



SARANAC LAKE CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

Building Enrollment Feasibility Study: Phase 1: Elementary Schools

Excerpts of Executive Summary

March 6, 2024

Last spring, Alliance Education Associates, LLC was contracted by the Saranac Lake Central School District to conduct a comprehensive Building Enrollment Feasibility Study. The initial phase of this study has been completed, yielding valuable statistical insights that extend beyond the confines of the school district. Recognizing the significance of this data to the educational institution and the broader community, the Board of Education has requested the dissemination of these statistics. This decision reflects a commitment to transparency, community engagement, and informed decision-making as we collectively navigate the challenges and opportunities in education.

The Board of Education recognizes the limitations of merely identifying challenges without actively seeking solutions. Nevertheless, it believes that by openly discussing and collectively understanding the realities of our population changes, we can foster an environment conducive to proactive collaboration. Through this concerted effort, we aspire to leverage our combined insights and resources toward developing effective strategies to address these challenges.

Study Objectives

1. To identify and quantify the district's current and future educational program needs.
2. To quantify the current enrollment capacities of the current schools and current building space utilization.
3. To determine the relative condition of the existing school buildings relative to increasing enrollment.
4. To determine the overall adequacy of the current facilities for both current and future educational programs, both short term and long term.
5. To develop and recommend alternatives for increased cost-effectiveness and efficient utilization of the district's building resources.



INTRODUCTION

By demographic principle, distinctions are made between projections and forecasts. A projection extrapolates the past and present into the future with little regard for any other factors which may affect the extrapolation (e.g. fertility/mortality rates, housing patterns or migration patterns). A forecast includes those factors which may have an impact on the extrapolation. This study does not only project the past into the future, but it also takes into consideration those factors identified in the following assumptions.

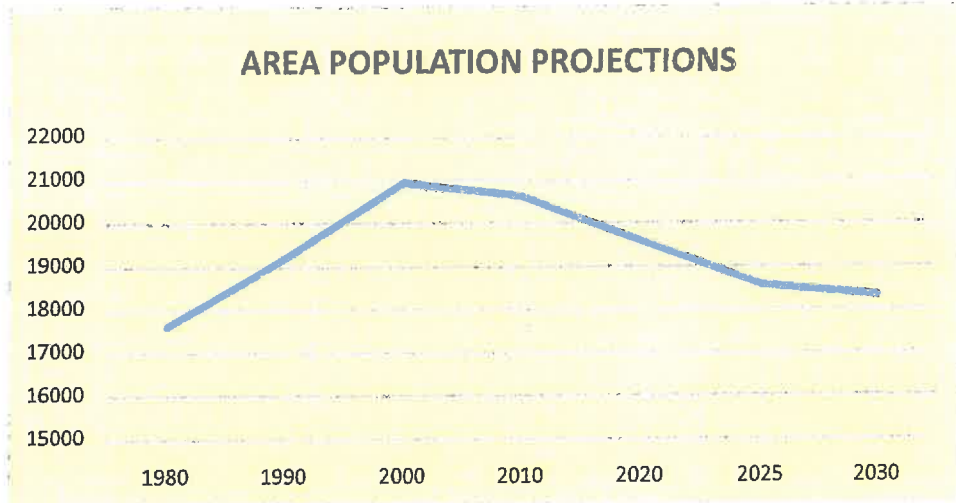
ASSUMPTIONS

1. That the national, State, and regional economy does not go into a deep recession at any time during the next 10 years.
2. That the Birth/Mortality rate for the District service area will remain relatively constant (1.02 births for every death).
3. That the annual inflation rate will remain relatively low (4%).
4. That the area unemployment rate will continue to be relatively low.
5. There will be no new war, resulting in a large U.S. military deployment.
6. That the price of gasoline and heating fuel will remain relatively stable.
7. That the area population will continue to decrease over the next several years then remain relatively stable.
8. That the major factor affecting population is the in migration of families with few, if any, school-age children.
9. That area property values will continue to remain relatively high.
10. The primary factors causing the District's enrollment decreases are population decreases, the out migration of school age children, growth of home schooling, and decrease in live births during the Covid years.
11. Changes in year-to-year enrollments will be primarily due to smaller cohort grade groups entering and transitioning through the system in conjunction with larger cohort groups leaving the system.
12. The State of New York does not change any of its current laws or policies relative to private schools, vouchers or inter district transfers and that no additional private schools open within the area.
13. The elementary enrollment will continue to decrease over the next 5 years and then stabilize.
14. Even if the District continues to have annual new housing construction over the next 10 years, the rate, magnitude, and price of existing and new homes, as well as rental costs will continue to be a dominant factor affecting both the changes in population and school enrollments.
15. St. Barnard's will continue to operate with approximately 0-3 Kindergarten students annually transitioning to the District first grade class.

NOTE: All fractions of student counts in our calculations were rounded up to a whole number.

AREA POPULATION PROJECTIONS

	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020	2025	2030
AREA POPULATION	17631	19203	20929	20631	19595	18576	18316
		8.92%	8.99%	-1.42%	-5.02%	-5.20%	-1.40%

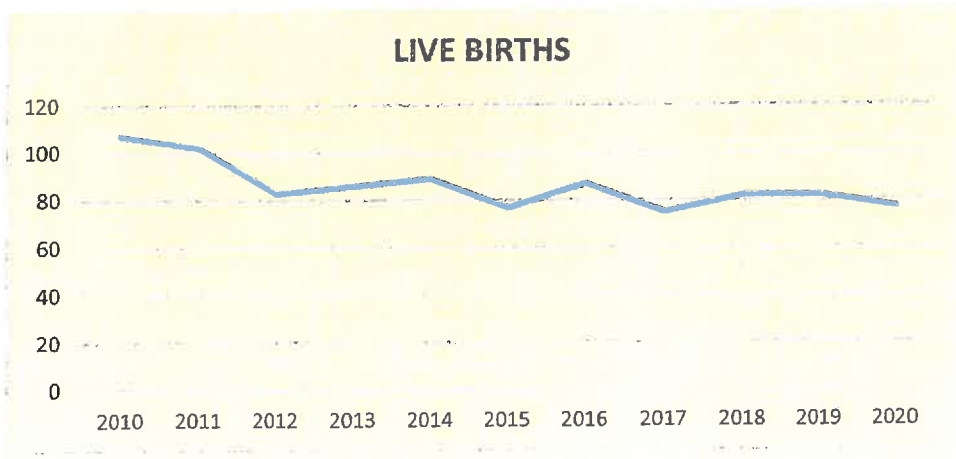


FINDING:

The Saranac Lake SCD area population has decreased 5.02 % from 2010 to 2020 and is projected to decrease by an additional 6.53% through 2030 before stabilizing at that level.

HISTORICAL LIVE BIRTH RATES

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
LIVE BIRTHS	107	102	83	86	89	77	87	75	82	82	77
DIFFERENCE		-4.7%	-18.6%	3.6%	3.5%	-13.5%	13.0%	-13.8%	9.3%	0.0%	-6.1%



FINDING:

Birth rates have decreased by approximately 28% since 2010 and are projected to continue to decrease over the next several years and then stabilize at that level.

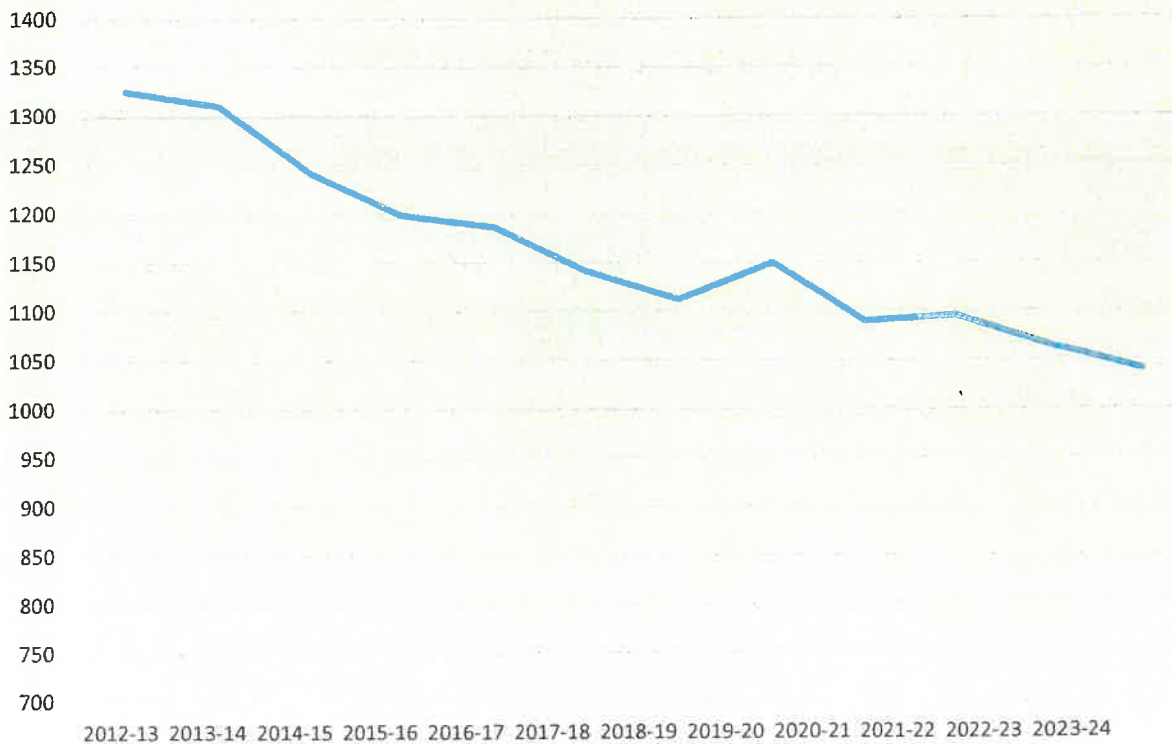
HISTORICAL KINDERGARTEN ENROLLMENT

	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
KINDERGARTEN	96	99	79	86	88	73	64	81	75	68	62	53
K DIFFERENCE		3.1%	-20.2%	8.9%	2.3%	-17.0%	-12.3%	26.6%	-7.4%	-9.3%	-8.8%	-14.5%

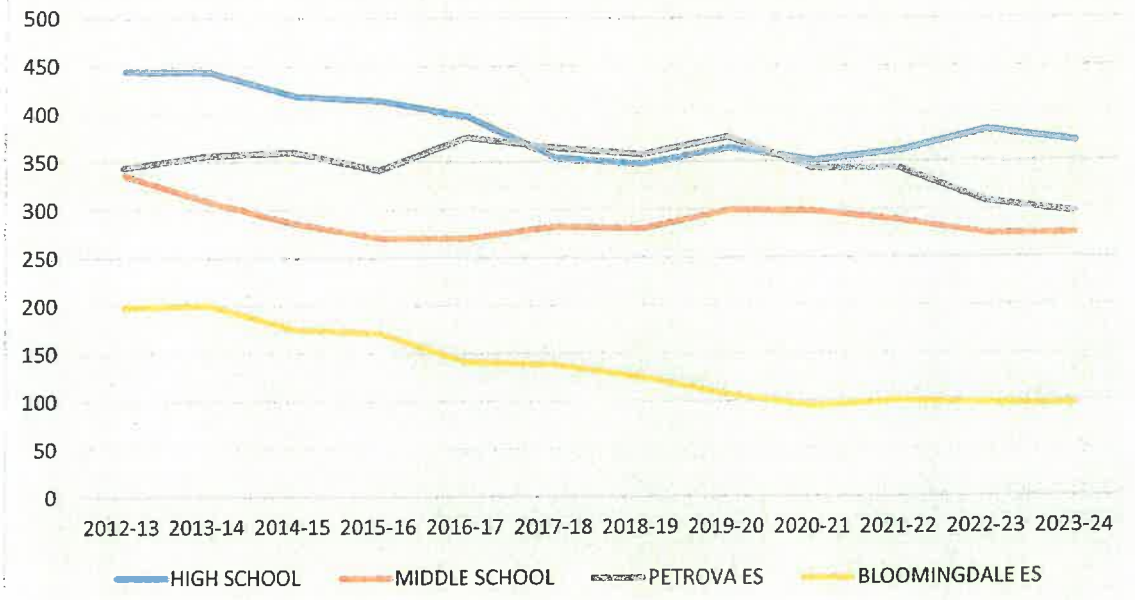
DISTRICT HISTORICAL ENROLLMENT

SCHOOL	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
HIGH SCHOOL	445	444	419	414	398	355	348	365	352	362	383	371
MIDDLE SCHOOL	337	309	286	271	271	283	281	300	299	289	275	275
PETROVA ES	345	357	361	342	376	365	358	377	344	344	309	297
BLOOMINGDALE ES	199	201	176	172	142	139	126	108	95	101	98	97
TOTAL:	1326	1311	1242	1199	1187	1142	1113	1150	1090	1096	1065	1040
		-1.1%	-5.3%	-3.5%	-1.0%	-3.8%	-2.5%	3.3%	-5.2%	0.6%	-2.8%	-2.3%

DISTRICT HISTORICAL ENROLLMENT



DISTRICT HISTORICAL ENROLLMENT



FINDING:

Elementary School enrollments have declined by approximately 18.6% over the past five years and by approximately 11.5% over the past two years.

FINDING:

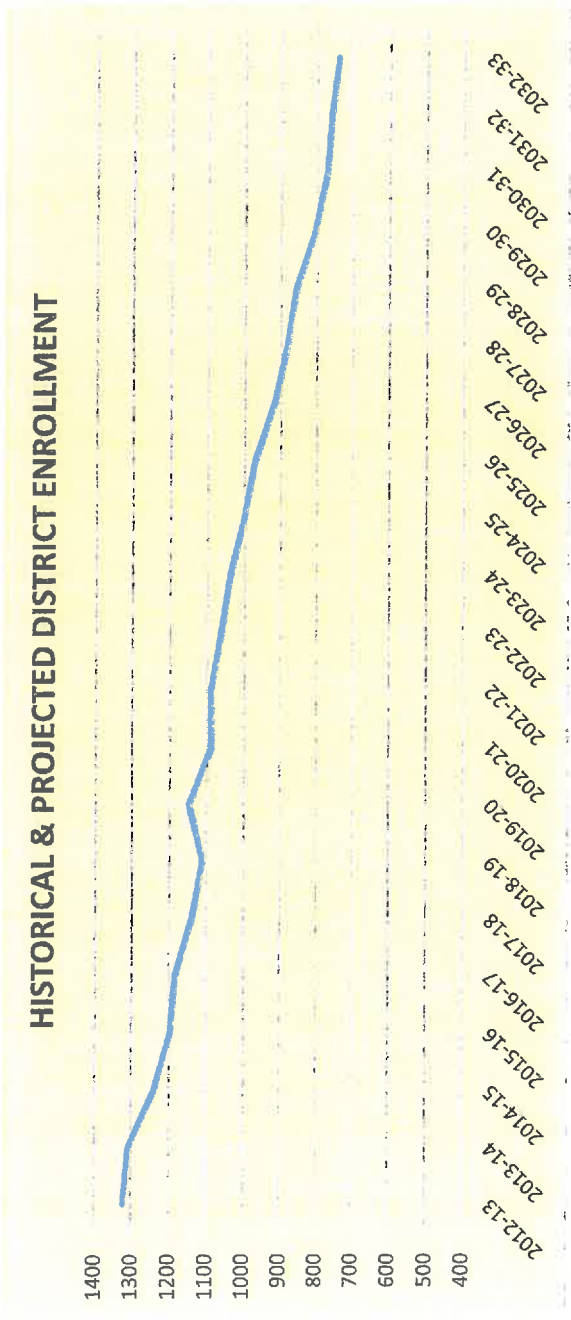
District enrollment has decreased approximately 9.56 % over the past 5 years with a decrease of approximately 2.3% from last year. Based upon current population decreases and our assumptions previously stated, we expect this trend to continue for the next several years before stabilizing.

**ENROLLMENT: HISTORICAL & PROJECTED DISTRICT ENROLLMENT
(2013-2032)**

YEAR	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
PROJECTED DISTRICT ENROLLMENT	1326	1311	1242	1199	1187	1142	1113	1150	1090	1092	1065
	-1.13%	-5.26%	-3.46%	-1.00%	-3.79%	-2.54%	3.32%	-5.22%	0.18%	-2.47%	

YEAR	2023-24*	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31	2031-32	2032-33
PROJECTED DISTRICT ENROLLMENT	1040	1004	974	920	886	861	809	777	765	745
	-2.25%	-3.55%	-2.99%	-5.54%	-3.70%	-2.82%	-6.04%	-3.96%	-1.54%	-2.61%

*Enrollment as of 2-28-2024



FINDING:

District enrollment has decreased an average of approximately 9.56 % over the past 5 years with a decrease of approximately 2.3% from last year. Based upon current population decreases and our assumptions previously stated, we expect this trend to continue for the next several years before stabilizing.

Aging facilities, shrinking numbers: Adirondack schools face double bind

Adirondack Explorer

April 9, 2024

Boquet Valley serves as example of problems facing many small school districts in the Adirondacks

By Tim Rowland

With a functional new school — one where everything worked — close to becoming a reality, the Boquet Valley Central School District had hoped it could run out the clock on failing systems at its two aging buildings in Westport and Elizabethtown.

But after voters overwhelmingly rejected the new complex, school leaders must now turn their attention to porous roofs and broken heating systems — and the bigger question of where Boquet Valley turns now to provide safe, healthy and adequate space for its students at a cost taxpayers can afford.

Paradoxically, the vote against the new school in Boquet Valley could mean students and property owners end up with the worst of both worlds: a patched-up old school that ends up costing taxpayers more than new construction, which the state would have helped pay for.

It also comes at a critical time for rural districts, as the state considers repeal of a policy known as Save Harmless, which prevents the state from contributing less to a school district than it did the previous year. Repeal of Save Harmless would cost Boquet Valley \$1.1 million a year.

These building and funding issues are ones most all Adirondack school districts will have to address, if they haven't already, along with the more basic questions of how to run their programs under state funding formulas that almost seem custom-made to punish the Adirondack condition.

"This is what is happening in rural New York," said Boquet Superintendent Josh Meyer. But, as with other thorny issues from housing to employment, in the Adirondacks it is more-so.

Boquet Valley Superintendent Josh Meyer. After voters rejected a proposal to build a new school for the district's 380 students, the district is figuring out next steps in updating its existing facilities.

Photo by Tim Rowland

To save money, the state department of education is pushing merger and regionalization, but "we've already merged," said Meyer, referring to the 2019 unification of the Westport and Elizabethtown-Lewis districts, which once totaled close to 1,000 students, but now serves 380.

Steeply declining enrollment is a common problem in the park. According to the Cornell Program on Applied Demographics (PAD), Essex County — the most populous county entirely inside the park — has 4,956 students, 750 fewer than in 2015. The other county entirely within the park, Hamilton, has lost a third of its students in the same period.

Trendlines show the decline leveling off somewhat over the next 15 years, but there is no hint of any rebound. By 2040, PAD projects there will only be 82 children in all of Hamilton County under the age of 5 — one for every 22 square miles.

Declining enrollments also help explain why the community rejected the new school by a 3-1 margin. In the merged district, elementary students attend the 91-year-old Westport school, while upper grades attend a 70-year-old building in Elizabethtown. (Elizabethtown, among other shortcomings, has no athletic fields, so teams must be bused 12 miles just to practice.)

Yet voters understandably wondered, Meyer said, how two schools that once accommodated 500 kids each, now were too small for a student population that today is less than half the size.

The answer is that programs the old schools never had to accommodate, such as mental health, social workers, student support and counseling now all clamor for space. The system once had one special education teacher; today there are nine. The state demands it, but doesn't pay for it.

Based on public comments, voters also felt the district should have done more to maintain its two schools, where ceilings leak and malfunctioning boilers force teachers to open the windows in the dead of winter. But with a new school a possibility, that seemed like throwing good money after bad, not to mention that it would have drained money away from teaching.

Adirondack schools in a bind

Declining student populations, unhelpful school funding formulas, decaying buildings and state-required spending on new programming, place school boards in an impossible situation when deciding where to allocate precious dollars, said Cynthia Ford-Johnston, a retired administrator who gained a reputation in the Eastern Adirondacks for being able to shore up troubled districts.

Beyond that, administrators must, with little money, deal with the Covid-related offshoots of poor attendance, stunted child development and addictions to both drugs and smartphones. "These challenges lead to decreased enrichment opportunities for children, a shift from prevention to treatment and reduced maintenance of facilities," Ford-Johnston said.

At a time when communities should be pulling together to solve these challenges, state funding policies drive a wedge between the needs of children and the property-owning taxpayers who must pay the bill and have a direct, ballot-box say over spending.

Adirondack school administrators say it's hard to blame Adirondack taxpayers because they already pay a disproportionately higher share than taxpayers in other parts of the state. That's because the Adirondacks lacks the industry that most regions can count on as a budgetary backbone, Meyer said. Further, as a highly desirable vacation destination, city dwellers and snowbirds build expensive second homes that, to a state algorithm, make Adirondack communities look wealthier — and less in need of financial help — than they are. And since boards can't raise taxes on those who can afford to pay without raising them for those who can't (and because they must comply with a rigid tax cap), they are powerless to make up the difference.

Attempts to rectify this have fallen on deaf ears, said John McDonald Jr., a former Ticonderoga Central superintendent who, during a budget crisis in 2019, took early retirement to protect school programming.

Schools are also penalized, McDonald said, because, while the state pays tax on public land, it does not reflect the true value of that land, either as a tourism draw or for its environmental value, such as water quality and carbon capture.

“The Adirondacks is unique to other rural schools, because the amount of land that can be developed is shrinking,” McDonald said. “Forever Wild is good, but there needs to be some other tax base.”

While superintendent, McDonald drew up what he believed to be a more equitable funding formula for schools inside the Blue Line, but while several Adirondack districts signed on, “it just never got any traction” at the state level,” he said.

Instead, there are fears the state will go in the other direction. Gov. Kathy Hochul’s executive budget calls for the elimination of Save Harmless on the grounds that rural districts with declining enrollments shouldn’t need as much.

But administrators say any savings are more than offset by state-mandated programs that Albany doesn’t pay for. Nor do districts necessarily pay less to teach fewer kids. “If a teacher loses 25% of their class, they don’t get 25% less pay,” Meyer said.

New school plans up in smoke

The new Boquet district did realize savings from consolidation, and saved up \$5 million, which it considered would be an adequate 10% local match on a new, \$50 million school. On the eve of the pandemic, the school submitted its plan to the state for approval — and then for 18 months didn’t hear a peep. Meyer said he’s reluctant to criticize organizations that were stressed by the pandemic, but with each passing day, building supply costs were spiraling. A \$50 million project quickly became a \$64 million project.

What the district did hear from the state was even more devastating. Typically, the state pays 90% of new school construction. But the state concluded that only 40% of the project was eligible for state money. “They said we didn’t read the fine print,” Meyer said at a public meeting earlier this year. “We didn’t know there was any fine print.”

Large districts have lobbyists that might have gotten the state to act sooner, and staff dedicated to grant writing and building proposals. Boquet Valley and its 380 kids had neither. So the state was able to shift its financial responsibility to the taxpayers of Westport, Elizabethtown and Essex, who, to pay for a new school, would have faced a 24% increase in the levy. Meyer said it’s small wonder they turned it down.

Meyer said a new committee will be appointed to study the options, but while he led the group that worked out the details of new construction, this time he’ll turn the reins over to an outside consultant. “I’m having trouble breaking away from that (new construction) option,” he said. “From an operational and academic standpoint it made fiscal sense to me.”

It’s an issue Boquet Valley has already studied top to bottom with no obvious solutions in sight.

“I find myself wondering what the future holds,” Ford-Johnston said. “How might technology be able to bridge some of the gaps in program options, staffing challenges and population sparsity. Perhaps buildings and districts as we know them will change or need to change to be able to provide all young people the tools to compete in the world.”

New York • County Reports 2021

ALICE IN FRANKLIN COUNTY

ALICE is an acronym for **A**sset **L**imited, **I**ncome **C**onstrained, **E**mloyed – households that earn more than the Federal Poverty Level, but less than the basic cost of living for the county. While conditions have improved for some households, many continue to struggle, especially as wages fail to keep pace with the rising cost of household essentials (housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, and a basic smartphone plan). Households below the ALICE Threshold – ALICE households plus those in poverty – can't afford the essentials.

2021 Point-in-Time-Data

Population: 47,996 **Number of Households:** 0 (0% change from 2019)

Median Household income: \$55,279 (state average: \$74,314)

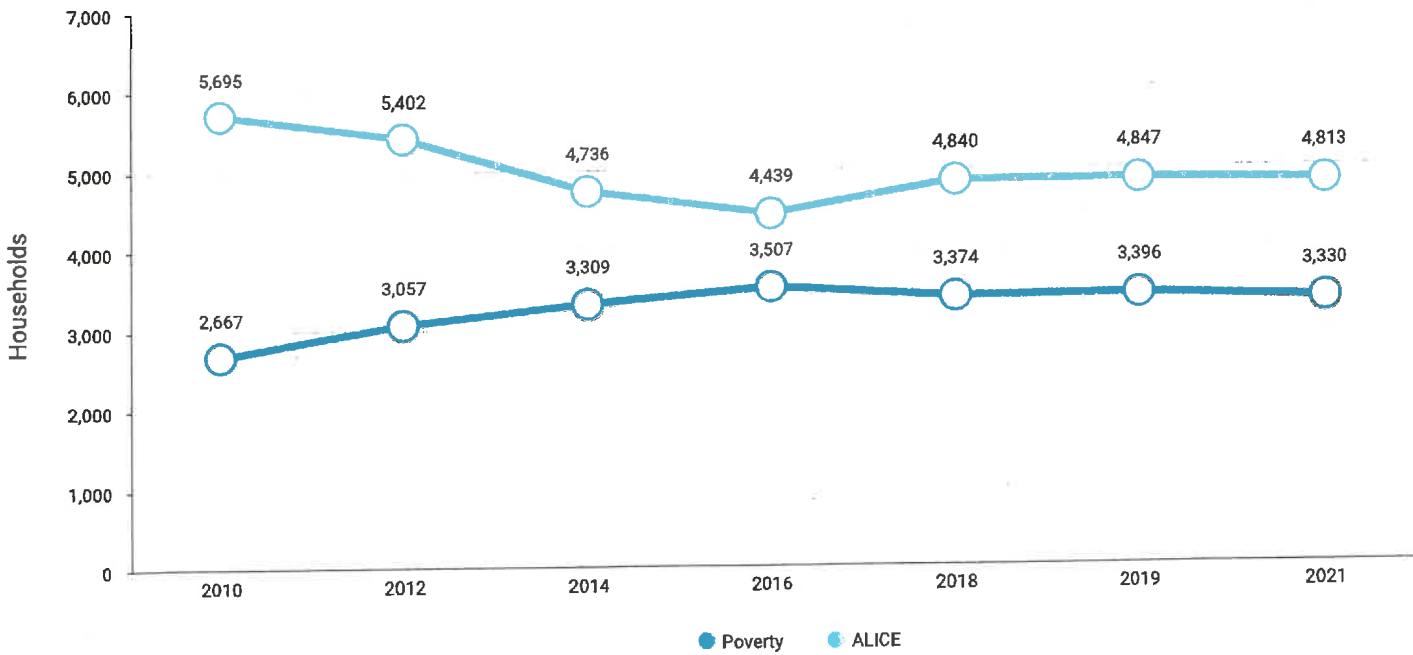
Labor Force Participation Rate: 50% (state average: 63%)

ALICE Households: 26% (state average 30%) **Households in Poverty:** 18% (state average 14%)

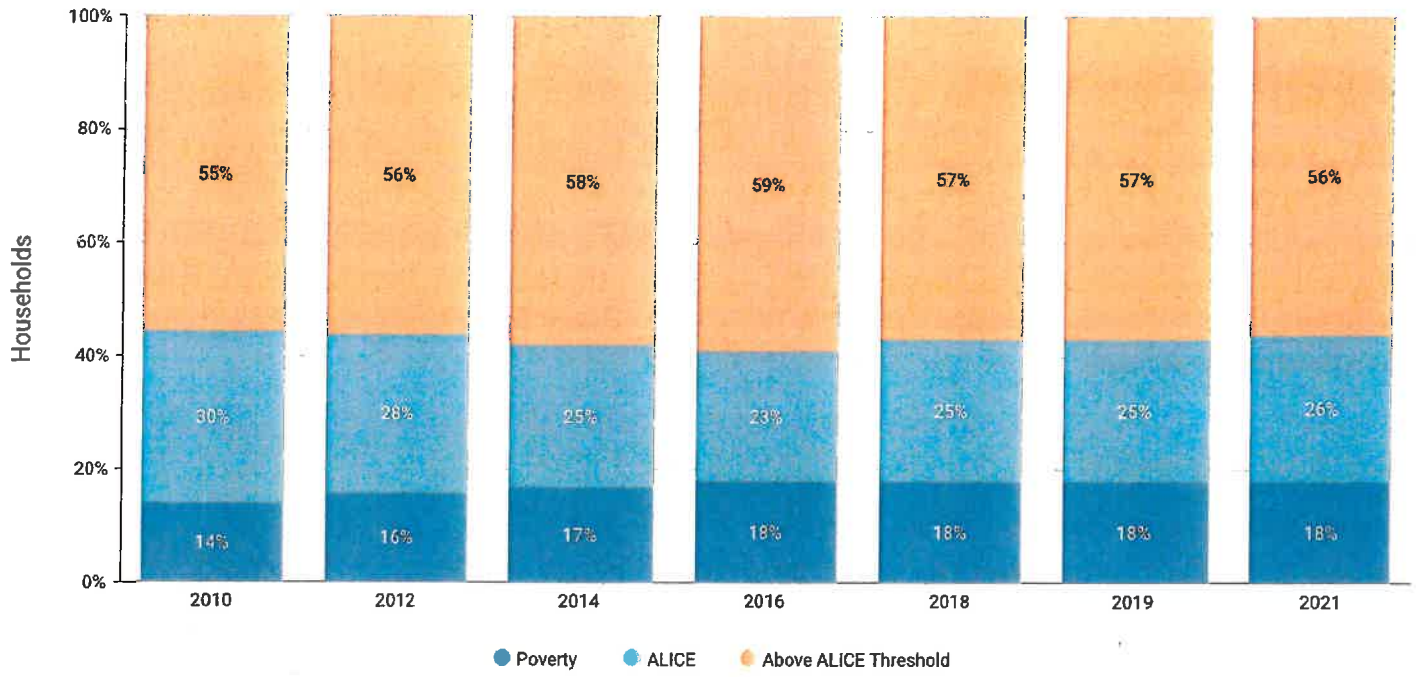
Financial Hardship Has Changed Over Time in Franklin County

As circumstances change, households may find themselves below or above the ALICE Threshold at different times. While the COVID-19 pandemic brought employment shifts, health struggles, and school/business closures in 2021, it also spurred unprecedented public assistance through pandemic relief measures. In 2019, 3,216,435 households in New York were below the ALICE Threshold; by 2021 that number had changed to 3,365,090.

Number of Households



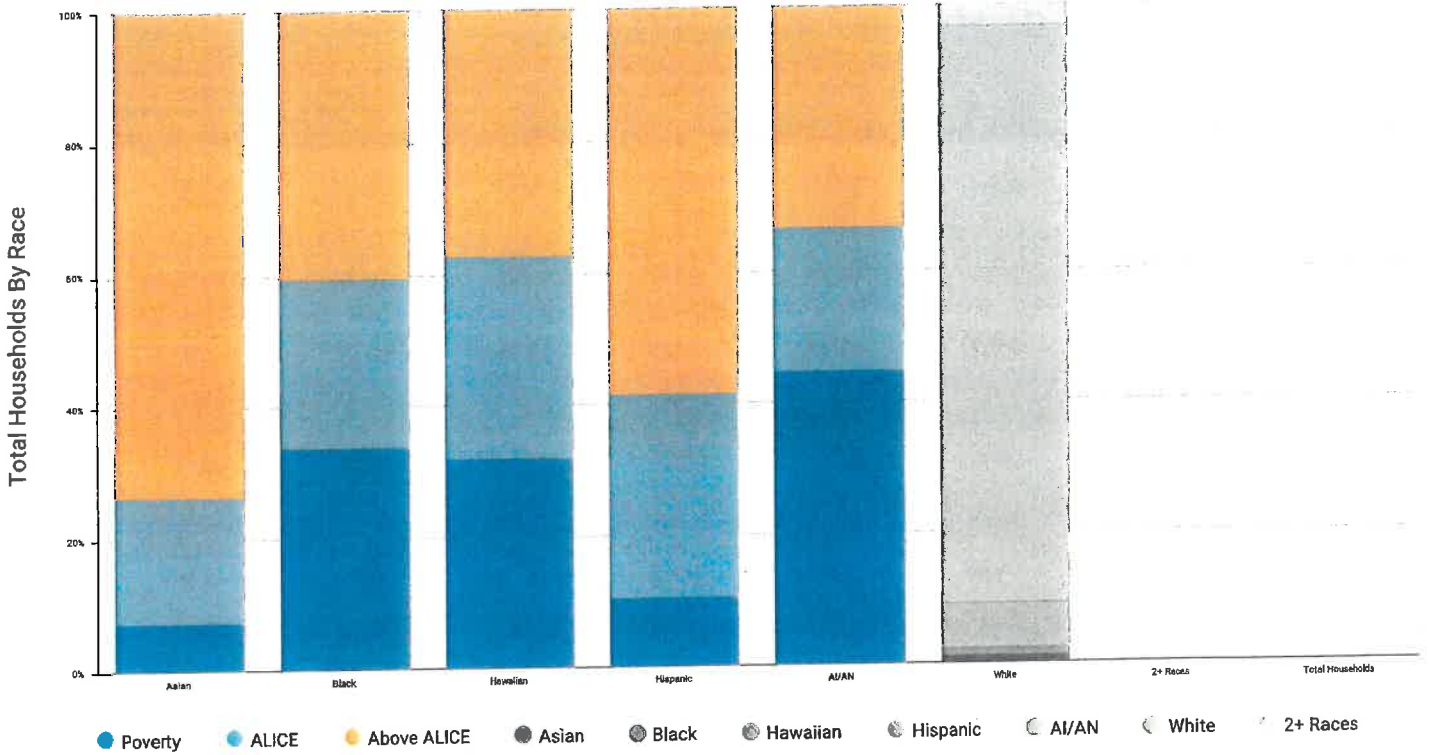
Percentage of Households



Financial Hardship is Not Equally Distributed

By total number, groups with the largest population of households below the ALICE Threshold tend to also be in the largest demographic groups. However, when looking at the proportion of each group that is below the ALICE Threshold, it is clear that some groups are more likely to be ALICE than others.

Households by Race/Ethnicity, Franklin County, New York, 2021



There were also differences in financial hardship by household type and age of householder.

Group	% Below ALICE Threshold
Single or Cohabiting (no children)	37%
Married (with children)	19%
Single-Female-Headed (with children)	77%
Single-Male-Headed (with children)	67%

Group	% Below ALICE Threshold
Under 25	70%
25 to 44 Years	44%
45 to 64 Years	32%
Seniors (65+)	56%



The Cost of Basics Outpaces Wages

The Household Survival Budget reflects the minimum cost to live and work in the modern economy and includes housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, a smartphone plan, and taxes. It does not include savings for emergencies or future goals like college or retirement. In 2021, household costs in every county in New York were well above the Federal Poverty Level of \$12,880 for a single adult and \$26,500 for a family of four.

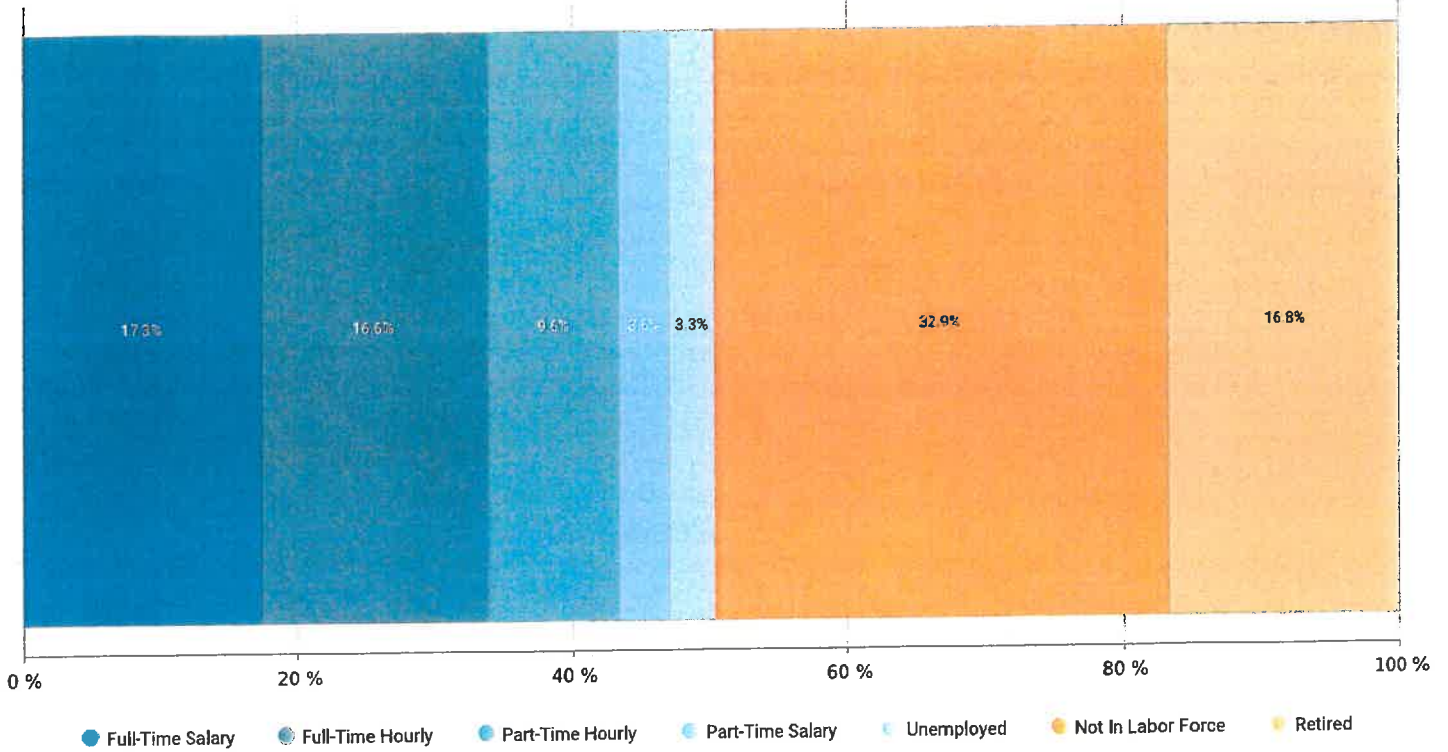
Monthly Costs and Credits	Single Adult	One Adult, One Child	One Adult, One In Child Care	Two Adults	Two Adults Two Children	Two Adults, Two In Child Care	Single Senior	Two Seniors
Housing - Rent	\$378	\$441	\$441	\$441	\$483	\$483	\$378	\$441
Housing - Utilities	\$154	\$239	\$239	\$239	\$292	\$292	\$154	\$239
Child Care	\$0	\$352	\$938	\$0	\$703	\$1,979	\$0	\$0
Food	\$419	\$711	\$638	\$769	\$1,253	\$1,143	\$387	\$710
Transportation	\$358	\$456	\$456	\$535	\$835	\$835	\$311	\$441
Health Care	\$226	\$522	\$522	\$522	\$784	\$784	\$578	\$1,157
Technology	\$75	\$75	\$75	\$110	\$110	\$110	\$75	\$110
Miscellaneous	\$161	\$280	\$331	\$262	\$446	\$563	\$188	\$310
Tax Payments	\$256	\$520	\$666	\$363	\$857	\$1,187	\$331	\$675
Tax Credits	\$0	(\$614)	(\$932)	\$0	(\$1,393)	(\$1,865)	\$0	\$0
Monthly Total	\$2,027	\$2,982	\$3,374	\$3,241	\$4,370	\$5,511	\$2,402	\$4,083
ANNUAL TOTAL	\$24,324	\$35,784	\$40,488	\$38,892	\$52,440	\$66,132	\$28,824	\$48,996
Hourly Wage	\$12.16	\$17.89	\$20.24	\$19.45	\$26.22	\$33.07	\$14.41	\$24.50



The Labor Landscape is Challenging for ALICE Workers

A small portion of adults (16 years and older) in Franklin County were unemployed and a large number were working in 2021. However, a significant portion of both full and part-time workers are paid by the hour; these workers are more likely to have fluctuations in income and less likely to receive benefits.

Labor Status, Population 16 and Over, Franklin County, New York, 2021



State Sponsors



United Way
of New York State



[UnitedForALICE.org](https://www.UnitedForALICE.org) | [@United4ALICE](https://twitter.com/United4ALICE)

By securing racial and economic equity for ALICE we can improve life for all.





Saranac Lake Central School District

2024-25 Budget Propositions – Vote May 21st!

Dear Saranac Lake Central School District Families,

The Saranac Lake Central School District is committed to excellence in education by creating an effective, safe, and productive learning environment for all students. Recent initiatives like the Smart Schools Bond Act, which allowed us to upgrade the security of our school buildings, and a voter-approved capital project that includes improvements to Bloomingdale Elementary, Petrova Elementary, Bus Garage, and the High School have made some much-needed improvements to our facilities. With this type of consistent investment in our facilities, we can continue to take care of required maintenance while making strategic improvements. In keeping with that focus, the District is presenting five propositions to the public as part of our 2024-25 Budget Vote, three are designed to improve our school facilities for our students and our community.



Proposition 1 – Transportation Purchases

A yes vote authorizes the district to spend up to \$335,000 from our unassigned fund balance to purchase two buses, replacing two that have reached the end of their useful life, and one van (or similar vehicle).

Proposition 2 – Energy Performance Contract

The Energy Performance Contract (EPC) includes:

- Bringing us to 100% LED, improving the learning environment, safety, and energy efficiency;
- Weatherization improvements to all facilities;
- Upgrades to building control systems at Petrova and the High School; and
- Various ventilation and equipment upgrades to the Petrova and the High School buildings.

A yes vote approves borrowing up to \$2,300,000 for the EPC. There is no tax impact because the EPC has a guaranteed return.

Proposition 3 – Artificial Turf, Lights, Scoreboard

This proposal is to convert the current grass field inside the High School track to a turf field and provide lighting and a new scoreboard. Turf fields allow increased use and playing time – all of our students and many of our community members would get regular use of this field. Voting yes approves the funding for this project. Funding combines restricted reserves (\$2,820,000), available funds (\$397,505), and borrowing (up to \$782,437). There is no tax impact because State aid will cover the cost of borrowing.

Proposition 4 – Bleachers & Press Box

Should voters approve Proposition 3, this additional proposition is to install bleachers and construct a press box. A yes vote approves borrowing up to \$1,250,000 for this work. This will impact tax rates.

Bleacher Project Anticipated Maximum Cost:

- \$200,000 home with Senior Exemption: \$4 per year
- \$200,000 home with STAR Exemption: \$7 per year
- \$200,000 home with no Exemption: \$8 per year

Proposition 5 – Saranac Lake Free Library

Under Section 529 of the NYS Education Law, public libraries may place funding propositions on a school district ballot. Voting yes authorizes the levy of taxes annually of \$511,895 to be paid to the Trustees of the Saranac Lake Free Library.

Benefits of an Energy Performance Contract:

Create efficient and environmentally conscious school buildings for our students and our community.

Capture an additional 10% New York State aid for the EPC, further ensuring the project is completed in the most financially responsible manner.

Demonstrate a significant environmental commitment.

Deliver significant reductions to our carbon footprint.

Vote! Tuesday, May 21, 2024
7 am to 8 pm, District Office

For Early Voting Information
visit: www.slcs.org

Benefits of Artificial Turf:

Year-Round Availability: Unlike natural grass fields that can become unusable or require rest periods due to weather conditions, an all-weather field can be used throughout the year. This ensures that students have consistent access to use the field. Spring sports benefit significantly from the opportunity to begin outdoor practice before the start of contests.

Enhanced Safety: With a level surface, drainage, and cushioning – all-weather fields provide protection to our athletes from serious injuries. The more consistent playing surface reduces the risk of injuries from slips, trips, or falls. Unlike uneven or muddy grass fields, synthetic turf fields offer a stable, predictable surface.

Cost-Efficiency: Synthetic turf fields require less water, mowing, fertilizers, and pesticides, than natural grass fields, leading to savings in maintenance and operational costs over time.

Community Use: Beyond school hours, all-weather fields can be used by the community for recreational activities, sports leagues, and events. This promotes community engagement, and physical activity.

Durability and Sustainability: High-quality synthetic turf fields are designed to withstand heavy use and maintain their appearance and functionality over time, with less need for repair. Advancements in synthetic turf technology have led to more environmentally friendly options, such as fields made from recycled materials.

Flexibility and

Versatility: All-weather fields can accommodate a variety of sports and activities, including soccer, football, lacrosse, flag football, and more. This flexibility allows schools to host a range of athletic events, practices, and competitions without the limitations imposed by weather-related constraints.

Boost School Spirit and Pride: Investing in modern, well-maintained facilities like an all-weather field can enhance school spirit and pride. It provides students with a sense of belonging, fosters a positive school culture, and encourages participation in extracurricular activities and events.

What is an EPC? What will the savings be?

An EPC is an agreement with a contractor to upgrade the district's energy systems and use the savings generated to carry out important facility improvements.

Savings: It is projected that the district will reduce energy costs by more than \$110,000 per year over the 15-year term of the project.

State Aid: Upgrades will pay for themselves through cost savings and New York State aid.

No Tax Impact: While the district is borrowing up to \$2,300,000 for the EPC, the cost will not impact the tax rate because the EPC has a guaranteed return.

Guarantee: The EPC guarantees that the district will at least break even on the \$2,300,000 cost of the project.

Projected: A positive cash flow to the district of about \$886,000 is projected over the life of the project.

