to a traditional school setting. Additionally, transportation is provided for Harwood students to attend vocational programs in Barre and, in some cases, Burlington. Harwood does provide some vocational opportunities on site, although these are limited.

6.E COST OF EDUCATION

It would be difficult to overstate the level of local concern related to educational funding. Property taxes have been identified in the two most recent community surveys as one of the major challenges facing Waitsfield. While dissatisfaction with taxes is likely as old as taxation itself, the passage of Act 60 in 1997 has resulted in overwhelming concern that the current system of funding education is not sustainable.



Act 60 was enacted in response to a decision by the Vermont Supreme Court, which decreed that all children should have access to substantially equal educational opportunities. Act 60 sought to accomplish this through a statewide property tax, which is used to help fund a block grant based on the number of pupils in a school district. Act 60 also instituted a sharing pool for spending above the block. The funding formula was changed by Act 68 and Act 130.

Under the current system, if a school decides to spend more than the state block grant per pupil, then a proportional amount must be paid into the sharing pool - an amount known as the local share. There are two statewide tax rates, one for residential property and another for non-residential property (which includes vacation homes). Local school budget increases are paid for only by residential property taxpayers.

The impact of statewide education funding on the town may be seen in Table 6-2, which shows annual education costs to Waitsfield property owners since 1996.

6.F ADULT EDUCATION

Continuing and Professional Education courses are offered in Waitsfield by the Yestermorrow Design/Build School on topics of architecture, construction, design, woodworking, and planning. There are no public institutions offering continuing adult education in the Mad River Valley. However, there are options which include the local Community College of Vermont's Waterbury campus, the University of Vermont, and several other private colleges in Burlington, Northfield, Middlebury and the Vermont Technical College in Randolph. Opportunities for "distance learning" on-line and through Waterbury's Vermont Interactive Television site are also growing each year.

A variety of adult basic educational programs are available through Central Vermont Adult Basic Education, also located in Waterbury. These include individualized and group educational services to adults in their homes, at the learning center, and in community settings. Basic education programs serve those who wish to improve their reading, writing and math skills for use on the job or in daily life, those who are studying for their high school equivalency degree (GED) or adult diploma, and those who want to

learn English as a second language. Computer training is also available.

The Adult Basic Education Center also offers a family literacy program, an out of school youth program, a teen parenting education program, and a getting ready to work program for welfare recipients who are seeking academic and job skills to improve their occupational outlook.

Table 6-1: School Enrollment

	pre-K	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	K-6	7-12	pre-K-12
1994-95	12	21	29	18	18	19	32	27	164	86	262
1995-96	12	19	24	27	19	19	18	28	154	104	270
1996-97	11	24	19	25	26	18	23	20	155	106	272
1997-98	14	21	24	22	29	27	20	23	166	105	285
1998-99	12	19	19	17	20	26	22	16	139	110	261
1999-00	10	23	27	19	16	22	26	23	156	106	272
2000-01	9	19	21	25	17	17	23	24	146	102	257
2001-02	15	21	20	21	24	18	17	23	144	101	260
2002-03	18	15	24	23	21	22	21	18	144	112	274
2003-04	21	20	14	22	25	20	24	22	147	112	280
2004-05	23	14	20	17	20	23	20	25	139	118	280
2005-06	22	26	15	22	18	23	24	19	147	126	295
2006-07	22	15	28	15	22	18	22	24	144	122	288
2007-08	20	19	15	25	13	20	18	22	132	123	275
2008-09	17	22	22	14	26	13	21	17	135	124	276
2009-10	15	19	27	25	14	28	17	24	154	118	287
Projection											
2010-11		16	20	27	25	13	29	17	147	119	
2011-12		12	17	20	27	25	14	29	144	108	
2012-13		7	13	17	20	27	26	14	124	115	
2013-14		12	8	13	17	20	28	26	124	105	
2014-15		16	13	8	13	17	21	28	116	105	

Source: Waitsfield Town Annual Reports and Vermont Department of Education

Table 6-2: School Costs

	1996-97	1998-99	2000-01	2002-03	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
PK-6 Spending	\$1,492,200	\$1,557,000	\$1,576,000	\$1,637,100	\$1,799,100	\$1,898,300	\$1,912,300	\$2,055,500	\$2,104,200	\$2,163,300
7-12 Spending	\$1,049,400	\$1,251,300	\$1,244,700	\$1,273,600	\$1,466,100	\$1,455,000	\$1,444,300	\$1,507,400	\$1,542,800	\$1,605,700
Total Spending	\$2,541,700	\$1,682,200	\$2,820,700	\$2,910,800	\$3,265,200	\$3,353,300	\$3,356,600	\$3,562,900	\$3,647,000	\$3,769,000
Education Taxes Paid				\$3,910,500	\$3,768,600	\$3,987,700	\$4,289,200	\$4,136,100	\$4,454,200	\$4,890,900
Taxes Paid in Excess of Spending				\$999,700	\$503,400	\$634,400	\$932,600	\$573,200	\$807,200	\$1,121,900

Source: Waitsfield Town Annual Reports and Vermont Department of Education, adjusted to 2009\$ using the CPI



6.G GOAL

- 6.G-1 The availability of high quality educational facilities and programs to enable all Waitsfield residents, especially children and youth, to become competent, productive and responsible citizens.

6.H POLICIES

- 6.H-1 Continue to provide sufficient and appropriate K-12 school facilities to meet current and anticipated enrollments.
- 6.H-2 Support programs and efforts to strengthen the central role that the Waitsfield Elementary School plays in the community, including providing access to school facilities for community events and activities in a manner that does not interfere with the school's primary function of educating the town's youth.
- 6.H-3 Support activities to engage middle and high school students in community activities.
- 6.H-4 Acquire additional land adjacent to the Waitsfield Elementary School for recreation purposes, should that land become available for purchase.
- 6.H-5 Support local and state efforts to reduce reliance on the local property tax to fund education, and actively promote alternatives to current statewide property appraisal formulas which discriminate against local property owners.

- 6.H-6 Support creativity, innovation and imagination when planning for future educational needs of the town's student population, and encourage efforts to strengthen the important role played by schools in fostering community and a shared purpose among local residents.
- 6.H-7 Improve efficiencies through coordination with neighboring school districts to the extent practical.
- 6.H-8 Encourage Waitsfield businesses to engage our schools in order to enrich the K-12 educational experience for students, demonstrate relevance of the curriculum, and foster an interest in the variety of jobs available locally.

6.I TASKS

- 6.I-1 Continue to monitor enrollment and population trends, and to make regular enrollment projections to ensure that the school system is prepared for significant changes in enrollment trends. [School Board, Planning Commission]
- 6.I-2 Consider appointing high school students as ex-officio (non-voting) members of local boards. [Selectboard]