

## **Superintendent Report - March, 2024**

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### **Annual School District**

Public hearings were held in person during the month of February. Participation was predictably low. The annual school meetings are underway this month. Annual reports have been distributed. Here is our list of annual school budget meetings.

March 5: Colebrook School District: 6:00 pm Gymnasium

March 7: Pittsburg School District: 6:00 pm Bremer Pond Auditorium

March 11: Stewartstown School District: 6:00 pm Emily Haynes Community Room

March 12: Clarksville School District 6:00 pm - Town Hall

March 12: Columbia School District 7:15 pm - Town Hall

### **North Point CTE Center Update**

The North Point Career and Technical Education Center's five Programs provide college credits that are available. Industry credentials are available as well.

- 1) Health Sciences - 24 College Credits
- 2) Education - 17 College Credits
- 3) Hospitality and Culinary - 19 College Credits
- 4) Automotive - 16 College Credits
- 5) Computer Technology - 22 College Credits

Integrated CTE programs with academic curriculum and workplace partnerships provide learning that is more inclusive, rigorous, relevant, and effective in preparing students for a career and /or college. These new programs will serve students throughout the SAU 7 region and beyond.

## **Spring Ahead - The Challenge of Budgeting and Funding our Schools**

Across the state, school budgets and tax rates are on the rise. This is the result of a perfect storm of inflation and the continued lack of funding from the State of New Hampshire.

Our state constitution, state law and state board of education ascribe the responsibility to school boards to provide public education through local school districts in New Hampshire. Broadly speaking, school boards have two main jobs: to draft an annual school budget and to create school policy. The challenges facing the School Board when funding education are longstanding. However, the Colebrook School District's education spending is close to the state average. How can we solve this predicament?

The New Hampshire Constitution, which dates back to 1784, confers upon its citizens a fundamental right to receive an education and a concomitant responsibility upon the state to provide that education. This was confirmed by the courts, thirty years ago in 1993 by the ruling in response to the Claremont lawsuit which established a state duty to provide an adequate education and guarantee funding. It was followed by the Claremont II 1997 ruling which required that the state define an adequate education and pay for that level with state raised tax dollars. Furthermore, the court ruled that the responsibility for education must still be paid by state tax dollars, not local tax dollars. The legislature's initial response was to change the need category from foundation aid to adequacy aid. Half of this aid came from the statewide property tax (SWEPT) tax that is raised locally from property taxes and counted as state aid. Then, in 2008, the State Legislature passed an education funding bill designed to comply with Supreme Court decisions. The bill provided \$3,450 for every student and additional aid for free lunch and for students with special education needs.

The ConVal School District filed a lawsuit in 2019 which argued that the state failed to meet its constitutional obligation of funding an adequate education. Eighteen other districts joined as plaintiffs. The trial for this case concluded in November of 2023 when the Superior Court found that funding based adequacy was unconstitutionally low. The ruling went on to state that while the legislature ultimately has the final say on the cost of adequacy, to be a constitutional level of funding, "the base adequacy cost can be no less than \$7356.01 per pupil per year and the true cost is likely much higher than that." The court stated that expenses like transportation, school nurses, school security, and facility expenses such as heat and electricity were clearly necessary for school districts to be able to provide students with an adequate education. Following the ruling the State requested reconsideration and a motion to stay the enforcement of the decision to 2026 or later. On February 20, 2024, the court issued a ruling denying both the motion to stay and the motion to reconsider.

In addition, another case on school funding was decided in 2023. In this second ruling, the court found that the statewide education property tax (SWEPT) is unconstitutional. That tax is collected by towns — not the state — at a set rate in order to provide funding for each town’s school district. In deciding the SWEPT issues in *Rand*, the Court held that the State SWEPT tax is unconstitutional. Further, the Court ordered that these practices are no longer allowed beginning with the 2024 budget cycle.

As you can see from the table below, New Hampshire ranks last (50th) in state funding for education:

**FIGURE 14**

**State Funding for Elementary and Secondary Local Public Education**

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Annual Survey of School System Finances, 2020*

State or Nation	Percentage Funding for Local Public Education from State Sources	Estimated Rank Among 50 States
Vermont	91%	1
Hawaii	90%	2
Arkansas	75%	3
Washington	71%	4
New Mexico	68%	5
<b>United States</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>--</b>
Connecticut	37%	46
Texas	34%	47
South Dakota	34%	48
Nebraska	33%	49
New Hampshire	31%	50

**How does the School Board Build Their Annual Budget?**

First, they consider what constitutes an adequate education. According to state law, RSA 193-E:2-a, an adequate education requires instruction in:

- (1) English/language arts and reading;
- (2) Mathematics;
- (3) Science;
- (4) Social studies, including civics, government, economics, geography, history, and Holocaust and genocide education;
- (5)

Arts education, including music and visual arts; (6) World languages; (7) Health and wellness education; (8) Physical education; (9) Engineering and technologies including technology applications; (10) Personal finance literacy; (11) Computer science; ...

The following skills shall be integrated into the learning areas: (1) Computer use and digital literacy; (2) Logic and rhetoric.

Further, the law requires that:

II. The standards shall cover kindergarten through twelfth grade and shall clearly set forth the opportunities to acquire the communication, analytical and research skills and competencies, as well as the substantive knowledge expected to be possessed by students at the various grade levels, including the credit requirement necessary to earn a high school diploma.

II-a. Instruction in support of kindergarten standards shall be engaging and shall foster children's development and learning in all domains including physical, social, cognitive, and language. Educators shall create a learning environment that facilitates high quality, child-directed experiences based upon early childhood best teaching practices and play-based learning that comprise movement, creative expression, exploration, socialization, and music. Educators shall develop literacy through guided reading and shall provide unstructured time for the discovery of each child's individual talents, abilities, and needs.

The school budget describes a district's plan for the upcoming year as related to anticipated revenues and expenditures. In addition to developing a budget which funds the education as outlined above, school districts are required to fund transportation, facilities, energy, health and safety, food services, curriculum, and professional development, as well as counseling services.

To provide education, school districts employ teachers, support staff and administrators who are tasked with the education and supervision of students and ensuring that they are provided a comprehensive education so that upon graduation, they have the knowledge and skills to pursue a career, attend college, or join the armed forces- in short to become .

With these requirements in the forefront, each School Board has prepared a budget which fulfills our legal obligation to provide a free education and to fulfill their duty as elected officials to the students, parents, and larger community.

### **The Colebrook Building Project - Round II - March 5, 2024**

The state also requires that school districts maintain their facilities and provide schools and classrooms for our students. Nearly five years ago, the Colebrook Academy closed and all students there transitioned to Colebrook Elementary School. Since that time our population has remained stable.

In 2022 the Interstate Study Committee tasked with considering regionalization of our schools disbanded. There were two primary reasons for this. They concluded that a regional district would increase opportunities for students, however regionalization would also increase local school districts' costs.

Recognizing the need to serve the students in Colebrook, the school board initiated a building committee and contracted with an architectural firm to design a modest addition for high school and CTE classes and to address required renovations in the elementary. The plan also included a regulation-sized gym to address the lack of space and safety for students. While the bond article failed last year, new legislation passed in 2023 which allows Colebrook to remain as priority 1 and to collect donations to cover the local contribution to building aid.

Due to this development, and the fact that the need for additional space continues, the Board voted to include Articles 1 and 2 - a vote for building aid on the warrant. If Article 1 passes, the voters will take up Article 2. Both will require contributions in order to meet the requirements of state building aid. These donations must be received by June 30, 2024 or the articles will be null and void.

### **March School Board Meetings**

Following the town elections on March 12, all school boards will conduct reorganization procedures. This process includes the election of board members to various roles such as chair and vice chair. In addition, members will be able to volunteer for one or more committees. Following school board reorganization, the SAU 7 Board will meet on April 11 at 6:00 pm at the Columbia Town Hall and undergo a similar reorganization process.

### **School Board Member Webinars**

The NHSBA provides several webinars for new and returning board members. Topics include Effective meetings, open meeting law and new board member orientation. If you are interested in these development opportunities, please contact the NHSBA website directly: [nhsba.org/events/](https://nhsba.org/events/)

### **Meeting Reminders**

***SAU Board Meeting - Thursday, April 11 at 6:00 pm at the Columbia Town Hall***

Think Spring!

Respectfully submitted,

Debra Taylor, Ph.D.

Superintendent

