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2012 and 60.4% in 2013.⁶ Furthermore, from 2009-2013, only 16% of students enrolled in

the summer melt rate is lower in Vermont than nationally. Nevertheless, it still played a role in low postsecondary enrollment rates.

The VSAC study also reported that *gap years* taken by students adversely affected the likelihood of enrollment. Of the students who took gap years, or yearlong breaks from schooling, 57% failed to enroll the following fall (2013). Of the students polled, 25% had either dropped out or transferred schools within one year of attending. Of the 14% who dropped out, many had attended two-year institutions (39%) while a lower percentage (10%) had attended four-year schools.¹⁴ The study also found that geography played a factor in students' enrollment rates. Chittenden County saw 66.7% of seniors enroll in postsecondary education, closely followed by Essex County with 65.9% of students continuing. Washington County had 61.4% of students continue with education, consistent with the state average of 60%. Orange and Lamoille counties saw only 50% of seniors do so.¹⁵

College tuition and state cuts in education spending are another factor contributing to low postsecondary enrollment rates across the country. In 2008, states had been spending 28% more per student on higher education than in 2013.¹⁶ Because of this decrease in higher education spending, public colleges and universities across the country have increased tuition to compensate for declining state funding. Since the 2007-08 school year, tuition at four-year public colleges has increased by 27% after adjusting for inflation.¹⁷ The cost of tuition is a growing concern for recent high school graduates. The Cooperative Institutional Research Program at UCLA reported in a recent study of 165,743 students that the cost of attendance was rated as being very important and played a role in of students' college enrollment decision making, a 2.6% increase from 2012 and a 14.9% increase from 2004.¹⁸ In Vermont, only 35% of low-income students enrolled in a postsecondary institution, whereas the New England average was nearly 47% in 2015.^{19,20}

¹⁴ Vermont Students Assistance Corporation, Highlights and Challenges for Pursuing a Postsecondary Education

¹⁵ Vermont Students Assistance Corporation, Highlights and Challenges for Pursuing a Postsecondary Education

¹⁶ Phil Oliff, Vincent Palacios, Ingrid Johnson, and Michael Leachman, "Recent Deep State Higher Education Cuts May Harm Students and the Economy for Years to Come," Washington DC: Center on Budget and Policy

Vermont ranks 49th in terms of total state fiscal support for higher education, and 45th in terms of state fiscal support per \$1,000 of state personal income.²¹ Between 1999 and 2007, median family income rose 4% in Vermont.²² Average four-year college tuition and fees increased 79% across the country in the same timeframe. In-state tuition in Vermont at public colleges and state universities was \$4,994 in 2001 and \$8,546 in 2007.^{23,24} Data from the Vermont Community Foundation states that, Vermont students and their families incur more debt for a bachelor's degree than the national average, ranking Vermont second to last in the nation for affordable education. Vermonters saw a increase in

most influence on students when thinking about financial aid. Of the 17,286 students who responded 60% said their parents had the most influence on them when thinking about financial aid. This data shows that parents have the most significant influence on high school student's education plans and the most influence on students when thinking about financial aid.²⁹ This study measured trends nationally; it did not present any specific data on Vermont students.

In 2009, the Vermont Commission of Higher Education Funding published the Compact with the State of Vermont. The goal of this measure was to raise the percentage of Vermonters who have completed college to 60% by 2020.³⁰ Although this compact is

and Eileen Burgin in response to a request from Representative Valerie Stuart and