

# 20 years ago, Act 60 fundamentally changed the way Vermont pays for public education

## What problem were we trying to solve?

Before 1997 Vermont had vast inequalities in education and tax bills from town to town. Towns with ski resorts, lakes, lots of stores, or high-value homes enjoyed well-funded schools with low tax rates. Property-poor towns had to tax themselves at high rates to afford barely adequate schools. For Vermont's children, geography was destiny. The quality of a child's education was directly related to the property wealth of the town she lived in.

## What did we do, and does it work?

Vermont enacted the Equal Educational Opportunity Act—Act 60—which equalized education funding across the state. Under the law, any two towns that vote to spend the same amount per pupil have the same tax rate. The system delivers resources to locally controlled schools in a way that's fair to both students and taxpayers.

## What changed?

- **Town property wealth no longer determines a child's fate.** Schools remain locally controlled, but we now all share responsibility for funding them. Instead of thinking about "our kids" as only those in our own town, we recognize that "our kids" includes all the children in Vermont.
- **We redesigned the school tax collection and distribution system.** In the past a town's tax revenue stayed in that town to support its school. Now we have a statewide system, where all school tax money goes into the state Education Fund and is equally accessible to every school. Today's system is more like the Transportation Fund. We all appreciate that the state's roads and bridges need to be in good shape to benefit the whole state—so all taxpayers contribute to the fund that improves infrastructure in any town where it's needed.

## What's the next challenge?

Funding equity is necessary, but it's not enough to ensure that every child succeeds in school. We also need to address the obstacles of poverty, racism, sexism, and disability.

## Vermont leads the way

When Vermont took the step 20 years ago to solve its education funding problem, nearly all the states were struggling with the same issue. We were not the only state whose Supreme Court said we had to fix the problem, but we are one of the only states that really fixed it.

## We all have a stake in every child's future

**Before Act 60** 'our kids' meant the kids in our own town



**Since Act 60** 'our kids' includes all the children in Vermont

