

## Glossary of Terms

**Independent School** – A school not operated by a municipal government organization. Such schools usually operate as non-profit organizations under IRS rule 501(c)(3).

**Private School** – A deprecated term for “independent” school. The term “independent” is used throughout Vermont statutes and is preferred by the schools themselves.

**Recognized Independent School** – All independent schools must register with the Agency of Education and annually provide a list of students. These schools are termed “recognized.” Recognized schools are otherwise unregulated except that they must obey federal and state public accommodations and nondiscrimination statutes.

**Approved Independent School** – “Approved” schools have been found by the AOE and the State Board of Education to meet SBE approval requirements, and unless they are religious schools they are then eligible to receive public tuition funds. Approval usually is granted for five-year terms.

**Accredited School** – Accredited schools have passed a review by a third-party peer review organization. The standards are much more rigorous than those applied for SBE approval. The New England Association of Schools & Colleges is the principal third-party accrediting organization in Vermont. NEASC has three separate commissions that accredit public schools, independent schools and independent colleges. The SBE currently recognizes NEASC accreditation as an acceptable proxy for SBE approval.

**Special Education** – A federal entitlement authorized by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) which provides mandatory services beyond ordinary educational services for students with qualifying disabilities. By federal law, special education is administered through the Agency of Education and local public education authorities.

**Disability Categories** – The IDEA defines 13 disability categories, of which one applies only to students ages 3 to 5 and the others to students up to age 22. Schools must use special education teachers in a particular category if the school wishes to bill the public system for the special education services.

**Public Tuition** – Vermont has 90 school districts which do not operate a full K-12 school system. These districts are obliged to provide the education to which their students are entitled by paying tuition to other public or approved independent schools. If paying to a public school, the tuition cost is determined by the receiving school district’s announced tuition rate. If paying to an independent school the tuition cost is set by the statewide average tuition or at a higher amount voted annually by the sending district’s voters or at an amount otherwise specified in statute.

**Statewide Average Tuition** – By statute, the statewide average tuition is computed by averaging the announced tuition rates of the state’s union school districts. As announced tuition rates do not have to be grounded in actual operating costs, the inputs to the statewide average computation need not be and is not consistent with real education spending.