

September 15, 2025

Merrimack School Board

36 McElwain Street
Merrimack, NH 03054
April 7, 2025

To: State Legislature and Governor of New Hampshire

On behalf of the Merrimack School Board, we are writing to convey our deep concern regarding the inequities and unsustainability of New Hampshire's current approach to funding public education. The New Hampshire Supreme Court's determination that state education spending is unconstitutionally low and a Superior Court ruling on inadequate special education funding underscore the urgent need for bold and comprehensive reform in the upcoming legislative session.

For decades, New Hampshire has relied heavily on local property taxes as the primary source of education funding. This model has created profound inequities between communities and placed an overwhelming burden on local taxpayers. As school costs continue to rise, districts like ours face untenable choices such as cutting staff, limiting programs, and increasing class sizes, while still striving to meet the constitutional requirement of providing an adequate education to all children.

We respectfully call upon the Governor and Legislature to take the following steps:

1. Identify and increase state-level revenue sources for education.

New Hampshire must diversify and strengthen its sources of state revenue to provide sustainable and equitable funding for education. Spreading the burden across a broader base of taxpayers, not just local property owners, will reduce inequality, stabilize school budgets, and strengthen statewide investment in our students.

2. Substantially raise the state's share of education funding.

Our state ranks last in the nation in the percentage of education funding provided by the state government. Meanwhile, inflation continues to rise annually, and school districts are disproportionately affected because healthcare and other employee benefit costs consistently outpace inflation. The State Adequacy Grant has not increased with inflation for twenty-five years, and when adjusted for inflation, is effectively 50% less than it was in 1999. Without greater state support, local taxpayers are left to fill the gap, forcing districts to choose between steep tax increases and painful program cuts. Increasing the state's share would not only ease this burden but also help ensure that every child, regardless of ZIP code, has access to the resources necessary for success.

3. Protect local control and oppose statewide budget caps on school districts.

Local communities best understand the needs of their students. Any legislation that restricts locally elected school boards from setting appropriate budgets undermines New Hampshire's tradition of local control and jeopardizes districts' ability to respond to changing student needs.

Despite these financial challenges, New Hampshire continues to rank among the top ten states in multiple national school ranking reports, a testament to the dedication of our educators and communities. However, sustaining this level of excellence requires realistic and competitive teacher salaries, especially considering New Hampshire's high cost of living. To recruit, train, and retain excellent staff, school districts must be able to offer compensation that reflects the economic realities faced by the very professionals who make our schools successful.

The courts have made clear that the state is not meeting its constitutional duty. It is now imperative that lawmakers act to create an equitable, sustainable, and forward-looking education funding system. Doing so is not only a constitutional obligation but also a moral commitment to the future of New Hampshire's children and communities.

We urge you to seize this opportunity in the next legislative session to lead with vision and fairness. Public education is the foundation of our state's prosperity, and it is time for meaningful reform that shares the responsibility more broadly and lessens the burden on local taxpayers.

Respectfully,

Lori Peters, Chair
Laurie Rothhaus, Vice Chair
Jenna Hardy, Member
Naomi Halter, Member
Rachel Paepke, Member

Merrimack School Board, SAU26