



**Rivendell**  
Interstate School District

# Strategic Plan

**Three Year Plan: 2025 - 2028**

*A clear, actionable plan with defined goals,  
steps, and timelines to confidently move  
toward the future we envision.*



**Samuel Morey Elementary School  
Westshire Elementary School  
Rivendell Academy Middle & High School  
[www.rivendellschool.org](http://www.rivendellschool.org)**

# About the District



**Rivendell Academy**  
6<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> Grades

**205**  
**Students**

Serving Towns of Fairlee,  
West Fairlee and Vershire, Vermont  
and Orford, New Hampshire



**Samuel Morey Elementary**  
Pre K - 5<sup>th</sup> Grades

**102**  
**Students**

Serving Towns of Orford,  
New Hampshire and  
Fairlee, Vermont



**Westshire Elementary**  
Pre K - 5<sup>th</sup> Grades

**93**  
**Students**

Serving Towns of  
West Fairlee and  
Vershire, Vermont

Above information as of August 2025.

# District Board



**REBEKAH CADWELL**  
**WEST FAIRLEE**



**LILLIAN (GAY-C) GAHAGAN**  
**AT-LARGE**



**JENNIFER HALLMARTEL**  
**FAIRLEE**



**KATHY HOOKE**  
**VERSHIRE**



**MORIAH LUDWIG**  
**FAIRLEE**



**TERRY MARTIN**  
**ORFORD**



**CHARLES NEWTON**  
**ORFORD**



**CLEMENT POWERS**  
**FAIRLEE**



**DAVID RICKER**  
**ORFORD**



**NATE THAMES**  
**VERSHIRE**



**SARAH ZWIKELMAIER**  
**WEST FAIRLEE**

# Superintendent Message



Dear Rivendell Interstate School District Community,

It is both an honor and a privilege to serve as the new superintendent of the Rivendell Interstate School District. I am sincerely grateful for the opportunity to join a community that values the well-being, growth, and success of every student.

Today, I am proud to share with you our district's new three-year strategic plan—an ambitious and forward-thinking roadmap designed to guide our collective efforts in the years ahead. Rooted in our mission of **empowering students through scholarship, character, and community** and inspired by our vision of **shaping lifelong learners and engaged citizens**, this plan reflects the aspirations we hold for our students, staff, and the entire Rivendell community.

We launch this work at a pivotal time. Education systems in both Vermont and New Hampshire are evaluating significant reform opportunities, creating a dynamic and evolving landscape. As an interstate district, Rivendell must not only adapt but lead with clarity and purpose—aligning with future changes to ensure our continued relevance and success. Though the path ahead may bring uncertainty, it also offers a powerful opportunity to reimagine how we educate and support our students.

This plan is more than a set of goals—it is a shared commitment. It represents what we can achieve when we come together in support of our students and invest in a future that empowers them to thrive—not just in school, but throughout their lives.

I look forward to working in close partnership with all of you—our students, families, staff, and community members—as we bring this vision to life.

With gratitude and optimism,



RANDY GAWEL

**SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS**

# Introduction

Through the district's strategic planning process, we prioritized gathering meaningful input from staff and leadership, acknowledging the shifting educational landscape in Vermont and New Hampshire, and laying a strong foundation we can build upon over the next three years.

The planning process started in 2023 with input sessions and a listening tour facilitated by the Vermont NEA. While we made progress throughout 2023 and early 2024, we were unable to finalize the plan at that time due to competing priorities and leadership transitions.

In the fall of 2024, with a renewed leadership team in place and the support of a consultant to help guide the process, we conducted individual staff interviews, hosted a staff work session, distributed a comprehensive survey to all employees and the board, and held numerous working meetings. Each of these efforts sought to capture a wide range of perspectives and find common themes across our district.

The result is a forward-looking strategic plan intended to serve our students, staff, and community as a guiding roadmap to future success.



# History



Established by voters in 1998, the Rivendell Interstate School District united three Vermont towns—Fairlee, Vershire, and West Fairlee, and the town of Orford, New Hampshire. As one of the four PreK–12 interstate public school districts in the nation, Rivendell assumed full educational and operational responsibility on July 1, 2000, then serving more than 550 students from member towns and about 32 students from neighboring towns.

The district was founded through the dedicated collaboration of community volunteers, administrators, educators, and teachers who worked collectively to create a shared curriculum and a cohesive educational culture. This grassroots effort was supported by state agencies and private foundations, which contributed legislative support, grant funding, and technical assistance to bring the vision to life.

From the outset, Rivendell was driven by a commitment to provide students with a rich and engaging education while remaining deeply rooted in the values and needs of its communities. The core principles that guided the district’s founding—high academic standards, strong school-community connections, effective systems and structures, and a commitment to accountability and excellence—remain central to the 2025 Strategic Plan. These values continue to shape the district’s mission and vision, inform its practices, and inspire its path forward.

## Core Values

### High Academic Standards

*We value a close-knit, collaborative learning environment where students are engaged, challenged, and inspired to reach their highest potential.*



### Healthy Workplace Culture

*We work to implement systems that strengthen teaching and learning, creating an environment where both educators and students thrive.*



### Strong School & Community Connections

*We aim to build strong, lasting connections between the district and the community, fostering collaboration that enriches education and supports the growth of both students and community members.*



### A Commitment to Accountability & Excellence

*We strive to implement standards of accountability and excellence that inspire growth, achievement, and success for our school, staff, and students.*



# Mission & Vision



**Rivendell**  
Interstate School District

A mission defines why we exist and whom we serve. A vision statement outlines the future we aspire to create. Together, they shape our values, inform our decisions, and unify us around a shared direction.

Through the planning process, the district revisited the original mission and vision statements decided to refine them to be clearer, more inspiring, and aligned with current goals. The result is a refreshed mission and vision that honors our past while confidently guiding our future.



## Mission

***Empowering Students  
through Scholarship,  
Character, and Community***



## Vision

***Shaping Lifelong Learners  
and Engaged Citizens***

# Analysis

As part of our strategic planning process, we conducted a thorough analysis to better understand our internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as the external opportunities and threats (SWOT analysis) impacting our district. This assessment helped identify the resources and capabilities we can build on, while also revealing gaps, challenges, and areas for growth.

The process encouraged open dialogue and honest insights, helping to gain trust across our school community. It also reinforced the importance of shared responsibility, recognizing that shaping the district's future requires collaboration among our staff, families, students, and leadership. The insights gained through the SWOT analysis served as our basis for the goals and actions outlined in the plan.



# Analysis



## Strengths

- Dedicated and Caring Staff
- Access to Unique Opportunities
- Experienced Staff
- Flexible & Responsive Curriculum
- Small Class Sizes
- Interstate School District



## Weaknesses

- Leadership Instability
- Financial Instability
- Ineffective Systems & Processes
- Need for Trend Analysis & Understanding
- Communication Gaps



## Opportunities

- Student Support & Skill Development
- In-Depth Research & Study of School Reconfiguration
- Curriculum Development & Consistency
- Global Learning
- Community & Family Engagement



## Threats

- Declining Enrollment
- Funding Challenges
- National & Regional Staffing Challenges
- School Consolidation Pressures
- Aging Facilities
- Interstate School District

# Goal #1 Academic Excellence



## 1.1 CURRICULUM ADVANCEMENT & ALIGNMENT

STRATEGY: <i>Advance and deliver a rich, consistent, and aligned curriculum with established teaching strategies to ensure consistency and high-quality learning experiences across the district.</i>	TIMELINE		
	2025 - 2026	2026 - 2027	2027 - 2028
<b>1.1.1 PROFILE OF A GRADUATE:</b> The District will engage the school community in a collaborative process to define a shared Profile of a Graduate—a clear, collective vision of the essential skills, knowledge, and attributes every student should develop to thrive in career, college, and life. The profile will refine and articulate current curriculum and instruction, and ensure that all students graduate prepared to succeed in a rapidly changing world.			→
<b>1.1.2 GOALS &amp; STANDARDS:</b> Document and clearly define grade-level benchmarks that articulate the specific knowledge and skills students are expected to master across all grade levels. The goals and standards will serve as a foundational guide for curriculum development, instructional planning, and assessment practices to align student learning across the district.			→
<b>1.1.3 CURRICULUM ADVANCEMENT:</b> Document and implement a well-defined instructional curriculum with vertical and horizontal alignment (e.g.: grades, subject matter, skills, schools). The curriculum will incorporate evidence-based instructional strategies and best practices to ensure consistency, relevance, and high-quality teaching and learning across all grade levels.			→
<b>1.1.4 DATA USAGE &amp; BENCHMARKING FOR STUDENT ADVANCEMENT:</b> Utilize qualitative and quantitative data-driven benchmarks to measure student progress against established standards to ensure curriculum alignment and effectiveness. The data will guide continuous improvement efforts and support the goal of consistent, relevant, and impactful curriculum delivery across all grade levels.			→
<b>1.1.5 FAMILY AND COMMUNITY COMMUNICATION:</b> Develop and implement a clear, consistent communication strategy to engage the community in understanding the district’s educational standards and student benchmarks. This includes creating accessible resources, hosting informational sessions, and leveraging multiple platforms to ensure that all stakeholders are informed and empowered to support student learning and success.			→

# Goal #1 Academic Excellence



## 1.2 FOSTER DEEPER LEARNING EXPERIENCES

STRATEGY: <i>The district is committed to providing deeper and personalized learning experiences that empower students to think critically, collaborate effectively, and apply their knowledge in real-world contexts.</i>	TIMELINE		
	2025 - 2026	2026 - 2027	2027 - 2028
<b>1.2.1 OPPORTUNITIES FOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING:</b> Continue and advance immersive experiences that allow students to connect theory to practice, fostering deeper understanding and skill development.			→
<b>1.2.2 PROJECT BASED LEARNING:</b> Continue to engage students with an instructional approach where students gain knowledge and skills by actively exploring real-world challenges and creating meaningful projects over an extended period.			→
<b>1.2.3 ARTS AND MUSIC:</b> Continue to foster and expand opportunities for students to engage with the arts and music.			→
<b>1.2.4 FOCUS ON GLOBAL LEARNING AND PERSPECTIVE:</b> Offer students opportunities to explore diverse cultures and experiences through curriculum development, integration, and expanded opportunities.			→
<b>1.2.5 CRITICAL EXPLORATION:</b> Focus on learning approaches where students actively investigate ideas, ask questions, and construct understanding through thoughtful dialogue and discovery.			→
<b>1.2.6 INTERDISCIPLINARY LEARNING:</b> Continue to integrate concepts and skills from multiple subject areas to deepen understanding and solve complex problems.			→
<b>1.2.7 EXPAND THE OUTDOOR EDUCATION PROGRAM:</b> Focus on engaging students with the outdoors and expanding their understanding of both local and global environments.			→
<b>1.2.8 INNOVATION AND HANDS-ON LEARNING:</b> Establish dedicated spaces and innovation hubs for hands-on learning and foster creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving.			→

# Goal #1 Academic Excellence



## 1.3 IMPROVE ACADEMIC OUTCOMES FOR ALL STUDENTS, INCLUDING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, WHILE MAKING THE WORK OF TEACHERS MORE SUSTAINABLE

STRATEGY: <i>Leverage the New Solutions K12 report conducted in March of 2025, and implement the recommendations to improve academic outcomes.</i>	TIMELINE		
	2025 - 2026	2026 - 2027	2027 - 2028
<b>1.3.1 TEACHER SUPPORTS:</b> Support teachers in serving all students who struggle, including those with mild to moderate disabilities. *Implement instructional coaching to better equip teachers to support students with disabilities. *Increase supports for students who struggle, thus allowing for less reliance on special education.			→
<b>1.3.2 LITERACY INSTRUCTION:</b> (see 1.1) Adopt a coherent, district-wide approach to literacy instruction that is rooted in research-based best practices accessed by all students.			→
<b>1.3.3 BEST PRACTICE INTERVENTIONS:</b> Implement best practice interventions to ensure that all students who struggle have access to extra-time direct instruction from content-strong teachers.			→
<b>1.3.4 PARA EDUCATORS:</b> Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of para educators in the district to better align with their training, skills, and strengths.			→
<b>1.3.5 COMMUNITY CLASSROOMS:</b> Continue to embrace the inclusive nature of the community classrooms while further refining services and supports for students with challenging behavior.			→
<b>1.3.6 SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING FOCUS:</b> Identify, research, and implement a district-wide program that supports students' social and emotional needs through a unified language and consistent approach across all schools.			→

# Goal #2 School & Community Connection



## 2.1 COMMUNICATION & ENGAGEMENT OUTREACH

STRATEGY: <i>Implement communication efforts to actively engage, inform, and involve all stakeholders—including parents, staff, and community members.</i>	TIMELINE		
	2025 - 2026	2026 - 2027	2027 - 2028
<b>2.1.1 EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGY:</b> Develop a consistent and comprehensive communication strategy that leverages multiple communication approaches --- newsletters, dedicated website pages, social media, newspapers, and direct mailings, etc.--- to effectively engage a broad audience with timely updates on district news, legislative happenings and impact, and other key issues and activities.			→
<b>2.1.2 LISTENING TOUR &amp; COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT:</b> Conduct a community listening tour and distribute a comprehensive survey to stakeholders to gather input on key issues, providing valuable insight into the community’s perspectives and priorities regarding district opportunities.	→		

## 2.2 STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY TIES BY CREATING SUPPORTIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCES

STRATEGY: <i>Curate meaningful opportunities for community members to actively support student learning.</i>	TIMELINE		
	2025 - 2026	2026 - 2027	2027 - 2028
<b>2.2.1 LEVERAGE PROJECT-BASED LEARNING:</b> Actively involving community members and students in authentic, real-world learning experiences.			→
<b>2.2.2 SHARED COMMUNITY SPACES:</b> Promote the school facilities as welcoming, multipurpose community spaces for events, workshops, and enrichment activities.			→

# Goal #3 Healthy Workplace Culture



## 3.1 PRIORITIZE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

<b>STRATEGY: <i>Focus on meaningful and impactful professional development opportunities to enhance learning outcomes for both staff and students.</i></b>	<b>TIMELINE</b>		
	2025 - 2026	2026 - 2027	2027 - 2028
<b>3.1.1 ESSENTIAL ANNUAL TRAINING:</b> Implement a district-wide Committee on Learning training schedule and require participation to support system-wide alignment and growth.			→
<b>3.1.2 SPECIAL EDUCATION TRAINING:</b> Develop a comprehensive schedule and strategy for special education training that strengthens both individual and collaborative instructional practices, ensuring educators are equipped to meet the diverse needs of all students.			→
<b>3.1.3 WEEKLY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:</b> Define and execute the weekly PD sessions with guidelines, intent, and a defined schedule.			→
<b>3.1.3 TEACHER MENTORING PROGRAM:</b> Formalize the district mentoring program with structure and tools to ensure consistency and effectiveness.			→

## 3.2 ENHANCE INTERNAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

<b>STRATEGY: <i>Develop consistent strategies to keep staff informed, aligned, and engaged.</i></b>	<b>TIMELINE</b>		
	2025 - 2026	2026 - 2027	2027 - 2028
<b>3.2.1 EXPAND AND DEVELOP INTERNAL COMMUNICATION:</b> Establish a consistent internal communication approach and plan that all employees can rely upon to receive information.			→
<b>3.2.2 ROLES &amp; RESPONSIBILITIES:</b> Discuss and communicate roles and responsibilities of the board, administration, and staff to support a healthy workplace culture.			→
<b>3.2.3 LEVERAGE TECHNOLOGY:</b> Evaluate and then implement, with training, a central system (e.g., intranet, Google Classroom) to communicate district-wide and store accessible information such as policies, procedures, etc.			→
<b>3.3.4 STUDENT INFORMATION SYSTEM:</b> Research, and if viable, implement, a system to document and share student updates and advancement for both staff and parents to access.			→

# Goal #4 Effective & Accountable Governance



## 4.1 ADVANCE STRATEGIC BOARD INITIATIVES

STRATEGY: <i>Promote effective governance through a committee structure and initiatives that drive impactful board engagement.</i>	TIMELINE		
	2025 - 2026	2026 - 2027	2027 - 2028
<b>4.1.1 POLICY DEVELOPMENT &amp; OVERSIGHT:</b> Develop a systematic annual approach to policy development and review.			→
<b>4.1.2 DISTRICT BUDGET:</b> Build the district budget around key strategic priorities while evaluating opportunities to gain efficiencies.			→
<b>4.1.3 ARTICLES OF AGREEMENT UPDATE:</b> Review and update the district's governance documents for relevance and accuracy.	→		
<b>4.1.4 BOARD MEMBER MENTORSHIP:</b> Develop a formalized process for new board members to connect with experienced board members.			→
<b>4.1.5 DISTRICT DASHBOARD:</b> Working with administration, develop board committee dashboards that culminate in a district dashboard to consistently measure and evaluate progress around key performance indicators.			→

# Goal #4 Effective & Accountable Governance



## 4.2 PROACTIVELY ASSESS ISSUES IMPACTING THE DISTRICT

STRATEGY: <i>Maintain ongoing evaluation of key issues and their potential impact through the work of board committees each of which will review and assess information in the context of their specific focus areas.</i>	TIMELINE		
	2025 - 2026	2026 - 2027	2027 - 2028
<b>4.2.1 FINALIZE SCHOOL CONSOLIDATION STUDY:</b> Examine and assess school configuration options considering demographic shifts, policy changes, and other key internal and external drivers.	→		
<b>4.2.2 CONDUCT FACILITIES EVALUATION ANALYSIS:</b> Conduct a comprehensive facilities assessment to document current conditions and identify future infrastructure and space needs.	→		
<b>4.2.3 LEGISLATIVE AWARENESS:</b> Stay informed on key legislative issues and communicate happenings and impact to the district through the communication strategy.			→
<b>4.2.4 EVALUATE DISTRICT CONSOLIDATION OPTIONS AND IMPACT CONSIDERATIONS:</b> In light of education reform efforts in both Vermont and New Hampshire, proactively evaluate advantages and disadvantages to district reconfiguration.			→



**Rivendell**  
Interstate School District

## **Acknowledgments and Appreciation**

The Rivendell Interstate School District Strategic Plan reflects the thoughtful input and collaboration of all staff, administration, and board leadership. We extend our sincere thanks to everyone who contributed their time, expertise, and commitment to shaping this plan and supporting the future of our district.

Cynthia L. Stuart

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CONSULTING

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