

Whether you have children who attend public school or not, if you own a home here in NH, 60% to 70% of your property tax bill funds education. Making an investment in a system of quality public education, one that impacts 92% of our children here in NH, benefits us all. As community leaders, working adults and business owners, we understand the essential role of public education in our ability to compete in the global economy, where an educated workforce is critical to our local and state economic vitality and future prosperity. Strong, supported, well-funded, public school systems can attract businesses, skilled workers, and families who choose to move to New Hampshire from other areas of the country. Well-funded and equitable public school settings consistently create communities that are vibrant and contribute to the greater well-being and vitality of our towns and our state.

It's a good investment, but is it fair? Locally, ConVal is a community that has not shied away from investing in quality public education. We understand its value and we are doing our part. The same cannot be said for the State. Over the last five years alone, the State has cut public school funding by 50% on average, so here in the ConVal District, \$2 million received in state support in 2012 shrunk to just over \$900,000 by 2017. The only way to cover cuts as severe as these is to ask the towns to make up the difference, and we have.

What are the numbers? The average cost of educating one child in NH is \$15,000 per year. Of that amount, the state provides funding for most students at \$3,636 per year. \$1,750 is added for special education students, and \$750 is provided for students who qualify for free/reduced lunch. Adequacy funding, a tax we pay the state and maybe they return to us based on a formula, is inadequate, and the number of unfunded mandates continues to increase, driving up the cost of running the district. As if increasing costs weren't bad enough, the state has eliminated school building support and contributions to teacher pensions over the last few years. Transportation, a huge expense here in our district, is also unfunded, as is support for students who may need expensive special services like those delivered at Crotched Mountain. And, if we do nothing to stop it, stabilization grants designed to help districts balance decreasing support, are scheduled to be cut by 4% each year until the fund zeroes out in 22 years. The result is an increasing burden that continues to shift to the local towns and taxpayers. Where is the fairness in this formula?

Legislators will argue that there just isn't any money to fund education, though they are required by law and our State Constitution to provide adequate education (and the funding) for all children. Instead, they continue to cut funding, essentially gutting our public education system, while proposing funding for private schools. This is mind-boggling. If New Hampshire is to have a strong economic future, funding adequate education for all of our kids makes good sense, but let's start with reinstating what's been cut already before we look at taking more away.

The results of these cuts are being felt most severely in poor towns and school districts, but districts like ours are also feeling the squeeze. All over New Hampshire, communities of all sizes and economies are recognizing that we are in the midst of an education funding crisis that must be solved.

And it will take all of us together to solve this. Here in ConVal, our school board members and district leadership are addressing what they can: renegotiating contracts, re-evaluating staffing levels and program offerings, creating public-private partnerships for educational opportunities, examining every part of the budget. Our town leaders are working in partnership with our school board to creatively find ways to reduce the tax burden. Recently, our nine ConVal towns and school board jointly penned a letter signed by all of us, that was sent to our elected leaders and candidates running for office this November, imploring them to make education funding fairness a front-burner issue this legislative session.

Together we must demand that the State be a full partner and pay its fair and legal share. We need to elect leaders and legislators who get it, who understand that NH's economic future is dependent on solving this problem. Once we've elected them, we need to hold them accountable to do the hard work involved. There are some great resources to learn more available at Advancing NH Public Education (<https://anhpe.org/>), and you can plan to participate in a Community Conversation on this very topic Tuesday, November 13th at 7PM at the Monadnock Center for History and Culture, 19 Grove Street, Peterborough.

New Hampshire succeeds when our children succeed. We must act now and act together to strengthen our public education system and bring fairness to New Hampshire's education funding structure. Other states with similar economics have solved this problem. Let's do our homework and figure this out.

*Karen Hatcher is a member of the Peterborough Select Board and representative on the Select Board Advisory Committee to the ConVal School Board. Contact her at [khatcher@peterboroughnh.gov](mailto:khatcher@peterboroughnh.gov)*