

Municipal and School Leader June 2020 Online Focus Groups

Summary Report



Facilitated and Compiled by NH Listens and Carsey School of Public Policy Staff for the Commission to Study School Funding to promote further discussion and understanding of community voices.

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Format and Participants

In June 2020, New Hampshire (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 that lasted approximately 90 minutes each via Zoom video conferencing. Leaders afforded the Commission with their knowledge, perspectives, and experience. A total of 48 municipal and school leaders participated. Tables 1 and 2 illustrate the distribution of participants.

Table 1. Participants by Role

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

Table 2. Participants by County

County	#
Rockingham	12
Strafford	10
Merrimack	9
Grafton	7
Cheshire	4
Coos	3
Hillsborough	1
Belknap	1
Sullivan	1
Carroll	0

Communities represented (with number of participants if more than 1) included:

- Allentown
- Berlin
- Bethlehem
- Bow/Dunbarton (n=2)
- Bridgewater
- Carroll
- Chester
- Croydon (SAU 99)
- Dover (n=8)
- Durham
- Easton, Franconia, Sugar Hill, Lisbon, Lyman, and Landaff (SAU 35)
- Farmington
- Franklin (n=2)
- Gorham (SAU20)
- Hebron
- Jaffrey-Rindge Cooperative School District
- Kearsarge (SAU 65)
- Kensington
- Lisbon
- Lyme
- Marlborough
- Marlowe
- Meredith
- Milton
- New Castle (n=3)
- Newbury
- Newington
- Northumberland, Stratford, Stark (SAU 58)
- Pittsfield (n=2)
- Portsmouth
- Rye (n=3)
- Stoddard, Weare, and Stark (SAU 24)
- Stratham
- Waterville Valley

Further outreach to municipal and school leaders may be warranted during a second gathering that is tentatively planned for fall 2020. The public engagement workgroup along with Commission members can support the identification of key communities.

Questions Explored

School and municipal leaders who frame local budgets hold values and perspectives that will help the Commission gain insight into local perspectives on school funding challenges, realities, and potential remedies. NH Listens and Carsey School of Public Policy Commission staff framed the focus group questions from the readings, analysis, and discussion conducted by the full Commission and the public engagement, adequacy, and fiscal policy workgroups. The questions refer to the Commission's charge, for example: How are we raising and distributing funds? What are we paying for? What are the costs and drivers? This includes defining the problems with school funding.

1. 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?
2. Introductions(do not include names in notes): Towns and roles represented
3. How does the current funding system for public education work for you in your role?
4. How does the current funding system for public education work for your community?
5. 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?
6. What should we measure to know whether students have received a comparable education no matter what community they live in?
7. In your opinion, what is working and what are the problems in the way we raise funds for public schools in NH?
8. In your opinion, what is working and what are the problems in the way we distribute funding to school systems in NH?
9. What is different today compared to 20 years ago that makes you understand 'adequate education' different?
10. What question(s) do you have for the commission about public school funding?
11. Anything else?

What Themes Emerged?¹

Current Funding System

Municipal and school leaders were asked how the current school funding system works for them in their role and in their communities. Overall, participants felt that current system does not work. Many expressed hope that leaders and decision-makers can think about students across the state rather than students within municipalities. There is a need and want among leaders to reduce the adversarial narrative among communities that limits collaboration and focus on students' success. Participants want to see the Commission move NH forward toward a solution that is collaborative, creative, and addresses the inequities across the state that persist due to an over reliance on property taxes. The plans needs to

¹ NOTE: The numbers and assertions in these statements may be arguable. They are notes taken during the focus groups and serve the purpose of helping the Commission inform their decisions as well as hear and understand local perspectives. Overall, these notes and findings serve as a means to help enhance discussion during the process of studying school funding in NH.

be reasonable, so the legislature will pass them and inequities can be mended. Participants wanted the Commission to be bold, “rearranging the chairs” or “kicking the can down the road,” is not enough.”

Property Tax Impacts and Local Costs – Burdens and Concerns

The biggest theme among participants in terms of the current system was the reliance on property taxes. They are too high in many communities and can no longer be a cornerstone for school funding. Participants asserted that communities throughout NH have variations in property values and commercial development. Funding is not just a problem in towns like Claremont and Berlin, many more are frustrated by the way the formula complicates fiscal management and creates inequities for residents, staff, and students. For some smaller communities with concentrated wealth, perhaps from vacation homes and part-time residents, the formula may work okay but because the taxes are high people are moving away (an example from Lyme). A participant from SAU 58 (Northumberland, Stratford, Stark) explained businesses are few in this area. The taxpayers are the residents, and any increase to the budget impacts households and rural areas. The stratification of wealth across and within districts is problematic, and assumptions of wealth in certain communities can be burdensome to those who are not wealthy trying to make a living and settle in the area. Overall, there was a sense that there are disparities and disconnects amongst the income residents earn, property value, continued tax increases and need for affordable housing, and what people think should go into schools. Some examples from the focus group notes included: (also see Appendix):

- A smaller town (mostly single-family homes) pays higher taxes per household than the larger town (more low-income families, less single-family homes), which creates unrest between the two communities
- Kensington, Local area has substantial variation in tax rates related to commercial activity in the district. Hampton Falls has more commercial so reduction in tax rates
- Elementary (200-240) and Junior High (100-130) in Rye, the school board budget passes with few problems, affluent, low tax rates, lose local control when sending kids to Portsmouth High School
- Marlborough (east of Keene), K-8 school, funding mechanism does not work – lower end of the socio-economic scale, no tax base from industry or vacation property, higher IEP requirements which raises the costs of students. Socioeconomic factors influence behavioral issues which increases costs for supports
- Do not want to see donor towns come back. Bretton Woods, Washington Hotel, can't afford extra taxes, need to look at average income and not assume wealth in certain towns, which put burden on those who are not wealthy
- Kearsarge SAU 65, regional high school, Includes property rich and poor tax, 40% distribution, 60% average daily membership of students, Lake towns and poorer towns, more affluent towns provide some relief
- Milton, Small groups that come out in December/January to push against a raise in taxes cause an inability to raise teacher wages or cost per students, property taxes are high because there isn't a lot property
- Stratford, supportive of education, but as property tax burden gets higher there is push back from residential property
- Franklin only gives ~35% of funds to school, and ~65% to municipalities... We struggle with the disparities within the city because at both a state and local level we are hit hard with financing schools. There is a lack of taxable property, and a lot of students here compared to surrounding towns and cities across NH

An Aging State -- Considerations of Wealth and Limited/Fixed Incomes

Within the discussion of property taxes was that of an aging NH. Participants talked about older residents who are living on fixed incomes, facing higher costs in retirement, and reflecting back on what their life was like and may not understand the current expenses of education now. Therefore, higher budgets may not pass. Some wealthier towns with an older average age and lower number of kids in school have found it difficult to argue for certain needs (e.g., ADA bathroom). Older residents in the focus groups agreed that with a limited income an increasing taxes, they may have to sell their house and move to a cheaper town (e.g., Rye). Wealth disparities and limited aide for low-middle incomes creates a dilemma for people who want to retain reasonable costs of living and owning property and funding schools that meet students' needs.

Managing Diverse Needs and Demographics in Districts with Small Towns

Leaders are managing diverse needs, demographics and multiple funding streams in districts with small towns. Students leave which shifts funding, and property taxes or high costs of living may dissuade families from moving in. Towns in a district may have a diversity of economics which can pit towns against each other for resources or to keep local schools open. For instance, a participant in New Castle noted they are surrounded by four larger communities. They have the lowest tax rate in NH, yet they are fighting to keep their local school open. In SAU 35 (e.g., Sugar Hill, Easton) there are very small towns who are committed to education but increases in school budgets are a hard sell. SAUs and districts include groups of towns and school boards that complicate budgeting. Participants saw benefits to regional collaboratives, and participants wanted to keep local schools (e.g., transportation would become expensive and time consuming).

Opportunity for an Adequate Education

Participants also talked about the components of an adequate education, as part of the base formula for calculating the cost of adequacy. They discussed outcomes and barriers that create disparities. For many, the current cost of an opportunity for an adequate education (~\$3,800) was considered not enough – a new formula is needed that accounts for the realities of school and educational costs. General comments about the costs of an adequate education included (also see Appendix):

- Adequacy was seen as a “political football” with a disconnect between political definitions and actual school budgets
- Ludicrous we can provide an adequate education for \$3,700. It’s more than the R’s. It’s the transportation, food, special education, behavioral issues. It’s the entire package. Everyone has different needs and services. All these services are essential to an adequate education – the state’s contribution is just not enough
- It is really contingent on what is needed in different school districts. (Equitable funding versus equal funding)
- State is passing costs to municipalities in general. If the state or government says that we’re required to provide a curriculum, service, class, then the state needs to be paying for that or helping to contribute to that, (e.g., if four years of science required, provide funding for four years)
- “what we have in Pittsfield is below what we consider adequate for NH students”
- The short term, budget to budget, is not working. Get us longer than just budget to budget.
- “Why does my zip code determine my educational quality?”
- The lack of research in what is actually equitable funding for students
- The state requirements is not supported or sustainable locally

Student-Centered Learning and Standards

Participants noted that what we know about development and science behind learning continues to evolve. Standards and teaching have evolved, and student-centered learning has redefined adequacy in comparison to the past. These changes require professional development, attention to class size, new positions and attention to the how families and students' lives have changed and what they need to achieve positive outcomes later in life. These realities require higher levels of funding that cannot be placed solely on communities. The standards that guide outcomes often come from the state or federal-level, and the funding formula needs to account for what it truly costs to meet the requirements.

Student Outcomes, Access to Curriculum, and Opportunities for Electives and Extracurriculars

Students in NH have varying access to curriculum, electives, advanced classes, career and technical education, and extracurriculars that support positive outcomes. Schools have varying means to pay for access. For instance, in Rye the PTA and foundation money play a huge role in funding extracurriculars and enrichment (e.g., artists in residence). Smaller schools may not offer physics or calculus. Instead they offer to pay for students to attend other districts, cheaper than hiring more teachers. Stratham can afford curriculum that meets the evolving needs of students and afford professional development that supports teachers' ability to provide competency-based learning. For other communities, their students are performing in the bottom 5% of state assessments and improvements are difficult without larger mechanisms for assistance. There is a concern among these schools that even getting to the state standards is a challenge under the current formula (e.g., two years of math). Communities find they are cutting the music, art, and woodshop, need to offer business classes but cannot afford a teachers, pay for online language courses instead of hiring teachers, and rely on donations and volunteers to promote opportunities for students that support their future outcomes.

Teacher Quality and Salaries

Participants described the disparities amongst teacher quality and salaries. For some districts with low per pupil spending, they become a "training program for new teachers who then move on." Participants noted that teachers often gain expertise after 5 years, and so students in these communities often face repercussions in opportunities for achievement. Participants agreed that teachers need opportunities to gain expertise so they can provide high-quality services for students, and this includes fair salaries statewide. Specific examples captured during the focus groups included (also see Appendix):

- Locally ability to employ people is directly tied to the quality of schools. This is often lost when we look at the school budgets. Property values are tied to great schools (x2)
- There is redistribution of wealth that is also occurring in the disparities in teacher salaries alone
- The boards are throwing money at problems but not actually fixing the problems. Dover is a community that serves the role in preparing teachers to move on to higher paying districts.
- Turnover rate of teachers is an unwanted cost
- Marlow, teacher compensation is the lowest in our SAU, it's hard to get teachers to live out in the middle of nowhere to teach students. Have great teachers with compassion
- Stratham, the most important thing in the classroom are teachers. Excellent teachers will teach children at an unbelievable level regardless of where (military bases, tribal schools, rural schools). There is emphasis on making sure teachers have everything they need because good things will happen, however, money is not the issue. There are places in the state with less money where they do a good job
- Would the state subsidize teacher salaries? Maine does this

Staff and Specialists to Meet Student Needs - Social and Emotional Services

Along with a focus on high quality teaching and salaries, participants also elevated the changing needs of students which require specialists and added support staff. For instance, some districts and schools rely on grant funding to hire social workers or share specialists to consolidate costs. These strategies do not provide long-term solutions of effectiveness. The increase in mental and behavioral health needs persist and a lack of investment in these areas of staffing creates major challenges for schools, families, and the students. A participant from Bow talked about three new hires specific to mental health, and another participant talked about the need for additional paraprofessionals. They both noted in their stories that it was hard to justify the costs that come with these essential personnel to people in the community when they are unaware of the issues.

Meeting students' needs and providing an opportunity for an adequate education goes beyond academics right now (e.g., safety and security staff, mental health counselors, paraprofessionals, mentoring and coaching programs, trauma-informed care and teaching, opioid epidemic. Schools are spending funding on social emotional curricula and writing grants to generate systems of care for families and students. The grants help with initiating structural change and supports, but funding is limited once they need to become part of an annual operating budget.

School Infrastructure

School and municipal leaders also focused on school infrastructure, supplies, and equipment. Districts asserted they cannot build sustainable infrastructure with the current formula. Participants noted that the absence of state building aide makes poorer districts poorer. The formula needs to include adequacy for building needs and maintenance. School infrastructure is a big need and leaders want to fix it (e.g., need to put into a trust funds). Participants felt that there is a need to think about how we can raise funding for schools – need to look at other states' in relation to NH unique revenue structures.

Access to Technology

Especially with the pandemic, access to technology was seen as a key component to providing an opportunity for an adequate education. Where it used to be a luxury in the past, now with remote learning and regarding jobs of the future, technology is considered essential for learning. Districts have found that technology-based curriculum has been a huge financial burden. Parents and families have variable beliefs, knowledge, and abilities when it comes to purchasing and using technology appropriately (e.g., cognizance of screen-time, instructional tools and apps vs. games only). Participants in the focus groups agreed that there are major equity issues with technology. Dover is updating their curriculum, and the general public struggles to understand the expenses. SAU 58 (Northumberland, Stratford, Stark) have 1:1 technology, but internet and cell service is a challenge in rural areas. Participants want to see the state play a role to move technology forward across NH schools.

Special Education and Unanticipated Out of District Costs

Special education and unanticipated out of district costs was another area of providing opportunities for an adequate education to students in NH. The costs of special education in communities is rising. Participants gave the following examples:

- Student enrollments may be down, but special education costs are going up. This falls on the backs of tax payers. Everyone knows who the student is. The ethics of that are very challenging as people talk about budgets to support their public schools, and knowing who the student(s) are that are causing costs to rise. It's always going up, can't skip, is unethical

- Significant cost for transportation of special education students. 2008 to 2018 big jump in budget for special needs. State says need to provide it, but won't support paying for it
- Some school districts have 30% of budget going to special education needs
- Special Education funding: It is a significant portion of our budget each year – by law we have to comply. It is impossible to plan for it – small communities can hardly afford it, and there is no way to make up for it besides making the tax bracket fluctuate depending on the amount of special needs students admitted each year
- Special education funding isn't good for our tax base. It's great for the students. We (Jaffrey-Ridge) have work-force housing. We have better opportunities for special education in schools
- Farmington, main factor is considering how to support transient students with budget needs
- Looking at special education and out of district placements, can costs 100,000s a year, these expenses should be largely funded by the state
- IDEA not always funded at 40% locally
- Opioid crisis, we have students coming in addicted at very young ages
- Need more special education teachers

Measurements for a Comparable Education Across Communities

Participants discussed: What should we measure to know whether students have received a comparable education no matter what community they live in? They discussed a variety of measures with a focus on student assessment and outcomes, teacher turnover and performance, community/school level measures in terms of socioeconomics, and college and career outcomes.

Varying Views on Student Outcomes and Assessment

Municipal and school leaders asserted that the Commission needs to focus on outputs, if those are not adequate then consider inputs. Starting with inputs does not work and potentially stifles creativity and innovation. Kids need access to a quality education across the state, and this can be measured via learning outcomes. State minimum academic standards are challenging because districts due not have the same access to funding and resources, so the outcomes will vary. Participants want schools to focus on resilience, as more people are unsure about the world and their future. Perhaps moving away from liberal arts and focusing on job training in post-secondary opportunities and careers. Participants varied in their support for competency-based learning measures, standardized testing measures, and the need to understand where students are holistically (including basic needs, and social and emotional needs) to determine costs and returns on investment. Specific ideas for measurement included:

- Look at programs of study and student transcripts
- Standardized testing: track the students over time and follow the trends during and after; track the students who are excelling and others that need support. See if there is an overall increase
- STAR assessments: focused on growth, talks about individual students which is good
- Schoolboards need benchmarks to understand and evaluate how things are going. We need to measure but it is often difficult to align benchmarks and tests that actually show if a school district is doing well and students are growing. Competency education makes this challenging (x3)
- Demonstrating individual students can master competencies (x3)
- PACE initiative: performance assessment of competency education – NH is on the right path to allow kids demonstrating knowledge (x3)
- Hesitate with only looking at mastery of competencies, unless there's state level definition

- Against high stakes testing (e.g., SATs); mid-terms and finals are not an adequate representation of what a student knows. A test presumes level playing field. But there isn't a level playing field.
- We need multiple measures – this is really important
- Test scores, not enough. How do you measure a little deeper? It's not a number on a test

Teacher turnover and performance

Participants suggested looking at teacher performance and turnover. They felt that professional development needs to be an investment in all districts and be considered a part of an adequate education for students.

- Some funds for professional development should be part of an adequate education.
- Math and reading among other curricula change constantly, so adaptability and training is key because it will continue. Constant changing curricula makes it hard for teachers to be good.
- The ability to hire and retain and inspire great teachers –don't steal from other towns but be able to attract teachers to NH
- Teacher performance is key indicator of student performance

Economic Factors in Communities/Schools -- Compare Spending and Assess Equity

Participants discussed the economic disparities across the state that are exacerbated by funding distributions. Grandparents on fixed incomes are raising grandchildren, and they do not have additional means to pay for higher property taxes. Participants noted that this area of differentiated aide, along with aide for English language learners (ELLs), was included in a bill two years ago that argued for higher aide and wanted schools to demonstrate how they used the funds (did not pass). School leaders described some of the supports they provide in their schools like a food bank and washing and drying machines for students at Dover High. Smaller towns have concerns about food insecurity, but they also feel they have social capita that allows for social issues to take precedence in the community. High levels of free and reduced lunch impact local budgets, and the addition of larger class sizes in some cases put further strain on students and teachers.

Additional supports are needed to aide in the disparities that come with limited economic resources among students, families, and schools. Participants felt that school boards needed to "push back" on disparities while remembering the strengths of local schools and what local communities can provide. They suggested the following ideas:

- Measure how much money is being put into our richer communities versus poorer communities
- Everyone should be able to have the same opportunities whether you're in Franklin or Bedford
- We need to look at equitable spending instead of equal spending for the success of all students.
- Arbitrary formulas/band aids are making it more difficult for communities and driving court time

College and Career Readiness Outcomes

Focus group participants suggested tracking students' outcome after high school (e.g., 2-year, 4-year, military, jobs). School and municipal leaders discussed the need to provide students with opportunities that allow them to be resilient and independent, use their voice, and think critically. For instance, at Lisbon regional they have exit outcomes (statements) that describe what a graduate is. Students will explain why they are a graduate. A participant mentioned that in Dover, students' competencies in the career and technical center are easier to show than competencies among students who are not involved in the programs.

Participants wanted to see greater alignments between local schools and local businesses/trade. There is a concern that students are going into deep debt for a 4-year degree, and participants wanted to make sure students are ready for the world in a variety of ways. They mentioned that there are a lot of careers out there with good incomes that are not focused on four-year education. Each level of education and teaching builds on the next with realistic needs and skills. A question to answer is: at the end of education, are the kids meaningfully prepared to move forward in their lives? (i.e., meaningful outcomes that are valued by the community, state, and families).

Raising Funds for Public School

Participants discussed the question: what is working and what problems exist in the way we raise funds for public school. Perspectives focused on costs of funding per pupil, the problem with property taxes, and the reliance on grants (which help but also do not allow for long-term planning).

Costs of Funding Overall and Per Pupil

Participants want the state to recognize the changing needs in schools, especially as remote learning may play a larger role in schools during the phases of pandemic and racial disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes continue to be a problem. Some communities like Kensington are high performers with high teacher compensation and student outcomes. Others communities are consolidating to make sure they have large enough schools to provide an adequate education. Participants acknowledged that legislators were putting education first and making it a top priority. They also discussed the need for certain funding to make sure NH remains a productive state (e.g., early intervention, pre-K, and full-day Kindergarten). They also wanted the Commission to consider that there are challenges with the focus on a per pupil cost and the ability to raise extra funds varies. Some specific notes about suggestions and challenges include:

- The disparity between the per-student cost between smaller towns and larger towns (smaller town wants to leave) is a problem
- It's very challenging. The amount of funding per student (~\$3,800) is very hard to work with. It costs around \$14,000 per student to educate them and coming up with the rest of it is very difficult for a property-poor city
- We keep defining school funding in NH as this per student costs. There is some relation between cost and disparity; however, there are communities like Cornish that spend a lot per student because there are so few students. We are not full. The value will come down.
- Some towns get more money from the state or federal government like Manchester
- Towns have donors and investors in education and others want to but don't have the means
- The restoration of stabilization and adequacy has put us in good shape for the past five years
- Annual determination of cost per student per year is based on the expenditures reported by schools. Less transport and tuition, food and supplies, etc. This number changes every year. Take the average cost per student, and take 70% of that, that should be the amount that is adequate.
- Better for the state to provide a base level of funding then a per pupil, instead of just a per pupil
- Back in the 90's when we proposed it, we said that the cost of an adequate education would only be about 50% of the cost per student per year. We need common sense and courage to go through with this

Small and Rural Communities' Property Taxes and Limited Capacity for Development

Participants again focused on the challenges with relying on property taxes and the disparities that emerge in smaller communities where there is limited property and capacity to develop. Shifting

demographics around the state creates challenges with enrollments for smaller schools in rural districts. Not all small towns have the money or enough properties to fund the school system. There needs to be a better balance for small and rural towns that includes support from the state. This could create opportunities for more equitable funding. Rural communities are seeing property values decline in some cases, and other cases have very little room for new housing or businesses. Some communities cannot attract new businesses and residents because of the high tax rates.

Reliance on Grants for Programmatic Improvements Reduces Long-Term Planning Opportunities and Hide True Costs

These same communities may rely on grant-funding to improve schools and programs, but they need some stability to do some long-term planning. For instance, a participant talked about their district applying for grant funding to provide school security measures. They had to apply quickly and spend the funding quickly. The district was wealthy enough to have plans drafted, staff, and legal services ready to go. They had 8 projects approved. This would be harder for districts with limited means. Big grants like Nellie Mae helps with changes and training that can distort the cost per student to the public eye. It could look like the district is wasting money, but in reality they are not. The way that the numbers are presented to the public is very important when schools are relying on grants to meet expectations and standards they cannot afford locally (e.g., behaviorists, social workers, math interventions). Local communities may need support to attend for extra costs (building aide, special education).

Distribution of Public Funds for School

Participants wanted the funding formula to focus on needs, equity, and fair distribution as they responded to the question: what is working and what problems exist in the way we distribute funds for public school.

Options for State-Based Funding and Reduced Reliance on Property Taxes

Municipal and school leaders talked about changing the source of revenue for school districts to the state to avoid raising property tax. They wanted property taxes reduced, as they are concerned with the continual rise as costs increase. Participants talked about the need to preserve local schools' choices on how they spend the funding distributed by the state, and they also talked about the benefits of regional efforts. Participants acknowledged that a state-based tax has long been argued against in NH. They still wanted to explore other options for bringing in income for schools (e.g., a sales tax, tourists). Participants wanted communities and legislators to help develop creative ideas for a sustainable source of funding that does not include raising property taxes further.

Unfunded Mandates

A problem with the current distribution of funds are state mandates that remain unfunded. Participants wanted the Commission and legislators to remember that every time they pass along a requirement it is another stress on the school district. Elected leaders need to know the effects of the bills they pass in Concord and how it affects locals across the state. Participants mentioned there is a continuous flood of unfunded and underfunded mandates that need to be looked and reviews at the legislative level.

Research on what the true impact on communities and people will be can help to prevent the disparities and inequities that exist in schools. The mandates from the state, when unfunded, puts a strain on local budgets. If the state requires certain items for education then it should be funded by the state. If the school district is required to have it, then it should be included in the base adequacy funding. It is a big problem when the definition of base funding is less than what is required by law to provide. The formula should include mandated costs across districts (e.g., transportation, special education, school lunch and

breakfast). Participants noted that the systemic lack of fairness in distribution creates winners and losers in the state, and the ebb and flow of funding creates feelings of instability for school board members.

Creative or Alternative Models, Collaborations, Regional/County Solutions

Participants reiterated throughout the focus groups the need for changes in how education is funded in NH. Communities are unique and regional and state supports are needed. There needs to be room for growth and change (e.g., the Virtual Learning Academy) and further efforts to close the gap between the legislative definitions of adequacy and the funding available and provided by towns.

Participants wanted to move away from “donor towns” and focus on more broad-based solutions. They mentioned that the formula needs to change as does the legislation. Participants noted that the calculations of assessed values seem to be three years behind and not knowing from the state how much they will provide creates too many uncertainties which make it hard for long-term plans. They would like to see more accountability. The hybrid system is not working between state and local.

A focus on collaboration and innovative solutions that move beyond a reliance on property taxes is desired. Think out of the box to meet additional costs and maintain some standardization. Participants wondered if a reduction in superintendents would help. For example, New York City has fewer superintendents than NH. What sort of cost savings could occur and be distributed elsewhere? Participants wondered how consolidation and regionalization in some areas could also help, perhaps raising funds in a regional manner. Having more students in a districts (4000 versus 400), we automatically have more opportunities that we can offer. Regionalization is needed as people are trying to afford “their own” which is difficult. Belonging to group purchasing commissions is helpful. Regionalization is important to maintain backbone of the state and regional names are used in a lot of other state efforts. Also, one size will not fit all (cities, rural areas, central, north). Each area is different.

A Better and Equitable Future for Students in NH

While discussing the questions posed during the focus groups, municipal and school leaders pointed to the need for a better and equitable future for NH students. Within this broad hope and belief, they continued to emphasize the need to be collaborative while understanding the unique needs of students, families, and communities and the resources they hold. Participants noted:

- Students need skills and opportunities to gain meaningful outcomes, not just put on a track
- The need for balance between accountability and equity
- Access to technology and accounting for the additional costs
- Investing in parent and family engagement
- Creating sustainable funding and distribution that afford equitable opportunities to students
- It’s more than keeping property values up. It’s about college and career readiness for kids
- Students value does not change because of what their parents earn or the degrees they have
- We need a big conversation and accept the responsibility for a better future for everyone
- The needs of our students in 2020 are so much greater. The expectations are greater. The behavior of students is different, and the family structure of students is very different as well.
- There has to be a better way for rural NH to educate their children.
- If we don’t do something different – then we are just going to keep repeating the same problems

Needs for Local Engagement, Decision-making, Education for Communities

Participants agreed that people in communities need to learn more about schools, education costs, and budgets to show what an opportunity for an adequate education looks like. Participants noted that many

legislators vote on things they do not know anything about which makes any shift in policy very difficult. Education about school funding and creating trust among the bodies making funding decisions is necessary, as is local democracy and decision-making. Municipal and school leaders continued to emphasize the balance between state and local as well as the need for change to a school funding formula that is not working for families, students, and communities overall in NH. For this change to occur, participants felt that the public also needed to learn and understand how NH funds education. Community, family, and student engagement and learning are necessary. This final theme speaks to the efforts of the Commission to engage numerous stakeholders from across the state and the efforts of organizations who are creating accessible means for local understanding of school funding.

Questions and Suggestions for the Commission

This final section includes a selection of questions and suggestions for the Commission put forth by participants. A full list can be found in the appendix.

Suggestions

- The Commission shouldn't be making these decisions in a 'bubble'. Tour schools in high rent vs low rent districts and see for themselves the disparities that exist between communities
- If it turns political nothing will be done. The Commission has to be politically neutral in order to provide equitable funding and quality education for ALL students
- We hope that you take this input seriously and really support some of the findings and data from the questionnaires
- Go back a few years and capture the data from the past and see how they compare now
- Hope the group will come up with something beyond "he said, she said" to move forward
- Hope that when talking about what adequacy is, adequacy for what? Take the long view. Tracking our graduates two and five years out after graduation
- Need to keep definition of adequacy clear and simple, adding to the list could jeopardize change
- We see a lot of our older population only relating to what they grew up with. The Commission needs to see the differences between then and now
- Is there an opportunity to take some aspects of funding schools (e.g., special education, teacher health care) and fund those at the state level? Then keep other pieces at the local level, take bigger and less predictable costs and pool them at the state level. Hybrid system for funding to begin at least
- What if we just funded health insurance at the state level? Then you take that costs away and maintain local control for schools
- Use the buying power of the state for big ticket items and then local costs go to curriculum and other costs. It could bring average premiums down
- The issue is not redistribution of the money already raised
- The Commission needs to look at overall how much money (3800\$ per student) and what is that money really giving our students
- How are we going to look this? We have continued to discuss and disagree about the amount of money that always seem to be the part that comes to forefront of the discussion over and over. Town B spends this. Town A spends this. That's not equitable. We need to step back and identify clear measures across the state. Going back and forth about state and local – we want local control. We think it's a state responsibility. There are many competing priorities that differ by town. Key question: What is the level of the problem? state or local?

Questions

- Why do we have so many inadequate systems and think about where combinations and collaborations could occur? People may not like it, but it will reduce disparity issues in some schools like in the northern and middle of state
- Communities like Berlin and Allenstown have necessary facilities that the state needs (like a state park that is used by everyone, a federal prison) how can the state acknowledge these facilities and help pay for education?
- What is the basis of adequacy and what can local communities add on?
- What is the return on investment for funding?
- Is adequate based on inputs or outcomes?
- If we were able to take a long view – what kind of person do we want coming out of our schools? What kind of young adult do we want people to develop into? Look further out from HS graduation. Active members in community and democracy.
- Is there a way to gather other data to measure the social / emotional / health success of the school? (e.g., parent satisfaction, emergency services, staff satisfaction. Social health determinant to measure)
- Are we even supporting and using the right proportion, if that is the only money we are going to get?
- What other places could they slice a piece of pie to go to education? Restaurant and meals tax
- Do we see NH as one state? Or separate communities that need to compete with each other for increasing tax base?
- Who are the stakeholders who can bring in the other perspectives related to public health and others areas of need?
- Can the state provide a floor for local schools to stand on?
- What are the selling points when there are fewer kids in schools and more seniors who need medical benefits?
- What are the teachers seeing?
- What will we settle on? A sales tax? Direct money to those who need it the most?
- Where did the sweepstakes revenue go? How much goes to the lottery goes to education? – what percentage go to education?

Appendix: Focus Group Notes

NOTE: The numbers and assertions in these statements may be arguable. They are notes taken during the focus groups and serve the purpose of helping the Commission inform their decisions as well as hear and understand local perspectives. Overall, these notes and findings serve as a means to help enhance discussion during the process of studying school funding in NH.

**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?**

Overall Comments about Decision-Making and Change

- The funding formula we currently have now for school funding is not working.
- We need to move forward in some way. It won't be simple or straightforward. The Commission needs to look at tax payer information and education that reveals the layers of educational needs and adequacy, looking at all the pieces that play into that.
- Revisioning the focus on "every town for itself" mentality
- The Berlin's of the world will struggle
- Need a mechanism that focuses on needs.
- The funding distribution, to do this fairly, means certain locals will get more money than others, needs to be unequal in distribution in order to make it fair for students (e.g., Rye doesn't get any, Berlin gets a lot)
- Would love to find a way where we are not pitting towns against one another
- Let's think about students as a state rather than students as within municipality – it takes the focus on individual towns and students – need to reduce the adversarial narrative and work together
- People kick the cans down the road, but people are not governing well regardless of party
- Grandiose plans get torn apart in the legislature.
- Minimum mandate for every student gets (certain amount) then municipality provides on top of that – towns build on top of base.
- Find a bucket of money and then find an adequate way to get it to those who need it most.
- We need to fix the cost per student to really have an adequate education (\$3800 is not enough). The commission needs to come out with a statement on what is adequate. The state of NH needs to adhere to the mandates set in stone by the Clairemont decision made by the Supreme Court.
- There are concerns on the fairness of funding formulas (property evaluations specifically), and the numbers provided for adequate education are off.
- Formula needs to stand on its own to create what is needed and then figure out how to pay for it NOT the other way around, the way it was done, ex: how much is available and then creating a formula was created
- The Constitution was written in a way that does value public education – is minimum standards doesn't meet the level it should be
- Special Education rules and laws in NH are good and exemplify the spirit
- Adequate and Appropriate – subjective terms and needs more definition – it's left to individuals to decide and often not knowing – they are motivated by a number rather than an outcome for individuals
- When I moved to NH I said, "this is what inequality looks like"

- Embarrassed by NH which is one of the most inequitable centers of NH
- Not an educator, but not a fan, hope the group will come up with something and move forward
- Playing Robin Hood with property tax will never be good enough
- Any changes in system are an existential threat because the charter would need revisions that may include some towns to go off on their own – property wealthy towns would leave and not be part of a cooperative district.
- Many legislators vote on things they don't know anything about which makes any shift in policy very difficult
- Be bold – we have big problems – rearranging the chairs is not enough
- It is much more difficult to make the argument to keep costs down and reasonable – people are running towns, and people are running schools
- There are benefits to forming cooperative school districts.
- We need education around the community to help argue what is needed in schools
- A moment in the next 12 months – the value of education delivered matters and the time to train teachers
- It was easier when we could say things were required by law
- Belief that Bow is affluent and supportive of schools.

Property Tax Impacts and Local Costs – Burdens and Concerns

- Property tax isn't the way to raise the funds for education. Have to look at a different way. Don't know what way. Can't allow those who can afford to pay to be the only ones who access.
- There are pockets of affluence in NH but statewide level needing to provide more employment opportunities to help increase the tax base that can help with more revenue
- The way that we are funding is not working – especially in two town districts.. A smaller town has hardly any businesses so the cost isn't as spread out. The cost per student is around \$22,000. While a in a larger town there are more businesses, so costs are spread out. The cost per student is more like \$14,000. It doesn't look fair.
- Dover is below average in terms of taxes that pay for education which creates inadequate education (teacher's salaries are smaller; students educational quality takes a huge hit compared to other districts).
- Huge issue in relation to any affordable housing efforts – but the impact on education and tax rate would cause people to think twice about building.
- Bristol has more affordable housing – attracts multiple children as well.
- Need some sort of statewide funding, even though income tax is bad word in NH.
- Funding is the most difficult, especially in terms of local housing.
- Look at Florida's homestead tax. If someone owns property in NH and is not a resident will have to pay 10% more. Focus on vacation home owners, not forcing elderly people to pay more. The out of state home buyers don't live here, so they don't vote
- Property taxes alone are not a sustainable way to fund education for a variety of reasons (e.g., fixed incomes, older residents, no children in schools, property taxes not the way to fund education)
- Property tax is what it is. Slicing it up and coming up with another solution.
- We are asking too much of the property taxes. We are funding a lot already on the local level, so it becomes burdens
- It's hard when the one lever is property tax

- The cost of school through property tax is under scrutiny locally, and when there is an increase it is noticed. People don't like it.
- Every town in northern NH considers itself overtaxed, so is everyone at the bottom or is it perception? Some communities don't want to have to spend money on education.
- Meetings can be cantankerous. Towns with lakes and older properties are more capable of funding. Social inequities exist.
- The issue in meetings when everyone is in the same room and the knowledge that some people are paying a higher share than others, and some may be better able to pay than others.
- The question of adequacy will just become taking from one community and giving it to another. This has happened before and continues to be a problem. Let them know we don't want to be a donor town.
- People worked hard and they deserve the tax rates and benefits when they live in a wealthy town
- Hard to fight for a small school to survive in a property rich town
- This is all has been a series of poor communication, and we can't just fall back into boxes of donor towns
- Variations in property values and commercial development – it makes the tax base variable and changes per district – from a state perspective becomes per pupil – state funds a minimal adequate education. This is a sham. This funding needs to be repurposed.
- Kensington may not get as much money per student from the state, but others with a lower tax base could benefit more from that money.
- It's not a matter of evaluation, it's a matter of debt – using property tax is regressive in terms of where people are financially and what they pay
- I don't understand the SWEPT tax and it's ridiculous – towns get to keep surplus. Small towns can't pay for all their schools and municipalities need – you see well-off towns are no longer able to manage the formula anymore – it's not just the Claremont's and Berlin anymore – there are major problems coming to roost for more towns, families, property owners.
- There are 700 houses in Lyme – there is concentrated wealth which allows it to go okay, but people are moving because they can't pay the property tax anymore
- Dover – Tax Cap Budget creates difficult situation. New High School with CTE center. People love new building / some push back. How the past 20 years ago School Boards decisions affects now...How City Council decisions affects education and timeframe
- Northumberland, Stratford, Stark SAU 58 -- We don't have businesses. Our taxpayers are the residents. Any increase to the budget is impact to the households and our rural area. 80% of budgets salary and benefits.
- We need another source of funding beyond property taxes – not sustainable
- Corner cannot be the property tax.
- When towns try to keep high quality for everything then it drives taxes very high.
- The cost of living in the upper valley is high – The property tax is a measure of people's debt.
- We cannot rely on local property taxes – the legislature has got to step up and deal with it. It is their responsibility
- We have to figure out how to fund an adequate education beyond the property focus
- The property tax focus is a screwed-up system at best
- The disparity between the property value of the house you live in and the income you earn

- Access to small strip of land on the land helps keep the tax rate low, the town next door spends a lot of taxes
- Out-of-staters buy homes in neighborhoods
- Part of the problem is disparities of income and property value and disparity of what people think should go into schools
- The slices of property and basing educational funding on property taxes is not sustainable – there are water lines from 1800s, high school built in 1965, had to build a new one – there is no room for sustainable infrastructure
- Kensington - Local area has substantial variation in tax rates – related to commercial activity in the district. Hampton Falls has more commercial – so reduction in tax rates.
- Elementary (200-240) and Junior High (100-130) in Rye – the school board budget passes with few problems, affluent, low tax rates, lose local control when sending kids to Portsmouth High School
- Need to even out the disparity across the state – model of donor down is not desirable – sensitivity with retired community who have fixed incomes – school district would absorb the costs potentially and then staffing would need to change
- Marlborough (east of Keene), K-8 school, funding mechanism does not work – lower end of the socio economic school – no tax base from industry or vacation property – higher IEP requirements which raises the costs of students – socioeconomic factors influence behavioral issues which increases costs for supports – top tier of education tax rates in NH – has a vacation home in another town and the school has more -- everyone dislikes their tax rates – Keene has different schools that are different because the areas are stratified by wealth.
- Do not want to see donor towns come back – Bretton Woods, Washington Hotel, can't afford extra taxes – need to look at average income and not assume wealth in certain towns – which put burden on those who are not wealthy
- The systems are night and day in our community. Property value in one town is contingent on the property value in surrounding towns. The taxes can be the same in all towns, but homes that have a higher property value will be more popular especially since they're all paying the same amount of taxes and where taxes are cheaper. We need to shift the responsibility to the state. The system is setting up contests of taxes in towns, and it forces the elderly to move out
- ^^ Agree, the biggest culprit is how the state views how they collect taxes. Some counselors that are appointed to boards tell the boards how to spend their money and it isn't working. As much as the schools are trying to do everything they can, the money they're getting is spread so thin and budgets are tight.
- State of NH system works great if you have a ton of property per kid, but not great if you have a ton of kids and not a lot of property.
- Correlation of wealthy tax base and investment in education and what they can provide (ex. Bow)
- Rye – Reduction of number of students attending to school – when tax-payers see this they believe there should be a reduction in taxes – but school funding is going up
- Since we don't have sales tax, everything is based on property tax. City government keeps hearing that people / businesses can't have the taxes continue to go up.
- Kearsarge SAU 65 -- district, regional high school -- Include property rich and poor tax, 40% distribution, 60% average daily membership of students, Lake towns and poorer towns, Warner has high taxes – challenges for high property taxes, More affluent towns allow for some balance of stressors.

- Workforce or affordable housing in untenable in this situation – 10 unit with 10-30 kids – could get funding from the building – impossible under the current funding formula.
- Milton - Small groups that come out in December/January to push against a raise in taxes cause an inability to raise teacher wages or cost per students, property taxes are high because there isn't a lot of property
- Difference in property tax rate – It's not working for the tax payers
- Top 20 tax rate in the state. Bear Brook State Park – there is no more room to build more or increase the property value in the town.
- Dover sued because it was unconstitutional, and they won. We are not common law here, and every town is seen as a silo. I think that we should have a funding mechanism by county, instead of city/town wise. The whole system has to be changed. When NH was less populated, the system that is in place made sense. Now, it doesn't (x4 agreement)
- Pre-K-8 and then they go to Pinkerton via tuition. The state's funding is very tight (talking about the 3-4 thousand given versus the 14-16 thousand needed), and they make it work but not at the expense of other things. The support we get is good but for town meetings and school board budget meetings only have a turn-out of 150 people versus the 31,000 people that are registered to vote in Chester. The system is broken, and it only will get worse especially in these polarizing times. We need a system that puts these taxes into a general system (send to Concord like any other taxes, and redistribute them accordingly).
- Overall NH doing well – but varies community to community whether education is an investment to make. Is it the right investment for taxpayer funds?
- People are willing to pay for the higher tax rate, but some push back
- Stratford – supportive of education, but as property tax burden gets higher there is push back from residential property
- If you don't have other property to generate taxes other than residents, it is difficult
- Tax impact is extraordinary. The amount of money we pay for schools with taxes, 63.7% of taxes go to schools. Average cost of a student is about 16000, but the state only pays 21% of that. That needs to change.
- Supreme court named the tax structure of NH unconstitutional, and part of my work helped implement a plan to change these taxes. They came up with the concept (they as in the govt) Donor Towns, and I am convinced it was unconstitutional. We made mistakes in our early plans and so did legislature. We have a new plan that could fix this thing with a low state property tax rate that is constitutional.
- Communities are supportive in the north country – the districts we represent do a good job at preparing students but the tax burden is difficult to work with. The tax rate is hard for property and makes it difficult for people to move and grow.
- There is tremendous community support for our K-8 program (west chesterfield). How can you move from NY (a very economically burdensome state) to NH (live free or die) and struggle so much with everything we have to pay for (taxes, groceries, etc....)
- Funding is based on population, Older town, 50 students in schools
- Bristol is the largest in the area – 600 to 700 children in the district – huge impact on their budget
- Tax rate Hebron is 10%, Bristol is 25%
- Franklin only gives ~35% of funds to school, and ~65% to municipalities... We struggle with the disparities within the city because at both a state and local level we are hit hard with financing

schools. There is a lack of taxable property and a lot of students here compared to surrounding towns and cities across NH.

An Aging State and Considerations of Wealth and Limited/Fixed Incomes

- We see a lot of our older population only relating to what they grew up with. The commission needs to see the differences for themselves.
- Retirement costs have gone up drastically – state used to fund 35% of retirement – now 0% and is all passed on to local districts. Really big change.
- Allentown 40% oldest residents – not understanding the current education needs and student supports needed – because they reflect back on their life and don't understand why it's so expensive now. Unwillingness to pass budgets.
- Educating the community, esp. older residents, on the needs of school budget
- Many of these^^ things are not considered important to older community ("When I was in school...") and funders/donors even if things like these are mandated by state officials
- Portsmouth – had to go through zero increase budget
- The current funding system is not working at all. The money is very short lived.
- Younger families are voting yes and voters who said no to the budget were from households without any children
- Wealthy town with older average age and lower number of kids, school board has to argue strongly and explain and justify why certain things are needed (ex. ADA bathroom)
- ^Agree. I am older, living on a limited income, and the way the taxes are going up, I am going to have to sell my house and move on to a cheaper town.
- Rye is really is two towns – wealthy coastal homes, and elderly people over 65 who are born and brought up in more modest homes – people will have to move out if taxes go up – 30% over 65 – significant amount on fixed income – charging around 6,000 – medium home ~650,000 means around \$6,000 homes --- higher is going to start pushing people out of their homes.
- Kensington has high tax rates, a perennial issues, retirees may struggle to stay in the area.
- Elderly cannot sustain the increases in property taxes when costs continue to downshift
- Some demographics in towns have changed dramatically while others have not – like north of Hanover and Lyme – this may be more expensive homes and tax rates – but people are on fixed incomes
- It's the young families who show up to vote and approve the budget to get what we need in school – there are people here with fixed incomes
- There's not a lot of aide for older groups in communities or people with low-middle incomes – you don't qualify for anything

School Leaders are Managing Diverse Needs, Demographics and Funding in Multiple Communities, small towns and districts

- Make the funding formula cost-efficient for a small school
- Expansions are difficult when you just don't have the trained people to make it work – the availability is not here, for instance Amazon
- Difficult to keep students here. People may leave and come back.
- The smaller town (mostly single-family homes) pay higher taxes per household than the larger town (more low-income families, less single-family homes), which creates unrest between the two communities.

- How will the state support communities meet the definitions of adequacy? Smaller towns and lack of local resources
- Learners have different needs and different pathways – district an hour away – students that aren't the right fit for traditional school, they have different options. That we can't afford here in Berlin.
- Four school boards and four school districts – there is an immense disparities across all – near bottom in per pupil spending – training program for new teachers who then move on – all new teachers creates a repercussion on student achievement – teachers hit their stride at 5 years – this pits town against town
- Statewide – the system is not sustainable
- Funding, distance – same district – schools are not equal in size, age, accessibility, over capacity – difficult to manage
- Superintendent manages a district in terms of different sized towns and diversity of economics
- Towns in a district are pitted against each other
- New Castle - Incredibly wealthy town with a lot of resources - Tiny school, tooth and nail for funding, building renovation – 50 kids K-6 - SAU 50 – with four other towns that are bigger - Lowest tax rate in NH – fighting not to close the local school
- SAU 35 – Sugar Hill, Easton - Northern part, very small towns, Commitment to education, Budgets are subject to local approval, Any increases to school budgets is a hard sell
- SAUs and districts include a group of towns and school boards which makes budgeting challenging
- This group represents some of the smaller and remote districts – it's important for smaller towns to keep their schools – not just folded into larger towns.
- The small towns have a high fixed costs without a lot of students
- Small towns are not as property rich in terms of business
- The nature of many NH schools is small towns and districts

Adequacy including Disparities and Outcomes - Most important components of an “adequate” education to consider 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?

General Comments about Costs

- Ludicrous we can provide an adequate education for \$3,700. It's more than the R's. It's the transportation, food, special education, behavioral issues. It's the entire package. Everyone has different needs and services. All these services are essential to an adequate education – the state's contribution is just not enough.
- State is passing costs to municipalities in general
- It is really contingent on what is needed in different school districts. (Equitable funding versus equal funding).
- Why are there existing disparities between districts? (Rural versus suburban and urban)
- It is all contingent on the comprehensiveness of education (starting with pre-k or kindergarten)
- “what we have in Pittsfield is below what we consider adequate for NH students”

- If the state or govt says that we're required to provide a curriculum, service, class – then the state needs to be paying for that or helping to contribute to that. Ex: if 4 years of science is required, should pay for that.
- Statewide cost of education. Clubs, sports, extra services.
- We don't have to get to perfect. We have to get somewhere.
- Frustrated knowing the long history that this has been happening. Just get us somewhere.
- The short term, budget to budget, is not working. Get us longer than just budget to budget.
- Money is a barrier
- Rurality and urbanism
- "Why does my zip code determine my educational quality?"
- The lack of research in what is actually equitable funding for students
- The state requirements is not supported or sustainable locally

Standards, Knowledge of Student Learning, Student-Centered and Personalized Learning, Time in School

- What's changed: there are so many standards and teachers aren't able to have the innovation and creativity because they are doing so many things
- Know a lot more about science behind learning and development – people don't know this context and could benefit from understanding this
- Education has changed around student-centered learning: Training, class size, teacher professionalism, teacher development. There is no long-term comparison, but new professionals and different positions are evolving.
- There is more personalized education for students.
- 175 school day year in Manchester, Rye 180 school year
- Time on task makes a difference – Rye gets five more days than Manchester
- Need to reduce disparities across the state instead of having towns like Newington having more and others having less
- The standards coming from the Feds and state need more attention regarding what it truly costs to meet those standards.
- Regional schools around Lancaster – 60-70 children – pay extra for regional attendance, most students have options to get into Berlin Tech, Littleton school access, variety of options through regionality – many go to college
- Setting a statewide standard of what we provide for services then figuring out how much it will cost
- Adequacy is a political determination and a political football
- 4% discretionary spending, adequate is 30% . There is not a connection between political definition and actual school budgets.

Staffing – Teacher Quality and Salaries Matter

- Pittsfield has turned into a training school district because contracts are negotiated locally, and because of this, teachers can earn 20,000\$ more in another district and it has formed a competitive nature (competing for salaries) in NH. Locally ability to employ people is directly tied to the quality of schools – this is often lost when we look at the school budgets – property values are tied to great schools (x2)
- There is redistribution of wealth that is also occurring in the disparities in teacher salaries alone

- Need a way to find and retain quality teachers
- The boards are throwing money at problems but not actually fixing the problems. Dover is a community that serves the role in preparing teachers to move on to higher paying districts.
- What's the cost for that? Teacher professional development
- Turnover rate of teachers – that is a cost
- Marlow - Teacher compensation is the lowest in our SAU, it's hard to get teachers to live out in the middle of nowhere to teach students – have great teachers with compassion
- Stratham – within the education system itself. The most important thing in the classroom are teachers – excellent teachers will teach children at an unbelievable level regardless of where (military bases, tribal schools, rural schools) – there is emphasis on making sure teachers have everything they need because good things will happen – however, money is not the issue – there are places in the state with less money where they do a good job
- Very important to have high quality teachers
- We are asked to provide an education to students, it's a service industry, we have lots of employees – if we cut the budget, we will be cutting people, not pencils. It is a difficult process.
- 1 principal for 50 kids
- 1 teacher per 8 kids
- Have to have a nurse, where is the nurse
- Be consistent with average salaries
- Teachers without a certain state-wide base salaries were provided support from the state to get good teachers across the state
- Would the state subsidize teacher salaries? Maine does this.
- Where is the food services person in the definition?
- Social workers are supported by grant funding which helps address student needs. Grant funding is going away and struggling how to find ways to pay for it to keep them in the district.
- Needing to consolidate local schools to afford costs and staffing.
- Struggles with teacher contracts
- Teachers turn over ~20% each year. Salary is 75% of average. Young teachers, high turnover because of salary. ~ \$30,000 starting salary for teacher in Pittsfield

Added staff and Specialists Require Creativity with Local Funding (ex. Mental Health, Wellness, and Safety)

- Ex. social worker in Pittsfield – paid half by foundation / paid half by individual. But then have to get it into the operating budget.
- Schools don't exist in isolation – opioid epidemics, slash to mental health services, there are no investments
- We used to be able to have large class sizes and it be manageable but now is it the opposite.
- Because we have to have so many other positions now (social work, psychologists, etc.), it is difficult to fund teachers.
- Differentiated needs for students, and the very definition of special needs and mental health issues. Levels of anxiety, stress and depression has greatly increased, and we don't have the resources to support them.
- Three new positions in Bow districts – all three about mental health – not traditional instructional hires. Skills and costs which are essential to the students today but hard to justify to the community when they don't know.

- Academic interventions are needed to – we need math interventionists to help kids behind catch-up, but we don't have the staffing, intervention, and supports to catch up
- Student disruption – takes a lot of time and personnel – would be best addressed with a para support in the classroom. But older residents don't understand this need.
- The student and family demographic has changed – psychological and mental health needs are greater now.
- Need more supports for school counselors, behavioral health
- Example: Social worker was cut from Pittsfield and they found that it caused so many more problems and it was more costly in the end. A Personal grant was given for this position instead of public/state funding because it was that necessary.
- The number of students who have needs now is greater than before. The amount of paraprofessionals needed is greater because of this.
- A long time ago, have 30 students in a classroom felt fine for teachers because the student demographic was different, but now even with 12 students it can feel like 50 because of how the demographic has changed.
- Full time behavioral specialist finally, needed it for awhile
- Allenstown - Para professional help is only special education – would like to add regular paras in the classroom not assigned to individual students to help the teacher
- We need to broaden the definition of adequate education: There are so many more students that need paraprofessionals, and one on one time with paraprofessionals for students who can't be in classrooms.
- Opioid epidemic – we have kids being raised by grandparents. We fund social workers here because of the population we serve.
- Wellness (counseling [we are behind in this because we can't afford all of the positions], mental health specialists, sports and clubs programs) We are turning out human beings not just math or science students
- Suicide prevention, and other mental health intervention programs
- We need more psychologists, but ultimately had to cut them from the program because we had to get science teachers in order to be accredited, while we didn't need the psychologists to be accredited
- There is increased need to support student beyond academics.
- This disparity starts at a very young age – elementary school age children, mental health problems, in the family
- School security and safety – received funding for a resource officer but have never been able to recruit a qualified person. Small police force, have to fit into the pay structure, struggle to find a way to afford this position. Is there a way the state could help with legislation – some state resource to enable or recruit qualified applicants for school resource officers – had to take it out of the budget for now.
- Social workers
- The needs of the students in the Lisbon regional area affect the budget a lot (opioid crisis, the amount of special needs kids).
- Behavioral specialists
- Clinical psychologists giving private practices spaces in buildings to support parents and students access – don't have to pay, just have to provide small room.
- Innovative program – mentoring and 1 on 1 coaching to help with school work

Social and Emotional Services and Curricula

- Behavioral health, SEL, etc. --- (not currently in the mix) Mental Health and social emotional learning is essential – students need extra support for coping and to learn in the system. With extra support the barrier is reduced – if all schools are doing it then should it become part of the universal definition
- Opioid epidemic – services in schools expected to be addressed in schools has changed – SAU has a position just focused on providing extra services – funding local supports not happening
- Mental health tools and resources are not readily available and behavior escalates and not ready to learn because they are focused on other issues. The state doesn't help on this.
- Mental health and social emotional health for students
- Social / emotional services – used to be getting at home and no longer
- How to help them find success but also not disrupting the other students in the room
- Social emotional curriculum
- Social Emotional Learning – funded by grants Project AWARE grant (5 year) then Systems of Care – were able to set up some systems but now needing to put it into the operating budget.
- Berlin's need for current SEL - \$300,000 in budget –
- Social emotional behavior issues have changed – however this is similar feedback from 20 years ago
- Student Outcomes, Learning and Curricular Access -- Electives and Extra Curriculars Varies by Community, College and Career Readiness, Career and Technical Education, Student Outcomes, Standards and Resources
- Smaller school does not offer physics or calculus – offer to pay for students to go other districts who want to take the class – cheaper than hire more teachers
- Rye – foundation and PTA money plays a huge role in extracurriculars and opportunities (like technology and artists in residence)
- Measuring student outcomes and measuring teachers perceptions of outcomes – we are living in silos and not always seeing every side.
- Now in a society to build adequate education – for in person and remote learning – the needs for those methods have different amounts and the state needs to recognize this
- The formula underfunds the minimum standards – so many things going into technology budget and the formula doesn't include that – doesn't include any support services OT, Speech, but required in the minimum standards.
- Need to figure out what we want to see happen – look at the outcome, then figure out how to pay for it.
- Our students are performing poorly (bottom 5% in the state in assessments), and it is difficult to improve them without assistance.
- Stratham, kids have a lot resources in the school. PTO, class sizes are not huge, curriculum meets the needs of the students and evolves – getting in line with competency-based learning and figuring out how to be effective – lot of professional development funding available from community – budget meetings can be contentious, but not always.
- Hope that when talking about Adequacy is, adequacy for what? Take the long view. Tracking our graduates two and five years out after graduation. Limiting to think about HS graduation as the end.
- The main question is: What is the return on investment for funding?

- The main purpose of the school is to make sure those students who matriculate to assume jobs in the community or graduate toward college work – not sure we are even getting to these standards across the state – 2 years of math etc. – if we ask students to achieve at a higher level, they will
- Look beyond our what the requirements are and how we're preparing our students need to for life beyond HS graduation. Students are taking on far beyond what is currently 'adequate' in order to prepare for the future.
- Need to offer Business class but can't afford to hire a business teacher
- It depends....it depends on the student. Graduate from HS and be involved in a post-secondary program that leads to an industry credential.
- CTE facilities very different around the state – some amazing facilities – not what Berlin is able to offer to students...
- Language services (previously cut from Pittsfield)
- Woodshop and other critical skills (previously cut from Pittsfield)
- Advanced Placement classes also had to be cut
- Meeting 5 language courses by including 5 online classes – can't higher the number of teachers needed
- District wants "special" extras beyond adequate
- Every school should have art, music, languages
- Marlow - Rely on volunteers and PTA groups for activities and extra curriculars – IEPs have increased, the needs of students have increased. It has not been easy to pass budgets; taxes keep going up because of Special Education and out of districts placements – it pits the town against each other. Not sure how many more times we will have to go through it – a couple hundred people who live here, a couple hundred who come in and out, nothing else in town so few funding streams and struggle to maintain what we have.
- 3 major disparities – lack of extra curriculars, \$0 for staff to do extra curriculars, volunteer staffing to run these programs (ex. Green Club, cheer club, track club). Doing well today because of dedicated staff.
- Music and Arts program – part time art / music teachers – this year getting full time and maybe being able to build up programs
- No budget for instruments – dedicated Superintendent – 40 instruments donated to the school. Passionate music teacher. Hopefully put together a band and choir.
- It is only happening because of dedicated people. Not because they are compensated.
- Franklin - We can't afford an art teacher in the elementary school, and I have had to cut 35 teachers in the past ____ years.
- Milton – small district and poor district – everything under disparities was an issue, Hard to attract good staff and keep good staff. We are teaching all the courses we need to, to provide an adequate education, let alone electives

School Infrastructure, Transportation and Supplies, Tools, Equipment are Difficult to Maintain

- No phones in the classrooms or voicemail in the schools --- E911 phones – even to get the 80% from state, had to fight locally for others 20%
- Absence of state building aid has made the poorer districts even more inadequate
- Berlin – closed an elementary school building – now in two buildings

- Berlin – 100-year-old building, with 17 entrances – safety issues –
- Adequacy for the building needs
- Facilitation management is poor – build expensive buildings then no plan for maintenance
- Built their own school in Hebron – and lease it for a dollar to the district – town pays for the school and the maintenance of the building
- School infrastructure is in big need and haven't been able to fix it – need to put into a trust funds. Past two years all 5 trust funds were very low – past couple years the voters passed all the trust funds. Enough surplus to go into trust funds, none back to tax payers, but nothing is left for building maintenance and addressing needs.
- 50+ year old buildings.
- Transportation costs in Hebron - 300 square miles of territory, Large commuting time for students – getting to work and going to school, Very large district.
- We need to think about how we can raise funding for schools – need to look at other states' mechanisms in relation to NH unique revenue structures.
- Access to Technology
- Technology
- Technology has changed along with the expectation for the classroom – it used to be a luxury and now it's a necessity – kids need to know how to use technology in their jobs.
- Having a technology-based curriculum is a huge financial burden (to all school districts)
- Within remote learning (COVID), there was a difficult time with families and students for technology. Either they didn't know how to use it, they didn't have it, or the internet wasn't adequate.
- iPads for every student in elementary school – this seems ideal, but parents often don't like it – it is too video game like – using abacus and common household objects, and geometric puzzles are better or the combination is important ---- so this goes along with the point that one-sized fits all solutions is not a fix-all.
- Internet and iPad creates access to education as well – if you can't bring teachers into the community – these resources do open up the world for students who experience that disparity in terms of access – games not always great and need to use care with screen time
- Technology has to be part of it as well – in today's world this a huge one
- Dover –how to make the money work for curriculum and technology. These are the bottom of the list. Teaching is a people business and funding has to go to teachers but there are other needs. Equity is a HUGE issue with technology access. Can't ignore it any longer.
- Scale is a huge issue and opportunities, access to technology, internet access
- Northumberland, Stratford, Stark SAU 58 -- School districts were able to have 1 to 1 technology but can't do remote learning because not internet access and cell service. During COVID-19 – 700 meals / day to three communities. Pay for getting families to get back cable / internet connection. Some teachers don't have internet access. Remote learning is going to continue to be a problem for the northern rural area.
- We're behind on technology – very uneven and not equitable across the state.
- Dover –updating curriculum is expensive and general public doesn't understand updating. Technology (1 to 1 device access) and internet access is going to be affect learning going forward. This isn't equal across communities. In one year, Dover can't purchase 1 to 1 technology, remote learning brought this to the center.
- The state needs to take a role to move this forward evenly across NH – esp. for technology

Special Education and Unanticipated Out of District Costs

- Special education students who require a special program – movement among towns causes a huge budget dance and panic due to expenses for smaller districts with lower funding – this should/could be a state burden that would relieve local stress and support the students --- this goes along with unanticipated costs and uncertainty
- Unanticipated funds we have to pay for out of district placements in general – have some educational trust funds, but not enough
- Student enrollments may be down – but special education costs are going up – this falls on the backs of tax payers – it can run towns six placements for students – and everyone knows who the student is – the ethics of that are very challenging as people talk about budgets to support their public schools, and knowing who the student(s) are that are causing costs to rise – it's always going up. Can't skimp on special education.
- Need to consider out of district placements – court ordered – unexpected bearing of costs that is burdensome to the district overall – and that doesn't break the backs of taxpayers overall.
- Special education services have increased dramatically
- Opioid crisis is something that wasn't back then, and we have students coming in addicted at very young ages.
- Remote learning resources – need more special education educators
- Significant cost rise for transportation of special education students. District tries to keep students in the school district even if student has had to move because of unstable family situations.
- Facing black boxes of special education costs increases – school board wondering how to manage and control the costs in comparison to overall school budgets – legal costs have been climbing – out of control locally, have to pay – so how do you budget for that responsively
- Special education has definitely increased.
- 2008 to 2018 big jump in budget for special needs. State says need to provide it, but won't support paying for it.
- Funding formula – more weight given to the special education. Some school districts have 30% of budget going to special education needs. More money should go to special education needs
- **Special Education funding:** It is a significant portion of our budget each year – by law we have to comply. It is impossible to plan for it – small communities can hardly afford it, and there is no way to make up for it besides making the tax bracket fluctuate depending on the amount of special needs students admitted each year.
- The next crisis we will see is on the burnout and stress on educators, when we are asking them to do more than they were ever prepared to do.
- Towns against children – how we handle special education is challenging – one student moves in and it blows up the budget and then everyone knows who the student is – then you villainize that student and it is so unethical
- Three out of district placements that is more than three teacher salaries – places on the burden on property taxes.
- Farmington –Main factor is considering how to support transient students with budget needs. Student basic needs being met.
- Looking at Special Education and out of district placements, can costs 100,000s a year, these expenses should be largely funded by the state – the problem is you don't know until October following the years – how do the moving pieces need repair

- IDEA not always funded at 40% locally
- Northumberland, Stratford, Stark SAU 58 -- biggest impact on budgets is special education costs and lack of services and placements. We're sending students to MA for placements (\$100,000 - \$200,000 / year). Well over \$18 / 1000.
- Special education costs are taking up a huge chunk of budgets that causes costs to go up, which is challenging for funding other parts of education – show where the money is going.
- We have a higher percentage of special ed students, and although we get help (\$\$) with it still isn't enough.
- Special education funding isn't good for our tax base but it's great for the students. Because we (Jaffrey-Ridge) have work-force housing, we have better opportunities for special education in our schools.

What should we measure to know whether students have received a comparable education no matter what community they live in?

Varying Views on Student Outcomes and Assessment

- Start with the outputs. If those are not adequate then what do we need to consider for inputs. Starting with inputs does not work and stifles innovation and creativity – need to focus on outcomes and work backwards.
- The outputs doesn't mean the kids have to be equal across the state but they have to access to quality education
- Learning outcomes are key (not just about having an iPad or certain courses) – not the details of who, with what, when and where
- State minimum academic standards – when districts don't have the same access to funding and resources -- there will never be the same returns even when funding is provided to meet the standards – town has to come up with the rest.
- We need to look at resilience – there are more anxious, unsure people of where their place is in the world – we have a generation of kids who are able to meet their needs – the feel of the curriculum is behind where we need to be. Moving away from liberal arts toward job training in higher education
- Need to balance in public schools – look at what's important, preparation in the world, and funding.
- Look at programs of study and student transcripts
- Everybody growing with the acknowledgement that not everyone will end up in the same place
- Competency-based education – inter-lakes schools – one to one computer – wealthy towns, seasonal high-tax payers: what are the components of adequate – this is a giving up term – we should talk about critical competencies – we want people to have different ways to demonstrate their learning -- it is not easy to create a curriculum in this way but the results are beyond adequate.
- Standardized testing – track the students over time and follow the trends during and after – track the students are excelling and others that need support – see if there is an overall increase
- STAR assessments – focused on growth – talks about individual students which is good – looking at end placements (college and career readiness)
- Changing benchmarks makes it difficult to measure progress over time

- Schoolboards need benchmarks to understand and evaluate how things are going – we need to measure but it is often difficult to align benchmarks and tests that actually show if a school district is doing well and students are growing. Competency education makes this even more challenging.
- Common Core and Competency-Based measures help
- There are as many paths to an adequate education as there are students in many ways, especially with a focus on individualization and competency
- Benchmarks do not attend to social emotional issues always - This is a complex inclusion in teaching nowadays and is not evaluated in standardized testing.
- Measuring went from number of hours in the classroom to mastery of competencies
- Demonstrating individual students can master competencies
- Engagement of student is important
- Hesitate with only looking at mastery of competencies – unless there's state level definition
- Measuring how students are challenging themselves and progressing
- Against high stakes testing, ex. SATs. Mid-terms and finals are not an adequate representation of what a child knows. A test presumes level playing field. But there isn't a level playing field. So, until we have that – how do we measure and compare.
- PACE initiative – performance assessment of competency education – NH is on the right path to allow kids demonstrating knowledge
- PACE is the way we need to go
- Individual students need different things
- not sure how to broadly measure but think it's important to measure the starting point for students and the tools they have to acquire the state's definition of adequate.
- Remote nursing teacher – competency and traditional teaching experiences – We are in a pivotable moment for being creative – outcomes, competency-based learning, teachers, growth of the student is very individual – how do we optimize costs and use the tools we have to reduce the costs of education – there are other ways we can do outcomes – example: online learning shows learning objectives and measures, a rubric, feedback is important for growth. Bring in teams to help students off-track back on. Create environments that are motivating and emotionally and socially responsive – combining traditional and online to create the best of both worlds – reduce costs, think outside the box.
- People may think this means we need a standardized assessment. This has not shown that these do not help improve school outcomes
- Need a system where students have learned something – PACE
- We have to be committed that students will reach certain levels
- NCLB (2001) – at the time we have 50% proficient – how much does it cost to make 100% proficient? That is the question we are asking
- We need multiple measures – this is really important
- It is hard to capture the richness of what happens in the classroom and then it boils down to English and math scores. We don't do analyses of cohorts, just third grade year to year.
- Observations need go beyond assessments that are single or simple scoring – need more measures that tell student learning as a whole
- Change the word adequate

- Focus on competency-based education – could tell students were learning in different ways – graded aspect of education goes away and you acknowledge that some students will excel and others will find a different path
- We want to measure achievement (yearly), not a huge fan of standardized tests but I understand the need for them
- We changed our system in 2005 to move to a competency-based system, and we have seen that other states have followed.
- Measure students on a continuum of mastery instead of textbook based etc. will specifically help special needs students excel
- Test scores, not enough. How do you measure a little deeper? It's not a number on a test. Do something like a special needs education plan – for everyone. Assess on that. Talking with the student, with the family.
- Test scores – ok – but not the only thing
- Individual students – what is their full potential? Measure to that
- Students need to do X which means X.
- When we get to the point where we understand what students need then we can allocate funding – change the curriculum – need to identify an AIM – graduates who come here stay here – there are not a lot of jobs here, people who are staying are not having children – we are not offering incentives to stay.
- What is the basis of adequacy and what can local communities add on.
- Identify outcomes first, then how you measure those outcomes, what is the expectation of the public education system – ROI.
- Need to focus on what do we want students to know – SAU 16/17 – seven-point scale of what it is – we don't know what students will have when they graduate – some of those jobs don't even exist yet – so this aim or outcomes first is nuanced.
- Now we are teaching kids to think – students now access information rather than memorizing. Our world of work and learning continues to change
- We have not figured out what our students to know, so therefore it is hard to determine cost
- Research how comprehensive the services and tools ARE available and how many students are making use of these services, and how well they are being used. This measures the opportunities that are being taken advantage of, without measuring raw data like standardized tests.
- Learning outcomes – shift toward competency-based education – what do students actually learn – this is the view of adequacy that I am most sympathetic

Teacher Measures

- Teacher turnover in our district
- Teacher training needs investments in all districts and needs prioritization – good teachers are really important – teachers need to know it's important – they need time and money to go and do it or access it in the schools.
- Some funds for professional development – should be part of an adequate education – teachers are curious and want to know what's next are the better teachers – learners.
- Math and reading among other curricula change constantly – so adaptability and training is key because it will continue – constant changing curricula makes it hard for teachers to be good.

- The ability to hire and retain and inspire great teachers – don't steal from other towns but be able to attract teachers to NH in towns to teach kids – teacher performance is key indicator of student performance

Economic Factors in Communities/Schools -- Compare Spending and Assess Equity

- School boards need to push back on this discrepancies
- Not everyone can afford iPads for everyone – need to look at local gifts – lopsided handing down from the legislature – we are losing what is good about local schools – what are local strengths beyond an idealized or legislative definition of adequate or standards that do not match local costs and capacity.
- Measure how much money is being put into our richer communities versus ours
- Everyone should be able to have the same opportunities whether you're in Franklin or Bedford
- We also need to look at equitable spending instead of equal spending to ensure the success of all students.
- Measure whether a school system is providing an adequate education.
- Arbitrary formulas and band aids are making it more difficult for local communities and driving court time
- I would be hard pressed to argue against anything local communities provided.
- Rye - Budget – discretionary spending is not very much. It is contractual in transportation, teachers, food etc.

Economic Disparity among students -- Poverty and Low-Income Students

- Barrier – biggest problem is economic disparities across the state – under the constitution they do and this has been reaffirmed – the state and federal level – we need to help level-out expectations and outcomes and ability to achieve those – state we have obligation to set and level out the meet those outcomes and expectations
- Raising children by grandparents – not a lot of expendable money – look at
- Look at free and reduced lunch
- Look at how grandparents may not have the money to spend more on their properties.
- The bulk of the differentiated aid comes from those students who receive free/reduced lunch and those who are labeled as English Language Learners. A lot of these forms are not being filled out the way that they were before. There was a bill that was introduced two years ago before the legislation that proposed higher differentiated aid and demanded that the schools showcase how they're using it. It didn't pass.
- There is a growing socio-economic disparity in Portsmouth but parent support is there (PTA) to fundraise for 1 to 1 technology
- We have a food bank at Dover high because of the food insecurity, and washing/drying machines because we have students who don't have access to those at home.
- There is a real concern about food insecurity, smaller towns have better social capita so local orgs can make more of a difference in social issues within the student community.
- 66% of our students are on free/reduced lunch. We need to look at poverty levels and how it impacts our budget.
- We have a struggling population of students already, so we have larger class sizes which puts a strain on teachers and in turn, we have a high turnover rate

- What happens is that disenfranchised students – instead go to ‘home school’ and they don’t have the same opportunities

English as a Second Language

- ELL (doesn’t really affect Franklin, but other cities like Manchester and Nashua)

Outcomes - College and Career Readiness

- Drop-out rates
- Knowing who go to or plan to go to 2-year, 4-year, military, job market – not sure after they leave high school (trying to keep track, but challenging when there is not a strong alumni network)
- There are career planning software available for guidance, but often budgets are too small to buy – so this limits some of the quality and technological advances for the schools
- From a first-year student professor at UNH, it would be nice to have students that can function in the real world along with their general ability to think critically and follow a rubric. There needs to be a balance between students functioning independently and being able to function in a classroom.
- We want to turn out students who are not fragile, and working on student voice
- We have exit outcomes and have statements that describe what a Lisbon Regional graduate is. We are transitioning into a defending stance where instead of just having these labels (you’ve met the exit outcomes) of what makes them a graduate, they have to explain why and their process as to what defines them as a graduate. It kind of gives the graduation more of a meaning instead of just a piece of a paper, enhancing the educational experience.
- Dover has a great career-technical center, and the competencies are very different from those students who aren’t in CTCs. The competencies are easily shown in CTC programs, but not shown as easily in those students who aren’t involved in these programs.
- We want to prepare our students in how to deal with the real world (social media platforms specifically)
- Hanover company – needed CNC controllers, coders, manufacturing processing – couldn’t find people in locally, so partnered with local schools to get alignments with trade schools – not help in NH – created a pathway from Vermont who were willing to help
- To what extent should CTE be integrated into the curricula – for instance Dover has integrated college and CTE. Some places are integrated in this way and some are not.
- Barriers – ultimately it’s the fact we’ve sold young people a bill of goods. We have emphasized that the road to success is that students go on to a 4-year degree and that is the path – people go into deep debt to get there – students work hard to go 4-year schools. Need to expect students ready to move to the next level and teachers help them get there – it does not mean a four-year degree, a technical school, need necessarily life skills in the world
- Once we know what students need to for the world – we can cost it out and move forward. The main focus on US is about defense budget (employ a lot of people). The focus shouldn’t be on what the federal government can do, but we in NH can do a lot of things if we focus on what we can have happen.
- Data does not show college graduates do better than high school graduates. College needs to be affordable.
- Trade schools and future of students – HVAC – lacking number of people who have these skills – reliable, trained, collaborative, adaptable to math and technology.

- Thinking about trades like welding – starting salaries are average \$55,000, and the trades need to be emphasized again – welding, plumbers, electricians
- There are a lot of careers out there with good incomes that are not focused on four-year education
- Each level of education and teaching builds on the next with realistic needs and skills.
- Thinking of retirees, help people stay in NH, losing young people, need connections, need create investments in the state's youth
- At the end of education – are the kids meaningfully prepared to move forward in their lives – not just an art class but meaningful outcomes that are valued by the community, state, and families.

What is working and what problems exist in the way we raise funds for Public School

Costs of Funding per Student and Overall

- We need to define adequacy by district based on municipality of city, town
- There is no other mechanisms where we determine per person how much we pay –
- We don't do per senior citizens like we do per pupil – thinking about how other public services are funded – beyond per person
- Now in a society to build adequate education – for in person and remote learning – the needs for those methods have different amounts and the state needs to recognize this
- Kensington (120 students – capacity is 100 higher) – cooperative middle school and Exeter high school – teacher compensation is among the highest in the state – educational outcomes are among the highest in the state – high school and middle school are high performing – 24,000 to \$25,000 per student, middle and high school \$10,000 less than that.
- Looking at budgets post COVID and looking at the race war in the country are two factors to redetermining what an adequate education is.
- Covering early starts and interventions (full day kindergarten), offering access to resources to all teachers (whether you're in a poor school or rich school) which further gives access to students to those resources. If we can prove what these kids need to stay in NH and be productive in NH, we can tell the legislature how they need to pay for it and what they need to pay for.
- Annual determination of cost per student per year is based on the expenditures reported by schools. Less transport and tuition, food and supplies, etc.... This number changes every year. Take the avg cost per student, and take 70% of that, that should be the amount that is adequate.
- Had to have a large geographic area to make the schools large enough to provide an adequate education
- Better for the state to provide a base level of funding then a per pupil, instead of just a per pupil
- SB2 Budgets – this has come up a few times
- \$23,000 in Rye – lots of applications for teaching, never had a budget fail
- Feds and the states framework for Preschool-12 is good and that there is still some local control in terms of funds and grant prioritization – there is always controversy and competing priorities for those funds – but the ability to have a local school board and administrators is working
- Back in the 90's when we proposed it, we said that the cost of an adequate education would only be about 50% of the cost per student per year. We need common sense and courage to go through with this.

- The disparity between the per-student cost between smaller towns and larger towns (smaller town wants to leave).
- Less than \$4000 per student that the state provides is not adequate.
- It's not working for Pittsfield. We've joined on to any lawsuit that is available.
- Waterville Valley – elementary, then Regional school. There are more students coming in – capacity for 45 students in elementary – it has pods for K-2, 3-5, 6-7. \$22,000 to 23,000 per student, great education in the area – need to reduce disparities across the state.
- 39 students (New Castle), hope to gain students otherwise it would become a retirement community – tuition kids out in middle and high-school. We lose the majority of control and its costly
- Not working - great disparity on what we're providing to students. Pittsfield \$16,000 / student in spending, Rye: \$24,000 / student. As the amount accumulates over the years, there is big disparity in the amount spend on students.
- It's very challenging. The amount of funding per student (~\$3,800) is very hard to work with. It costs around \$14,000 per student to educate them and coming up with the rest of it is very difficult for a property-poor city.
- Marlow – elementary and tuition out middle and high school to another SAU – small and rural (25-65 kids at any given year), currently 50
- Analytic Decision-Making formula
- Some towns get more money from the state or federal government like Manchester and others don't
- Quality teachers cost more
- Bethlehem – little trouble with school budget and able to put forward raises in teacher budgets, and it was not problem
- Some towns have donors and investors in education and others want to but don't have the means
- The legislative body has tried to figure out how we are paying for the education of our children. Education has to be a number 1 priority. A priority list has to be put into place, with education at the very top. We have to stay away from the stabilization and/or the reducing the amount of \$\$ that go into education.
- The restoration of stabilization and adequacy has put us in good shape for the past five years.

Problems with the Focus on Property Taxes

- Changing the source of revenue for school districts to the state in order to avoid raising the property tax. Giving the voters a voice! Legislature has said no to all broad based.
- Property taxes need to be reduced- by 2049 they will have gone up by 100%. We need to create a way to get additional money (perhaps a 1-2% sales tax) to address this issue.
- If it's based on local property valuation – that's a problem
- Pittsfield's total property value declined
- Allentown – no more wiggle room. No available land – for new housing, for business.
- Berlin – highest or second highest tax rate for the state. Difficult to attract business industry.

Reliance on Grants for Programmatic Improvements Reduces Long-Term Planning Opportunities and also hide true Costs

- Berlin relies on grants so much for school and programs. Need stability to do some long-term planning. To know what you have.
- State responsibility, different payment structure
- Allentown, the incremental amount that was passed over the two years, FY 20 / 21 budget, need to at least keep what was passed
- Grant funding available for school security measures. Had to apply right away and spend money quickly. District got 8 projects approved, wealthy enough district to have the plans already drafted up and ready to go – if you don't have a facilities staff and attorneys ready to go, then these adjustments are harder to make.
- **Grants:** Big grants like the Nellie Mae grant was there for the Change and training and that distorts the cost per student to the public eye. It looks like they're wasting money, but in reality they're not. The way that the numbers are presented to the public is very important.
- District surviving on grant money to provide, behaviorists, social workers, math interventions etc. – without we wouldn't have these things
- Capacity in districts is a problem when it comes to accessing grants potentially
- Local communities have to create trust funds to attend for extra costs (building aide, special education)

Smaller Communities and Disparities in Property Available or Building Capacity

- Around the state shifting demographics and continued enrollment continues to be an uphill battle for renovations or keeping smaller schools open
- Funding from local property taxes immediately creates disparities between towns. If you can't meet the quota, there is no choice but to ask the community for more funds in taxes, and it creates less opportunities for towns who have less annual household income. Not all small towns have the money, and not enough properties or property value to fund the school system.
- If the balance between state/govt funding was more equitable for these lower income, smaller, rural communities was adjusted to create equitable funding it MIGHT work.

What is working and what problems exist in the way we distribute funds for Public School

Options for State-Based Funding and Reduced Reliance on Property Taxes

- Everyone is going to do things differently – towns across the state differ – needs to be more choice and options to use the minimum funding the way they choose versus a prescriptive measure. Need equal access the funding – opportunities for a focus on student outcomes
- Small schools, different wealth – per pupil costs are high for all, for instance transportation funded at the state level which would relieve local costs, \$20 or more per student – overhead is duplicated several hundred times throughout the state in terms of facilities, transportation, etc., need to focus on economy of scale. Costs per pupil are reduced once students leave their local elementary toward a regional middle and high school.
- Mandatory identified special education costs paid for towns – and special attention for other needs identified

- State-level funding (people referring to this as adequacy that is a narrow definition of adequacy and is inadequate). There is a process in which state personnel go around and determine adequacy and that does not seem like a rigorous process.
- 2004 and 2006 adequacy formula, state didn't want to get into the mechanism to provide the money it would need, it would require a statewide tax – people not interest
- The state budget is tight and there's a lot to worry about – but the state representatives need to hear the voices to support education
- Need to diversify other options for bringing in income. Whether it's sales tax, or tourists.
- Need creative ideas
- Don't necessarily think it needs to be sales tax.
- But other creative revenue streams – tourism going to education, not just to state budget
- We are not going to get income tax and sales tax in NH
- Need to find more sustainable source funding. Regressive tax structure is not working and it hasn't worked for a while. We need a different tax structure to fund something as essential as education to fund at state or at least a larger regional level.
- We have SWEPT and local School Property. Local property tax holders are paying their school system, some aid through federal and state government but it is not sustainable and not working
- A statewide tax is never going happen
- Like any other NH tax, the tax has to be proportional and the state will use that money based on need.
- We need to stay as a donor tax, or we need a state tax – we need a broad-based tax to fund education
- If I were to pick a tax, I would choose a sales tax not an income tax. Sales would take advantage of tourism allow that to reside at the state level so they can make decisions regarding the wealthy and poorer towns
- Hard to sell a sales tax in NH even though we have come close. It would not add enough, but it would make it better than working the property tax system to help education out – this is not sustainable
- There is not a high likelihood of a sales tax – the Overton window is shifting on public policy. It has to move beyond property taxes right now.

Unfunded Mandates

- The funding does not match what the state mandates
- Thank you – knowing that Commission is trying to be thorough. As a group of legislators, know that every time they pass along requirement, it is another stress on the school district. Knowing the effects of the bills they pass in Concord and how it affects the local.
- There is a continuous flood of unfunded or underfunded mandates that needs to be looked at and reviewed at a legislative level. Doing the research of what the true impact is going to be might help prevent these disparities.
- The mandates that the state puts upon us aren't funded by the state and it puts a strain on our budget. If the state is going to require us to have certain items for education, it should be funded by the govt/state.
- Monadnock case, if a school district is required to have it then it should be part of the adequacy number

- Identifying mandated costs across districts should be included (school lunch and breakfast, transportation, special education)
- Big problem to define it as less than what the districts are required to provide by law
- “It’s a systematic unfairness that creates winners and losers.”
- Berlin is getting special funding support with CARES Act, because of Title 1 and maybe some other schools don’t get it.
- It’s ebb and flow from school board perspective, can’t count on it

Creative or Alternative Models, Collaborations, Regional/County Solutions

- There are benefits to forming cooperative school districts.
- How we fund education has not changed for a long time – if students are taking classes in technology then how will they be ready for the next stages in life – we should be using more of what we learn in school to match what is needed to work, live, and learn later in life.
- Each community needs an opportunity to use their unique gifts and means for providing education to varying numbers of students. It provides opportunity for community-based supports and strategies – can meet outcomes in the community without having to following strict A, B, C prescriptions to meet the goals.
- More defined adequacy becomes the more you prevent innovation – the more prescriptive the less opportunity to learn, grow, and change – for example the Virtual Learning Academy
- There is a huge disconnect about legislative definitions of adequacy and the funding available and provided by towns – Have to close this gap before we can move forward
- Focus is on collaboration
- Locally we have one way to raise funds which is property taxes. State can raise it in other ways – budgets passed with both parties leading the way have consistently voted to raise taxes and place the burdens on the local communities
- If the federal govt funded special ed 100% with all their mandates, we would actually be able to keep up with the things we need to do and the tax payers would not be complaining so much. When we have to do budget cuts, it doesn’t come out of the special ed budget.
- If the property tax was distributed equally at the very minimum it would be better (maybe take after Vermont and their statewide property tax instead of local property tax).
- **Keep local schools, keep local power but worth hand in hand with admin (SAUs)*
- Unbalanced, need to redistribute. No one wants to close schools even if there is lower capacity. Like in Danbury, NH, too far to bus students. People like having elementary schools in their community. Otherwise the transportation is too long.
- The pledge for funding is not going to be short-term – we need to think outside of the box to meet the additional costs and to have some standardization
- Why do we have so many inadequate systems and think about where combinations and collaborations could occur? People may not like it, but it will reduce disparity issues in some schools like in the northern and middle of state.
- City of New York have fewer superintendents. NH has 101 superintendents. Could we have a count-based school system? Larger cities can have a superintendent. Then counties. The SAUs were designed for alignments – reduce overall costs, pay teachers more, reduce the number of superintendents we have to pay.
- Opportunities for consolidation and regionalization, which can factor into how funds are raised.

- We need a formula that equitably distributes across the state, need to raise funds on a larger scale regionally or another methods
- Regionalizing makes sense, figuring out and looking at what resources are revealed.
- Nothing is working in terms of funding. It is the case of Emperor has no clothes. There is such a large political disruption for overall change.
- Need to make changes, but it needs to happen via tiered approach – people will acknowledge that it needs to change, but the radical change will cause some anger
- We keep putting band-aids on it – placing it at the local level, definitions of adequacy, makes towns pitted against each other – it makes it a constant challenge – we need to let the state do it or not
- Finding alternative resources that make sense and not relying on donor town – more broad-based solutions
- The formulas need to change, and so does legislation.
- The calculations of assessed values seem to be three years behind and knowing from the state how much they will provide, too many uncertainties which make it hard for long-term plans. It's a roll of the dice what you will get back from the state.
- State needs to be more accountability. Legislators don't have skin in the game. It's whenever they get around of it, doing it based on information that is far behind, don't have to answer questions because it comes up at local board meetings, legislators don't have anything to answer. The hybrid system is not working between state and local.
- Having more students in a districts (4000 versus 400), we automatically have more opportunities that we can offer
- Issues locally – regionalization is needed as people are trying to afford “their own” which is difficult. Belonging to group purchasing commissions is helpful. Regionalization is important to maintain backbone of the state.
- One size will not fit all (cities, rural areas, central, north). Each area is different.
- Regional names are used in a lot of other state efforts
- Balancing school volume in rural areas is difficult (e.g., transportation)

A Better and Equitable Future for Students in NH - Communities are Unique in their Needs and Resources

- Balance between accountability and being equitable when it comes to vast shifts in online learning during the Pandemic.
- What about technology in terms of adequacy? Additional costs because of remote learning? Education has gone through a fundamental shift in the last few months. There are things that have changed and will not go back to what they were. Have to increasingly focus on equity in approaches to remote learning. Lots of kids of who lose their community just shut down. Need social connections with peers and students. Need to cognizant about who and who doesn't have access to Internet and devices. Parent engagement is a new area of investment. Some parents are not home, they are too busy, students need different types of help. Therefore, it is hard to speak to progress of students. Observations, realizations of what parents and students are going through during the shift. Students could seem tough in class and in person, but they can be different at home and during this time of the Pandemic – to be equitable we couldn't say much or require much.

- Passing a threshold that will give students meaningful opportunities after high school. It is dangerous to track people away from certain skills or competencies just because they are low-skilled at the beginning. But this costs money.
- We treat our kids fairly not the same – need to consider this and have more conversations
- Also, making the cost per student equal can be a little more expensive (science classes versus humanities classes). Students' cost for education should be distributed in a way that allows equitable opportunities for students.
- Funding right now is unsustainable and inequitable – it sustains the problems – education turns out to be the main component
- It's more than keeping your property values up – it's about educating kids and getting them career and college ready – the next generation's labor force – tough enough that so many students leave the state
- Local residents want local control not state-run schools – need a balance.
- Leading with the importance of town-based decisions and then also making sure we aren't leaving towns behind just because they don't have the property tax base.
- We hope that you take this input seriously and really support some of the findings and data from the questionnaires.
- If it turns political nothing will be done – the commission has to be politically neutral in order to provide equitable funding and quality education for ALL students.
- Go back a few years and capture the data from the past and see how they compare now.
- Hope the group will come up with something beyond "he said, she said" need it to move forward
- Hearing from others is very helpful
- Students value does not change because of what their parents earn or the degrees they have.
- We need to have a big conversation and accept the responsibility for a better future for tomorrow for everyone.
- Need to reduce disparities across the state instead of having towns like Newington having more and others having less
- It's not working, I think every other community could say the same thing
- No two communities are the same
- You can't compare Portsmouth and Berlin, Berlin and Dover, or Portsmouth and Dover
- NH disparities are profound – disparity is economic downturn, not enough students, older communities, bussing needed
- There has to be a better way for rural NH to educate their children.
- If we don't do something different – then we are just going to keep repeating the same problems

Community, Family, and Supports Matter, Need for Local Engagement and Decision-making, Education for Community

- In a town or in a family that parents work two jobs. Have we covered for societal issues in our schools?
- Flexibility for educators and need support at home
- In some cases, schools are often becoming more like parents – parents are focused more on their careers so the home support has lessened – it's costing us money – degradation of the family corps the issues and needs come up

- Barriers – student, family, community demographics and characteristics -- between and within communities – different family situations, different attentiveness – income disparities that create challenges in public schools – discrepancies about who can access charter schools and private schools – inequities that need to be taken into account
- Creating trust between the bodies who create the budget – need to broadcast
- Local government and local democracy is important, voting on local budgets and taxes.
- Local control helps. Community values education.
- When budgeting is reviewed, people come out and argue against raising taxes -- Schools often become the squeeze
- It's a state tax that many local taxpayers do not see as a state tax – the amount of money being raised – it's difficult to explain to local folks about the distribution of the state tax – it is hard to share with local residents what it means for them – the SWEPT is buried, and people don't understand what the breakdown is. We need to more effectively communicate – what it covers, how individuals can have more input – it is the legislature, not local school boards – need to be clear with local taxpayers about SWEPT
- People don't understand what is incorporated in the "big" tax number – educate people and display it in a better way.
- We need to start with teachers and ask if they think students are getting an adequate education – for example special education, teachers don't always know what to do for students
- Residents continue to not understand how NH funds education. Can the Commission do more on a state level to educate the tax payer on how the education funding works.
- The commission shouldn't be making these decisions in a 'bubble'. Tour schools in high rent vs low rent districts and see for themselves the disparities that exist between communities.
- There used to be local services that supported families and students which now have gone away. Now the schools are the place that all of those things get picked up.
- The needs of our students in 2020 are so much greater. The expectations are greater. The behavior of students is different, and the family structure of students is very different as well.
- Families have changed – need for parents to work, technology, change in home lives – contributing to a rise in mental health issues for students and parents
- access to programs when students do not come to school ready to learn
- Raised by grandparents
- We are being constantly asked to do more and more but with no more budget. We can't begin to do all that without feeding them, and giving them a general education. Having students who are 'parental impaired' is especially difficult because we need to give them so much more because they aren't getting a lot at home.
- Two generations of disfunction – children of those who weren't doing well
- Society has changed so much – family structure – families more fragmented and have less support as family as community around them.
- It has been a lot harder
- The school budgeting process and laws need to be simplified for the sake of voter understanding. it is overly complex and turns your average voter off from engaging in the budgeting process.
- Very good budgeters – school districts are very creative
- Some families can provide the support at home and programs – many families cannot (Allenstown, Pittsfield)

- Adequacy – depends on the community – hard to deal with but that is the reality
- Family structure and available parent support makes a very big impact. And when it's not there – it matters.
- We need to talk about funding what the schools actually need across regions
- Need to be put in the hands of educators, not politicians
- The path to adequacy and defining adequacy at the political level is a cop-out
- National conversations about equity and showing what people deserve – all students deserve a quality education
- Barriers – parental engagement is super important for people to be successful.

Questions and Suggestions for the Commission

- The commission shouldn't be making these decisions in a 'bubble'. Tour schools in high rent vs low rent districts and see for themselves the disparities that exist between communities.
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- We hope that you take this input seriously and really support some of the findings and data from the questionnaires.
- Go back a few years and capture the data from the past and see how they compare now.
- Hope the group will come up with something beyond "he said, she said" need it to move forward
- Hearing from others is very helpful
- Why do we have so many inadequate systems and think about where combinations and collaborations could occur? People may not like it, but it will reduce disparity issues in some schools like in the northern and middle of state.
- Communities like Berlin and Allentown have necessary facilities that the state needs (like a state park that is used by everyone, a federal prison) how can the state acknowledge these facilities and help pay for education? What is the basis of adequacy and what can local communities add on?
- Hope that when talking about Adequacy is, adequacy for what? Take the long view. Tracking our graduates two and five years out after graduation. Limiting to think about HS graduation as the end.
- The main question is: What is the return on investment for funding?
- How will the state support communities meet the definitions of adequacy? Smaller towns and lack of local resources
- "We see a lot of our older population only relating to what they grew up with. The commission needs to see the differences for themselves."
- What is the purpose of education? Is it to prepare students to be citizens, for jobs? We seem to be leaning toward more job training type curricula and SEL.
- Need to keep definition of adequacy clear and simple – adding to the list could jeopardize change.
- The average age in legislature will affect decision-making based on their own experiences.
- Is adequate based on inputs or outcomes?
- How are we going to look this? We have continued to discuss and disagree about the amount of money that always seem to be the part that comes to forefront of the discussion over and over.

Town B spends this. Town A spends this. That's not equitable. We need to step back and identify clear measures across the state. Going back and forth about state and local – we want local control. We think it's a state responsibility. There are many competing priorities that differ by town. Key question. What is the level of the problem? state or local?

- What do we want to help prepare students for? Are we just preparing students for Harvard? We want to be reasonable about what we expect of from students.
- If we were able to take a long view – what kind of person do we want coming out of our schools? What kind of young adult do we want people to develop into? Look further out from HS graduation. Active members in community and democracy.
- Is there a way to gather other data to measure the social / emotional / health success of the school? (e.g., parent satisfaction, emergency services, staff satisfaction. Social health determinant to measure)
- Do we have the best people in the legislative offices to make these solutions? At the local level how do we entice people to be elected into legislative office to work on these needed solutions for funding education?
- How do we put everyone on the same playing field?
- The issue is not redistribution of the money already raised.
- State is responsible to ensure students are getting an adequate education – legislature needs to make the decision. State needs to make a plan that people can agree to fund schools.
- Towns in the same district/SAU and variable tax rates, in equities in same schools, families different tax rates. Do you see that dynamic play out in select board meetings? People are happy to pay low taxes. The rub comes in from bumping from town to town.
- Are we even supporting and using the right proportion, if that is the only money we are going to get?
- Question can't be how to distribute if they don't have the revenue to distribute
- The commission needs to look at overall how much money (3800\$ per student) and what is that money really giving our students.
- Where is the lottery going?
- Restaurant and meals tax?
- What other places could they slice a piece of pie to go to education?
- Do we see NH as one state? Or separate communities that need to compete with each other for increasing tax base?
- The state has put things in place and then taken them away – how do we create sustainable budgeting?
- Who are the stakeholders who can bring in the other perspectives related to public health and others areas of need?
- Is there an opportunity to take some aspects of funding schools (e.g., special education, teacher health care) and fund those at the state level? Then keep other pieces at the local level, take bigger and less predictable costs and pool them at the state level. Hybrid system for funding to begin at least.
- How can access to understandable data be easier?
- How can keep ideologically and politically neutral when making decisions?
- Can the state provide a floor for local schools to stand on?
- What are the selling points when there are fewer kids in schools and more seniors who need medical benefits?

- What are the teachers seeing? What are the loopholes? What are you seeing? What aren't we seeing?
- What will we settle on? A sales tax? Direct money to those who need it the most?
- What if we just funded health insurance at the state level? Then you take that costs away and maintain local control for schools. Use the buying power of the state for big ticket items and then local costs go to curriculum and other costs. It could bring average premiums down; however, costs are driven by last three-year claim history, so districts could be different. Who is the underwriter of the health insurance? Then does one provider override the competitiveness of the market?
- Where did the sweepstakes revenue go? How much goes to the lottery goes to education? – what percentage go to education?

Draft for Discussion Purposes



NH Listens

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