

Your Voice on Vermont's Public Education Future: Response Analysis

Prepared by the Office of the Speaker of the House
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Introduction

Between February and March 2025, the Speaker's Office conducted a statewide survey to gather feedback on Vermont's education system and funding model. The goal was to hear directly from Vermonters across political, geographic, and socioeconomic lines.

Thank you to everyone who helped distribute the survey. We received nearly 3,000 responses, reflecting a diverse cross-section of Vermonters. Below is a high-level overview of the responses, which may be useful as you return to your districts and as the Legislature continues deliberations around education reform.

Questions and Response Analysis

What do you think makes a great public school?

Total Responses: 2,917

Trends in Responses:

- Strong, Supported Teachers: High-quality educators were the most frequently cited factor—especially when they are well-compensated, experienced, and supported.
- Supportive, Inclusive Environments: Safe, welcoming school cultures with strong mental health and social-emotional support were prioritized.
- Well-Rounded Offerings: Residents value academic rigor alongside arts, music, physical education, hands-on learning, and extracurriculars.
- Small Class Sizes: Many emphasized the importance of individualized attention and strong teacher-student relationships.
- Community Connection: Great schools were described as hubs of their communities, with engaged families and local partnerships.
- Equity: Respondents want every student to have access to a high-quality education, regardless of geography or background.

Key Concerns:

- Uneven funding and access across districts
- Teacher burnout and low compensation
- Overreliance on testing

- Aging facilities and infrastructure

Notable Differences:

- Rural respondents focused on schools as community centers and small-school sustainability.
- Urban respondents emphasized diversity, equity, and infrastructure.
- Parents focused on communication and enrichment.
- Educators highlighted systemic supports and resources.

What educational opportunities do you think every Vermont student should have?

Total Responses: 2,615

Trends in Responses:

- Career and Technical Education (CTE): Strong support for access to hands-on learning, job training, and real-world experiences like internships and trades.
- Arts, Music, and Creative Learning: Many people named the arts as essential — not supplemental — to student success and engagement.
- Life Skills and Financial Literacy: Respondents want schools to teach students how to navigate adulthood: budgeting, cooking, civic participation, and more.
- Small Class Sizes and Strong Relationships: Vermonters expressed a deep desire for students to be known, supported, and seen as individuals.
- Diverse Pathways: Respondents supported college prep, trade routes, and individualized instruction — with student choice at the center.
- Mental Health and Special Education Support: Many noted the need for better staffing and stronger systems to serve all learners well.
- Access to Enrichment: From field trips to foreign languages, from outdoor learning to AP classes, people want students in every district to have access to meaningful enrichment.

Key Concerns:

- Equity by Geography: One of the most repeated concerns was that students in small or rural schools often don't have the same opportunities as those in larger districts — especially when it comes to electives, advanced coursework, or mental health support.
- Overworked Systems and Understaffing: Several respondents — especially educators — flagged the burnout, staffing shortages, and program cuts as threats to equitable opportunity.
- School Climate and Safety: A significant number of responses noted concerns around classroom safety, behavioral disruptions, and the importance of emotional wellbeing as a precondition for learning.

Notable Differences:

- Parents / Educators: Parents tended to focus more on enrichment, life readiness, and personalized support. Educators emphasized staffing, special education, and systemwide investment.
- Rural / Urban Districts: Rural respondents were more likely to name long bus rides, lack of access to electives, and community connection as concerns.
- Age of Respondent: Younger voices (including some students and recent graduates) called for more flexibility, project-based learning, and real-world relevance.

Are there specific programs or resources you'd like to see expanded in your local schools?Total Responses: 2,774Trends in Responses:

- Career and Technical Education (CTE): CTE was the single most frequently mentioned area for expansion. Vermonters want students to have more hands-on learning opportunities, job training, and real-world pathways into the workforce.
- Mental Health Support: Strong demand for more school counselors, social workers, and embedded mental health services. Many residents see mental health as foundational to student success.
- Arts, Music, and PE: Respondents consistently called for expanded creative and physical outlets. Arts programs were seen not as “extras” but as essential to student engagement and well-being.
- Afterschool & Summer Programs: Many residents emphasized the need for safe, structured, and enriching opportunities outside of regular school hours—particularly to support working families.
- Advanced and Enrichment Coursework: Residents want access to more challenge and choice for students, including AP classes, dual enrollment, and gifted and talented offerings.
- Special Education & Student Support: A notable number of respondents called for increased special education staffing, instructional assistants, and individualized supports.

Key Concerns from Residents:

- Limited access to CTE, especially in rural areas
- Shrinking arts programs due to budget constraints
- Mental health resources not keeping pace with student needs
- Inequity in offerings between districts
- Lack of transportation limiting access to afterschool/CTE programs

Notable Differences in Opinions:

- Rural respondents frequently noted the lack of access to CTE and enrichment programming due to distance and staffing.
- Parents of high schoolers prioritized advanced coursework and college prep.
- Parents of younger children focused on afterschool care and emotional support.
- Educators stressed the need for staffing and sustainability of expanded programming.

Do you feel like Vermont's current education system is funded in a fair and sustainable way? Why or why not?

Total Responses: 2,633

Trends in Responses:

- Majority View – No, it's not fair or sustainable. Most respondents expressed concern that the current system disproportionately burdens property taxpayers and results in wide inequities between districts.
- Fairness Concerns: Many cited that towns with similar needs and student populations pay dramatically different tax rates, leading to a sense of injustice—particularly among rural and low-income communities.
- Sustainability Concerns: A strong number of respondents questioned the long-term viability of relying heavily on property taxes, especially in a time of rising costs, demographic shifts, and school consolidation pressures.
- Calls for Reform: Many residents asked for a new funding model that is more transparent, predictable, and responsive to student needs—frequently referencing the need to protect both educational quality and taxpayer stability.

Key Concerns from Residents:

- Tax rates are too volatile and hard to plan around
- Residents don't understand how the education fund works or how tax rates are set
- There's a disconnect between school spending decisions and community input
- Towns feel penalized for supporting their schools
- Fear that rising property taxes will price people—especially older Vermonters—out of their homes

Notable Differences in Opinions:

- Rural respondents were more likely to feel penalized under the current system and express concern about funding formulas not accounting for geographic challenges.

- Respondents in higher-income towns were more mixed—some believed the system is unfair because they “pay in more,” while others expressed willingness to contribute if outcomes were more equitable statewide.
- Educators and school board members frequently called for more predictability and a simpler system that allows for long-term planning.

Do you think Vermont’s school funding system is easy to understand? If not, what parts seem unclear to you?

Total Responses: 2,621

Trends in Responses:

- Overwhelming Majority – No, it is not easy to understand. Most respondents described the current school funding system as confusing, opaque, and overly complex.
- Common Themes of Confusion:
Respondents most frequently cited:
 - The role of the “education fund” and how money flows from the state to local schools
 - How local budget votes relate to statewide property tax rates
 - The formula used to determine equalized pupils and per-pupil spending
 - The process of setting yields and its impact on tax bills
- Desire for Simplicity: Many people noted that they are eager to support their schools but feel frustrated by a lack of clarity. There was a strong call for better public education on how the system works and more transparency in how tax rates are set.

Key Concerns from Residents:

- The average taxpayer doesn’t know what “yield” means or how it’s calculated
- People struggle to connect local budget votes with their individual tax bills
- There’s a general mistrust or skepticism around the process because it feels inaccessible
- The system feels too technical—people feel they need a finance background to follow it
- In towns with high tax rates, residents feel especially confused about how their rate was set

Notable Differences in Opinions:

- Respondents with school board or town government experience were more likely to understand the system—but still described it as needlessly complex.
- Older Vermonters and longtime residents frequently expressed frustration about how much the system has changed over time and how hard it is to follow.
- Newer residents and parents of school-aged children often said they felt “in the dark” and unsure how to engage meaningfully in school budget decisions.

What's most important to you when thinking about how we pay for education?

Total Responses: 2,598

Trends in Responses:

- Affordability and Fairness were top priorities. Most respondents emphasized that Vermont's education funding must be fair for taxpayers across income levels and equitable for students across all districts.
- Quality of education remains a core concern. Many Vermonters expressed a deep desire to ensure that changes to the funding system don't come at the expense of high-quality public education, particularly in rural or under-resourced areas.
- Property tax fatigue is real. A large portion of respondents voiced strong frustration with the property tax burden, especially for retirees, low-income households, and working families. Many called for new or diversified revenue sources beyond property taxes.
- Transparency and accountability matter. Vermonters want a funding system that is clear, easy to follow, and ensures that dollars reach the classroom. Several suggested linking spending more directly to student outcomes or school performance.

Key Concerns from Residents:

- Ensuring the funding system is equitable and does not disproportionately burden low- and fixed-income Vermonters
- Reducing reliance on property taxes to fund education
- Maintaining high-quality education while promoting fiscal responsibility
- Increasing transparency and accountability in how education dollars are spent
- Addressing perceived inefficiencies in district administration
- Prioritizing direct investments in student learning and classroom resources

Notable Differences in Opinions:

- Retirees and fixed-income households focused heavily on tax burden and affordability.
- Parents of school-aged children emphasized program quality, student supports, and access to opportunities.
- Rural respondents raised concerns about being left behind in a system they perceive as favoring wealthier or more populous areas.
- A small group called for a broader tax base, such as income or sales taxes, to reduce pressure on property owners.

When we talk about making public education more affordable, that can mean different things to different people. What does 'affordable' mean to you?

Total Responses: 2,537

Trends in Responses:

- Affordability is primarily tied to property taxes. The vast majority of responses define affordability in terms of property tax relief, particularly for middle-income families, seniors on fixed incomes, and those in high-tax towns.
- Affordability also means sustainability. Many Vermonters emphasized that education should be funded in a way that doesn't create financial pressure year after year or rely heavily on one volatile revenue source.
- Balance between cost and value. Respondents often said affordability shouldn't mean cutting corners; rather, they want to see value for their tax dollars—efficient use of funds and educational outcomes that reflect the investment.
- Income sensitivity and ability to pay. There was strong support for more progressive funding models, including expanding income sensitivity and offering greater support to low- and moderate-income households.

Key Concerns from Residents:

- Many residents are worried about the burden of rising property taxes, particularly on seniors, middle-income homeowners, and Vermonters on fixed incomes.
- There is strong concern that without changes, affordability will continue to pit community support for education against personal financial stability.
- Respondents frequently stressed that affordability should not come at the expense of educational quality, and want to see better use of funds rather than program cuts.
- There is a desire for a more equitable system, where funding is tied more closely to income and ability to pay, rather than property values alone.
- Several noted that ongoing uncertainty around education costs creates stress during budget season and undermines trust in the system.

Notable Differences in Opinions:

- Urban and suburban respondents tended to focus more on long-term sustainability and budget efficiency.
- Rural respondents often tied affordability to the risk of school closures or reduced programs.
- Older Vermonters and homeowners focused on fixed incomes and tax burden, while younger families expressed concerns about balancing affordability with educational quality.
- A small number emphasized that affordability should not override the moral obligation to invest in children's futures.

In your opinion, what is the biggest challenge facing our public education system today?

Total Number of Responses: 2,709

Trends in Responses:

- **Rising Costs and Affordability:** A significant number of Vermonters identified the increasing cost of education—and its impact on property taxes—as a major challenge. Many respondents expressed concern that current funding levels are unsustainable and that affordability is threatening local support for schools.
- **Teacher and Staff Shortages:** Many respondents cited workforce shortages as a growing issue, especially the difficulty of recruiting and retaining qualified educators, support staff, and school-based mental health professionals. Rural communities in particular highlighted staffing challenges as a persistent barrier.
- **Equity and Consistency Across Districts:** Respondents flagged disparities in funding, resources, and educational opportunities between school districts as a major concern. Some expressed frustration with unequal access to programs such as the arts, advanced coursework, and career and technical education (CTE).
- **Student Mental Health and Wellbeing:** Numerous responses mentioned the increasing need for in-school mental health resources and support services. Residents linked this challenge to broader concerns around school climate, behavior management, and classroom disruptions.
- **Governance and Bureaucracy:** Several Vermonters expressed frustration with the complexity and inefficiency of the current education governance structure, especially the tension between state and local control. Others noted that the system feels overly bureaucratic and lacks clear lines of accountability.
- **Changing Demographics and Enrollment Decline:** A subset of responses focused on Vermont's declining student population and the difficulty of maintaining robust educational programs in small or shrinking schools.

Key Concerns from Residents:

- Rising education costs are outpacing what many communities and individuals can afford, and are a significant source of frustration.
- Staff shortages are creating strain on schools, leading to burnout, larger class sizes, and fewer student supports.
- There is a deep concern about inequities in opportunity between wealthy and lower-income districts.
- Mental health and behavioral needs of students are growing, but resources remain insufficient.

- The system feels opaque and overly complex to many, with a lack of trust in how funding decisions are made or implemented.
- Communities worry about the long-term sustainability of their schools in light of Vermont's shifting population.

Do you think Vermont's education system is structured in a way that supports students and teachers effectively? Why or why not?

Total Number of Responses: 2,661

Trends in Responses:

- This question elicited a broad range of responses, but a clear majority expressed skepticism or concern about how well the current system supports students and teachers.
- Mixed Confidence in the Structure: While some respondents acknowledged the strengths of Vermont's education system—such as local control, community engagement, and teacher dedication—many raised concerns about systemic barriers that limit its effectiveness.
- Understaffing and Burnout: A key theme was the strain on teachers and support staff. Many respondents noted that educators are overwhelmed by increasing demands, behavioral challenges, and inadequate staffing, all of which contribute to burnout and lower morale.
- Lack of Student Supports: Respondents consistently highlighted insufficient access to mental health services, special education, and academic intervention as areas where the system is falling short in supporting students.
- Governance and Bureaucracy: Many respondents identified confusion and inefficiency in the current education governance structure. They described a disconnect between state mandates and local realities, with a belief that too many decisions are made without sufficient input from educators or communities.
- Equity Concerns: A number of responses pointed to unequal opportunities across districts, suggesting that the system does not support all students or teachers equally—especially in rural areas or lower-income communities.

Key Concerns from Residents:

- The system is stretched thin—educators lack adequate staffing and support to meet students' growing needs.
- State mandates can feel disconnected from on-the-ground realities in schools and classrooms.
- Mental health and special education services are under-resourced, leaving vulnerable students without consistent support.

- Rural and underfunded districts are struggling to offer the same opportunities as better-resourced areas.
- There is a desire for more coordination, clearer leadership, and structures that empower schools rather than burden them with bureaucracy.

Notable Differences in Opinion:

- Respondents with experience working in education (teachers, administrators, or school board members) were more likely to highlight systemic inefficiencies, staffing shortages, and rising expectations without additional resources.
- Community members without direct school involvement were more likely to focus on funding structures and visible outcomes (like class sizes or access to programs) as indicators of systemic success or failure.

Are there ways you believe your local school district could be better supported by the state?

Total Number of Responses: 2,484

Trends in Responses:

- The majority of respondents believe the state can and should play a stronger role in supporting local school districts—particularly in terms of funding stability, mental health services, and staffing support.
- More Equitable and Predictable Funding: A significant number of respondents called for more stable and equitable state funding. Many expressed frustration with property tax variability and a perceived lack of fairness in how resources are distributed across districts.
- Increased Support for Student Services: There was strong support for expanded state investment in mental health professionals, special education resources, and academic interventions—especially in rural or under-resourced areas.
- Teacher Recruitment and Retention: Respondents noted that staffing shortages are a statewide issue, not just a local one. They encouraged the state to provide stronger support for training, recruiting, and retaining teachers and paraeducators.
- Reduced Administrative Burden: Several respondents called on the state to streamline mandates, reduce paperwork, and offer more flexibility to local administrators. The desire for “less bureaucracy, more support” came up frequently.
- Capital and Infrastructure Aid: Many residents urged the state to provide more direct assistance for aging school buildings, HVAC systems, and facility improvements, especially in districts that can’t afford major capital projects on their own.

Key Concerns from Residents:

- Local districts need more funding predictability and less reliance on property taxes.
- There's a strong desire for the state to increase its investment in student health, learning supports, and inclusion services.
- The education workforce shortage needs to be addressed as a statewide problem, with state-level solutions.
- Many believe state mandates should be accompanied by funding, not unfunded requirements.
- Some called for more direct state investment in physical infrastructure to relieve pressure on local budgets.

Notable Differences in Opinion:

- Rural respondents emphasized the need for equitable funding formulas and more consistent support for specialized services, which can be harder to access in small districts.
- Respondents from more urban or better-resourced areas were more likely to focus on specific programming support or state-level policy reforms around testing, school safety, or curriculum mandates.

The Governor's education plan includes moving from our current school district size of 119 districts to 5 and reshaping how local school district votes are held. What district size seems right to you? Do you believe our education system should have a more regional approach?

Total Number of Responses: 2,250

Trends in Responses:

- **Strong Concern About Local Control Loss:** A significant majority of respondents expressed concern or opposition to consolidating Vermont's school districts from 119 to 5. The most commonly cited worry was the erosion of local control and community voice in school decision-making.
- **Skepticism About Effectiveness:** Many respondents questioned whether such a large-scale consolidation would actually improve education outcomes or fiscal efficiency. Some feared it would increase bureaucracy rather than reduce it.
- **Support for Some Efficiency:** While most opposed a full consolidation to just five districts, several respondents indicated openness to more regional collaboration or shared services—if local decision-making could still be preserved.
- **Concerns About Equity and Representation:** Respondents from rural areas were especially concerned that under a larger system, their communities would lose representation and be overshadowed by larger population centers.

- Voting System Changes Viewed Warily: Proposals to shift how school budgets are voted on (e.g., moving away from local votes) were met with broad resistance. Many Vermonters value the current system that allows for direct democratic input at the local level.

Key Concerns from Residents:

- Consolidating to five districts risks eliminating local voices and community engagement.
- Residents are wary that larger bureaucracies could create more administrative overhead rather than saving money.
- Rural communities feel they may lose representation and flexibility under a more centralized structure.
- There's broad support for keeping local school budget votes in place—many see this as a cornerstone of Vermont's civic tradition.
- Some openness exists for regional collaboration or shared services, but not wholesale consolidation.

Notable Differences in Opinion:

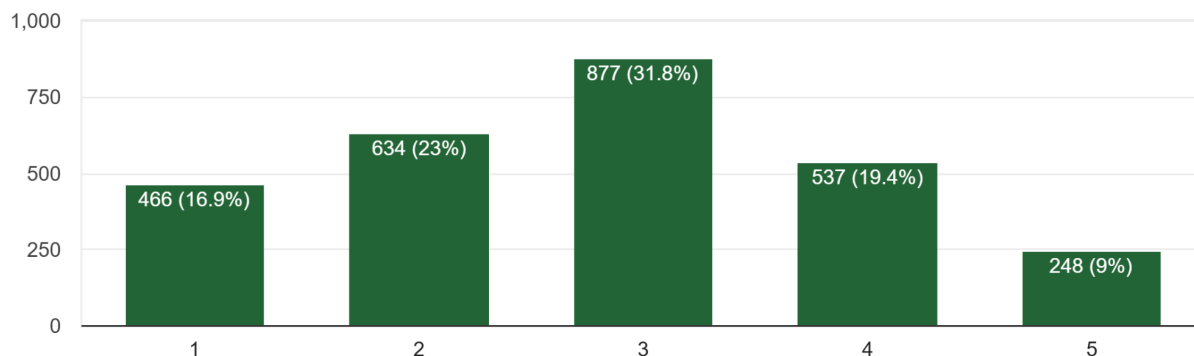
- Urban Rural Divide: Respondents in more populated areas were slightly more open to consolidation than rural respondents, but even urban respondents expressed concern about losing local school culture and direct accountability.
- Those with School Governance Experience: A subset of respondents who currently or previously served on school boards or in education leadership were particularly skeptical, noting the complexity and nuance of district-level decisions that could be lost in a larger structure.

How connected do you feel to the decision-making process around Vermont's public education system? On a scale from 1 - 5, 5 being completely connected/involved, 1 being not at all connected or involved.

Total Number of Responses: 2,762

How connected do you feel to the decision-making process around Vermont's public education system?

2,762 responses



Average Response: 2.8/5

Where do you currently get information about the work being done to improve Vermont's public education system?

Total Number of Responses: 2,115

Trends in Responses:

- **Local News Outlets Lead:** The most common sources of information were local newspapers (print and online), including Seven Days, VT Digger, and regional papers like the Caledonian Record, Times Argus, and Valley News.
- **Word of Mouth and Community Engagement:** Many respondents reported relying on conversations with local school board members, teachers, or other community members. Public meetings and Front Porch Forum were also frequently cited.
- **Limited Use of Official Government Channels:** Few respondents mentioned state websites, legislative updates, or communications from the Agency of Education or elected officials as a primary source of information.
- **Social Media Is Present, But Not Dominant:** Some respondents said they follow legislative work or education-related discussions on platforms like Facebook and Twitter, but these were often mentioned alongside frustration about misinformation or limited context.
- **Educators and Parents Rely on School Communications:** Respondents working in or connected to schools often get updates through district newsletters, superintendent letters, or school board meetings.

Key Concerns from Residents:

- There is a lack of consistent, centralized, and accessible information about education reform efforts in Vermont.
- Many people feel they have to “dig” to stay informed, and often don’t know where to look for reliable updates from the State House or Agency of Education.
- Some residents want clearer communication from legislators and education officials in plain language, not legal or policy jargon.
- There’s an appetite for more transparency and proactive outreach—particularly before major decisions are made.

Notable Differences in Opinion:

- **Geographic Variation:** Residents in smaller or rural communities rely more heavily on Front Porch Forum, local conversations, and community meetings, while those in Chittenden County and other larger areas cited statewide outlets like Seven Days and VT Digger more frequently.
- **Engagement Levels Matter:** Respondents who work in education or serve on boards report more direct access to information, while general community members often feel out of the loop or unaware of how to stay updated.

We in the Legislature want to ensure that we are receiving valuable community feedback. How would you like to stay informed and share your input on Vermont’s education system?

Total Number of Responses: 2,124

Trends in Responses:

- **Email Updates and Newsletters Were the Most Common Preference:** Many respondents want to receive regular email newsletters from the Legislature or their local representatives with plain-language summaries of bills, votes, and opportunities for input.
- **In-Person and Virtual Community Forums:** A significant portion of respondents expressed interest in town halls, school-based forums, and public meetings—both in-person and via Zoom. Flexibility in timing and format was emphasized to accommodate different schedules.
- **Front Porch Forum and Local Media:** Many Vermonters rely on Front Porch Forum for community news and said they would read legislative updates if posted there. Local newspapers and public access channels were also cited as useful venues for information.
- **Surveys Like This One Are Appreciated:** A large number of respondents specifically thanked the Legislature for asking and indicated they’d like to see more short, clear surveys to share feedback in the future.

- Social Media—Mixed Feelings: Some expressed interest in following updates on Facebook or Instagram, particularly if information is accessible and consistent. Others expressed concern about misinformation or lack of professionalism on social media.

Key Concerns from Residents:

- Many Vermonters feel left out of the loop and want clear, non-jargon communication.
- There's strong demand for two-way communication: not just updates, but opportunities to give feedback in meaningful ways.
- Timing matters—respondents often noted that meetings during work hours can be inaccessible.

Notable Differences in Opinion:

- Digital vs. Traditional Preferences: Older Vermonters often prefer print materials, local papers, and mailers, while younger and more digitally-connected residents prefer email, websites, and social media.
- Rural Urban Access: Rural Vermonters often emphasized the importance of Front Porch Forum and local public access TV, whereas those in more urban areas leaned toward email newsletters and news websites.
- Professionally Connected Respondents: Educators and school board members asked for more formal channels of communication, such as direct outreach from legislative liaisons or organized educator feedback sessions.

As we work to improve our education system, what values do you think should guide the process?

Total Number of Responses: 1,884

Trends in Responses:

- Equity and Fairness were the most frequently cited values. Vermonters emphasized the importance of ensuring all students, regardless of zip code, income, background, or ability, have access to a high-quality education.
- Transparency and Accountability were also top concerns. Respondents want clear communication from policymakers and school leadership, and they want decisions to be data-informed, fiscally responsible, and well-explained.
- Community Voice and Local Engagement came up often. Many Vermonters believe local communities, parents, and educators should have a meaningful role in shaping education policy and budget decisions.
- Student-Centered Approach was emphasized across demographic groups. Many respondents encouraged the Legislature to prioritize the needs and well-being of children first—especially around mental health, learning recovery, and individualized support.

- Long-Term Sustainability was named repeatedly. Respondents expressed concern about the growing cost of education and emphasized the need to make changes that are not just effective now, but viable for future generations.

Key Concerns from Residents:

- Policies should be guided by what's best for students, not politics or bureaucracy.
- Rural schools and smaller communities fear being left behind in broader reform efforts.
- People want investments in education to come with clear plans and measurable outcomes.
- Many voiced that affordability and fairness in the tax system should be weighed alongside maintaining strong schools.

Notable Differences in Opinion:

- Tax Fairness vs. Service Expansion: Some Vermonters emphasized keeping property taxes affordable as the top value, while others prioritized protecting or expanding educational programs, even if it meant higher taxes.
- Local Control vs. Statewide Equity: There is a tension between the desire for consistent, equitable outcomes statewide and the desire to retain strong local decision-making power.
- Civic vs. Workforce Emphasis: While many respondents highlighted the importance of preparing students for the workforce, others emphasized the broader purpose of public education: fostering citizenship, creativity, and critical thinking.

What's one thing you love about your local schools that you want to make sure stays strong?

Total Number of Responses: 1,965

Trends in Responses:

- Dedicated Teachers and Staff: By far the most frequently mentioned strength, respondents praised the commitment, compassion, and quality of local educators and support staff.
- Community Connection: Many highlighted the strong sense of community, close relationships between families and schools, and the way schools serve as local hubs for engagement and support.
- Small Class Sizes and Personalized Learning: Respondents deeply value the individualized attention students receive and the close-knit feel that small schools and class sizes provide.
- Extracurriculars and Enrichment: Programs such as music, arts, athletics, theater, and outdoor learning were commonly named as essential elements of what makes their schools vibrant and well-rounded.

- Student Support Services: Mental health resources, special education services, and programs for social-emotional learning were often cited as vital components to preserve.

Key Concerns from Residents:

- Worry that consolidation or budget cuts could eliminate local programs or reduce access to enrichment opportunities.
- Concern that pressures on staffing, funding, or policy changes could negatively impact the relationships and trust built between teachers, students, and families.
- Fear that a shift toward standardized models could erode the unique identity and strengths of individual schools.

Notable Differences in Opinion:

- Rural residents often emphasized the importance of preserving local control and the character of small community schools, while others focused on specific programs or academic offerings.
- Some respondents from larger districts focused on specialized programs (e.g., IB, CTE, advanced placement), while others emphasized inclusivity and a welcoming school culture as their top priority.

If you could change one thing about Vermont's education system, what would it be?

Total Number of Responses: 1,893

Trends in Responses:

- Simplify and Clarify the Funding System: A large number of respondents cited the education finance system as overly complex, inequitable, or frustrating to understand. Many suggested greater transparency, statewide oversight, or rethinking the property tax model.
- Increase State Support and Reduce Local Burden: Vermonters expressed concern that communities are being left to shoulder too much of the funding responsibility. Suggestions included more robust state-level investment, fully funding mandates, and better support for rural and under-resourced schools.
- Address Staffing and Teacher Shortages: Respondents want to see increased pay and support for educators, more staff in schools, and better retention strategies. Many called for reducing administrative burdens so teachers can focus on teaching.
- Focus on Core Academic and Life Skills: Some respondents felt schools should refocus on foundational learning—math, reading, civics, and practical life skills—while others pushed for more personalized, hands-on, or experiential learning.

- Consolidation Concerns: Several respondents were wary of the Governor’s proposal to reduce the number of school districts, fearing loss of local control and unique community identity.

Key Concerns from Residents:

- Rising property taxes and a sense that the funding system is both confusing and inequitable.
- A lack of state-level leadership in solving complex challenges—many feel their districts are “on their own.”
- Concerns that students aren’t receiving the same opportunities or support depending on their ZIP code.

Notable Differences in Opinion:

- Some respondents wanted more rigorous academic standards, while others emphasized social-emotional learning, mental health, and equity.
- Rural residents were more likely to mention keeping schools open and maintaining local control, while respondents from larger towns focused more on affordability and program expansion.

Is there anything else you would like to share?

Total Number of Responses: 1,230

Trends in Responses:

- Gratitude for the Opportunity to Weigh In: Many respondents thanked the Legislature for asking for community input and encouraged continued transparency and outreach.
- Deep Concern About Rising Property Taxes: Property taxes came up frequently, with Vermonters urging lawmakers to find more sustainable, equitable alternatives that won’t drive people—particularly seniors and working families—out of their homes.
- Desire for Local Control and Community Voice: A recurring theme was opposition to large-scale consolidation. Respondents voiced pride in their local schools and expressed concern that centralized decision-making would erode community identity and responsiveness.
- Worries About Burnout in Schools: Several responses emphasized concerns about burnout among teachers, support staff, and administrators. They asked the Legislature to prioritize educator well-being, reduce paperwork, and increase staffing support.
- Appetite for Innovation and Reform: Respondents suggested creative ideas such as year-round school calendars, agricultural education programs, more CTE options, and reforms to school board structures to improve efficiency.

Key Concerns from Residents:

- The current system isn't financially sustainable or easy to understand.
- State leadership needs to offer clearer guidance and long-term vision.
- Students and educators are under pressure—emotionally, academically, and financially.

Notable Differences in Opinion:

- Some residents advocated for significant restructuring of school governance and spending, while others urged caution and emphasized community-centered approaches.
- Urban and suburban respondents leaned more heavily into system reform, while rural Vermonters emphasized the importance of maintaining school access and community connection.

Conclusion

The responses to this survey reflect the deep care Vermonters have for their public education system and the many different perspectives they bring to the table. Across every question, we saw a wide array of answers—often thoughtful, sometimes conflicting, and always passionate.

The breadth and variability of responses to this survey underscore the complexity of Vermont's public education system and the diversity of public opinion surrounding it. Across all questions, respondents provided a wide range of perspectives—highlighting differing priorities, regional variations, and varying levels of understanding around how the system functions and is funded.

Several key themes emerged: a desire for equity in funding and outcomes, widespread concern about property tax burdens, and the importance of student-centered programming. At the same time, conflicting views on system structure, the Governor's proposal, and definitions of affordability reveal that no single reform path will satisfy all constituencies.

This data suggests that any legislative effort aimed at improving Vermont's education system will need to balance clarity and transparency in communication, equity in outcomes, and flexibility in implementation to address the concerns raised.

We thank all Vermonters who took the time to share their thoughts, and we remain committed to an inclusive and thoughtful process as we shape the future of public education together.