
COMMISSION TO STUDY SCHOOL FUNDING

YOUTH VOICE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE, OCTOBER 2020

Facilitated by New Hampshire Listens on behalf of the Commission Engagement Workgroup

OVERVIEW OF THE COMMISSION AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The New Hampshire Commission to Study School Funding is focused on developing school funding policies that are more fair. This group needs to make sure the system of funding education is legal and constitutional. The Commission partnered with the University of New Hampshire Carsey School of Public Policy and its public engagement program New Hampshire Listens to hear from local stakeholders, like you, the students who attend or attended public schools in New Hampshire. Your voice matters in this process, and today provides the Commission a chance to hear what you are thinking. For the next hour or so, you will participate in a small group discussion. You will not be recorded, but your thoughts will be noted by our facilitators and notetakers.

SCHOOL FUNDING IN NH: A QUICK OVERVIEW¹

The New Hampshire constitution states that every student has the right to the opportunity for an “adequate” education paid for by the state. “Base adequacy” funds include the combined cost of teachers, instructional materials, facilities, transportation, a school counselor, a principal, and technology. In 2020, each district received \$3,708 per student. Additionally, districts received additional funds called “differentiated aid” that is based on the number of students who may need special education services, receive English Language Learning services, and/or qualify for free or reduced lunch.

New Hampshire schools operate on local, state, and federal funding. Much of every school’s budget comes from people and businesses that pay taxes on the value of their property. Some districts and towns have more property wealth than others. This can be from living in communities with large bodies of water like the Atlantic Ocean or Lake Winnepesaukee. Or it can be because there is a lot of industry or businesses. Public school districts in New Hampshire with more property wealth can spend a lot more on schools beyond the state’s “base adequacy.” Some districts spend less than \$15,000 per student, and some spend over \$25,000. This can mean students in public schools across New Hampshire have different access to technology, materials for learning like textbooks, extracurriculars like sports and band, classes like foreign languages or advanced placement options.

At the beginning of 2020 a Commission to Study School Funding was created with legislators and community members to help make school funding in New Hampshire more equitable, meaning fair for all students. That is why we are here, to discuss what you think about school funding.

(Moderator leaves time to clarify terms and answer questions as needed, making sure the group follows the learning agreements)

¹ Adapted from Reaching Higher NH’s forthcoming video on school funding in New Hampshire.



GROUP AGREEMENTS

- Listen to each other
- Be fully present
- Lean into discomfort
- Be open to another perspective
- Share airtime so everyone gets a chance to be heard
- Be respectful and use respectful language
- If you disagree, consider asking a question rather than arguing to prove your point.
- Bring your authentic self to the conversation
- Stories stay here, learning leaves here

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION (~45MIN)

ROUND ONE: GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER (~15 MIN) (EACH PARTICIPANT TAKES 1 MINUTE TO ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS)

- Where do you live and what school do you attend?
- Name one or two things that were important to you about your own education in NH
- If you could name one thing that needs more funding in your school, what would it be?

ROUND TWO: EXPLORING THE TOPIC – SCHOOL FUNDING (~30 MIN) (TAKE ~2 MINUTES EACH TO ANSWER A QUESTION BELOW WITHOUT INTERRUPTION OR CROSSTALK. ONCE EVERYONE HAS ANSWERED, THE GROUP MAY TAKE A FEW MINUTES FOR ANY CLARIFYING QUESTIONS OR ADDITIONAL RESPONSES TO THE QUESTIONS BELOW.)
Students who attend publicly funded schools across New Hampshire have different educational experiences. These different experiences can be disparities, or inequalities between schools and districts. Some students have greater access to technology, more subjects taught in school, updated materials, smaller class sizes, and teachers with higher professional qualifications). For students, college or career paths after graduation can differ depending on where you live and what school you attend. Thinking about the video we watched...

- What do you think about the difference in funding amongst schools in our state?
- What would you consider an adequate education?
- What barriers exist for students and their families based on how schools are funded?
- Who should pay for our public schools?
- Students take tests and make decisions about life after high-school that help decision-makers measure how well students are doing in school. What should school leaders measure to know whether students have received a (Good? Fair? Similar? Equal?) education no matter what community they live in?

LARGE GROUP CLOSING

What questions do you have for the commission about public school funding?

