

# 4. EDUCATION

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Planning decisions on the location, type and amount of future growth can have significant implications for educational services. Because education represents a large portion of local expenditures, we must closely coordinate planning decisions with the school districts to avoid adverse fiscal impacts on the Town.

## 4.1 Existing Conditions

The Town of Essex is fortunate to be located within easy commuting distance to numerous colleges in Chittenden County. These include the University of Vermont, Champlain College, St. Michael's College and Community College of Vermont. Numerous and varied opportunities for adult education are also offered by area high schools and other private entities. High quality education for all children in the Town of Essex is one of the most significant and basic services that Essex must provide.

The Town of Essex outside the Village is served by the Essex Town School District which serves kindergarten through the eighth grade. An Early Essential Education preschool program is also provided by the district. High school students of both the Village of Essex Junction and the Town outside the Village are served by the Essex Community Education Center Union District #46. This district, formed in 1995, administers the former Essex Junction Education Center. Currently Essex Town students comprise 56 percent of the Union High School's total enrollment and Essex Town pays 54 percent of net operating costs.

The Essex Town School District has existed as a separate entity since 1978. Prior to 1978, the Essex Town School District was part of the Chittenden Central School District. The Town School District is governed by an elected School Board composed of five members. The Board's primary functions include establishing policies to govern School District operations, preparing the annual budget, representing community interests, and maintaining quality educational services. The Town School budget is voted on annually by Australian ballot on the second Tuesday of April.

In 2009, the Essex Town School District had approximately 215 employees, about half of which were certified teachers. Many staff members have published in nationally distributed periodicals, have been sought as consultants by other schools and have been called upon to give presentations at state, regional and national conventions. In addition, many staff members serve on state and national commissions. Realtors in Chittenden County continually indicate that the quality of schools is a primary reason people move to Essex.

There were a total of 2,631 Essex Town students as of October 2010 in kindergarten through grade 12. The Essex Town School District has three school buildings within the Town: Essex Elementary school (grades K-2); Founders Memorial School (grade 3-5); and Essex Middle School (grades 6-8). The majority of Essex Town high school students (grades 9-12) attend Essex Educational Center. A more detailed description of each facility follows with the locations of same shown on Map 1, Community Facilities.

**Essex Elementary School** – Located on Bixby Hill Road, this facility has a 58,300 square foot building on a 13-acre site. The original building, known as the Essex Classical Institute, was torn

down in 1971 because it was structurally unsound. The Institute still owns a 10-acre site on the south side of Browns River Road but allows the Town School District to use the property. The school building was expanded in 1982 and 1990. This facility currently has 30 classrooms, a gym, cafeteria and kitchen, a learning center and two large common rooms which can be used for larger assemblies. There are approximately 69 full-time staff members.

**Founders Memorial School** – This is a 68,200 square foot building originally built in 1979 and added to in 1990. It has 27 classrooms, a computer lab, a gym, cafeteria and kitchen, and a learning center. There are approximately 62 full-time staff members.

**Essex Middle School** – This 82,700 square foot facility was built in 1970 off Founders Road on a 100 acre site shared with the Founders Memorial School. It has 31 classrooms, one computer lab, a gym, cafeteria and kitchen, a family consumer science lab, an industrial arts lab and a learning center. In 1999, the citizens approved additions, upgrades and renovations to the 30-year old building. There are approximately 71 full time staff members.

Other support facilities for the School District include a 2,000 square foot bus garage and an administration building. A 78-acre tract of land adjacent to the Founders Road site has been acquired to add to the present campus land area for future expansion needs.

**Essex Community Educational Center** – Located in the Village of Essex Junction is a 273,431 square foot building on a 99.1-acre site. It was built in 1970 (244,945 square feet) with an addition in 2000 (24,485 square feet) and includes a lighted track, football field, tennis courts, indoor ice skating rink, gymnasium, 715 seat auditorium and several meeting rooms. The facility contains a high school and a recently renovated regional technical center, called the Center for Technology - Essex. There are approximately 347 full-time staff members and approximately 109 classrooms.

The cost of educating a student for one school year in FY08 was an average of \$13,847 for all (K-12) students in the Town, which is slightly more than the state average of \$12,034.

Table 4-1 shows the capacity of each school, present enrollment and the percent of capacity. A school's capacity is determined by a number of interrelated and frequently changing variables such as federal and state program mandates, teachers' union contract provisions and the School Board's own philosophy such as pupil/teacher ratios. Based on enrollment projections as of October 2000 and completion of Essex Middle School construction in July 2001, the Essex Town School District does not anticipate the need for additional classroom space until sometime after the 2011 Town Plan is adopted. Prior to that time, decisions regarding the restructuring of the grades within each building will need to be made.

At the high school level, study continues concerning the establishment of an independent comprehensive technical academy and workforce development center to serve youth and adult learners in Chittenden County. The establishment of this technical academy will have a space impact on the Essex Educational Community Center. Accordingly, future addition/expansion plans are linked to the outcome of that process.

	<b>Capacity</b>	<b>FY 2009 Enrollment</b>	<b>Percent of Capacity</b>
<b>Essex Elementary School</b>	525	422	80.4%
<b>Founders Memorial School</b>	500	398	79.6%
<b>Essex Middle School</b>	590	438	74.2%
<b>Essex Community Education Center</b>	1,680	1,373	81.7%
Sources: VT Dept. of Education School Data and Reports			

Although population in the Town outside the Village grew by 24 percent between 1990 and 2008, the total number of school enrollments increased at a rate of 31 percent as can be seen in Table 4-2 and Figure 4-1, depicting enrollment, housing and population change between 1980 and 2000. (Housing figures have not been updated since the 2000 Census.) In the 1990s, with the relative resurgence of single-family home construction compared to the construction of multi-family units, school enrollments increased, albeit at a rate below the growth in housing and overall population growth. This trend in increasing school enrollments has continued into the 2000s, increasing at an even a greater rate than the overall population growth.

The extent to which out-of-town tuition students impact enrollment at the Community Education Center is also noteworthy. In the early 1990's, 15 percent of the total enrollment was comprised of tuition students. The percentage rose to 21 percent by 2006 and has now fallen back to slightly more than 15 percent. Tuition students are generally considered to have a positive impact on the school funding, and provide greater opportunities for expanded curriculum than might otherwise be possible with a smaller student body.

Two competing factors are likely to keep school populations relatively stable during the second decade of the 2000s. Declining numbers of women of child-bearing age will lower fertility rates and the resulting number of children that are born in Essex. In contrast, in-migration will continue to cause the number of children entering school in kindergarten and beyond to be greater than the number of Essex births.

The Town of Essex and Essex Town School District have enjoyed a cooperative relationship in monitoring and mitigating the impacts of the Town's growth on the school system. Some of these efforts include:

- The adoption of a residential phasing policy to control the rate of growth in accordance with what the schools can accommodate.
- The adoption of school impact fees to assist in the acquisition or construction of new school facilities. These fees were phased out in 2010 because of the decline in school enrollment.
- Cooperation in the annual updating of a computerized enrollment and population growth projection model.
- Acquisition of land for school facility expansion needs from the Forestdale Heights residential subdivision.

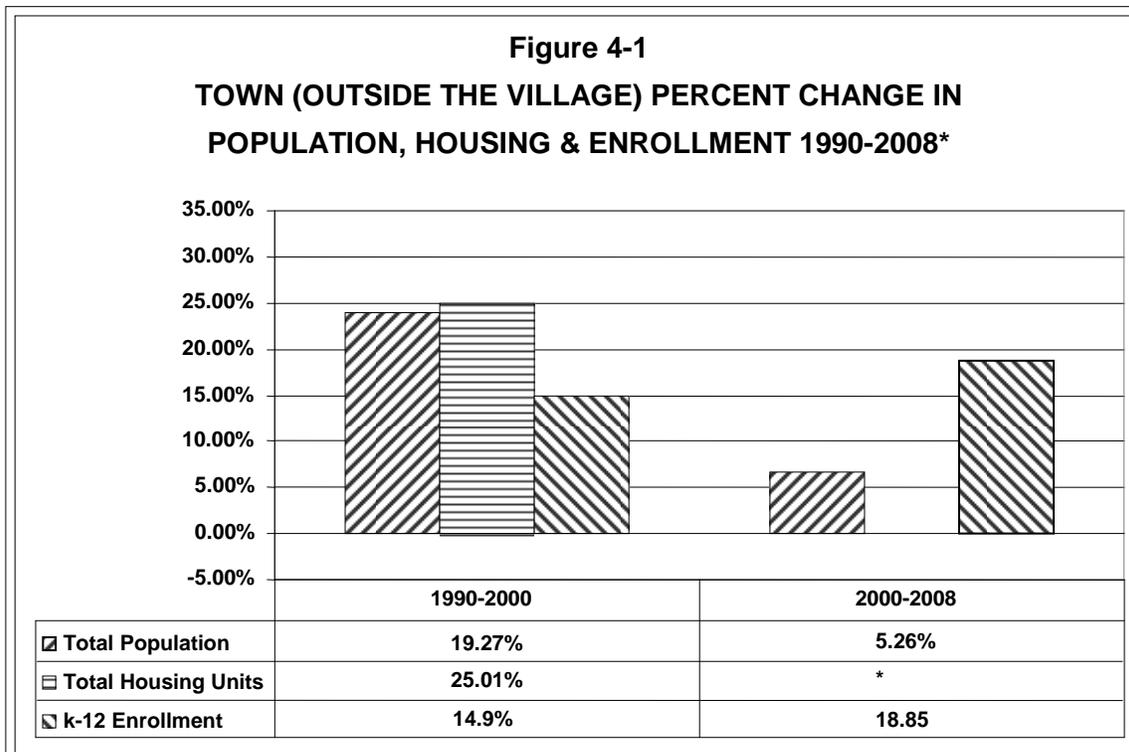
Other planning considerations that pertain to schools include student transportation (school bus pickups, non-motorized, multi-use trails, scattered development) availability and location of recreational activities, and future school sites.

**TABLE 4-2  
SCHOOL ENROLLMENT FIGURES BY GRADE: 1990-2009**

Fiscal Year	Grade Level															
	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total K-8	9	10	11	12	Total 9-12	Total K-12
1990	135	153	141	137	155	128	155	130	137	1271	134	136	133	129	532	1803
1991	129	147	151	148	146	156	136	152	129	1294	136	143	131	140	550	1844
1992	145	143	155	156	149	148	170	145	156	1367	141	138	149	133	561	1928
1993	146	151	142	163	164	153	152	183	146	1400	171	132	144	155	602	2002
1994	146	160	145	145	180	167	166	150	184	1443	146	164	141	154	605	2048
1995	169	144	163	147	145	182	160	164	140	1414	176	146	154	130	606	2020
1996	133	173	160	162	151	159	190	161	168	1457	150	175	145	152	622	2079
1997	144	148	182	159	172	152	160	194	156	1467	168	142	176	149	635	2102
1998	112	152	163	189	161	181	162	170	191	1481	162	164	143	169	638	2119
1999	162	132	149	167	203	171	173	162	173	1492	187	160	167	145	659	2151
2000	140	158	123	158	168	192	171	178	160	1448	166	185	155	164	670	2118
2001	148	139	168	128	169	171	188	168	183	1462	166	167	195	150	678	2140
2002	128	146	141	167	134	173	171	199	175	1434	179	188	166	192	725	2159
2003	122	128	152	143	165	134	184	174	206	1408	185	189	181	168	723	2131
2004	127	126	140	143	145	164	141	179	173	1338	172	205	184	169	729	2067
2005	114	132	125	138	143	146	167	133	181	1279	369	404	407	353	1533	2812
2006	138	115	133	129	137	147	146	166	137	1248	395	344	414	390	1543	2791
2007	119	140	112	128	133	138	153	145	162	1230	362	367	360	384	1473	2703
2008	135	118	147	115	129	130	137	156	152	1219	319	338	383	351	1391	2610
2009	126	138	120	147	117	134	132	144	162	1220	350	311	340	371	1372	2592

Source: Essex Town School District Superintendent's Office, Chittenden Central Supervisory Union Superintendent's Office, and VT Department of Education

Figures taken at the beginning of the school year



Source: US Census Bureau

\* Housing figures have not been updated since the 2000 Census

## 4.2 Goals, Objectives and Strategies

**Goal 4.1: School facilities will be expanded or downsized in accordance with the planned growth of the community.**

**Objective 4.1.1:** Maintain residential growth at a level consistent with the Town’s fiscal capacity to accommodate that growth.

**Strategy 4.1.1.1:** The Town’s residential phasing program, last updated in 2008, should be regularly reviewed in light of changing household sizes, number and type of permits issued for new housing units, and school capacity and enrollment figures.

**Objective 4.1.2:** Plan for long-term capital needs in a timely manner to avoid uneven peaks and valleys in expenditures and tax rates, and to identify alternative revenue sources.

**Strategy 4.1.2.1:** The School District should provide a list of all school capital needs for inclusion in the Town’s five-year capital budget and program.

**Strategy 4.1.2.2:** Impact fees should be appropriately calculated to reflect the costs of providing educational services to new development.

**Goal 4.2: School facilities will be integrated with and serve the entire community.**

**Objective 4.2.1:** Prepare a master plan to ensure the effective and appropriate use of school property.

**Objective 4.2.2:** Improve vehicular, bicycle and pedestrian connections between schools and residential neighborhoods.

**Objective 4.2.3:** Encourage the development of educational resources such as natural areas, museums, multi-use trails, etc., throughout the Town.

**Objective 4.2.4:** Encourage community participation and use of educational facilities in future design of school facilities.

**Goal 4.3: School facilities in the Town of Essex will reflect the Town's philosophy of education.**

**Objective 4.3.1:** Ensure that the *Essex Design for Learning* serves as a guide for the design and use of K-8 school facilities in the Town School District.

**Goal 4.4: The School Districts will communicate, cooperate and coordinate planning efforts with other municipal entities.**

**Objective 4.4.1:** Continue a cooperative effort among the Town Planning Commission and School Board to coordinate development with educational facilities. Future cooperative efforts should include:

**Strategy 4.4.1.1:** Prepare an annual report of classroom space needs versus enrollment trends.

**Strategy 4.4.1.2:** Develop a trail system connecting schools to neighborhoods, parks, natural areas, and commercial centers.

**Strategy 4.4.1.3:** Assist in the development of a master plan for any future expansion of the school facilities, should the need for such expansion arise.

**Objective 4.4.2:** Initiate a cooperative effort between the Town government and school district to prepare a five-year capital budget and program for the entire Town.

**Objective 4.4.3:** Hold periodic meetings among the Selectboard, Planning Commission and School Board to discuss issues of common concern. Issues may include:

- Expansion plans and future school sites or consolidation plans
- Transportation routes and alternatives such as trails and mass transit
- Population and school enrollment projections based on residential development trends
- Utilization of facilities for community and service organizations
- Substance abuse education
- Bulk purchasing
- Energy efficiency, conservation, generation of renewable energy
- Alternative taxing methods, etc.