

Frequently Asked Questions- Slate Valley Budget

Last update- July 20th

1. Why can't we close schools now?

In 2017 Slate Valley voters approved articles of agreement related to the merger. The merger was not fully operational until the 2018-2019 school year. Article 8 Section F states:

Closure of K-8 Schools. The Union School District shall not close any schools within its boundaries during the first four years it is fully operational and providing educational services. Thereafter, a vote of 75% or more of the Board of Directors and a positive vote of the municipality by Australian Ballot in which the school is located, shall be required to approve the closure of a school. Prior to holding a vote on whether to close a school the Board shall hold three (3) public hearings regarding the school's closure. At least one (1) of the public hearings shall be held in the community in which the school is located. If after conducting public hearings, the Board of Directors intends to vote on whether to close a school, it shall give public notice of its intent to hold a vote on whether to close a school, stating the reason for the closure, at least ten days prior to the vote.

*****In our current structure there are not many more efficiencies to be gained.

2. What efficiencies have been gained by the merger?

Over the past 2 years (FY19, FY20), we have eliminated 13 staff/administrative positions. Additionally, we have gained efficiencies in Building/Grounds, Technology, Nursing, Accounting, and sharing of instructional staff across buildings. We have been able to share programming and alternative classroom options to students throughout the district. This reduced the number of students that needed to be served outside of the district to obtain their special education programming in the least restrictive environment.

3. Why can't staff be reduced now (Summer of 2020)?

We are required to give notice to our employees in March regarding layoffs per employment contracts. Our administration must be notified by February 1st per State law. Therefore the period by which layoffs can occur passed prior to the COVID closures and budget revote. The board is looking carefully at each position that is vacated due to

attrition and considering if we can do without filling each position. This is not possible in all of the cases.

4. What are some of the unfunded state mandates?

- a. Act 77
 - i. Proficiency Based Learning
 - ii. Personalized Learning
 - 1. Flexible Pathways
 - 2. Work Based Learning

- b. Hazing, Harassment and Bullying
 - i. Investigations
 - ii. Trainings
 - iii. Consultation with attorneys

- c. Act 173
 - i. District Educational Support Team restructure
 - ii. Universal Screeners
 - iii. Multi-tiered Systems of Support-SEL, ELA, Math
 - iv. Intervention Programs/positions

- d. Act 166- Universal Pre-K
 - I. As of 9/1/2018, districts must offer or pay for 10 hours of publicly funded universal preschool education for all 3-5 year olds.

- e. Special Education - Regulations and rules for the provision of special education were signed into federal law in 1975; special education has never been fully funded. Currently, we receive approximately 56% reimbursement for the provision of special education services.

5. Why were all staff paid during the COVID Closure in the Spring of 2020?

As part of Governor Scott's Executive Order/State of Emergency school districts were required to pay all staff based on their employment contracts. It was an economic stability strategy as it is likely that some of the district's support staff would have made more money on unemployment. Additionally, our support staff participated in daily professional development, handed out food to families, delivered supplies, assisted teachers with their online classrooms and worked directly with students providing academic support.

6. What is the status of the bond that was presented in March of 2020?

*A bond is no longer under consideration by the board at the present time. We are expecting that due to the current crisis the legislature may take action to place a moratorium on bond votes unless there is a safety issue for the 2020-2021 school year. A bond requires the approval of the electorate. If a bond was being proposed there would be a separate question on the warning for the school district to obtain approval for a bond. Since the bond did not pass in March there **has not** been a question on the warning for a bond.*

7. What additional costs were incurred as a result of the COVID Closure?

As of June 30th the district has incurred \$40,700 of expenditures related to COVID19. In FY21 the district expects to incur additional expenditures related to health and safety supplies, classroom furniture and modifications, nurses' office modifications, front entrance modifications, and additional hand washing stations to name a few areas. We expect that these costs will be reimbursed by federal CARES funds.

8. What is the health insurance increase and why can't we negotiate a lower cost?

Act 11 of 2018 created the Commission on Public School Employee Health Benefits. The Commission was mandated to determine the relative shares of health insurance premiums and out-of-pocket expenses that should be paid by Vermont districts and their employees. This means that negotiations related to health insurance benefits are no longer conducted at the district level. The Commission is made up of employee and employer representatives. The health insurance premium increase for the plan that most employees participate in for FY21 is 12.9%. There are 3 other plans with increases that ranged from 13.7% to 14.7%.

9. Why did transportation increase at a rate of 15%?

Every 5 years we are required to go out to bid for transportation services. This was necessary for the 2020-2021 school year. We went out to bid this year and we received 1 bid. That bid was 15% higher than the past year. This is due to the fact that there are higher costs associated with the bus company hiring staff as well as we needed to lease new buses in some cases as some of the buses were showing considerable wear and tear.

10. What is Provision 2 and what does it cost?

Slate Valley chose to start participating in Provision 2 last fall. Provision 2 is an option for schools participating in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs to provide free meals to students. Our program provides 1 free breakfast and 1 free lunch to all children who choose to take part in the program.

- *Provision 2 increases student participation in school meals.*

- *Children who eat school meals have more nutritious diets than children who don't, regardless of income level.*
- *Better nutrition in children leads to improved academic performance, behavior and learning environments.*
- *Providing school meals at no charge promotes the value of good nutrition to all students.*

Reasons why:

Reduce stigma — When all children are offered a meal at no charge, more children participate and stigma that the school meal programs are only for low-income children is eliminated.

We had a large number of students incurring debt with their parents unable to pay their bills.

<https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/provision2.pdf>

Each breakfast costs the district \$1.09 and each lunch \$1.09. Depending on the number of students that take meals we estimated that Provision 2 could cost the district about \$200,000 prior to the issues created by COVID. At this time it is hard to say whether we will be providing more or less meals to students. We currently have \$100,000 in the budget.

11. What is in the budget to address building and grounds issues?

The proposed budget includes \$529,500 for 6 buildings for the continued repair and maintenance of heating and ventilation systems, upgrades to public address systems, flooring replacement, lighting replacement, parking lot sealing and repair, window and door replacement and other deferred maintenance items. The School Board and Administration continue to prioritize items that directly address these core infrastructure needs of the school buildings.

12. How do municipalities collect taxes when there isn't a school budget in place?

The district's associated town must collect the nonresidential education property tax, with or without an adopted budget at a rate set by the tax commissioner. If the district has not adopted a budget by June 30, the tax commissioner will issue an interim homestead tax rate by adjusting the base homestead tax rate by the town's CLA. Once a budget is adopted, the correct homestead rate will be set within 30 days, but after the 30-day reconsideration period. The difference must be collected by the town – 32 VSA § 5402(b)(3).

Housesite tax adjustments are determined using household income and school tax information from the prior year and can be made even if the district has not yet adopted a budget for the next year. Towns will have the necessary tax adjustment information to adjust the tax bills of eligible housesite owners based on data provided to them by the Tax Department. Towns will issue tax bills so that any interim tax bills will include the income adjustments.

13. How does the FY21 budget compare to previous years and what reductions have been made?

This past fiscal year which was FY20 (school year 2019-2020) was the first year we were a merged district. The FY21 budget proposed in March compared to FY20 was an increase of \$129,403. The budget that is being proposed for August is a decrease of \$91,052 when compared to the FY20 budget. Three years ago (FY18) was the last year before the districts started merging. When the expenditure budgets for all the districts plus the supervisory union (net of assessments) are added together the total expenditures is \$25,626,285. There has been an increase of \$776,301 over 3 years when compared to the FY21 currently proposed budget.

FY21 Personnel Changes:

Reduction of 4.7 FTE (Direct Instruction and Support Staff)

Addition of .8 FTE (.4 Student Support, .4 ELL Teacher)

Total reductions: 3.9 FTE

Total Reductions in Staffing over 3 years (FY19, FY20 and FY21): 15.15 FTE

14. What schools does the budget support?

- a. *Benson Village School*
- b. *Castleton Elementary School*
- c. *Castleton Village School*
- d. *Fair Haven Grade School*
- e. *Fair Haven Union High School*
- f. *Orwell Village School*

Two towns that are part of Slate Valley do not have schools located within their towns:

- a. *Hubbardton*
- b. *West Haven*

15. How does Slate Valley's spending compare to surrounding districts?

The best way to compare Slate Valley to other school districts is by comparing education spending per equalized pupil. Of 33 other school districts, Slate Valley UUSD has the

13th lowest cost. A list of schools can be found [here](#). This is not a complete list, but it does include most of the surrounding districts.

16. What happens when a budget does not pass? How does the district continue to operate?

School districts must continue to vote until a budget is passed. The State cannot impose a budget. This past winter the legislature was considering legislation that might have imposed the last voter approved budget for districts that did not have a budget when schools closed in March. The legislation did not end up going anywhere.

If a budget has not been adopted by the start of the school year the school must still open. Categorical grants from the State will still be paid to the school district. A portion of the payments due the district from the education fund will also be paid. If additional funding is needed the school can borrow up to 87% of the most recently approved budget. At this time Slate Valley has a line of credit with People’s United Bank in the amount of \$2.5 million that bears an interest rate of 1.75%. The district has not had to draw on the line yet, but typically does in late August around the time that the first payroll for school year employees is processed.

17. How does the staff and administrative ratio compare to surrounding districts and the state?

Ratios	ARSU/SV		VT		ACSD		BRSU		Greater Rutland		Mill River		Rutland City		Rutland Northeast	
	SY181 9	SY17 18	SY1 819	SY1 718	SY18 19	SY1 718	SY1 819	SY1 718	SY1 819	SY1 718	SY1 819	SY1 718	SY1 819	SY1 718	SY181 9	SY1718
Student:Teacher	9.4	9.4	10.4	10.5	10.9	10.8	8.9	9.6	9.6	8.9	10.5	10.3	10.6	10.8	11.0	10.7
Teacher:Administ rator	7.9	8.2	9.2	9.5	9.9	10.4	8.2	8.2	7.4	10.0	6.8	6.3	8.0	8.0	12.4	11.1
Student:Administ rator	73.7	78.9	95.6	99.3	107. 8	111. 7		72.9	78.8	71.1	89.0	71.2	65.1	85.4	86.8	137. 117.9

******ARSU/SV data is premerger and since then 1 administrative position has been reduced. Please note that many districts may classify administrative positions differently.**

18. Why are schools faced with an increasing number of social service programs?

Social emotional learning has become a growing focus of schools throughout the last decade. Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. It includes direct

instruction, interventions, programming and supports, followed up by practice of these skills. These are implemented to ensure that all students get what they need to access their education and progress academically, socially and behaviorally, so that they can go on to become responsible and independent adults and citizens.

The communities in which we live are very different now than they were in previous decades and we face different challenges. Rutland County no longer has a strong and stable employment base. Families face increased economic struggle and instability. Often, families are blended, more complex, more transient and changeable. Community organizations (Church, Grange, Lions, Masons, Eastern Star, etc.) are a smaller part of our community systems of support for families. Families move more, providing less local and familial support in some cases. Drug use and addiction has also increased which creates more stress and challenges for families. Our part of Rutland County has experienced significant impacts compounded by our geographical location. We have multiple sources of data that tell this story.

Society and communities have changed and no longer have the support structures in place which made it possible for schools to focus narrowly on the three R's. Schools have had to change accordingly. The school is now the primary place for children to learn what they need to know to grow up to be competent community members, employees, and family members. Schools are now at the heart of our communities and have stepped in to fill the gaps of these many changes in society. There are no entitlements for children to access community mental health supports. If schools step out, those community supports are no longer there to pick up the pieces.

Given the COVID-19 pandemic, students will be coming back to school with unprecedented levels of social, emotional and mental health challenges and needs. Unless they're addressed upfront, students can't learn. If we want schools to produce competent, responsible, compassionate, functioning members of society, SEL supports are critical to making that happen. Ultimately, providing these supports makes it possible for children to learn and thrive and is more cost-effective in the long run for both the school and the larger community.

19. What is the district Vision and Mission?

District Mission: We are dedicated to the academic excellence of every student by empowering them with the means for the successful completion of standards, and by challenging them to be productive members of our global society. We are committed to a comprehensive system of support to assure that each student has the opportunity to develop the skills and talents necessary for college and career readiness.

District Vision: All students are engaged in rigorous, authentic, experiential, individualized learning that is supported or accelerated to ensure that they meet or exceed standards.

Our Students are curious and creative learners who succeed through personal initiative and sustained effort to reach high academic goals. They are critical thinkers and learners who seek knowledge and possess technological competence and collaborative skills. Our students embrace diversity and culture, act responsibly, and contribute to our community.

Our Educators believe in providing for the social, emotional, and academic needs of every child so that they feel connected, safe, and respected. They are committed to offering a challenging and engaging atmosphere in which all members of the school community can learn and grow.

Our Families and Community are integral to the success of our students and schools. Families are active, engaged, and welcomed partners in their child’s education. Our community is passionate about equitable educational outcomes for all students.

Our Schools offer an enriched learning environment and a comprehensive system of support to address the needs of the whole child.

We believe:

- In providing for the social, emotional and academic needs of every child so that they feel connected, safe, and respected in order to ensure student achievement.
- In providing a challenging and engaging atmosphere in which all members of the school community can learn and grow.
- In providing opportunities for inquiry, research, global collaboration, and communication.
- In providing varied, rich and personalized opportunities for learning.
- In providing experiences to develop critical thinking skills that allow students to become engaged participants in their school communities and beyond.

20. What are the approximate number of students planning to attend Early College, School Choice (attend another high school) and Stafford at the high school level?

- a. Early College: 8
- b. School Choice out 23, School Choice in 6
- c. Stafford Technical Center: 29

21. How do Slate Valley Central Office salaries compare regionally (FY20 Data)?

Position	District/Supervisory Union	Salary
Director of Finance	Rutland Northeast SU	\$117,130
	Southwest Vermont	\$110,000

	Addison Central SU	\$106,090
	Rutland City	\$103,825
	Bennington Rutland SU	\$103,770
	Slate Valley	\$101,751
	Greater Rutland SU	\$94,760
	Mill River Union	\$91,651

Position	District/Supervisory Union	Salary
Director of Student Services	Rutland City	\$123,000
	Addison Central SU	\$118,450
	Bennington Rutland SU	\$116,246
	Rutland Northeast SU	\$114,418
	Slate Valley	\$111,548
	Southwest Vermont	\$101,002
	Greater Rutland SU	\$98,056
	Mill River Union	\$87,418

Position	District/Supervisory Union	Salary
Director of Curriculum	Rutland City	\$132,821
	Rutland Northeast SU	\$104,000
	Addison Central SU	\$101,210
	Greater Rutland SU	\$95,000
	Southwest Vermont	\$92,700

	Slate Valley	\$91,271
	Mill River Union	\$84,872

Position	District/Supervisory Union	Salary
Director of Operations	Southwest Vermont	\$103,915
***** SV position is 2 positions in one (technology and building/grounds). No other district has the same position.	Rutland City	\$100,413 (Technology)
	Greater Rutland SU	\$95,000
	Slate Valley	\$91,271
	Mill River Union	\$87,418 (Buildings & Grounds)
	Rutland Northeast SU	\$82,700 (Technology)
	Addison Central SU	88,190 (Facilities)
		\$79,568 (Technology)

Position	District/Supervisory Union	Salary
Superintendent	Southwest Vermont	\$156,502
	Addison Central SU	\$146,423
	Rutland Northeast SU	\$142,000
	Bennington Rutland SU	\$138,000
	Mill River Union	\$137,231
	Rutland City	\$135,000 (interim)
	Slate Valley	\$135,000
	Greater Rutland	Vacant (interim 2 days/week)

22. What grants funds are available and are we applying for them?

There are a number of federal grants available to school districts that will be available to school districts. The district will be applying for all Coronavirus Relief Funds funds that it possibly can.

Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act \$50 million:

Coronavirus Relief Funds (CRF) will be used for reimbursing eligible costs districts incurred or will incur in FY2020 or FY2021 due to COVID 19.

\$6.5 million: For Vermont K-12 schools to improve the heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems in school buildings in reference to COVID-19-specific guidelines from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American Society of Heating, Refrigeration, and Air Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE). **The program is being administered by Efficiency Vermont**

\$1.5 million: For independent schools

\$1.0 million: Consulting Services for school districts administered by the VT AOE

\$12.0 million: Grant funds for school districts to reimburse for the costs related to food service during the months of July and August

\$29.0 million: For school districts to be used to reimburse for eligible costs districts incurred or will incur in FY20 and FY21 related to COVID19. Some of the reimbursement for these funds will reduce the amount of money that comes to school districts from the Education Fund. By doing this the State of VT will remedy some of the Education Fund deficit that could impact schools when formulating their FY22 budget.

Elementary and Secondary School Relief Fund (ESSR) \$29 million:

These are also CRF funds that will be administered as a grant program to help K-12 educational entities prevent, prepare, prepare for and respond to the coronavirus pandemic. School districts must apply for these funds. All the funds that school districts receive through this program will reduce the amount of money that comes to school districts from the Education Fund. By doing this the State of VT will remedy some of the Education Fund deficit that could impact schools when formulating their FY22 budget.

23. What is included in the Functional Area Code on the flyer that went out on the budget, on the line called 2410 School Administration and what is the explanation for the increase?

School Administration includes all the costs related to school district administrative services. The costs for 19 staff members are budgeted for here, and includes all the Principals and the school clerical staff. This line accounts for changes in wages and benefits as well as

changes in costs related to each building's office such as telephone, postage and supplies. The increase is primarily attributable to increases in wages and benefits with additional increases and decreases in some of the non-employee related lines.