

Required Element: an educational facilities plan consisting of a map and statement of present and projected uses and the local public school system.

Vermont's education system is complex. Due to court decisions and legislative acts, there is diminished local control over education decisions and education tax rates. Maidstone's future is directly affected by the complicated education opportunities for the students in our town and unpredictable education tax rates.

Current Situation:

The Town of Maidstone has been part of a ten-town school district, the NEK Choice School District. The ten towns are Bloomfield, Brunswick, East Haven, Granby, Guildhall, Kirby, Lemington, Maidstone, Norton and Victory. Each town elects a representative, who serves a three year term, that form the school board for the NEK Choice School District. None of the ten towns in the NEK Choice School District has a school, therefore all students attend schools outside the district, including schools in New Hampshire.

This school district is supervised by the Essex North Supervisory Union (ENSU) which also supervises the Canaan School District. The ENSU coordinates the eligibility, enrollment and tuition payments to the participating schools.

The choice of which schools parents select to send their children is a private decision. The Town of Maidstone has no say in where its students are attending school and therefore has minimal ability to maximize educational opportunities. The Town can encourage local participation in the NEK Choice School District and the ENSU's board meetings where local education decisions including the local school budget are set.

Current Education Taxes:

Vermont raises most of the funding necessary to cover the cost of education through property taxes. Maidstone's property tax bills are comprised of the municipal tax, covering the cost of running the town, and the education tax, which represents the largest portion of the tax bill. In recent years, the education tax portion of the property tax bills exceeds 80%.

All property owners in Maidstone pay the non-homestead education tax as part of their property tax bills, unless they annually declare their homestead. Those that declare their homestead pay the homestead education tax rate.

Education tax rates are calculated at the state level by the Agency of Education.

The non-homestead education tax has two components, one of which has local control. The non-homestead education tax rate is set by the legislature and is the same rate for all of Vermont. Each municipality's non-homestead education tax rate is adjusted by the municipality's Common Level of Appraisal (CLA). The CLA is locally controlled and is the end result of the year-long work of the Maidstone Board of Listers. The CLA is generated by comparing valid sales that have occurred in the town with the value delineated to that property in the grand list, then attributing that percentage to all similar properties in the grand list.

The homestead education tax rate has four components, three of which have some degree of local control. The homestead education tax rate is determined by the NEK Choice School District's budget, approved by Australian ballot at the Annual Meeting of each of the ten towns. The approved budget is divided by the student count, called the Long-Term Average Daily Membership, to determine the cost per student. This number is divided by the homestead yield, a number set by the legislature to guarantee that, statewide, enough education taxes are raised to pay for the cost of education. This determines the base homestead education tax rate that the ten towns in the NEK Choice School District pay. Each municipality's base homestead education tax rate is adjusted by the municipality's CLA.

Because the non-homestead and homestead education tax rates are derived from different sources, there is no guarantee that one rate will be higher or lower than the other. Over the past few years, Maidstone's homestead education tax rate has been higher than the non-homestead education tax rate, but in 2024, Maidstone's homestead education tax rate is lower than the non-homestead education tax rate.

To aid those who declare their homestead in Maidstone from the high cost of education, the state calculates the maximum amount of education taxes that the taxpayer is obligated to pay by comparing the education taxes paid to a percentage of the taxpayer's income. If the state determines that the taxpayer paid more than a certain percentage of their income, the state returns the overpayment in a credit to the next year's property tax bill. This is called a state payment. In Maidstone, anywhere between two thirds and three quarters of the homestead education taxpayers receive a state payment each year, meaning that these taxpayers are paying their education tax payments based on their income, not their grand list property value.

The areas of local control over the education tax rates need to be encouraged and supported at the Town level.

Recommendations:

Town encourages participation in the NEK Choice School District and the ENSU board meetings.

Town encourages parents with children in the education system to complete all paperwork from the ENSU to ensure that the Town can take advantage of every opportunity afforded by legislative initiatives.

Town encourages our state legislators to explore other alternatives for funding the education system and lowering the education tax rates.

Town fully supports the work of the Board of Listers to generate the most accurate CLA possible because the CLA is the most locally controlled component of our education tax rates.

Town encourages homestead property taxpayers to complete their annual filings.

Towns in the NEK Choice School District

