

Vermont leads the nation in education but achievement gaps still remain

For the second year in a row, Vermont was ranked “Smartest State in the Nation” by the Morgan Quitno Press.⁵⁷ Smaller classrooms; comparatively high scores in reading, math and science; wide access to preschool programs; and a low dropout rate contribute to the state’s status as an education leader. But nationally, the bar is set low. Too many Vermont students are being left behind, scoring well below proficiency levels, repeating grades, and leaving school under-prepared for work and life.

the FACTS

Pre-kindergarten preparation

- Vermont ranks second in the nation for making preschool and Head Start available to three-year-olds and fourth in the nation for making them available to four-year-olds. A partial state scholarship for these programs is largely responsible for these rankings.⁵⁸
- As many as 40% of Vermont preschoolers did not meet developmental milestones used to indicate readiness for kindergarten.⁵⁹
- Vermont ranks 30th in the nation in education spending during the preschool years but spends about \$2.5 million each year on children who must repeat kindergarten, first, second or third grade.

Primary and secondary school

- Vermont’s teacher-pupil ratio is 1:11.7, compared to a national average of 1:15.9.⁶⁰
- In 2005, Vermont eighth-grade students ranked second in the country for science and third for mathematics. Math scores in the state have increased every test year since 1996. Despite this, one in four Vermont eighth-grade students performs below grade level in science, and one in five performs below grade level in reading and math.⁶¹
- Thirty-eight percent of Vermont’s fourth-grade students read at or above proficiency, ranking the state second in the nation in this category. But that leaves one in four Vermont fourth-grade students reading below grade level. One in five scores below grade level in science.⁶²

Graduation and beyond

- Vermont’s 4% dropout rate is half the national average and tied with Connecticut for lowest rate by state in New England.⁶³ Nationally, 75% of public high school freshmen go on to graduate. In Vermont, the percentage is 85.4%.⁶⁴

- Only 20% of Vermont 9th-graders will go on to earn a four-year college degree. This figure exceeds the national college graduation rate of 18%.⁶⁵
- While Vermont’s young adults attain college degrees at a slightly higher rate than the national average, other states with high rates of college degree attainment have significantly higher percentages who attend “some college or earn associates degrees.”⁶⁶
- Over the past 30 years, the percentage of Vermont high school students aspiring to pursue post-secondary education has increased significantly—from 43.9% in 1978 to 62.9% in 2003. Even with this increase, college aspirations among Vermont’s young people fall below the national average of 63.9%.⁶⁷

MORE DIPLOMAS



85%

of Vermont high school freshmen go on to graduate.

The national average is 75%.

National education testing sidelines other school subjects

Confined by shrinking budgets and pressed by national requirements in reading, math and science, schools are inclined to “teach to the test.” This phenomenon is narrowing the educational experience of Vermont’s youth, who have diminishing access to the intrinsic personal and social value of arts, history, social studies and other subjects.⁶⁸



the FACTS

- Despite a statutory requirement for arts education in Vermont, local budget cuts are compromising the scope and quality of arts education, including the elimination of funds for art tools, materials and field trips.⁶⁹ This negatively impacts Vermont students because young people who consistently participate in comprehensive arts programs are dramatically more likely to excel in school through academic achievement, including math and science success and school leadership.⁷⁰
- Attending arts events and learning side-by-side with artists have been shown to have a dramatic impact on students, according to the Arts Education Partnership.⁷¹ But many rural schools are struggling to fund artist residencies and trips to cultural events.
- A shortage of educators in urban and rural classrooms finds many teachers in these regions teaching outside of the subject areas for which they earned their degrees.⁷²
- In addition to core subjects, more than 96% of Vermonters feel that it is important for children to study “food, farms and nutrition” in school, as reported in a 2004 poll.⁷³

FOOD SMARTS

96%

of Vermonters felt that it is important for children to study food, farms and nutrition.