



The Vermont Legislative Research Service

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Vermont's Post-Secondary Education Enrollment

Vermont has a high percentage of students who graduate from high school. In this report we examine why a portion of Vermont high school graduates are not enrolling in postsecondary education or skills training.

Enrollment in Vermont

Based on data from the Vermont Agency of Education, the high school graduation rate for Vermont was 92.4% in 2007-08 and 92.5% in 2012-13, well above the national average of 71.7% in 2007-08 and 81.0% in 2012-13.^{1,2,3} But, Vermont tends to produce a low level of high school graduates who continue on to postsecondary education or other programs that develop higher-level skills. In 2013, the national postsecondary enrollment rate immediately after graduating was 66%, while in Vermont it was 52%.^{4,5} According to the Vermont Agency of Education and the National Student Clearinghouse, only 59.3% of graduates continued onto postsecondary education within sixteen months of graduating in

¹ Vermont Agency of Education, "Vermont Public School Dropout and Completion Report," Data Analysis and Reporting Team, Montpelier, VT: Vermont Agency of Education, 2014, accessed February 18, 2016, http://education.vermont.gov/documents/EDU-Data_2013_2014_DropComplReport.pdf.

² Tom Mortenson, "College-Going Rates of High School Graduates - Directly from High School," Boulder, CO: National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, 2010, accessed February 12, 2016, <http://www.higheredinfo.org/dbrowser/index.php?measure=32>.

³ U.S. Department of Education, "U.S. High School Graduation Rate Hits New Record High," Washington D.C: U.S. Department of Education, 2015, accessed February 28, 2016, <http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-high-school-graduation-rate-hits-new-record-high>.

⁴ Duke Albanese, and Dr. J.D. Beaudoin, comps. "Common Data Project 2014 Annual Report," New England Schools Consortium, Portland, ME: Great Schools Partnership, 2014, accessed February 18, 2016, http://newenglandssc.org/app/uploads/2015/10/NESSC_Annual_Data_Report_2014_FINAL.pdf.

⁵ National Center for Education Statistics, "Immediate College Enrollment Rate," Washington DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2015, accessed March 3, 2016, http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cpa.asp.

2012 and 60.4% in 2013.⁶ Furthermore, from 2009-2013, only 16% of students enrolled in the Community College of Vermont, and 3.8% attended Vermont Technical College.⁷ In comparison, postsecondary education attendance rates for Rhode Island were 59.2%, New Hampshire - 58.1%, Maine - 62.6%, and Connecticut - 66.9%.⁸

Summer 'Melt'

Across the country, high school students who act as though they intend to enroll in college after they graduate are failing to do so in the fall, a phenomenon known as "*summer melt*."⁹ Students are categorized "intending to enroll" if they have completed high school, applied for financial aid, and/or applied for an additional scholarship.¹⁰ During the summer before attending college, specific hurdles are seen to timely enrollment, including: difficulty in registering for classes, filling out housing forms, paying college fees and completing other required paperwork. These hurdles become more challenging without the support network that students receive in high school.¹²

The Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 and data from uAspire collected in 2007, 2008 and 2009, conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics, states that nationally nearly 20% of students intending on enrolling in a four-year institution, and 40% of students intending on enrolling in a community college, failed to do so in the fall after high school graduation.¹¹ In order to account for students who come from wealthier families and do not apply for financial aid, high school seniors were surveyed asking whether they intended on enrolling in college immediately after high school. The affirmative answers were tallied and included in these percentages of students intending on enrolling in two and four-year institutions.¹²

A 2015 study conducted by the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation (VSAC) identified *summer melt* as contributing to the low postsecondary enrollment numbers in the state.¹³ After surveying 5,902 (85%) of Vermont seniors in 2012, VSAC followed up with the same students two years later and found that 16% of students who had planned to attend college ended up changing their minds over the summer after graduating. According to this data,

⁶ Vermont Agency of Education, "Vermont High School Graduates Postsecondary Enrollment Rate," National Student Clearinghouse, Montpelier, VT: Vermont Agency of Education, 2015, accessed February 12, 2016, http://education.vermont.gov/documents/EDU-Data_High_School_Graduates_Higher_Education_Enrollment_Rate.pdf.

⁷ Vermont Agency of Education, "Vermont Public School Dropout and Completion Report."

⁸ New England Schools Consortium, "Common Data Project 2014 Annual Report."

⁹ Lindsay C Page and Benjamin L. Castleman "A Tickle or a Torrent? Understanding the Extent of Summer 'Melt' Among College-Intending High School Graduates," *Social Science Quarterly* 95, no. 1, (2014): 202-220, accessed February 18, 2016, doi:10.1111/ssqu.12032

¹⁰ Page and Castleman, "Understanding the Extent of Summer Melt" 202-220.

¹¹ Page and Castleman, "Understanding the Extent of Summer Melt" 202-220.

¹² Page and Castleman, "Understanding the Extent of Summer Melt" 202-220.

¹³ Vermont Students Assistance Corporation, "Vermont's Class of 2012: Highlights and Challenges for Pursuing a Postsecondary Education," Winooski, VT: Vermont Student Assistance Corporation, 2015, accessed February 18, 2016, <http://www.vsacnews.org/wp-content/uploads/2015-special-report-Class-of-2012-Highlights-and-challenges-for-pursuing-a-postsecondary-education1.pdf>.

the summer melt rate is lower in Vermont than nationally. Nevertheless, it still played a role in low postsecondary enrollment rates.

The VSAC study also reported that *gap years* taken by students adversely affected the likelihood of enrollment. Of the students who took gap years, or yearlong breaks from schooling, 57% failed to enroll the following fall (2013). Of the students polled, 25% had either dropped out or transferred schools within one year of attending. Of the 14% who dropped out, many had attended two-year institutions (39%) while a lower percentage (10%) had attended four-year schools.¹⁴ The study also found that geography played a factor in students' enrollment rates. Chittenden County saw 66.7% of seniors enroll in postsecondary education, closely followed by Essex County with 65.9% of students continuing. Washington County had 61.4% of students continue with education, consistent with the state average of 60%. Orange and Lamoille counties saw only 50% of seniors do so.¹⁵

Rising Cost of Tuition

College tuition and state cuts in education spending are another factor contributing to low postsecondary enrollment rates across the country. In 2008, states had been spending 28% more per student on higher education than in 2013.¹⁶ Because of this decrease in higher education spending, public colleges and universities across the country have increased tuition to compensate for declining state funding. Since the 2007-08 school year, tuition at four-year public colleges has increased by 27% after adjusting for inflation.¹⁷ The cost of tuition is a growing concern for recent high school graduates. The Cooperative Institutional Research Program at UCLA reported in a recent study of 165,743 students that the cost of attendance was rated as being "very important" and played a role in 45.9% of students' college enrollment decision making, a 2.6% increase from 2012 and a 14.9% increase from 2004.¹⁸ In Vermont, only 35% of low-income students enrolled in a postsecondary institution, whereas the New England average was nearly 47% in 2015.^{19,20}

¹⁴ Vermont Students Assistance Corporation, "Highlights and Challenges for Pursuing a Postsecondary Education."

¹⁵ Vermont Students Assistance Corporation, "Highlights and Challenges for Pursuing a Postsecondary Education."

¹⁶ Phil Oliff, Vincent Palacios, Ingrid Johnson, and Michael Leachman, "Recent Deep State Higher Education Cuts May Harm Students and the Economy for Years to Come," Washington DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2013, accessed February 15, 2016, <http://www.cbpp.org/research/recent-deep-state-higher-education-cuts-may-harm-students-and-the-economy-for-years-to-come-ftn3>.

¹⁷ Oliff, Palacios, Johnson and Leachman, "Recent Deep State Higher Education Cuts May Harm Students and the Economy for Years to Come."

¹⁸ Kevin Eagan, Jennifer Lozano, Matthew Chase and Sylvia Hurtado, "The American Freshman: National Norms Fall 2013," Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA, 2013, accessed February 15, 2016, <http://heri.ucla.edu/monographs/TheAmericanFreshman2013.pdf>

¹⁹ Vermont Legislature, "Study of State Funding for Higher Education Related to a Performance/Outcomes-Based Formula," Higher Education Subcommittee to the PreK-16 Council, Montpelier VT: Vermont Legislature, 2015, accessed February 15, 2016, <http://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Legislative-Reports/Performance-Based-Funding-Proposal-2015-Act-58-SectionE608.pdf>.

²⁰ Institute for Higher Education Policy, "Getting Through College Voices of Low-Income and Minority Students in New England," Washington DC: Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2001, accessed March 17,

Vermont ranks 49th in terms of total state fiscal support for higher education, and 45th in terms of state fiscal support per \$1,000 of state personal income.²¹ Between 1999 and 2007, median family income rose 4% in Vermont.²² Average four-year college tuition and fees increased 79% across the country in the same timeframe. In-state tuition in Vermont at public colleges and state universities was \$4,994 in 2001 and \$8,546 in 2007.^{23,24} Data from the Vermont Community Foundation states that, “Vermont students and their families incur 25% more debt for a bachelor’s degree than the national average, ranking Vermont second to last in the nation for affordable education.” Vermonters saw a 21% increase in student debt between 2005 and 2006.²⁵ This was the third-highest student debt load in the nation.²⁶ Among VSAC aid recipients, average family’s loan debt increased from \$27,188 in 2003 to \$38,000 in 2007.²⁷

Influences on High School Graduates

Of the 23,503 students who participated in the High School Longitudinal Study of 2009 by the National Center for Education Statistics, 34% in 2009 and 60% in 2013 stated that the strongest influence on their choice to attend college came from their parents.²⁸ High school freshman were asked with whom they spoke to about future plans. Out of the 20,899 students who responded to this question 34% said “mostly parents” and 26% said “parents and friends about the same.” In 2012, in response to the question of whom had the most influence on students thinking about education after high school, of the 20,465 students who responded when they were high school seniors 42.8% said their parents, 29.3% said themselves and of 5% said friends or guidance counselors. In 2013, when the interviewed students were one year out of high school, the same question regarding who had the most influence on their education plans after high school was asked, 17,428 students responded and 55% said their parents. The same is seen in response to the question of who has the

2016, <https://www.nmefoundation.org/getmedia/a434a86c-b690-430a-a2cc-e6bb294fb74a/getting-through-college?ext=.pdf>.

²¹ Vermont Legislature, *Study of State Funding for Higher Education Related to a Performance/Outcomes-Based Formula*.

²² Vermont Community Foundation, “Postsecondary Enrollment,” Middlebury, VT: Vermont Community Foundation, 2009, accessed, February 29, 2016, http://www.vermontcf.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Post2Ed_final_LoRes.pdf.

²³ New England Board of Higher Education, “New England Tuition and Fees,” Boston, MA: New England Board of Higher Education, 2013, accessed March 3, 2016, http://www.nebhe.org/info/spreadsheet/policy/2012/2012_Tuition_and_Fees.pdf.

²⁴ Phyllis Palmiero, “2001-02 Tuition and Fee Report: Virginia’s State-Supported Colleges and Universities,” Richmond, VA: State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, 2001, accessed March 3, 2016, <http://www.schev.edu/Reportstats/tuition-fees62001.pdf?from=>.

²⁵ Vermont Community Foundation, “Postsecondary Enrollment.”

²⁶ Vermont Community Foundation, “Postsecondary Enrollment.”

²⁷ Douglas Wilhelm and Lisa Ventriss, “Investing in State Support for Higher Education, South Burlington, VT: Vermont Business Roundtable, 2008, accessed March 1, 2016, http://www.vermont-colleges.org/Documents/4-2-08_VBR_Policy_Brief_copy.pdf.

²⁸ U.S. Department of Education, Institute for Educational Sciences, *High School Longitudinal Study of 2009*, Washington DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2009, accessed February 15, 2016, <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/hsls09/>.

most influence on students when thinking about financial aid. Of the 17,286 students who responded 60% said their parents had the most influence on them when thinking about financial aid. This data shows that parents have the most significant influence on high school student's education plans and the most influence on students when thinking about financial aid.²⁹ This study measured trends nationally; it did not present any specific data on Vermont students.

Recent Developments on the Issue in Vermont

In 2009, the Vermont Commission of Higher Education Funding published the Compact with the State of Vermont. The goal of this measure was to raise the percentage of Vermonters who have completed college to 60% by 2020.³⁰ Although this compact is nonbinding, it serves as a guide for the state's policy decisions when considering how to expand the appeal of postsecondary education. In 2015, Act 44 (H. 427) of the Vermont Legislature introduced the One Hundred Percent by 2020 Initiative. This policy was designed to ensure that postsecondary school completion rates reach 100% by 2020.³¹ As part of this initiative, career exploration, workforce training and readiness, preparation for postsecondary education and transition assistance opportunities are provided to high school students. These programs are employed by Vermont high schools and may vary. The Secretary of Education is responsible for insuring that schools are complying with these requirements.³²

Conclusion

Vermont tends to produce a low proportion of high school graduates who continue with higher education, but summer melt is less of a problem in Vermont than in most other states. There is no evidence regarding whether parental support is more or less of a factor in Vermont high school graduates' decisions to pursue higher education or training. Two key factors that do contribute to higher proportions of Vermont high school graduates failing to continue their educations are low levels of state funding for higher education and rising education costs. While Vermont has a low level of high school graduates who enroll in post-secondary education, recent programs have begun to address this issue and its causes; however, it is too early to determine the effectiveness of Vermont's new initiatives.

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²⁹ U.S. Department of Education, *High School Longitudinal Study of 2009*.

³⁰ Vermont Legislature, *Study of State Funding for Higher Education Related to a Performance/Outcomes-Based Formula*.

³¹ VT LEG 247430.1, Vermont State Legislature, "No. 44 An act relating to making miscellaneous amendments to education law," H427, 2009, accessed February 18 2016, [http://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Documents/2010/Docs/ACTS/ACT044/ACT044 As Enacted.pdf](http://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Documents/2010/Docs/ACTS/ACT044/ACT044%20As%20Enacted.pdf).

³² VT LEG 247430.1, Vermont State Legislature, "No. 44 An act relating to making miscellaneous amendments to education law."

and Eileen Burgin in response to a request from Representative Valerie Stuart and Representative Jean O'Sullivan.

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