

Craftsbury Schools

Community Member Perceptions Regarding the Future of Its Elementary and Secondary Schools

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Challenge and Opportunity

The Craftsbury school district is composed of coalitions of individuals and interest groups. Membership in the community arises in different ways. For some it is from long histories of membership in town. Others are relative new comers who chose this community as a special place to live and function. In both case these residents share values, beliefs, information and interests. They form a web of community spirit and loyalties to one another even in times of differing points of view. Craftsbury residents are currently faced with some differing perspectives regarding the future of their school system. These different views have led to some disagreements that need to seek balance and resolution.

Therefore, it was important for the school board to gain understanding of the multiplicity of perspectives. Understanding of these multiple perspectives will provide greater insight into challenges and opportunities. There will be a deeper understanding of the issues and disputes so that policy decisions can be made based on solid values and move toward reconciliation of challenges. These decisions are not so simple as to be based on the principle of all or nothing. They need to reflect careful and difficult choices that must be made after taking into account the interests of all students balanced with the needs of sometimes competing interests of parents, taxpayers and individual groups of community members. In any case, the Craftsbury school board members are recognized for their courage and tenacity for the democratic process in initiating this study. The results will hopefully serve their needs for understanding community member thoughts and lead to decisions that are in the best interest of student education and sustaining Craftsbury as a very special place in which to live and function.

Acknowledgements

Analysis of school systems is complex and requires intellectual contributions from individuals who are intimately knowledgeable about the inner operations of the institution, its status and history. I am indebted to all who cooperated so freely in sharing information important to this study. All participants (citizens, faculty, staff, parents and students) were thoughtful in their responses, sincere, and forthright in the information shared. Their willingness to take time from their busy schedules is recognized and appreciated.

The Craftsbury Town Clerk was most cooperative and helpful in the random selection of people to be interviewed in this project. She insured random selection for each of the seven areas of town and maintained objectivity in the process. Heartfelt appreciation is extended to Yvette Brown for her knowledge of the community and cooperation in helping to frame this project.

I also want to recognize the excellent work school administrative assistant, Jane Linck, did in setting up interview schedules, arranging space for the work to be done and attending to other necessary logistical matters. There was also need to attend to many details in organizing and carrying out the Focus Forum and Community Engagement sessions. School administrators, talented facilitators and school staff are thanked for their dedicated efforts.

Intent

The purpose of the study was to describe key stakeholder perceptions of various aspects of the organizational conditions, structures, systems and resources as they play out in contributing to the direction necessary for the Craftsbury schools. The research was designed to allow participants to share their level of understanding of the current status of the schools and how these variables influence the efficacy of the organization now and in the future.

This work will hopefully provide insights into future directions deemed necessary in Craftsbury for adequately addressing community needs and desires, working conditions for faculty and staff, and providing for safe school facilities. Most importantly, I wish everyone great success in creating conditions needed for assisting students as they strive for excellence in their personal development and learning.

Research Methods

Data collection consisted of four different methods. First, semi-structured interviews were held with each of the fifty-three (53) participants. The participants included twenty-four (24) randomly selected citizens, eleven (11) randomly selected teachers and staff, six (6) students currently living in other Vermont communities and attending Craftsbury, five (5) students who live in Craftsbury and attend school here, one (1) home-schooled student, and six (6) students who live in Craftsbury but attend other Vermont High Schools. Areas of inquiry were consistent among all interviewees but people were also permitted to add additional insights not included in the questions as they deemed appropriate. The length of time for interviews ranged from twenty (20) to sixty-five (65) minutes. The average time for interviews was 38 minutes. Interviews resulted in two hundred fifty-eight (258) pages of hand written field notes. These notes were then organized into seven (7) primary themes. Frequency of responses was recorded to gain deeper understanding of the intensity of the specific interview findings.

Second, a “Community Focus Forum” was held on September 11, 2006. One hundred (100) citizens were randomly chosen to participate in the Forum. Forty-one (41) people were able to attend. In addition, five (5) people who were invited but were not able to attend submitted written information to the researcher. Seven (7) volunteer facilitators worked with small groups and collected data generated through the dialogue. Ten (10) pages of typed notes recorded actual responses from participants. Analysis of these notes resulted in themes and patterns of information important to this report.

Third, fifteen (15) historical documents were reviewed containing information such as previous facility studies, surveys of community members, architectural analyses, State Department of Education reports, minutes of school board and community committee meetings, and a variety of correspondence. All of this information was important in framing a cultural context for the study and to enhance understanding about the comprehensiveness of past efforts. A review of this data further informed comments made by interviewees who extended deep appreciation to school board members for their extraordinary efforts in trying to set direction for the future of the Craftsbury schools.

Fourth, current reports and documents generated by the State Department of Education were read in order to provide statistical data that either supported or refuted specific perceptions. The researcher felt that this

portion of the research was needed in order to objectify differing perceptions. It was also felt that this information was vital in informing future action.

Fifth, an “Open Invitational Forum” was held for all interested community members and staff who desired to be heard. This forum was held on October 24, 2006 with forty-six (46) people attending. The researcher recorded notes from this session that were analyzed and applied to this report. One participant followed up on this forum with information shared through a copy of a previous communication to the community.

The researcher pledged to maintain confidentiality by preserving anonymity of names in reporting and discussing the results of this study. To this end, field notes and other confidential materials collected in this research will be destroyed upon the completion of this study.

Theme #1: The Making of Community

Twenty-three (23) of the twenty-four (24) citizens interviewed and almost all teachers and staff (majority live in the community) perceived Craftsbury as a true “community” in which citizens are involved, proud to have membership, caring for one-another, have a sense of cohesiveness, share history and traditions, have familiarity with local people and places and share a common goal for “sustaining the Craftsbury culture and heritage. This sense of community was pervasive among all interviewees regardless of length of time for membership in town. Folks new to the community spoke of choosing to live here because of the desire for this type of tranquil, scenic, peaceful and wholesome culture and climate. One relatively new member to the community described Craftsbury with the following statement; “We are Norman Rockwell, but real”. Others, with multi-generational family history of membership in Craftsbury, love the culture and “can’t imagine living any where else”. Some people “moved back to Craftsbury after going away to work because we never found a place as wholesome and caring as this community. We have traditions based on human values that have been lost in many other communities. Craftsbury is a special place to live, raise kids and/or retire.”

Craftsbury is a school system that many of the community members and parents attended as children and youth. The roots are deep for these folks and pride is strong. These community members value the family-like learning environment, individual attention to students, opportunities to participate in school life and security found in this close environment.

The schools are also central to the community in general. They provide a clear center for community gatherings, municipal functions and public events. In addition, school events (emphasis on sports) are well attended by community members and serve as opportunities for socialization and sharing. “Loss of our school would mean loss of sports events. This would take one of our

primary ways for getting together as a community away from us. We would lose a lot of what makes us a family-like community.”

However, interviewees were clear in their perceptions that the school(s) was not the only corner stone for framing the community of Craftsbury. Other important features of the community cited include:

- The Common
- Church
- Sterling College
- Forest Land/Outdoor Center
- Chamber Players
- Historical Society
- Senior Center
- Community Care Center
- Librarian Project
- Potential Recreation Center
- Homes and other structures considered unique and special to Craftsbury.

It was perceived by all but one interviewee that the school did serve as an important corner stone for sustaining community. At the same time, thoughts of many interviewees are represented in the following quote: “Our community has many parts to its special culture. If we were to not have a high school we would lose one of our pieces for community but this would not cause us to falter. We have all of the other structures, traditions and ways of life that would hold us together as a community. The school is an important place in the community but it is one of many. It is not the only one”.

Community members, faculty, staff and parents shared varying perceptions about the impact of current school facility initiatives on the sense of community. Participant reactions to this inquiry can be sorted into three areas:

Area one, approximately sixty-percent (60%) of the interviewees felt that the current state of discussion about school facilities had the potential of dividing the community but had not yet done so. “It appears that people are starting to take sides rather than to see this issue as a common challenge. We have not drawn our wagons into separate circles but there are some indicators that sentiments and positions are becoming more ingrained. Some have stopped communicating and begun to lobby. If this behavior becomes common we will harm our sense of community”.

Area two, approximately thirty-percent (30%) of the participants saw no negative impact at all with the current discussions regarding school facilities and the future of school system. These people felt strongly that “there are deep roots that hold this community together. We have been discussing school facilities since the 1800’s and have held different opinions but we always stay together as a community. I think that we demonstrate a true democracy where most people participate in the community, share their opinions and vote their conscience. We have always been respectful of this right. We are a close knit community with strong desires to do what is best to keep it together.”

Area three, the remaining 10% of the interviewees felt that adversarial community relationships among some adults were developed. One of these people felt that “divisions between those with different opinions about quality are being felt”. Three others were of the opinion “that capacity and/or willingness to pay for the new school initiatives are creating challenges. We are divided on the question of whether or not we can afford to continue to operate a small school and feelings are becoming strong.”

Theme #2: Perceptions of Quality of Education

A) Community Members and Parents:

There is a clear bifurcation among the community participants in this study on the definition of quality education. Approximately fifty percent (50%) of parents and community members interviewed defined quality at Craftsbury in accordance with their expressed values for “smallness”. These interviewees described quality of education as “warm, connected, supportive and individual”. They liked a school environment where teachers, students and parents all know and care deeply for one another. They want the academic, social, emotional and physical needs of children to be known and to be dealt with individually.

Quality educational experiences were also described by this group as the opportunity for participation in all aspects of the school stemming from experiences like athletics, student council, mentoring peers and helping with daily events. These folks emphasized that the “matter of winning teams or having the best student performances were not the issue. It is the act of participating that makes the difference in kids now and in their future.” Some of these community members and parents stated that they preferred the small school environment because it “attended to the development of citizenship, life skills, family, human values, character building and ability to interact with others. These individuals were open in sharing that they realized that Craftsbury schools (emphasis on secondary) were small, had limited number of teachers and narrow academic offerings compared to larger institutions. At the same time, they felt that “if students have confidence in themselves, resilience, and resourcefulness, understand local life skills and have personal drive they will achieve academically. Knowledge of subject matter and other specialties can come later in schooling. Kids may have a hard time transitioning to large post secondary schools or to large technical/career centers but they will make it if they have these qualities that come from small school environments.”

The second half of community members and parents interviewed described quality at Craftsbury in terms of course offerings, opportunities to engage in in-depth learning experiences with a broad range of diverse peers, academic excellence and participation in high status extra-curricular activities and events. These folks saw “smallness as limiting quality education because of the lack of adequate resources and lack of diversity”. These interviewees used the following descriptors in their definition of quality education: “high academic expectations, college bound, smooth transition to college and successful college experiences, choices in subjects

and instructors, broad range of arts and humanities, global life skills, quality competition for extra-curricular choices and state of the art skills in technology and electronic communications”.

B) Students:

Students were more united in their perceptions of quality of education at Craftsbury and made choices accordingly. Students attending Craftsbury (emphasis on secondary) liked the school and their peers. They expressed respect and appreciation for most teachers and staff. They enjoyed the closeness of the small environment and felt very much a part of the total school. They also liked being able to participate on the sports teams. At the same time, twelve (12) of thirteen (13) students interviewed thought that “academics offered in other schools were of a higher standard than those offered in Craftsbury”. Students living in Craftsbury but attending schools outside of the community and a home-schooled person all made their choice not to attend their local community school because they felt that they would have better courses and learning experiences elsewhere. One student currently attending Craftsbury plans to transfer to another secondary school because of his desire to play football. Three other students currently attending Craftsbury plan to attend a Technical-Career Center as soon as they are eligible. Two other students interviewed shared that they would not be comfortable attending any of the other secondary schools of choice “because I am not smart enough to compete with those students”.

Students who attend Craftsbury but live outside of the community stated that they chose to attend this school for the following reasons:

- “I fit in better here than I would in a larger school.”
- “My grandmother convinced me to come here.”
- “My father graduated from here and wanted me to come.”
- “My friends come here and it is closer to where I live.”
- “I like the teachers and I like being able to be on teams.”
- “I can go to tech. school and get ready for VTC.”

C) Teachers:

Eighty-two percent (82%) of teachers interviewed shared their perceptions of Craftsbury as a high quality school offering excellent academics and exceptional learning and life experiences for students. Elementary education was perceived by them to be excellent. High standards of performance were expected of students and the environment

was considered safe. The elementary school playground was pointed to as a quality place for students to play and develop both physical and social skills.

Middle and secondary school teachers were confident that they are offering quality learning experiences for all students that included a wide range of subjects, breadth of exposure to state of the art topics, integration of technology and readiness for post secondary education or other choices to be made by individual students. These teachers emphasized the value of a close and family like learning environment where mutual respect and caring is pervasive. Many of these teachers spoke of Craftsbury as their “school of choice that had deep seated values”. “This is the only school that I want to teach in. It is a special and unique place for both students and adults.” “It is a school that is not only small but a gem. I can not imagine working any where else.” Teachers spoke of one another as capable instructors and caring educators. In addition, middle and high school faculty referred to their “capacity to offer individualized instruction in a wide range of topics that provides similar exposure to courses that are offered in larger high schools. Our teachers are creative and provide experiences for students that meet their needs and give them both breadth and depth of learning opportunities.”

Theme #3: School Facilities

Ninety-eight percent (98%) of the interviewees across all groups perceived the need for addressing school facilities. Although some interviewees felt the need to address facility issues at both schools the primary focus of these sentiments were on the secondary school. The most important concern was about health and safety in the original school and gymnasium. There was also concern by a few that the secondary school was too close to the highway and created a safety issue for students, staff and visitors as well as drivers of vehicles passing by. Some of these people also spoke about the need to have up to date educational space that include state of the art technological infrastructures and capacity to access electronic learning opportunities. Although nearly everyone participating in this study agreed that the facilities needed attention the solutions for meeting this need varied. There were three primary options suggested that will be addressed in a separate section of this report. These options are: (1) Keep two separate schools and renovate the secondary school. (2) Consolidate into one school facility for grades K-12. (3) Educate grades K-6 or K-8 in Craftsbury and tuition grade 7 through 12 or 9 through 12 students to area schools.

Two Percent (2%) of the interviewees felt that the school facilities “are a means to an end and should not be the focal point. The core of our facilities

has been here since 1829 and has served us well. We can not replace these structures with the same quality of construction. The important consideration for us is to have a place to learn. We do not have to have new buildings to have quality. We would lose part of our heritage if we lost this building. Where would we ever find things like five horizontal panel-doors?”

Approximately seventy percent (70%) of the participants in this study were of the opinion that the cost estimates for the school construction project(s) were too high. People were generally very appreciative of the efforts of the school board and administration to address the facility needs. However, it was the overall perception of interviewees and participants in the forums that estimated costs needed to be investigated further. “We need to either have other alternatives to reduce the cost or we need to become more realistic in our renovation and construction design of the existing facility.” These people were not convinced that the student population justified the construction costs. There was also great concern by this segment of the participants “that the construction project would raise the cost per pupil beyond what is affordable in this small community. We have a limited tax base and our costs are already higher than average. We have obvious facility needs but we can not afford the plan that was proposed.” Others called for more data that would inform the need for space, student population projections, available number of possible tuition students and impact on taxes.

Theme #4: One School (K-12) or Two (K-4 and 5-12)

Twelve (12) of the community members and parents expressed the desire to keep the two current schools separated even if new construction was to take place. The remaining fifty percent (50%) of this group thought that having one school for all grades would be better. Those who desired two separate schools provided the following rationale for their position:

- Better to keep younger and older students separated.
- Fear that older students would have adverse effects on younger children.
- There would be less need for new construction.
- Do not want to lose the elementary playground.
- Concern about what would happen to the vacant school building.

- Current elementary programs are established well and effective. Fear that change may alter the efficacy of these programs.

Perceptions of the twelve (12) people who desired to have one K through grade 12 school if school renovations and new construction took place offered the following rationale:

- Transportation to and from the two schools would be eliminated. This would save both money and time.
- The facility could be designed so that elementary and secondary students would be separated but core facilities could be shared.
- The present elementary school building could be converted into space for municipal functions.
- There would be greater economy of scale in assigning faculty and staff.
- Communication among all school personnel and students would be made easier.
- Activities for faculty, staff and students would be easier to coordinate with less cumbersome travel and other logistical issues.

The majority of faculty and staff interviewed who currently teach in the elementary school desired to have separate school facilities for students in grades K-4 and 5-12. These employees had strong sentiments about the quality of the elementary playground and the layout of the elementary school. They expressed the desire for some renovations to the facility but did not recognize any significant advantages in consolidating the schools. These interviewees also expressed potential challenges in commingling older and younger students.

Most of the teachers and staff interviewed from the secondary school felt that merging the two schools into one would be more cost effective than keeping them separate. They also felt that having all grades in one building would facilitate student mentoring programs and that all students would benefit from interacting with one another. These people recognized the need for some separation but felt strongly that structured opportunities for students to interact would expand their development and learning opportunities. Use of staff and scheduling of special content area teachers and staff would be made more efficient.

It is important to point out that community members, faculty and staff who participated in the two forums were also divided on the issue of consolidating the two school facilities into one. Many people in these forums spoke about the positive features of the elementary playground and the desire to keep younger and older students separated. Others addressed the economies that would be realized and the advantages in use of space and staff. Exact percentages of where participants fell on this issue are not able to be calculated from recorded notes. However, it appears that the split in sentiments is approximately fifty percent (50%) on either side.

Theme #5: Tuition Craftsbury Secondary Students to Other High Schools

The topic of tuitioning Craftsbury secondary students to other schools was raised during the forums and in interviews. Comments and perceptions shared by individuals on this topic came in the form of questions as well as strong perceptions and opinions. Five (5) or twenty-one percent (21%) of community members interviewed and some participants in forums desired more information before making up their minds on the merits of tuitioning high school students to other schools. The most common questions were:

- Will there be cost savings?
- How do we know that it won't cost more?
- How will students be transported?
- Will the time for transportation be excessive for students?
- Will there be choice of schools or will all students attend one school?
- What additional course offerings will be available that students do not currently have?
- Will our kids have the opportunity to participate in school events and sports?
- Could we keep our high school open and partner with another area school for special subjects, sports and other extra-curricular activities that we can not afford or do not have enough students to sponsor?
- Can we keep our secondary school open and offer more choices of courses through technology and virtual classrooms?
- What will happen with our present facilities?

Fourteen (14) (54%) of the community member interviewees favored tuitioning students to other high schools rather than engage in school

construction. People interviewed as well as those who attended forums who were in favor of tuitioning high school students to other schools were near unanimous in the desire to keep students in kindergarten through grade eight in Craftsbury. No one shared the perception that Craftsbury should tuition out elementary pupils (K-6) and nearly everyone also desired to maintain schools in the community for grades seven and eight. Perceptions of folks who desired to tuition high school students to other secondary schools are represented in the following quotes:

- “We have waited too long to update our high school facilities. They are too far gone to renovate. We can not afford construction now and we do not have the number of students to justify it. We need state of the art facilities and there is no way that we can come up with the money. The only real option is to tuition students to other places.”
- “Our students will have more learning opportunities if they attend other schools that have more programs, more teachers and greater numbers of students with more diverse interests and backgrounds.”
- “My child would have dropped out of school if she did not go to a different school. She was not making it here. I think that all of our high school students need to be able to choose a school that is right for them.”
- “The number of high school students in Craftsbury is too small. Everyone is trying very hard to do well for all students but we just plain do not have the resources to carry out these wishes. It is time to face the reality that if we are to have our students achieve high standards, have access to technology and advanced programs and be ready for higher education that we need to expand their opportunities. The only way to do this is by sending them to other schools with greater numbers of students and more combined resources.”
- “We need at least 15 students in high school classes. Having fewer than that just does not make educational or economic sense. There is limited opportunity for rich discussion and too few choices for courses and teachers.”
- “We have high schools in the region that could take our students. It would help both them and us if our kids went to them. Some of the schools that I know about are: Hazen, Lake Region, St. Johnsbury, Lamoille, Peoples and Stowe.”

- “If we tuitioned our students we could use some of the facilities for grades K through 8. The remaining buildings could be used for town offices, historic purposes, community center or we could sell some of them.”

Twenty-five percent (25%) of the community members interviewed (6 of 24) and many of the participants in the two forums were adamant about keeping the high school open and in Craftsbury. Rationale supporting their desire to sustain the high school included:

- “We have quality teachers and quality programs that will not be enhanced elsewhere.”
- “Our small school is best for students. They are safe, involved, treated with care, are more than just numbers and learn skills that will prepare them for life.”
- “Our quality of courses may not be equal to other schools but our quality of life and other experiences are much better than what could be gained in larger institutions.”
- “We can pay for what we value. If we have quality then people will support our small school.”
- “We can support our school if we attract more tuition students. Rather than close we need to get aggressive about attracting kids from other communities.”
- “We can attract tuition students and provide quality if we can find our ‘nitch’.”
- “Lose our school and we lose our community.”
- “We need to shift from the attitude that it is all about money to it’s all about quality and community.”

Theme #6: Cost of Education

Nearly everyone interviewed with the exception of students, as well as those who attended the forums, agreed that the per-pupil cost for education in Craftsbury was higher than most school districts in the State of Vermont. Two quotes will serve to summarize the voices of many in regard to perceptions of cost of education: “Our per-pupil cost in Craftsbury is currently 20% higher than state average before construction. If we add construction costs to this figure we will most likely have the highest cost in the State.” “Our education expenses are currently very high. We are 13th from the top in the State and current facility needs will drive us to be number

1”. No one expressed views that contradicted the foregoing perceptions. The most significant findings regarding costs dealt with sentiments about how to respond to these high costs. Those people in favor of maintaining schools in Craftsbury offered the following suggestions for attending to financial challenges:

- Attract more tuition students to offset per-pupil expenses.
- Tighten up on special education programs to save money.
- Use community volunteers to save personnel costs and still offer education to students.
- Find our niche and stick to it. Do not try to be all things for all students.
- Do only those renovations to facilities that are necessary for health and safety. Quality of education is not dependent on facilities it is dependent on quality instruction.
- We should explore privatization to see if it would be more cost effective.
- Collaborate with Sterling College and other area colleges and schools to offer some education programs that would be more cost effective.
- Apply the use of technology to expand programs in more efficient ways.
- Taxes are the issue rather than school costs. If we can do something more to relieve the tax burden then the cost per pupil goes away.
- People will pay for quality. We need to demonstrate quality in order to gain financial support.
- Students attending technical/career center cost us more. We should look into having more technical education here in Craftsbury.

Individuals who were in favor of closing the high school and tuitioning students elsewhere provided the following perceptions regarding cost savings:

- Area schools tuition rates are lower than our cost per pupil. It only makes sense that we would realize savings if we sent our students to these schools.
- We have reached the point of no return in our financial situation. Our buildings are too old, in disrepair, not energy efficient and not safe. Coupled with decreasing enrollments (loss of 17% -- from 191 to 158) this equals one option for controlling costs: tuition to other schools.
- Costs are driven mostly by expenses for personnel. We can not offer the breadth of programs at the high school without having very low

student to teacher ratios. Therefore, options for cost savings can only mean getting to an economy of scale that is affordable. We need to have at least 15 students per class.

- We need lots of things in the high school to make it competitive with other schools. We either need to get these things through grants, fund raising or volunteers. We are not able to continue to rely on property taxes.
- I love our small schools but we are limited in resources. It takes extra-ordinary financial effort to keep small schools operating with the quality that we want. We either have to be willing to acknowledge this need for extraordinary effort or go to the alternative of not having our own high school.

Theme 7: Summary of Perceptions

Commonly Shared Perceptions	Diversified Perceptions	Necessary Action
1. All people involved in this study desire quality of education.	1. The definition of quality of education is divided into two points of view with a split of approximately 50% on either side.	1. The community needs to unify its mission and desires for education. There needs to be a common understanding of the definition of quality and expectations for learning. Current disagreement on whether or not to maintain secondary education in Craftsbury is divided along the same lines that differentiate people on the definition of quality.

Commonly Shared Perceptions	Diversified Perceptions	Necessary Actions
2. All participants in this study (emphasis on community members) value Craftsbury as a community and want to sustain its current values, culture, heritage, traditions and ambiance.	2. The perceived impact of not having a high school within the community varies. For most, there is a fear that a core, if not the core, of the community would be lost. For others there is agreement that there would be a loss but that there are numerous other corner stones that would sustain the community.	2. All cornerstones that currently provide the foundation for community in Craftsbury need to be considered when weighing in on the question of loss or gain of community spirit. No one cornerstone, including the school, should be considered in isolation.
3. Craftsbury should continue to educate grades K through 6 and most likely K through 8 within the community.	3. No one expresses opposing views to this perception. There are a few people who do not see harm in educating all K-12 students in other communities but do not have strong desires for K-6(8) to be educated elsewhere.	3. The board and community will need to determine which facilities to utilize if secondary students are tuitioned out and grades K through 8 are kept in town. Will the current elementary building and playground be the primary site or will the campus move up to the Common?
4. There is an absolute need to provide safe and healthy learning environments and facilities for students, faculty, staff and guests.	4. Everyone agreed with the need to have safe facilities and environments for schools. The only discrepant thoughts were on the degree of facility restorations needed and breadth and depth of the renovation	4. Clear and understandable data supporting the need for renovations, new construction and improved school space need to continue to be developed and shared. Specific questions asked by some of the

	<p>project.</p>	<p>participants in this study need to be addressed. The most frequent areas of question included: Cost estimates for construction and renovation, student population projections, impact on property taxes, potential for quality education and costs for tuitioning secondary students. There were also questions about alternative solutions such as privatization of the school system and formation of working relationships with Sterling College.</p>
<p>5. The number of students attending the Craftsbury schools has declined over the past decade. The fact that Craftsbury had 274 students (255 without Albany) in 1995 is agreed upon. There is also agreement that there were 215 K – 12 students attending school in 2005. Sixty-one (61) secondary pupils.</p>	<p>5. There is some disagreement regarding projected enrollments. Some feel that the resident number of pupils has leveled off and that the number of tuition students can be increased. Others feel that the numbers in both categories will continue to decline over the next decade. There is also a sentiment that the Green Mountain Technical and Career Center will continue to draw students away</p>	<p>5. Current student population data for Craftsbury needs to be analyzed (see attachment 1 as a start). Data then needs to be shared and agreed upon by all. The number of available tuition students from surrounding towns must be realistically evaluated. (see attachment 2 as a starting point)</p>

	from the high school leaving very small class ratios at Craftsbury.	
6. Per-pupil cost for educating children and youth in Craftsbury is relatively high compared to other schools in Vermont.	6. People generally agree that the cost per pupil in Craftsbury is higher than state average. They also agreed that the construction and renovation project as previously presented was not affordable. Although some folks referenced the “pre-bate program” as a safety net for tax payers there was agreement by almost everyone that the net result of the building project as outlined would not be tolerable to most townspeople.	6. The design of the proposed construction and renovation projects need to be re-examined in regard to project costs. If the project is to continue people will need assurance that all options for reducing costs have been explored.
7. There is overwhelming agreement that more students are necessary if Craftsbury is to sustain its secondary educational in the community.	7. There is no disagreement with the desirability for a larger secondary pupil population. At the same time, there are variations in thought about how to increase the number of pupils. For some, finding the right niche (arts, sports, languages, family like are examples) is the solution. Others feel that more aggressive	7. Data needs to be collected regarding the availability of tuition students from regional schools. In addition, alternative structures such as private school or combining secondary and post secondary education are desired by some.

	<p>marketing of the school is needed to attract tuition students.</p> <p>Another group feels strongly that attracting additional tuition students is an admirable yet unrealistic idea.</p>	
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Theme 8: Summary of Perceptions of Advantages and Disadvantages of Sustaining High School Education in Craftsbury

Advantages	Disadvantages
Shorter distance and time in traveling to and from school.	Limited number of peers to interact with.
High school is more convenient and accessible to parents and public.	High cost for educating secondary students. Lack adequate numbers to provide efficiency.
Community has greater capacity for control of education and related policies.	The need for increasing the number of students in the high school is daunting. Students from other towns may not be available.
Parental involvement in school will be sustained.	School facilities are in desperate need. Renovations will be challenging and costly. New construction will be expensive given the number of students.
Individualized instruction for all students.	Students will continue to be too protected in the small school environment. Transition to post secondary education will continue to be challenging for many.
School remains one of the cores for sustaining the Craftsbury culture.	Student to teacher ratios and teacher to administrator ratios will be low.
All students can participate in extra-curricular activities and school events.	Limited choice of curriculum, programs and teachers.
Students will be able to continue to use local resources such as the	Capacity to obtain state of the art technology and other instructional

libraries, outdoor center, the Common, and other natural environmental surroundings.	and learning materials will be challenged.
Sustained tradition of multi-generational family attendance in the high school.	The danger of the high school being too close to the main road will continue.

Theme 9: Summary of Perceptions of Advantages and Disadvantages of Educating Secondary Students in Schools Other Than Craftsbury

Advantages	Disadvantages
Students will have greater number of students engage with.	Students will spend more time in travel and parents/students may have to provide transportation.
More exposure to diversity and more peers to integrate with.	Parents and community will be further removed from school as a community center.
Expanded curriculum and program offerings.	Share control of education, budgets and policies with members of other communities.
Opportunity for participating in higher level extra-curricular activities. More extra-curricular offerings.	Parents will have less opportunity for engagement in school.
More opportunity to engage with groups of students with similar interests, academic aspirations, talents and capacities.	Larger cohort groups of students may lessen capacity for individualized instruction.
Potential reduction in cost per pupil due to economy of scale and tuition costs being lower than Craftsbury's cost per pupil.	There will be more challenge to sustain the culture of Craftsbury. Other cornerstones will need to be intentionally used.
No need for construction and renovation of current high school facilities.	Involvement in extracurricular activities will be more competitive. Some students will not be able to be participants.
Current facilities may be used for other community groups including	Local resources may give way to more regional resources. Potential

the elementary school.	for local resources to be challenged in sustainability.
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Supporting Documents and Documentation:

Three (3) community members and two (2) staff members provided statistical information for areas such as student population, projected costs for construction and renovation project, and cost per pupil for Craftsbury and surrounding schools. In addition, many historical documents created in conjunction with this project over the past five (5) years were shared to help the consultant understand the context for this work and better understand information shared by interviewees. This information is not presented as comprehensive research or total representation of all of the documents that were reviewed. However, some of these data are added because they may help inform some of the perceptions shared by participants in this study. In addition, this information may be foundational for engaging in more in-depth research needed to answer the questions raised in this study.

Area A: Potential for Increasing the Number of Tuition Students Attending Craftsbury-What is the Client Base?

Three (3) of the twenty-two (22) sample school districts in this data bank had increases in student population from the years 1996 through 2005. Nineteen (19) schools realized decreases in their enrollments.

The total number of students in the twenty-two (22) school districts in 1996 was 7,424. This total was reduced to 6,801 in 2005. The total reduction in the number of students in these schools was 623 (-9.16%).

If the three largest school districts among the 22 used in this data are excluded (Lamoille Union High School, St. Johnsbury Academy and North Country Union High School) then the reduction of students in this same time period is 720 or minus 20.65%. The average reduction in enrollment in these 19 schools was 2.29% per year.

These data indicate that the market for tuition students has shrunk from 1996 through 2005. The competition for high school students has increased because all but three schools have realized declining enrollments. The range of student populations in these nineteen schools was from 96 to 525. The range in 2005 was 57 to 397. (See appendix A)

Area B: Comparability of Announced Tuitions for 2006 Among Area Schools

Announced tuition rates for nine (9) area high schools reveals that Craftsbury Academy (grade 9 -12 tuition) is among the top three. The range in tuition rates is from a low of \$6,807 (North Country Union) to \$10,520 (St. Johnsbury Academy. Craftsbury’s announced tuition is \$10,000. The lowest announced tuitions were found in North Country Union (\$6,807), Lake Region Union (\$7,700) and Lamoille North Union (\$8,796). Competitive pricing is a challenge.

(See Appendix B)

Area C: Comparative School Data for Cost-Effectiveness, FY 2006 (Produced by the Vermont D.O.E.)

Eleven (11) K-12 Vermont school districts are included in this data. The comparisons included by the State of Vermont to judge cost-effectiveness are: student/teacher ratios, student/administrator ratios and teacher/administrator ratios. The following chart shows this information for the eleven K-12 schools:

School District	Enrollment	Total Teachers	Total Adm.	St/Teacher Ratio	St/Adm. Ratio	Teacher/Adm. Ratio
Royalton	487	41.97	2.0	11.60	243.50	20.99
Twinfield Union	481	44.30	1.20	10.86	400.83	36.92
Blue Mountain	432	41.20	.30	10.49	1,440.00	137.33 This ratio is an anomaly because of the way this school has organized its school and central office administrative

						structure.
West Rutland	407	37.70	2.0	10.80	303.50	18.85
Danville	385	42.00	2.00	9.17	192.50	21.00
Canaan	277	21.6	1.0	12.82	277.00	21.60
Concord	253	24.20	1.00	10.45	253.00	24.20
Rochester	249	20.83	2.00	11.95	124.50	10.42
Chelsea	237	24.52	1.00	9.67	237.00	24.52
Craftsbury	219	22.17	1.00	9.88	219.00	22.17
Cabot	212	28.20	2.00	7.52	106.00	14.10

Area D: Classifying Town Districts by Size and Type of Education Offered: FY 2005 – State Department of Education Report

There are 149 Vermont school districts with student populations between 100 and 499. The average number of students in these 149 school districts is 244. The following bullets show how they offer education:

- Thirteen (13) of these school districts offer education to all grades K through twelve in their community.
- Two (2) tuition all students K through 12.
- Thirty-six (36) offer elementary education and tuition high school students to schools outside of their community.
- Seventy-three (73) operate elementary schools and belong to a union high school.
- Five (5) belong to a union elementary school and tuition high school students.
- Four (4) belong to a union elementary school and a union high school.
- Five (5) operate elementary schools and send high school students to a designated high school.
- Nine percent (9%) of these 149 school districts educate high school students within their town as single units.
- Ninety-one percent (91%) of these schools do not operate high schools by themselves. They either tuition students or belong to some form of secondary school union.
- Forty-one (41) (27.5%) of these school districts tuition high school students to other school districts.

The following chart reveals the comparison of cost per pupil by classification of size and type of education offered. Size of schools is from 100 to 499 students. Costs represent total budget divided by number of equalized pupils. This results in weighted costs per pupil. (Source: Vt. D.O.E. Report on Classifying Town School Districts by Size and Type of Education Offered: Revised 3/7/2005)

Type of School Structure for Offering Education	Weighted Cost per Pupil
Do not operate schools and tuition all students	\$11,508
Operate elementary school and send high school students to designated	\$10,345

high school.	
Belong to a unified union	\$10,273
Operate K through 12 in town	\$13,045
Operate elementary school and tuition high school students.	\$10,737
Operate elementary school and belong to a union high school.	\$11,303
Belong to an elementary union and tuition high school students.	\$11,095
Belong to a union elementary district and a union high school district.	\$9,794

Conclusion:

It is no secret that there has been division within the Craftsbury school community. It is also self evident from the information collected in this research that there is clear and wide-spread desire to move the school district in a direction that will serve students best while balancing the needs of community members. There is an explicit love for the community and desire to sustain its wonderful character and values. Different perspectives of what is best for both the school district and community exist. Most prominent of these differences are:

- Definition of quality education and expectations for results.
- Affordability of sustaining education programs for all grades K through 12 in town.
- Perception of whether or not educating grade 9 through 12 students in town is best for their development and readiness for meeting their futures. Multiple perspectives lead to questions: When is small just right and when is it too small? Is it a matter of size at all? Is it really about quality and capacity to pay for it? Has the community reached its capacity to sponsor a quality small school environment?
- Advisability of school construction given the size of the student population and the high cost per pupil.

Most prominent areas of agreement:

- Craftsbury schools have been special places for students for many years. There is a rich heritage and fond memories.
- Everyone wants the best for students and wants them to be prepared for their future.

- Sustaining Craftsbury’s image, ambiance, culture and values.
- Costs of education have risen and are high.
- The student population has declined over the years.
- Desire to maintain a population of citizens that respect and like one-another.
- School facilities are in dire need of upgrading for education, safety and health.
- Status quo for the school district is not an option.
- Continuing to educate students in grades K -6 or 8 within the community.

Options for Consideration Mentioned but Not Explored in This Study

Note: This list of options is not intended to be all inclusive. These are concepts that entered into conversations in the course of this work. The researcher did not engage in specific areas of inquiry regarding options.

- **Extra-Curricular Programs:** Expand opportunities for extra-curricular activities for students through joint efforts and formal memorandum of agreements with Hazen Union High School. Both Craftsbury and Hazen Union could sponsor different extra-curricular programs and students from both schools could elect to participate in programs of choice. On the other hand, Craftsbury Academy could rely on Hazen Union to sponsor all extra-curricular programs for students from both schools. This option is apparently already being explored and research is available to inform decisions.
- **Expand or Create a Formal Contract with Sterling College:** Explore the potential for cost and program sharing that may result in mutual benefits to Sterling College and Craftsbury Academy. For example, Sterling College could focus on academic areas including science, agriculture and/or work study opportunities for high school students. Costs for operating said programs would be shared through the provisions outlined in the contract.
- **Maintain Schools in Craftsbury:** Status quo is not an option because of the broad based agreement that something must be done about health and safety conditions (focus on the Academy). However, some people remain interested in upgrading school facilities, expanding educational opportunities and supporting such initiatives through local

- efforts. Attracting tuition students to the Academy is an accompanying theme. The two primary factors to be explored in this option are:
- Can construction costs for renovation and new facilities be reduced?
 - Can additional tuition students be attracted to attend the Academy?
- Explore possibilities for Craftsbury Academy to engage through formal agreements with neighboring schools like Hazen Union High School whereby Craftsbury would focus on offering specialized programs rather than to attempt to be a comprehensive high school. Students from within the schools in the agreement could attend the schools with programs that best met their needs. This option would need to involve careful review of legal issues. It may need special legislation in order to be implemented.
 - Join Hazen Union High School: Hazen Union could expand its current union high school to include Craftsbury by engaging in the processes outlined in Vermont State Statutes, Title 16, Section 721. In this case, Craftsbury would continue to have a Pre-K through grade 6 or grade 8 school board and school district. This elementary school district would operate in the same way that the current school district functions. Craftsbury would also have school board representation on the Hazen Union School Board in accordance with the proportion of the number of Craftsbury citizens to the total number of citizens in the member school districts belonging to the Hazen Union School District. All high school students would attend Hazen Union. Costs per pupil for education would be the same for all member school districts.
 - Tuition Students in Grades 9-12 (Title 16, Section 822): Grade 9 through 12 students would have their choice of attending any approved public or independent school of their choice. The Vermont State Department of Education approves schools and maintains a list of these schools annually. Approved schools include high schools all over Vermont, the United States and abroad. The Craftsbury School District would be responsible for paying the announced tuition of any approved public high school in Vermont. It would also be responsible for paying the average Union High School cost for any students attending approved private or independent schools.
 - Operate Craftsbury Academy and Pay Tuition For Students Who's Interests Would be Better Served by Attending Another School of

Choice (Title 16, Section 822 (2) (c) or Title 16, Section 827 (d): In this case Craftsbury Academy would continue to maintain education for high school students. However, parents, guardians or students could partition the school board to obtain approval of attending another secondary school of choice in order to meet their needs. This option goes beyond the current arrangement for student choice through exchange of students among schools.

- Designate St. Johnsbury Academy as the Public High School for Craftsbury: Title 16, Section 827 (a), (b) and (c): The citizens of Craftsbury could vote to designate an approved independent school as the public high school rather than to maintain high school education within the community. In this case, all high students living in Craftsbury would have to attend St. Johnsbury unless an alternative is approved by the Craftsbury school board.

Appendix A

Enrollment Trends 1996 through 2005

(Source: Vt. D.O.E. Public School Enrollment Report 05/03/05)

School	1996 Enrollment	2005 Enrollment
North Country Union	1068	1039
Troy	213	155
Hazen Union	412	401
Hardwick Elem.	355	275
Orleans	151	135
Wolcott	162	144
Coventry	129	123
Craftsbury	261	219
Albany	73	110
Lamoille Union	800	903
Irasburg	161	147
Peoples Academy	525	397
Lowell	107	111
St Johnsbury Academy	890	961
Lakeview	96	57
Derby	553	373

Glover	107	105
Newport Town	175	142
Barton	240	177
Neport	408	320

Appendix B -- FY 2005

(Source: Vt. D.O.E. AAT-20006 Report, Thursday, February 10, 2005)

School District	Enrollment	Announced Tuition	Current Instructional Expenses
Hazen Union	601	\$9,038	\$9,850
Craftsbury	61	\$10,000	\$12,091
Lamoille Union	903	\$8,796	\$10,295
Green Mt. Career Ct.	--	\$9,696	--
Stowe	221	\$10,175	\$10,250
Lake Region	369	\$7,700	\$9,042
North Country	1039	\$6,807	\$8,903
St/ Johnsbury Academy	961	\$10,520	\$12,450
Danville	144	\$9,400	\$9,779
Morristown	397	\$6,640	\$6,806