
Education

Goal: To provide effective and efficient educational and child care facilities and programs for Weston residents.

Background**Elementary and Secondary Education:**

In 2016, Weston, Landgrove, Londonderry, and Peru (the Mountain Town Regional Education District) joined an Act 46 Study Committee with the towns of Manchester, Dorset, Mt. Tabor, Sunderland, and Danby to consider consolidation into one large district governed by a single board with a single administration and tax rate. Voters in the nine towns approved the merger in 2017 and the Taconic and Green Regional School District was formed. The School District continues to be a part of the Bennington-Rutland Supervisory Union (BRSU). Weston has one seat on the Taconic and Green Regional School Board.

~~At the time of the 2011 Town Plan, Weston did not operate a public school within the Town boundaries.~~

~~–Weston K-8 students attended the Flood Brook Union School in Londonderry (established in 1968) with students from Landgrove, Londonderry, and Peru. None of the three school districts within the Bennington-Rutland Supervisory Union operates a high school and Weston students in grades 9-12 attend a school chosen by their families. Nearly all Weston students choose to attend the independent Burr and Burton Academy in Manchester, although students have also attended Stratton Mountain School, Long Trail School, Green Mountain High School, and others. The School District pays the tuition for students in grades 9-12 at rates approved by voters at the annual district meeting.~~

Weston enrollment numbers have been fairly steady over the last several years, with a total of _____ students in 2023-2024 school year. Weston enrollment has declined steadily since a peak of 370 students in the mid- 1800s.

Weston Student Enrollment

<u>School Year</u>	<u>2019-2020</u> <u>2011-2012</u>	<u>2020-2021</u> <u>2012-2013</u>	<u>2021-2022</u> <u>2013-2014</u>	<u>2022-2023</u> <u>2014-2015</u>	<u>2023-2024</u> <u>2015-2016</u>
<u>Pre-K</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>7</u>
<u>K-8</u>	<u>46</u>	<u>48</u>	<u>44</u>	<u>49</u>	<u>45</u>
<u>9-12</u>	<u>29</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>21</u>
<u>Total</u>	<u>79</u>	<u>77</u>	<u>75</u>	<u>84</u>	<u>73</u>

Source: Taconic and Green ~~Mountain Town Regional Education~~ School District

Early Education and Child Care:

The Little School is an independent, non-profit early childhood program and preschool serving children aged 2-5 located in the Town Office Annex (the old Weston School). This space is leased to the school by the Town. The Little School has operated since 1976 and serves families in Weston as well as surrounding towns. Tuition support is offered for eligible children aged 3-5 through Vermont's Universal Pre-K Program (Act 166). Under this legislation, pre-kindergarten programs must now meet specific standards that ensure high-quality and effective instruction. In addition, The Little School accepts funding from the Vermont Child Care Financial Assistance Program and has its own financial aid program for families.

Other early childhood programs are available in surrounding communities, including the West River

Montessori School in Londonderry and the Northshire Day School in Manchester. Weston's Zoning Bylaws include provisions that allow for family child care operations in a residence and for separate child care facilities.

Adult Education Programs

Adult education opportunities for Weston residents are available regionally. Vermont Technical College (VTC) has satellite campuses in Bennington, Rutland, and Brattleboro that offer Associates Degrees, career-related certificates, and credit and non-credit training programs. The Tutorial Center offers adult education and literacy classes and has locations in Manchester and Bennington. Vermont Adult Learning operates centers in Rutland, Springfield, and Brattleboro and offers similar adult learning services as well as workforce development programs.

Weston Pop-Up University is another opportunity for adult education. It was organized in 2020 by a group of Weston residents to provide free learning opportunities to the community and is a program of the Wilder Memorial Library. Classes are given during the month of March each year on a variety of topics – including cooking, physics, literature, calligraphy, fly fishing, yoga, cartoons, and karaoke. The classes are taught by community volunteers and anyone can take a class for free. The goal is to meet new friends, learn new things and discover all that the community has to offer.

~~Weston had two elected seats on the Flood Brook Union School Board with its own budget and tax rate. Weston also had a separate school board responsible for paying tuitions for students in grades 9-12 and pre-K students. High school students had the choice to attend any Vermont approved secondary school, and Pre-K students had the option to attend any approved preschool. However, although Weston students continue to attend these schools, the governance and tax structure for providing these services have undergone major changes since 2011.~~

~~In 2010, the Vermont Legislature passed Act 153 to address statewide declining enrollments, rising costs and inequities in education opportunities by providing incentives for voluntary school district consolidations. After a lengthy investigation, a formal Act 153 Study Committee with members from Landgrove, Londonderry, Peru and Weston proposed consolidating all of their five separate districts into a single Regional Education District (RED) with one board responsible for a total of 418 students from Pre-K through high school.~~

~~In March of 2012, voters in all four towns approved the merger to form the Mountain Towns RED, the first in the state. The Vermont Board of Education also approved the proposal to move the new RED from the Windsor Southwest Supervisory Union in Chester to the Bennington Rutland Supervisory Union in Manchester, thus placing the district in a supervisory union whose other districts also offered high school choice. Voters elected a new RED board to oversee the year-long transition to the new RED which became fully operational in July 2013. Weston has two elected seats on the 8 member RED board which is apportioned by population.~~

~~The budget for the RED is voted at the RED annual meeting held at the Flood Brook School in late February. The single RED property tax rate for all four towns is based (under Acts 60 and 68) on per-pupil spending: total Pre-K-12 “education spending” divided by the total number of weighted “equalized students.” That rate is then adjusted by each town’s Common Level of Appraisal.~~

Weston Student Enrollment

School Year	2009-2010	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016
Pre-K	6	4	5	5	10	7
K-8	46	46	48	44	49	45

9-12	25	29	24	26	25	24
Total	77	79	77	75	84	73

~~Source: Mountain Town Regional Education District~~

~~Weston enrollment numbers have been fairly steady over the last decade, with a total of 73 students in 2015-16. (Weston enrollment has declined steadily since a peak of 370 students in the mid-1800s.) Nearly all Weston high school students choose to attend the independent Burr and Burton Academy in Manchester, although students have also attended Black River HS, Stratton Mountain School, Long Trail School and others. Most Weston preschoolers choose to attend The Little School, an independent non-profit early childhood program located in the old Weston School also serving families from surrounding towns. Weston has paid for pre-school for families who choose to attend since 2006; now Act 166 mandates universal access to publicly funded pre-K education at 10 hours/week for 3 and 4 year olds.~~

~~Since only a few school districts merged voluntarily under Act 153, the Vermont Legislature passed Act 46 in 2015 to mandate school district consolidations. Therefore, more big changes are afoot for Weston education because the Mt. Towns RED does not meet the required minimum district size. Further, in order to preserve school choice, the RED must look to merge with other districts that have the same choice options. In early 2016, the RED joined a formal Act 46 Study Committee with Manchester, Dorset, Danby, Mt. Tabor and Sunderland to consider consolidation into one large district governed by a single board with a single administration and tax rate. The process is complex. The final proposal will be presented to the voters of all the towns for approval. By the publication of the next Weston Town Plan, things will certainly have changed, again.~~

Educational Policies:

1. Encourage the active participation and input of Town residents into the decision-making process and actions being considered by Flood Brook ~~Union~~ School, Burr & Burton Academy, the ~~Taconic and Green Regional School District, and the Bennington-Rutland Supervisory Union. Windsor Southwest Supervisory Union and the Weston School Board.~~
2. Require that proposed significant new developments be reviewed in accordance with Act 250 formulas to determine whether the development will result in more students than our current school system can handle.
3. Continue the current method of providing choice for secondary schooling. Every effort should be made to continue this desirable system, rather than the Town joining one secondary union district. Elementary school students should be made aware of the available secondary school choices.
4. Continue to provide support for and cooperation with the Little School. The Little School is an asset to the community and should be encouraged to continue to provide early childhood programming and preschool education and services ~~to pre-schoolers~~ so that Weston's youngest students start school ready to learn.
5. Support educational policies to assure that Weston's school students will become self-supporting and participating members of society, including being literate, mathematically prepared, and aware of their own potential and the world around them. Students should be computer-literate by the end of eighth grade and possess the skills necessary to make informed decisions. High school students should be properly prepared for their future whether it be college, vocational, agriculture or forestry.
6. Encourage adults to use/take advantage of the existing adult educational facilities and services in the region, ~~including the computers at Flood Brook School.~~

7. Continue to support the Wilder Memorial Library, which is an asset to the community also providing inter-library loan service and ~~a~~computers with Internet access.

8. Strengthen the role of cultural and artistic disciplines in public education.

7.9. Support the provision of safe and affordable child care for Weston families.

Recommendations for Action:

1. Town ~~directors~~ School Board Members on the School Boards should develop a system to keep the people of Weston informed throughout the year of the actions being considered by the schools used by Weston residents.

2. Town representatives to the School Boards should push for standards to measure performance of students so that we know that our priorities with respect to learning are being met.

3. The ~~ramifications of the impacts~~ of Act ~~46s 60 and 68~~ and the consequences on school budgets and education property taxes should continue to be monitored.

3.4. Maintain the Town Office Annex property in order to continue to support its use by The Little School.