

# TAXPAYER ASSOCIATIONS AND SENIOR RESIDENTS

## FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE, OCTOBER 2020

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

### COMMISSION TO STUDY SCHOOL FUNDING BACKGROUND (10 MIN)

As part of the final budget resolution enacted by the New Hampshire General Court at the end of the 2019 legislative session, RSA 193-E was amended to create a commission to study school funding. The Court recognized that the long-time challenge of funding New Hampshire's public schools, resulting in both legislative and judicial efforts to assure proportional and equitable financing, demands intensive study to create legal and sustainable solutions. The Commission builds on the work of prior study and oversight committees to develop policy recommendations for consideration during the legislative session beginning in January 2021. The primary purpose of the Commission is to "review the education funding formula and make recommendations to ensure a uniform and equitable design for financing the cost of an adequate education for all public school students" (RSA 193-E:2-e). Further, the Commission is charged with developing school funding policy that complies with court decisions calling for uniform revenue sources and fulfillment of the Constitutional requirement for a state-funded adequate education for all students.

The Commission consists of 16 members appointed by the Speaker of the House, the President of the Senate, the Governor, and the Commission chair. Six of these are public members (not currently serving legislators). Visit the School Funding website to learn more: <https://carsey.unh.edu/school-funding-study>.

## THE PROBLEM THE COMMISSION IS ADDRESSING

The Commission understands that New Hampshire on average spends among the highest levels per pupil in the US. And New Hampshire students achieve at among the highest levels in the US. Overall, there appears to be sufficient funds available to support public schools when looking *at the state as a whole*.

The problem the Commission is addressing is how to assure that all students, regardless of where they live or what their challenges are, have a fair and reasonable opportunity to achieve at the same level as their peers. This will require that some students, and the districts where they are educated, have access to differential resources that can “level the playing field.” At the same time, Constitutional requirements for uniform and proportional taxes (in this case the property tax) must be a part of any school funding formula. Thus, the Commission is working to achieve greater fairness in outcomes for students and greater fairness for taxpayers who live in communities with a wide range of property values.

## TODAY

Overall, the New Hampshire Commission to Study School Funding is focused on developing school funding policies that are fair for school-aged young people across the state. 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.

## GROUP AGREEMENTS

- Listen to each other
- Be open to another perspective
- It’s okay to disagree, but don’t personalize it. Focus on the idea, not the person.
- If you disagree, consider asking a question rather than arguing to prove your point.
- Share airtime.
- We all share responsibility for making the group productive.



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## SMALL GROUPS (45 MIN)

### INTRODUCTIONS

1. Introduce yourself
2. Where you are calling in from, and what role(s) you represent (ex. taxpayer, parent, property owner, grandparent, home owner, business owner etc.)
3. Say a little bit about your familiarity with how public school funding works in NH and what brought you here today.

### QUESTIONS

1. How does the current system for funding public schools work for you? Your family? Your community?
2. In your opinion, what is currently working in terms of the way we fund public schools in NH?
3. In your opinion, what are the problems with the current system?
4. If education is a right for all the school-aged young people in NH, how would you solve the dilemma of adequate educational funding for every child?
5. How can we look at funding with reference to the different types of communities we have in NH? Looking at the state as a whole, as families move in, out, and around the state?
6. What do you think are the necessary elements of a funding policy that is bi-partisan and able to solicit wide-spread support so school-aged young people in NH can have an opportunity for an adequate education?

### LARGE GROUP CLOSING (10MIN)

What questions do you have for the Commission?

All Commission and workgroup meetings and all reports and related resource materials received by the Commission are available at <https://carsey.unh.edu/school-funding-study/resources>. Questions and comments may be submitted through <https://unh.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SVe4gwYUyg0FHQNxP>.

