

CANFIELD LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

Community Financial Forum

Summary Report for the Board of Education

May 14, 2026

Sixty-three community members participated in a structured financial forum to discuss the district's financial position and future funding options. The forum included a full-audience live poll (46 respondents) and small-group discussions across six tables, each responding to 11 written questions. The results below summarize key themes from both components.

Section 1: Live Audience Poll Results

46 of 63 participants responded to six poll questions (73% participation rate). Results reflect the full-audience sentiment captured live during the forum.

63	46	73%	6
Total Participants	Poll Respondents	Participation Rate	Poll Questions

Poll Question	n	Top Results
How informed do you feel about district finances?	43	47% Somewhat informed — have heard things but have questions 40% Very informed 9% Not very informed — tonight was mostly new 5% Not informed at all
Do you believe the district has been spending money responsibly?	45	58% Mostly yes, with some concerns 24% Yes, clearly 11% No, I do not think so 7% Not sure — need more information
If funding becomes limited, what should be the highest priority to protect?	44	68% Core academic programs 27% Class size / staffing 5% Extracurricular activities and sports 0% Technology
What concerns you most about a potential levy ask?	4	48% Whether a levy will actually solve the long-term problem 30% I do not have major concerns 14% Whether the district will use money wisely

Poll Question	n	Top Results
		9% The additional cost to my household
What communication method do you trust most for district information?	46	74% In-person meetings or forums like tonight 22% District website or email newsletters 2% Social media 2% Direct mail to my home
How likely are you to support a new operating levy on the November 2026 ballot?	44	80% Very likely 9% Somewhat likely 5% Unsure — still need more information 5% Very unlikely 2% Somewhat unlikely

Key Poll Takeaways

- **89% of forum attendees are very likely or somewhat likely to support a November 2026 levy — a strong signal from an engaged audience.**
- Most attendees (87%) believe the district is spending responsibly, though many hold some concerns.
- Long-term sustainability — not household cost — is the top concern about a levy (48%).
- Core academics and staffing (95% combined) are the clear protection priorities.
- In-person forums are by far the most trusted communication channel (74%) — this format works.
- Note: Forum attendees skew toward engaged community supporters; results may not reflect the broader electorate.

Section 2: Small Group Discussion Themes

Seven small groups (one entry was a facilitator test) responded to 11 written questions. Groups ranged in composition and included current parents, community members, staff, and engaged residents. Themes below represent synthesized consensus across groups, with notable dissenting or minority views noted where relevant.

Q1 — Option preference: reduce expenses, increase revenue, or combination?

- Combination of cuts + levy was the consensus as most politically viable
- Visible cost reductions are seen as a prerequisite to earning community trust before a levy ask
- Strong opposition to cutting teachers, core programs, or anything that makes Canfield distinctive
 - 'If you cut people, Canfield won't be Canfield anymore'
- Specific reduction ideas surfaced: busing, privatized services, pay-to-play, 4-day week exploration
- Minority view: revenue-only (levy) preferred to avoid any program harm

Q2 — How informed do you feel about the district's financial situation?

- Mixed awareness — some groups felt well-informed; others were surprised by the depth of the deficit
- School funding formulas are genuinely confusing; property tax increases don't translate clearly to school revenue in public understanding
- Strong call for simpler, bolder public communication — big facts via direct mail, with links for deeper reading
- Social media is seen as a misinformation risk; board meetings lack Q&A and feel inaccessible
 - 'If you put out 80%, someone will find the 20% you didn't share and call it a coverup'
- Mr. Marko's presentation style was praised as a model for accessible financial communication

Q3 — Do you believe the district is managing finances responsibly?

- Majority view: yes — the district has received state auditor recognition and outperformed inflation
- Concern raised: administration growth while enrollment has declined
- Deferred facility maintenance perceived by some as a strategic gamble that backfired
- Call for full transparency, including owning mistakes — 'take ownership of everything, good and bad'
- Positive note: recent board changes seen as energizing and more educator-informed
- Minority view: skepticism about hidden issues; the financial situation appeared to arrive suddenly

Q4 — What are the primary causes of the district's financial challenges?

- State funding erosion and EdChoice voucher program — tax dollars follow students to private schools
- No operating levy passed since 2013; decade-plus of flat local revenue against rising costs
- Inflation compounding across all budget lines for 10+ years
- Open enrollment: students leave, but district costs remain
- Deferred maintenance converted routine upkeep into emergency capital costs
 - 'This is not a today problem — it started 30 years ago'

Q5 — Has the district done enough to cut costs before seeking new funding?

- Most groups were unable to answer — not because of distrust, but because cost reductions have not been publicly communicated
- Key question raised: 'Were we ever told what was cut?'
- Staff attrition cited as a real reduction that has not been shared publicly
- Perception concern: neglecting facilities while pursuing a new building felt like mismanagement to some
- Suggestions: independent healthcare audit, community benefactor outreach, publicize cuts already made

Q6 — What areas of spending should be reduced or reviewed?

- Administration — central office staffing, assistant athletic director, curriculum coach roles
- Transportation — consolidate routes, survey ridership, consider eliminating high school busing
- College Credit Plus (CCP) — community members suggested parents bear this cost, not the district
- ESC contracts — value of purchased services questioned; receiving fewer services than paid for
- Creative staffing solutions — early retirement incentives, student-driven social media to replace paid positions

Q7 — What programs and services should be protected from cuts?

- **Teachers and staffing — near-universal consensus; 'staff will preserve the programs'**
- Special education services — specifically called out; suggestion to explore in-house delivery vs. ESC
- Arts, music, and extracurriculars — seen as central to the Canfield identity and student development
- Core academic programming and advanced coursework (AP, CCP, enrichment)
- SROs (school resource officers)

Q8 — How would you describe the value the district provides?

- Exceptional: top academic performance at below-average per-pupil cost
 - 'The return on investment is very good'

- Canfield graduates are recognizable — comparable to private school outcomes
- Music, AP, and college-credit programs cited as highest-value offerings
- Warning: cuts will dilute the brand and make Canfield less competitive with private school alternatives
- Gap noted: district serves high achievers well but has less to offer students who fall behind

Q9 — How would the community respond to a property tax or income tax levy?

- General expectation of community resistance to either option
- Property tax seen as slightly more acceptable than income tax (many residents already pay city income tax)
- Hybrid income tax model presented as compelling — one group cited a neighboring district that passed a 1% income tax 20 years ago that has kept pace with inflation, excluded Social Security income (senior-friendly), and captured revenue from renters
- Identified barrier: large segment of community (est. 75%) has no school-aged children
- Social media opposition is vocal and organized — a 'no' constituency exists and is active

Q10 — What information or transparency is needed before a levy decision?

- Specific scenario planning: exactly what gets cut if the levy fails (positions, routes, programs)
- Plain-language household cost breakdowns — what does the levy cost per month per household?
- Case studies from comparable Ohio districts — what worked and what did not
- Strategies to reach seniors and non-parents — the groups that feel least connected to the outcome
- Consistent, unified messaging — past campaigns were seen as inconsistent
- One group raised facility consolidation as an unaddressed question: is closing a building on the table?

Q11 — Most important message for board leadership?

- **Be completely honest and transparent — share everything, including mistakes and uncertainties**
- Protect what makes Canfield exceptional — do not cut teachers or signature programs
- Communicate earlier, simpler, and more boldly — 'dumb it down' for general audiences with links for those who want more detail
- Advocate loudly at the state level — vouchers and funding formula erosion are the root cause
- Show fiscal stewardship before asking for more — 'show us you're cutting before you ask'
 - 'What is happening to the district budget is exactly what is happening to every household budget'
- Start the levy campaign earlier this cycle — more time is needed to build trust and reach skeptics

Section 3: Cross-Cutting Themes

Across both the live poll and small group discussions, four themes emerged consistently:

1. Credibility before asking Show visible cuts first. Community members across every group said the district must demonstrate responsible stewardship before requesting more revenue.	2. The state is the root cause EdChoice vouchers and state funding formula erosion are widely understood as the primary drivers. This is a useful and accurate public narrative.
3. Communication is the gap Attendees were surprised by tonight's information. Social media fills the vacuum. In-person forums (74%) and direct mail are the most trusted channels — use them.	4. Protect staff above all else Teachers are the product. Protecting staffing and core academics was the single most consistent answer across every group and the poll combined.

Prepared by district administration following the May 14, 2026 Community Financial Forum. Small group data collected via Google Form (n=7 groups). Live poll conducted via Vevox (n=46 respondents, 63 total participants).