



School and Municipal Leaders Online Focus Groups Overview and Findings

Commission to Study School Funding Meeting
July 13, 2020

Format and Participants



June 2020 -- NH Listens and Carsey School of Public Policy staff working for the Commission to Study School Funding coordinated and facilitated 12 online focus groups with municipal and school leaders.



Each lasted approximately 90 minutes over Zoom video conferencing.



A total of 48 municipal and school leaders participated

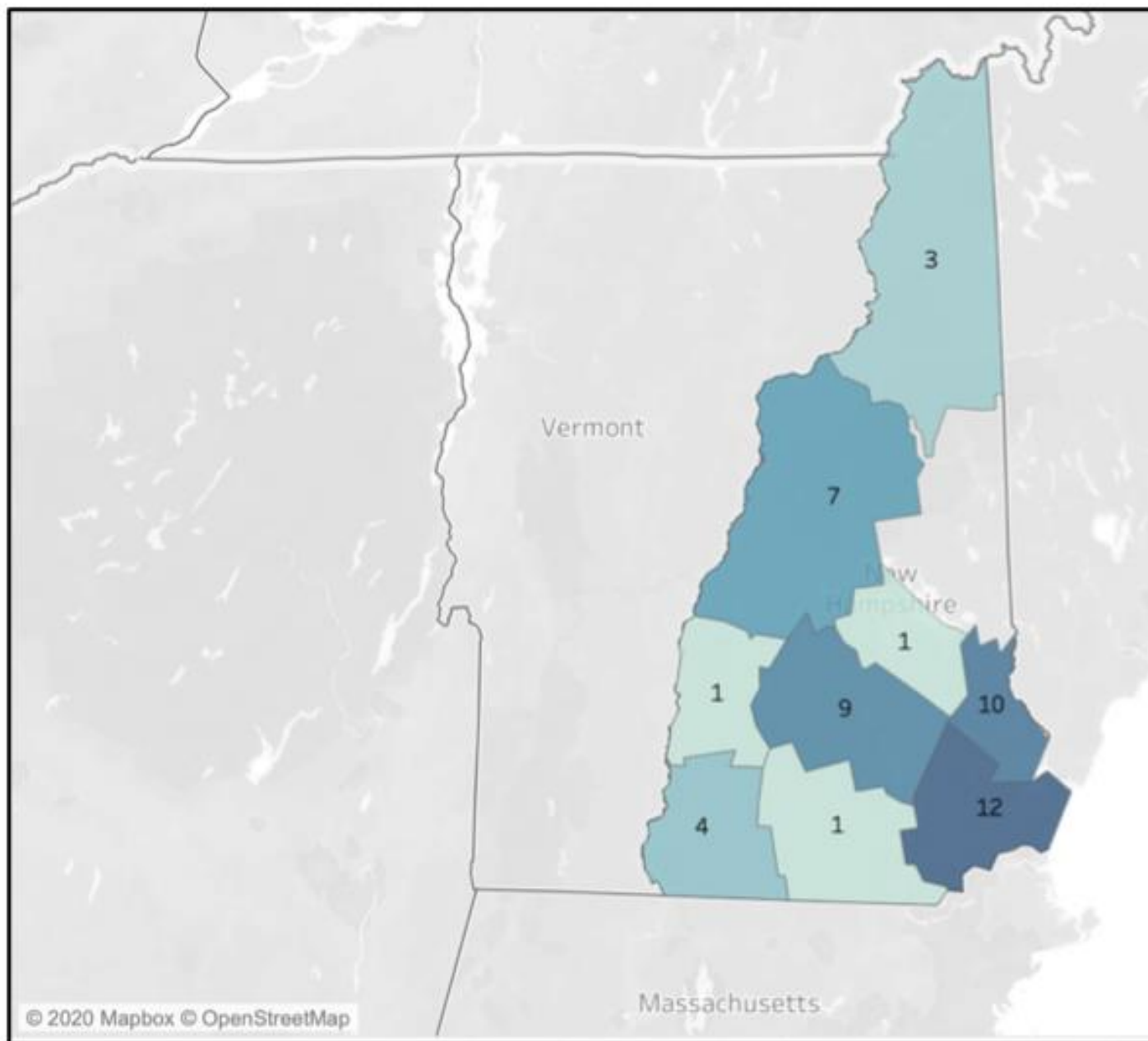


FIGURE 1. PARTICIPANTS BY COUNTY

Table 1. Participants by Role

| Role | Count |
|--------------------------|-------|
| Budget committee member | 3 |
| Principal | 5 |
| School board member | 23 |
| Select board member | 7 |
| Superintendent | 7 |
| Town/city council member | 3 |

Table 2. Participants by County

| County | Count |
|--------------|-------|
| Belknap | 1 |
| Cheshire | 4 |
| Coos | 3 |
| Grafton | 7 |
| Hillsborough | 1 |
| Merrimack | 9 |
| Rockingham | 12 |
| Strafford | 10 |
| Sullivan | 1 |

Communities Represented

- ✓ Allenstown
- ✓ Berlin
- ✓ Bethlehem
- ✓ Bow/Dunbarton (x2)
- ✓ Bridgewater
- ✓ Carroll
- ✓ Chester
- ✓ Croydon (SAU 99)
- ✓ Dover (x8)
- ✓ Durham
- ✓ Easton, Franconia, Sugar Hill, Lisbon, Lyman, and Landaff (SAU 35)
- ✓ Farmington
- ✓ Franklin (x2)
- ✓ Gorham (SAU20)
- ✓ Hebron
- ✓ Jaffrey-Rindge Cooperative School District
- ✓ Kearsarge (SAU 65)
- ✓ Kensington
- ✓ Lisbon
- ✓ Lyme
- ✓ Marlborough
- ✓ Marlowe
- ✓ Meredith
- ✓ Milton
- ✓ New Castle (x3)
- ✓ Newbury
- ✓ Newington
- ✓ Northumberland, Stratford, Stark (SAU 58)
- ✓ Pittsfield (x2)
- ✓ Portsmouth
- ✓ Rye (x3)
- ✓ Stoddard, Weare, and Stark (SAU 24)
- ✓ Stratham
- ✓ Waterville Valley
- ✓ West Chesterfield



Initial Themes – Local values, perspectives, preferences

- Reliance on property taxes is problematic overall
- Need to consider definitions of adequacy *and* what remains funded and unfunded currently and what is needed
- Funding concerns and inequity across communities included *but are not limited to* staffing, salaries, transportation, facilities, and supplies
- Need to find a systemic solution for funding and investing in school/educational adequacy equitably in communities, for a better and equitable future for students in NH



Examples: Unique community needs and resources

- School leaders are managing diverse needs, demographics and funding in multiple communities
- Districts and SAUs have towns that vary in size and need in terms of school funding and meeting adequacy standards
- An overall older population in NH requires a consideration of impacts on costs of housing
- Disparities in property available or building capacity
- Concerns about closing local schools in favor of regionalism. There are benefits to regional schools.
- Wealthier communities acknowledge inequities across NH
- Lower income communities struggle with adequacy



Examples: Costs of funding and definitions of adequacy

- Adequacy including disparities and outcomes
- Student learning needs and/or opportunities vary widely
- Teacher quality and salaries matter
- Access to electives and extra curriculars varies by community
- Needed supports and specialists require creativity with local funding – Social emotional learning, trauma informed care
- School infrastructure, transportation, supplies, equipment, technology
- Special education and unanticipated out of district costs
- Reliance on grants for improvements can reduce long-term planning
- Considerations for smaller communities

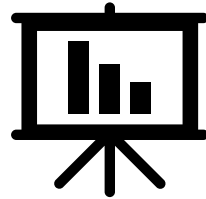


Forthcoming Reports, Data, Next Steps



Online Focus Group Report

Published on the Commission website in the next couple weeks



Employee and District Survey

Over 1600 respondents from across the state holding various school and district roles

Questions align with focus groups

Preliminary findings will be shared in the next couple weeks



UNH Granite State Poll

Public Engagement Workgroup in partnership with Fiscal Policy and Adequacy workgroups will form questions



Questions Posed



- **Main Question: What are the most important factors to consider to reduce disparities across and within school districts resulting from variations in revenue from property taxes?**
- How does the current funding system for public education work for you in your role?
- How does the current funding system for public education work for your community?
- What are the most important components of an “adequate” education that should be considered as part of the base formula for calculating the cost of adequacy?
- Are there barriers you can identify that inhibit an equal opportunity to an adequate education?



- What should we measure to know whether students have received a comparable education no matter what community they live in?
- In your opinion, what is working and what are the problems in the way we raise funds for public schools in NH?
- In your opinion, what is working and what are the problems in the way we distribute funding to school systems in NH?
- What question(s) do you have for the commission about public school funding?

