

Frequently Asked Questions

This Frequently Asked Questions document has been put together to address some of the questions and concerns the Royalton community had about the proposed merger with Bethel and Rochester. We hope people will take the time to learn about the plan and the options before our town to prepare for the vote on June 13th.

- Royalton School Board

FINANCES

Will Royalton will be paying the most in taxes?

No. Education tax rates will be equal for all three towns before the Common Level of Appraisal adjustment for each town. The CLA is an adjustment based on how real estate sales compare to the town appraised values, is different for each town, and is recalculated every year, so the final relative rates will vary depending on how this value changes. The education tax rate is calculated independently from the CLA though, so the other towns' CLA adjustments do not affect Royalton's tax rates at all.

PROPOSED STRUCTURE TAX RATES (pre CLA, assuming 25 extra choice students)

School	Current	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22
Bethel	1.71	1.73	1.43	1.50	1.57	1.63
Rochester	1.60	1.65	1.43	1.50	1.57	1.63
Royalton	1.52	1.47	1.43	1.50	1.57	1.63

NO ACTION

School	Current	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22
Bethel	1.71	1.73	1.78	1.83	1.89	1.94
Rochester	1.60	1.64	2.07	2.29	2.36	2.44
Royalton	1.52	1.47	1.51	1.56	1.60	1.65

Will Royalton tax rates increase in the long term as a result of the merger?

Probably not. In the short term, tax rates definitely decrease due the merger incentives provided by the state. After the incentives expire, the difference between the tax rates will depend on how many choice students we can attract to the town. If a similar portion of Chelsea students come to South Royalton as come from Tunbridge, the projected tax rate would not change. If the increased opportunities this model provides attract more choice students, our tax rate will be lower. Also, if the increased opportunities available for students make our towns more attractive for young families looking to move to the area, having an increased resident student population would also lower the resulting tax rate.

The table below shows how the tax rates (not including the state incentives) would change depending on how many additional choice students we are able to attract. The rate without incentives was used to show that the tax rates could decrease even after the incentives expire.

Scenario	2019 rate comparison with no incentives				
	No Action	No extra	10 extra	25 extra	40 extra
Non Incentivized tax rate	1.51	1.57	1.54	1.51	1.48

The other thing to keep in mind is that Royalton will not be allowed to remain as we are without changes, so it is more appropriate to compare the projected rates to the tax rates that might result from other merger scenarios. Merging districts with Bethel and Rochester while maintaining PK-12 in Royalton would be more expensive than merging while combining schools.

Is Royalton subsidizing Rochester with this plan?

No. Rochester will be contributing around \$2.7 million in taxes and state revenues. A very conservative estimate is that it will cost \$1.8 million to maintain building and their PK-5 program, and somewhere around \$350,000 for the CEEL program. Even factoring in increased money for the additional busing needed, that still leaves a significant amount of money that can be used to improve the elementary, middle and high schools.

In a merger, won't Royalton lose out financially?

While we will contribute \$125,000 more in building reserve funds than the other towns (\$191,236 to \$68,167), this is offset by the fact that Royalton brings by far the most debt to the merger (\$2,320,000). This is almost three times as much as Rochester's (\$455,500) and Bethel's (\$385,000) combined. Meanwhile, the real estate values of each school are fairly equal ranging from \$7.5 million in Rochester to Royalton's \$9.1 million.

Will we lose ownership of our school building?

The property will be transferred to the shared district, not the supervisory union. We will be sharing our building with Bethel and Rochester, just as they will be sharing it with us. Since we have 47% of the population of the shared district, our town's opinion will have a significant impact on the final outcome in any bond votes on building construction or improvements.

REPRESENTATION

Will Royalton’s interests be served by the new school board?

It is true that the board composition would not be proportional to the population of each town. However, with this representation model we get to vote on the board members from the other towns. This way we can make sure representatives from the other towns will represent our interests as well.

How will we know who to vote for from the other towns?

Once the new school is operational we will be interacting with people from the other towns at school functions, sporting events, and school board meetings, so we will have a better understanding of the different candidates’ qualifications and positions. To further address this issue, we could put in place a system for school board candidates to make their positions known, either through written statements in the newspaper or pre-vote meetings.

Will board members from other towns represent our interests?

It is important to keep in mind that we would all be sharing the same school system. A board member from Rochester will be paying the same tax rate as we will and will be sending their kids to the same middle and high schools. They will have the same motivations as us to provide the best educational opportunities in the most cost effective way possible. Also, once elected to the board, board members will have a legal obligation to represent students and taxpayers from all three towns, regardless of their town of origin.

ACADEMICS

How many students will be in the new district?

Enrollment	PK-5	6th - 8th	9th - 12th	Total
Bethel	150	49	75	274
Rochester	82	26	33	141
Royalton	186	81	113	380
Combined	418	156	221	795

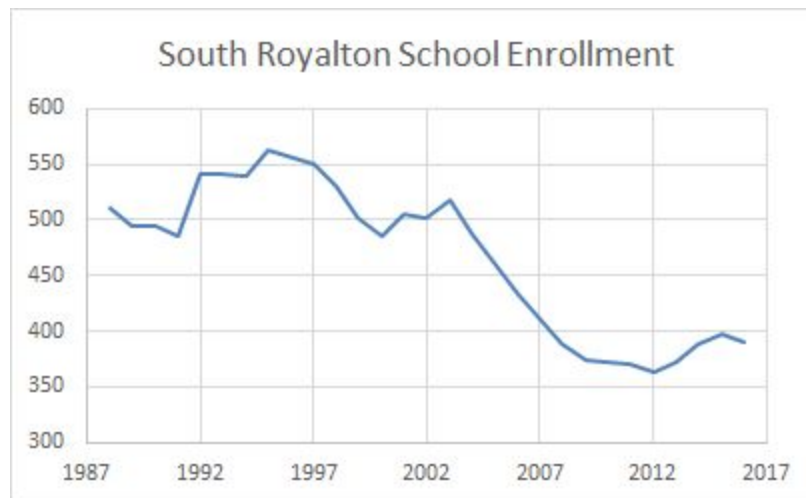
What academic benefits will Royalton see?

Our high school students will be getting an estimated 44 new courses offered, split between new previously unavailable courses, and additional sections of previously offered courses. This represents a 63% increase in total class offerings. More offerings will provide more opportunities to target classes towards particular learning styles or

levels, providing benefits for students at all levels. In addition the proposed budget included money for two additional remedial educators.

How has school enrollment changed throughout the years?

Enrollment peaked at 563 students (an average of 47 students per class) in 1995 and has been dropping steadily since then, bottoming out at 363 students (an average of 28 students per class) in 2012. It has bounced back slightly since then, with the student population at 390 students this past year. According to state projections student enrollments are projected to decrease statewide going forward at a rate of one percent a year.



How many classes at the high school are currently under capacity?

Currently over half of the 70 classes offered at the high school have 1-7 students in them.

Would the Center for Environmental & Experiential Learning in Rochester duplicate what the Randolph and Hartford tech centers offer?

No, it will provide an experience that is not currently available to students. It is an academic program with a student driven project based learning approach. It is situated in and near Rochester School Forest and the Green Mountain National Forest which is a unique location for environmental learning. This program will have access to the resources of Castleton State College as well as the staff of the National Forest Service. It will be an innovative research based learning experience that will have students designing and performing experiments to conduct an in depth exploration of a single topic.

Will the CEEL program incur the cost of building new facilities?

No, the CEEL program will be based out of the existing Rochester school building.

ALTERNATIVES

What are our options if we do not vote yes on the merger with Rochester and Bethel?

If we are unable to merge with Bethel and Rochester, we would need to find another PK-12 district to work with. Hartford or Randolph are the next nearest PK-12 districts. We can make an Alternative Governance Proposal, but would have no guarantee the state would accept our plan. We could also do nothing and let the state decide what to do with us.

If we vote no on the merger with Rochester and Bethel, can we propose an Alternative Governance Structure (AGS)?

We can propose an Alternative Governance Structure and hope the state complies with our request. In order to qualify to stay an independent district using an AGS proposal, Royalton would have to demonstrate that we can meet the four goals of Act 46: equity, opportunity, quality, transparency, and fiscal sustainability. The Secretary of Education has stated that she “can’t envision” that Royalton will be able to meet the goals as we currently exist. An AGS proposal is just a recommendation to the State about what we would like to have happen. The Secretary of Education will take our proposal into consideration but could decide a different path would better serve the needs of our region. The only way to maintain complete control over our district’s fate is to enter a voluntary merger plan before the November deadline.

Sharon Academy is our closest neighbor, could we work with them to comply with Act 46?

No, Sharon Academy is a private school and subject to different rules and regulations than a public school. While we could work with them in certain ways, we would not be able to do so to achieve Act 46 compliance.

If we vote no on the merger, can the state close our school?

Not directly. However, the state can put us together in a district with a larger town, such as Hartford or Randolph. In that situation, our school would remain open for one to four years. After that time period, the school board of the district could vote to close the school. Since Royalton would be a small minority of the population in one of those districts, we would not have much control over the school board’s decision.
