

(updated 01/15/15; DRS)

A Broad Overview of Current Education Governance

SUPERVISORY UNIONS AND SUPERVISORY DISTRICTS

SUPERVISORY UNION (SU)

Definition / Function

- An “administrative, planning, and educational service unit” consisting of two or more school districts. (16 V.S.A. § 11(23)) (*But see “NOTE”* under Supervisory District below)
- The State Board of Education has the authority to adjust the boundaries of an SU on its own initiative or at the request of a school district. (16 V.S.A. § 261)
- An SU may hire a superintendent, but it is not required to do so. (16 V.S.A. § 241)
- An SU does not operate schools, but as of July 1, 2014 it is required to provide special education services on behalf of member districts. (*See* 16 V.S.A. § 261a for a list of duties)

Governing Board (16 V.S.A. § 266):

- An SU board consists of representatives appointed from each member school district’s board.
- The proportional representation requirements of the Equal Protection Clause do not apply.

Budget (16 V.S.A. §§ 261a and 301):

- The SU board adopts a budget and allocates it among the member districts.
- The electorate does not vote directly on the SU budget; it is included in each district’s budget.

SUPERVISORY DISTRICT (SD)

Definition / Function

- An SU that consists of only one district (*e.g.*, Burlington; Montpelier). (16 V.S.A. § 11(24))
- The footprints of the SD and the school district are identical.

Governing Board

- One board governs all schools in an SD and serves as both the SD and school district boards.

Budget

- As with any school district.

NOTE: The definition of “supervisory union” includes a supervisory district “if the context clearly allows,” so it usually is not necessary to include an explicit reference to supervisory districts.

NUMBERS

- There are 59 SUs. Of that total number, 12 are SDs and 2 are Interstate SDs.
- In addition, there are 3 independent Regional Technical Center School Districts.

SCHOOL DISTRICTS

SCHOOL DISTRICTS – GENERALLY

Definition / Function

- A school district is responsible for *providing for* the education of its resident students, either by operating a school or schools, paying tuition on behalf of its resident students, or both. (16 V.S.A. §§ 821–822)
- The boundaries of a district can encompass one or more towns or portions of a towns.
- A district can be organized to provide for the education of resident students in all grades or in some subset of grades.

Governing Board

- There is one elected governing body for the entire district, regardless of the number of towns or portions of towns included in the district.
- The Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution requires proportional representation.

Budget

- The board proposes a budget that must be approved by the electorate.
- When a district includes more than one town or parts of towns, the votes are commingled.

Types of School Districts

- Town or City School Districts
 - The boundaries of the town/city are the boundaries of the district – *e.g.*:
 - Berlin School District (operates PK–6)
 - St Johnsbury School District (operates PK–8; pays tuition for 9–12)
 - Colchester School District (operates K–12)
- Incorporated Districts
 - These districts operate under a charter granted by the General Assembly – *e.g.*:
 - Barton ID (operates K–8)
 - North Bennington ID (pays tuition for K–6)
- Union School Districts (16 V.S.A. chapter 11)
 - Two or more school districts merge into one district, a union school district, for the purpose of owning, constructing, maintaining, and operating schools – *e.g.*:
 - Leland & Grey Union School District (Brookline, Jamaica, Newfane, Townsend, & Windham; the district operates 7–12)
 - These districts have all the same rights and responsibilities as any school district, including: representation on the school board must be proportional; there is one tax rate for all member towns; and votes of the electorate are commingled.
 - A Unified Union District operates a school offering K–12 – *e.g.*:
 - Twinfield Union School District (Marshfield and Plainfield)
- Interstate School Districts
 - There are two districts that provide education to a combination of New Hampshire and Vermont students. They were created by acts of the two state legislatures and of Congress. They are Vermont schools for purposes of financing only. Vermont governance decisions do not affect them.

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OTHER

JOINT CONTRACT SCHOOL

Definition / Function

- Two districts can contract to operate a school jointly. (16 V.S.A. §§ 571–572)

Governing Board

- The underlying school *districts* and their school *boards* remain separate and distinct, but there is a third *board* made up of representatives from the districts that operates as a *joint board* – *e.g.*:
 - Jay / Westfield School (Jay School District & Westfield School District)
 - Twin Valley School (Whitingham School District & Wilmington School District)

Budget

- The underlying districts proceed as any district (separate budgets, per-pupil spending, tax rates, and non-commingled votes)
- Any costs related to the joint contract school are the subject of the contract between the districts and so are included in each district’s budget.

NOTE: There is no such thing as a “joint contract school *district*.” No separate *district* is created; rather, it is a contractual relationship between two existing districts.

REGIONAL CAREER TECHNICAL CENTER SERVICE REGION

- The region designated by State Board of Education rule surrounding each of the 16 regional career technical centers. (16 V.S.A. § 1522)
- Three of the regional career technical centers are governed by their own independent board of directors and are operated as a separate school *district*. (16 V.S.A. ch. 37, subch. 5A)
- The other regional career technical centers are overseen by the host school district.

COMPREHENSIVE HIGH SCHOOL (16 V.S.A. § 1522)

- A public or independent school other than a career technical center that provides secondary technical education.

INDEPENDENT SCHOOL

- The statutes refer to independent schools in four categories / subcategories:
 - an approved independent school
 - an approved independent school serving as the area career technical center
 - an independent school meeting school quality standards
 - a recognized independent school
- The classification of independent schools and identification of which may receive publicly funded tuition dollars and in what amounts will be discussed at another time.

HOME STUDY PROGRAM (16 V.S.A. § 166b)

- These programs will be discussed at another time.