

## Education

The public education of local children has been and remains a high priority for our community. Like many small New England towns, our early education system began with one-room schoolhouses. Stowe's first public school, a log structure located in the Upper Village, was built in 1803. One-room neighborhood schools continued to be built to serve a growing school population, generally within walking distance of the children they served. By 1882 there were 19 schools, overseen by 19 independent school districts, scattered throughout town. This district system was abolished in 1893 with the consolidation of neighborhood districts into a single town-wide district. It was not until 1954, however, with the construction of the Stowe Elementary School in Stowe Village, that the last of the town's one-room schools was closed. The elementary school has since been updated and renovated, last in 1992, to meet the needs of the community and state educational standards.

Secondary education took longer to arrive in Stowe. A tuition high school was established by the Village School District in 1863, and took in students from other districts and surrounding communities. Following local district consolidation, the Stowe High School was reorganized to provide publicly supported secondary education, and graduated its first class in 1901. Both high schools were located in the Village District's Village School, built in 1861, which now houses the Current (formerly the Helen Day Art Center) and the Stowe Free Library. The present Stowe High School was built on Barrows Road in 1973, and a middle school wing was added in 1992. A regret expressed in town planning forums was the siting of this important community facility outside of Stowe Village. It is not within easy walking distance of the village and remains physically unconnected to our community center.

In 2014, Vermont passed Act 46, which was designed to encourage the consolidation of school districts across the state. The law aimed to reduce costs and improve educational opportunities for students by creating larger, more efficient school districts. After the passage of Act 46, the Agency of Education sketched out plans for which districts would merge and which could stand alone. Stowe, which had long operated as an independent school district, faced pressure, and was later forced to merge with nearby school districts. In 2018, the Vermont Agency of Education revealed plans to force the Stowe School District to merge with the Elmore-Morristown district into a single unified body, the Lamoille South Unified Union. Controversy sparked and the two districts filed a lawsuit. This merger was met with some controversy, as many in our community valued the independence of a local school district. However, proponents of the merger argued that it would lead to better resource allocation, expanded educational opportunities, and financial stability. In 2019 the Lamoille South Unified Union began to operate.

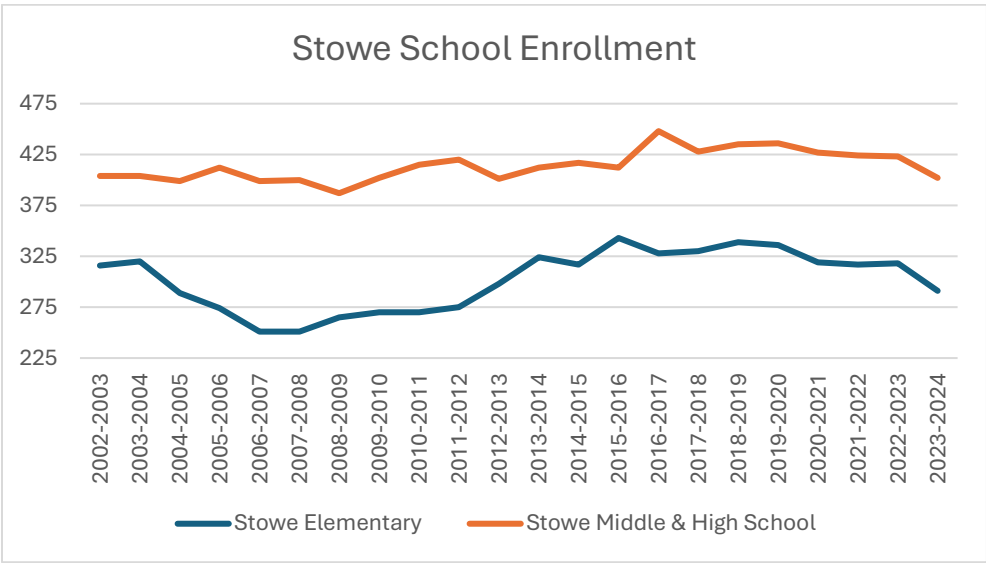
As a result of Act 46, in 2020 the Stowe School District merged with the neighboring Elmore-Morristown School District to create the Lamoille South School District. In May 2021 Stowe residents overwhelmingly voted to leave the district which created the Lamoille South Supervisory Union (LSSU).

LSSU is now comprised of two districts: Stowe and Elmore-Morristown. Each of these districts has their own school board. The two school boards combined create the LSSU Board, which meets every other month. The LSSU serves students from Stowe, Morristown, and Elmore. Under this unified district, schools have increased collaboration and resource-sharing, but Stowe High & Middle School and other Stowe Elementary School continue to maintain a distinct identity within the larger district. LSSU provides human resources, personnel and administrative services- these include fiscal management, grant application and administration, data management, and instructional, curriculum, and assessment support. Student-based services (e.g., speech language pathology and essential early education programs) are paid for based on the number of days/weeks the services are provided locally.

Stowe's local schools continue to focus on providing high-quality education for local students. Our school system includes:

- Stowe Elementary School: Serving kindergarten through 5th grade.
- Stowe Middle School: Serving grades 6 through 8.
- Stowe High School: Serving grades 9 through 12

The Stowe School District provided kindergarten through high school education for 693 students in school year 2023-2024. Fluctuations in enrollment over a 20-year period are indicated in Table XX.



With minimum class size requirements taking effect in 2026, we must carefully monitor enrollment trends. Current enrollment of 693 students in K-12 suggests potential challenges meeting minimums in all grade levels, particularly given demographic trends. Strategic planning for facility use and potential grade reconfigurations will be essential.

## **Cost of Education**

Concerns over educational funding remain one of the most pressing issues for our community. Repeated community surveys have identified property taxes as a major challenge. While tax concerns are not new, the 1997 passage of Act 60 significantly heightened local frustration. Act 60 was implemented following a Vermont Supreme Court ruling requiring equal educational opportunities for all children. It established a statewide property tax to fund a base block grant and created a cost-sharing pool for districts spending above that threshold.

Later reforms—Acts 68 and 130—further modified the funding structure. Today, Vermont’s education system is funded through a combination of sources: the state lottery, a portion of sales and use taxes, purchase and use taxes, the General Fund, and two statewide property tax rates (residential and nonresidential). Residential (homestead) tax rates vary by district based on per-pupil spending, while non-residential rates are fixed statewide. Any increase in a local school budget is borne entirely by residential taxpayers.

In 2025, Vermont enacted H.454, the most significant education reform in decades. Beginning July 1, 2028, all school districts must consolidate into larger regional districts serving 4,000–8,000 students. Stowe School District, with 693 students (2023–24), will be required to merge with multiple neighboring districts beyond its current LSSU structure.

Key provisions of H.454 include:

- New district boundaries effective July 1, 2028
- Minimum class size requirements (effective July 1, 2026):
  - Grade 1: 10 students
  - Grades 2–5: 12 students
  - Grades 6–8: 15 students
  - Grades 9–12: 18 students
- Transition to a foundation formula, replacing per-pupil spending
- New uniform statewide property tax, with income-based homestead exemptions replacing current education property tax credits

Under the new foundation formula, the base funding level will be \$15,033 per student (adjusted annually). Additional weighted funding will be provided for:

- Special education (0.79–2.49 weighting)
- English learners (0.12–2.11)

- Economically disadvantaged students (1.02)

Districts will be allowed to exceed the base formula by up to 10% initially, with this limit reduced to 5% by 2038. These reforms mark a significant shift from the current locally controlled funding model. The fiscal and administrative implications will require thoughtful planning to maintain educational quality and community expectations.

Challenges for the Stowe community include:

- Reduced local control and district autonomy
- Risk of school closures if enrollment does not meet new class size minimums
- Merging districts with different programs and priorities
- Managing assets and consolidating debt across new district lines

Opportunities may include:

- Eligibility for State Aid for School Construction (covering 20–40% of debt service)
- Expanded course offerings and extracurricular programs
- Greater professional development opportunities and shared staffing
- Operational efficiencies through centralized services

Key Timeline:

- December 2025: Redistricting Task Force releases proposed boundaries
- 2026: Vermont Legislature adopts final district maps
- November 2027: Elections for new school boards
- July 2028: New districts become fully operational

While Stowe's current enrollment of 693 students across grades K–12 presents challenges under H.454's new minimum class size requirements, it also offers an opportunity for the community to come together and plan thoughtfully for the future of our schools.

Maintaining healthy student enrollment will depend in part on addressing related issues such as housing availability for families and the balance of short-term rentals. By working collaboratively—through coordinated efforts among school boards, municipal leaders, educators, and community members—we can adapt to these changes, preserve the strengths of our educational system, and support a bright future for our local students.

### **Private Education**

A private school opportunity within the immediate surrounding area serving K-8 students is at the All-Saints Catholic Academy in Morrisville. Stowe residents also have access to technical programs at the Green Mountain Technical and Career Center (formerly called the Lamoille Area Vocational Center) in Hyde Park, and other higher education programs within commuting distance – including but not limited to the University of Vermont in

Burlington, Johnson Campus, and Community College of Vermont (CCV) programs in Morrisville and Montpelier. CCV is an important center for affordable continuing and adult education.

***(Existing goal, policies, and tasks)***

**Goal:** To provide a comprehensive educational experience for all students through a variety of academic, athletic, social, cultural and community activities so that they learn to communicate effectively, to value themselves and others, to make informed choices and to contribute to society.

**Policies**

1. Opportunities for quality education will be provided for all Stowe students in relation to anticipated enrollment, associated costs, required standards, and available funding for education.
2. The Town will continue to support the efforts of the Stowe School Board to identify and evaluate local education financing options.
3. The Town will plan for anticipated future demand on educational services and facilities to accommodate future growth in population.
4. The Town will support broadened access to educational, vocational and distant learning opportunities, including educational programs and initiatives of local organizations, to the extent feasible.
5. Town educational facilities will continue to be made available for public meetings, recreation, entertainment and special events to the extent that these do not interfere with educational programs.
6. The Town will continue to improve communication and coordination between the School Board, Selectboard, Planning Commission and State representatives.

<b>Education Tasks</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Priority</b>
1. Develop enrollment projections, and annually monitor school enrollments in relation to facility and program capacities.	School Board	Ongoing
2. Conduct a capacity analysis of school facilities in order to accommodate projected enrollments and maximize staff efficiencies.	School Board	Ongoing
3. Review new housing development for its potential impact on the school system.	Development Review Board	Ongoing

<p>4. Consider, in association with the Stowe School Board, municipal options for education financing and/or restructuring, including but not limited to joint purchasing programs, the transfer or privatization of some services and facilities and impact fees as authorized by statute.</p>	<p>Selectboard</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>5. Inventory educational capital needs for inclusion in a comprehensive capital budget and program.</p>	<p>School Board</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>6. Develop interactive distance-learning programs in partnership with other organizations.</p>	<p>School Board</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>7. Explore options for conversion to biomass energy systems and other alternative energy sources in public school buildings, using local fuel sources where economically feasible.</p>	<p>School Board</p>	<p>Mid-term</p>
<p>8. Continue to support Stowe school programs that provide environmental education opportunities to students.</p>	<p>Conservation Commission Planning Director</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>9. Continue to support and enhance educational opportunities for all Stowe students through fundraising activities to supplement the school budget.</p>	<p>*Stowe Education Fund</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>