



EWSD ²⁰₂₇

BUDGET SURVEY

RESULTS



Essex Westford School District

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Introduction

Crafting the budget is one of the School Board's most significant legal responsibilities. Our task is to weigh the escalating cost of operating schools in Vermont against the real and growing tax burden placed on residents. We take this responsibility incredibly seriously, particularly in the context of what is happening at the [State Level with ACT 73](#) and unaddressed healthcare costs. We are facing factors outside the district's control that are creating severe financial strain. ACT 73 was passed without any evidence that massive consolidations will result in either taxpayer savings or improved student outcomes. Data has been presented that shows the opposite to be true.

As a result, EWSD is approaching a critical juncture.

Since the State, per the governor's direction, assumed responsibility for negotiating health insurance in 2018, premiums have risen steeply every year. In 2019, EWSD's health insurance cost \$8.8 million. By 2026, it will reach over \$15 million—a 73% increase.

To keep pace with these rising benefit costs, EWSD has reduced staffing from 907 full-time equivalent (FTE) employees in 2024 to 808 FTEs today. While [enrollment has declined by 67](#) students since 2024, EWSD has already reduced staff positions by nearly 100 in that same timeframe. Positions across teaching, support staff, and administration have been eliminated, not because educational needs have declined, but because [health insurance now consumes approximately 15% of the district's entire budget, compared to less than 10% in 2018](#).

These pressures are harming our educational system and straining our community.

At the same time, our school buildings are aging beyond what routine maintenance and repair can reasonably sustain. Each year, maintenance costs rise, and each year, the expense required to operate grows at an accelerating pace. We are nearing a point where building failure could directly affect students' ability to attend school. As a community, we must determine how to ensure that our children have safe, welcoming, and functional learning environments. This challenge also presents an opportunity: the opportunity to shape a lasting legacy for future generations.

It is within this difficult context that we begin developing the FY2027 school budget. We remain committed to transparency, good-faith communication, and meaningful community engagement within the timeline required for a vote in April 2026.

The results of this survey provide valuable insight into community priorities, concerns, and expectations. They help shape the lens through which we do our work, but they do not predetermine specific budget decisions. This qualitative feedback will be considered alongside fiscal data, legal obligations, and other essential information that the Board must integrate as it carries out its responsibilities.

Method of collection and analysis:

This survey was sent out to the EWSD community via Google Form.

All responses were anonymous and did not require an email to be submitted.

All responses are shown below with both the percent and individual survey count for context. All open response answers were analyzed by AI to outline the most frequent key themes and then verified through human analysis for accuracy.

Disclaimer on reported data and themes

The quotes and views expressed in this findings report are taken directly from the respondents of this survey and reflect individual participant sentiments.

This report is to inform the board and themes should not be read as an endorsement by the board or EWSD.

THE BUDGET SURVEY INFORMS BUDGET PLANNING THE BOARD DETERMINES THE BUDGET THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY VOTES ON THE FINAL BUDGET

Survey Participant Sentiments

*"I am glad this survey forces people to consider the factors that the board has to balance. And I also wanted to share that I am concerned that feedback or input forms like this just become weaponized...Most people think you all do a reasonably good job and understand you're elected to balance complicated factors most people aren't aware of. But the public meetings and these forms are going to skew towards people who don't reflect the trends of the community...I worry the school board gets distracted by emotionally charged single decisions instead of focusing on the district as a whole being sustainable. Please don't be afraid to do the job you're elected to do, rather than govern by popularity. There is a reason the board's role exists" - **Survey Respondent***

*"This was very difficult to complete. I see just a little of what the EWSD board needs to consider to bring the budget to a vote." - **Survey Respondent***

*"As a community and a parent, I support fiscal responsibility. However fiscal responsibility does not mean eliminating or stop investing in our youth...We need to realize investment in our youth is an investment in our community." -**Survey Respondent***

HOW THESE RESULTS WILL BE USED

ADVOCATE

State Officials

SCHOOL BOARD

EWSD Staff
EWSD Community

COMMUNICATE

The school board will utilize local data, trends, and quotes when engaging with local and state officials.

With this data, we intend to:

- Testify with clear and convincing evidence at the state capitol
- Clarify misinformation about local education challenges and community sentiment with state officials
- Craft targeted advocacy communications with well-informed local input from parents, staff, students, and residents

The board can use this report and other data points to partner with the EWSD Finance Committee, giving them parameters for our FY 27 budget

This data helps inform the board about community priorities and also sheds light on areas where the community is asking for greater communication and clarity

We seek to provide correct and accurate program and budgetary information based on participant questions

Next Steps

Where does the board go from here?

Below are the overlapping phases that the board will undergo in the budgeting process. As elected officials, board members have the responsibility to research and understand in-depth nuances of the budget they are balancing. This requires significant time and capacity beyond what an average community member is able to provide, which is why the board is entrusted to represent the community in this decision-making process. The budget is informed by the public, but is not determined by popularity or survey results. Therefore, the board must balance community engagement with the data-driven, nuanced factors such as union, state, and federal requirements, long-term repercussions, legal considerations, educational best practice, and more.

01

Budget Guidance to Finance Committee

The board will hold a meeting on December 16th to give guidance and guardrails for our FY 27 budget to support the Finance Committee in the development of the budget proposal.

Finance Committee meeting schedule:
12/18, 1/8, 1/22, 2/5, 2/19, 3/5

02

Research & Review

As elected officials, the board is tasked to make deeply informed decisions based not just on community feedback, but understanding of the nuance and full picture of the issues. Therefore, the board will review and comprehensively discuss the relevant factors and ramifications of tradeoffs in balancing the budget

continued on next page

Next Steps (continued)

03

Community Engagement

Throughout January and February, there will be multiple opportunities for the [board to engage](#) with the public both through in person and virtual meetings as well as electronic communications.

04

Finalize the FY 27 Budget

When the board has reviewed the budget, bringing back questions and updates as needed, the board will vote to present the budget to voters in April 2026

In addition to using this local data to advocate at the state level, the board will continue to connect with the community

Clarifying Budget Facts

Provide the community with critical context and accurate information regarding:

- Universal Free Meals
- Staff Health Insurance
- [How Act 73 could affect the budget](#)
- Other key priorities

Community Outreach

Continue to foster reciprocal communication with the community through the budget process

- Engagement Board Meetings
- Future Surveys
- Virtual Gatherings

Survey Outcomes

1139 TOTAL SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

PARTICIPANTS INCLUDED

494 Parents & Caregivers

349 EWSD Staff Members

113 EWSD Current Students

196 Unaffiliated EWSD Residents

Data Subgroup Definitions

Parents & Caregivers

Individuals who have a current student at EWSD

EWSD Staff Members

Currently employed at EWSD

EWSD Current Students

Students currently attending EWSD

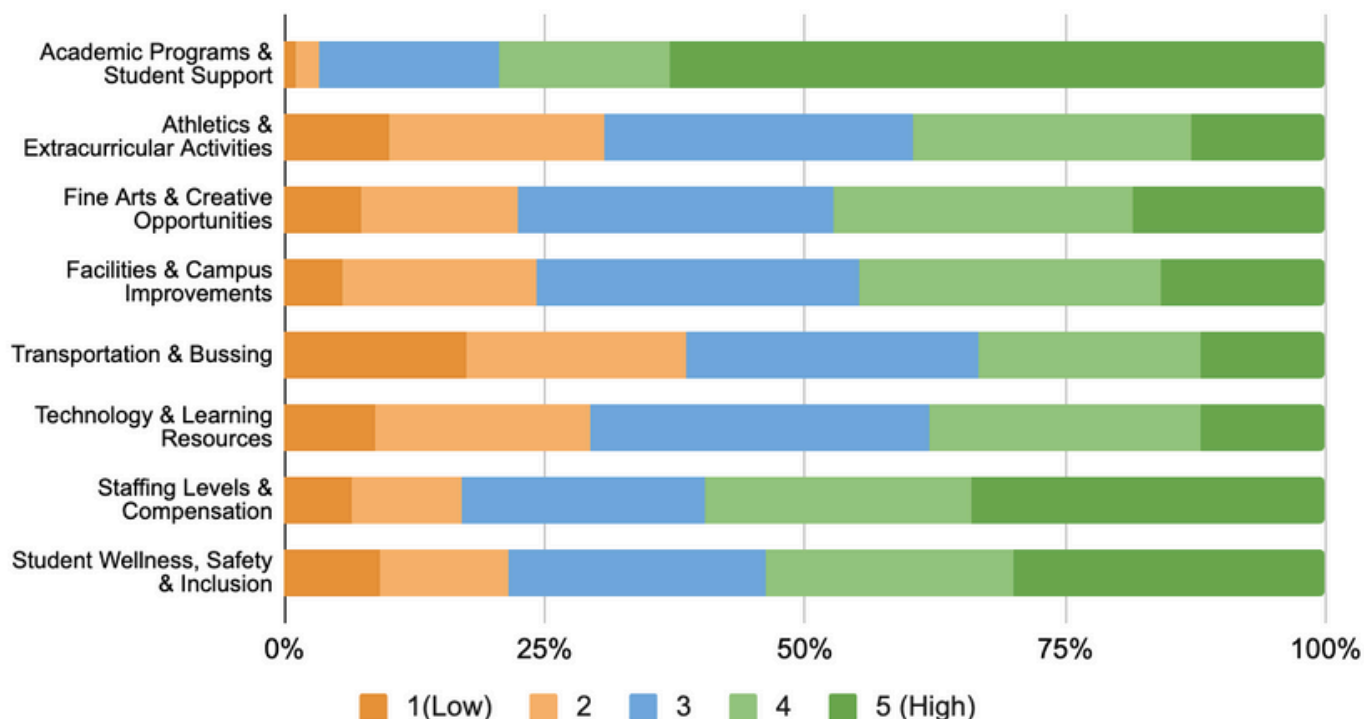
Unaffiliated EWSD Residents

EWSD Community members who live in the district but are not a parent, staff member or a student.

The following pages contain survey participant data, charts by subgroups, open response themes, and quotes

How do you prioritize the following areas of the EWSD Budget?

ALL RESPONSES



Academic Programs & Student Support

Core instruction, curriculum, tutoring, counseling, and special education services.

Athletics & Extracurricular Activities

Sports, clubs, student leadership, and enrichment programs outside the classroom.

Fine Arts & Creative Opportunities

Music, theater, visual arts, language, and related programs that foster creativity.

Facilities & Campus Improvements

Building maintenance, modernization, safety, and learning environment upgrades.

Transportation & Bussing

Safe and reliable transportation to and from school and activities.

Technology & Learning Resources

Classroom technology, student devices, and digital learning tools and literacy.

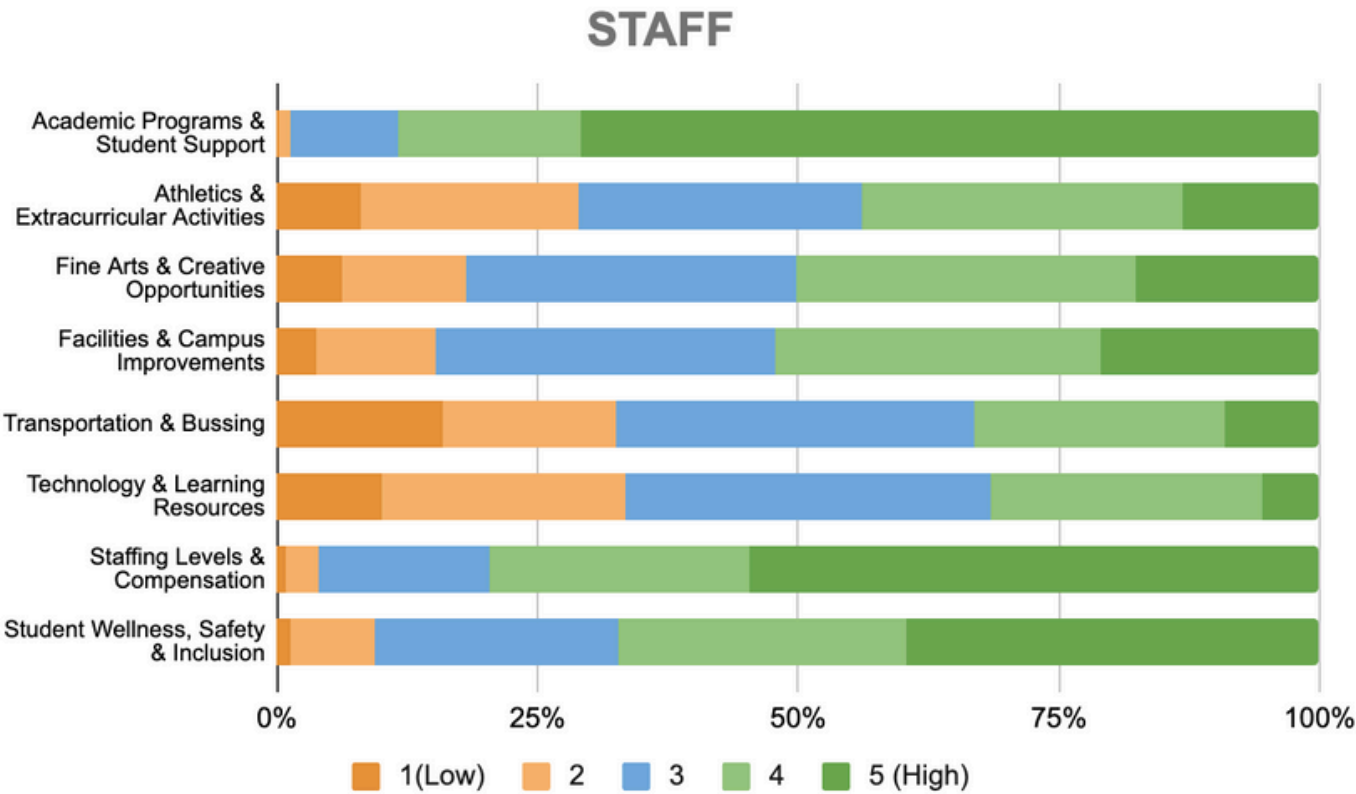
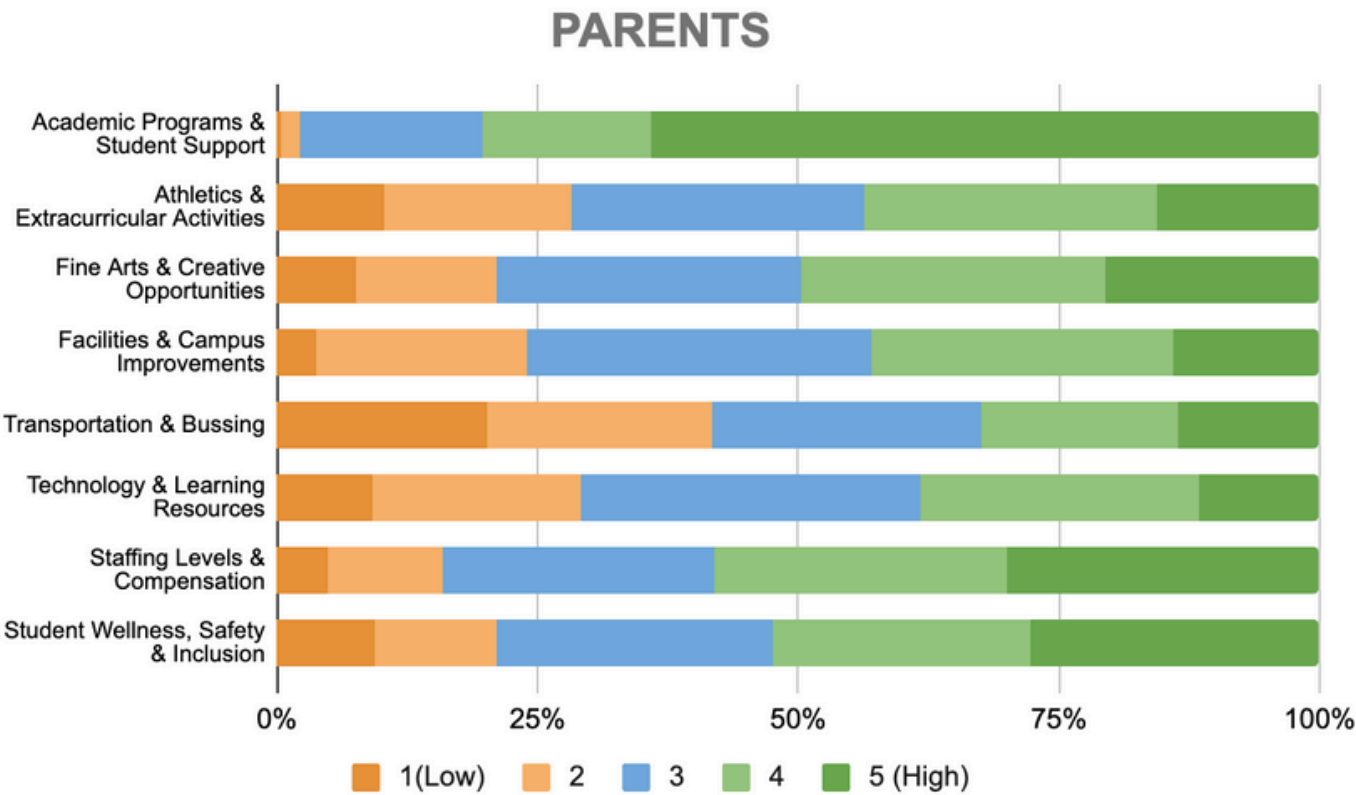
Staffing Levels & Compensation

Recruiting, retaining, and supporting teachers and school staff.

Student Wellness, Safety & Inclusion

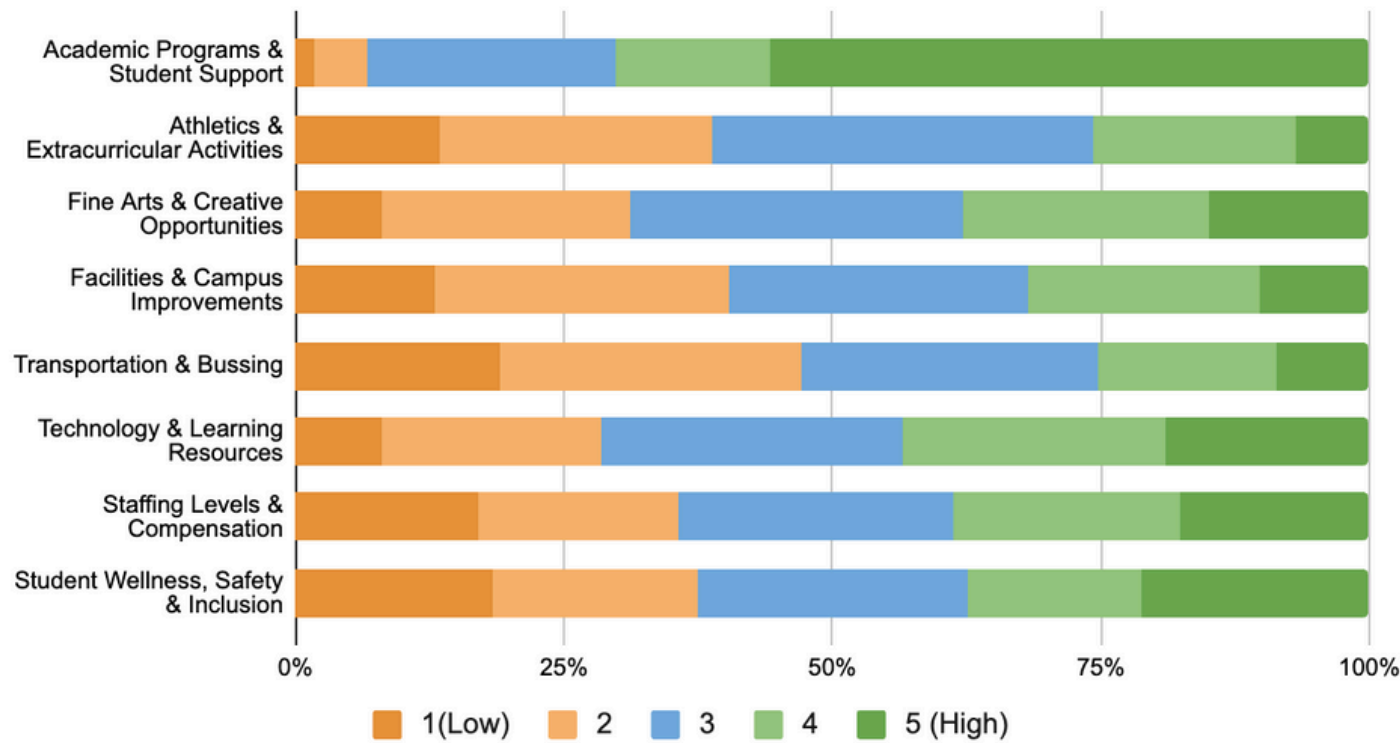
Health, nutrition, mental well-being, and equitable access for all students.

How do you prioritize the following areas of the EWSD Budget?

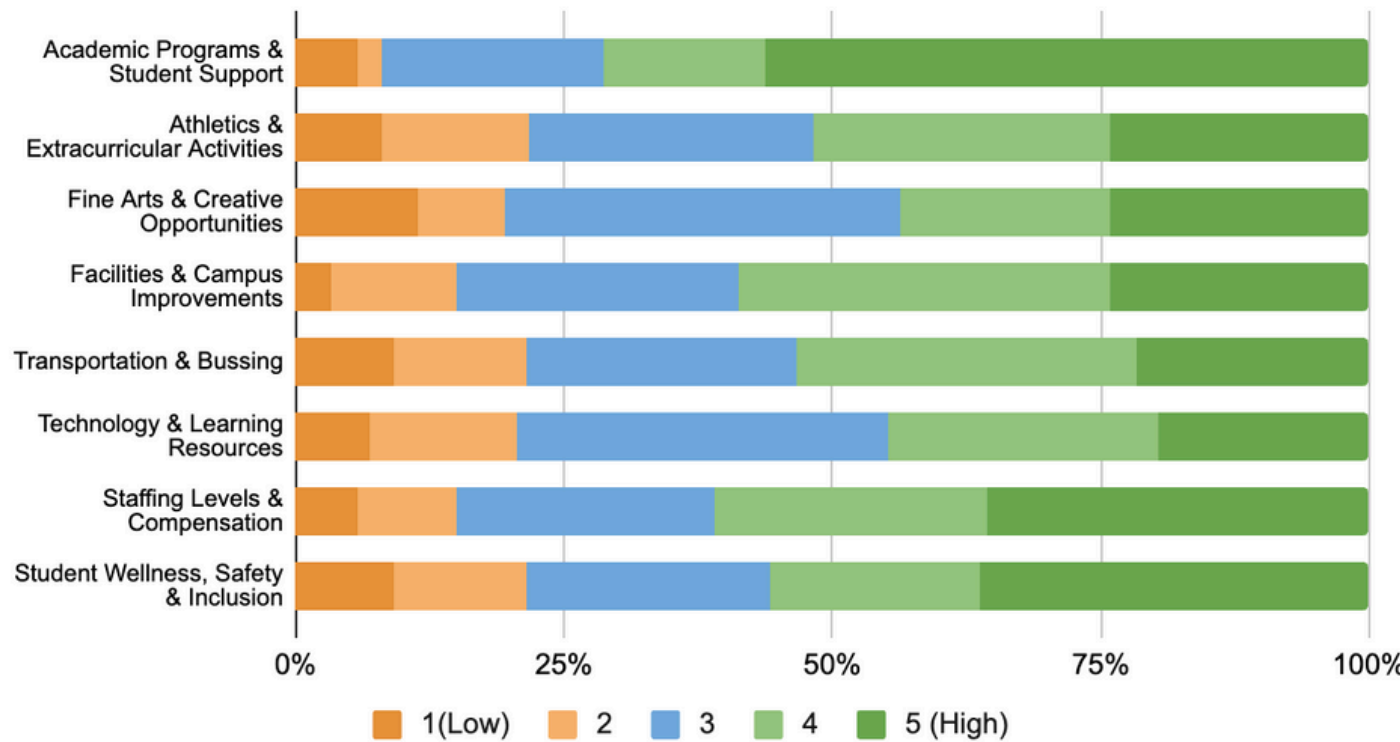


How do you prioritize the following areas of the EWSD Budget?

COMMUNITY

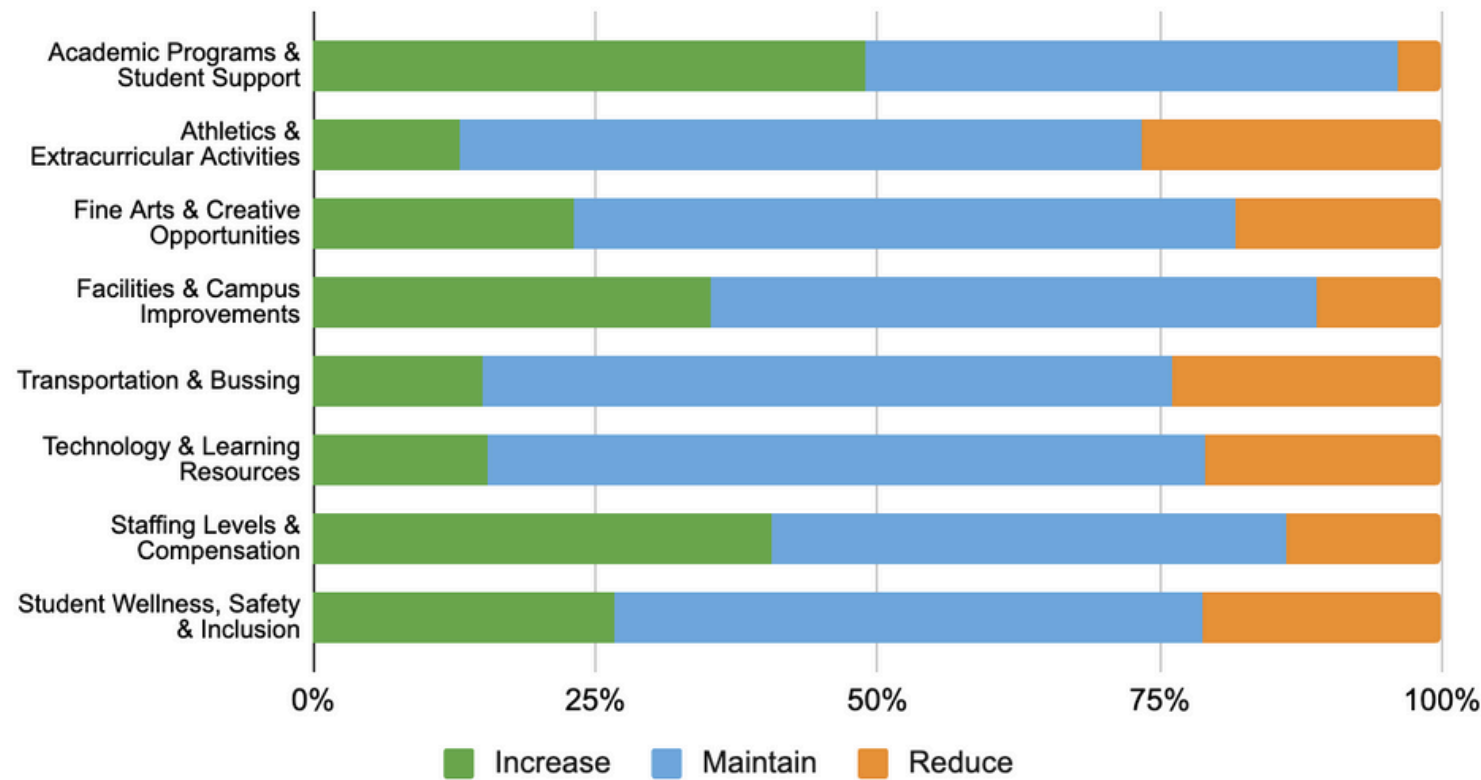


STUDENTS



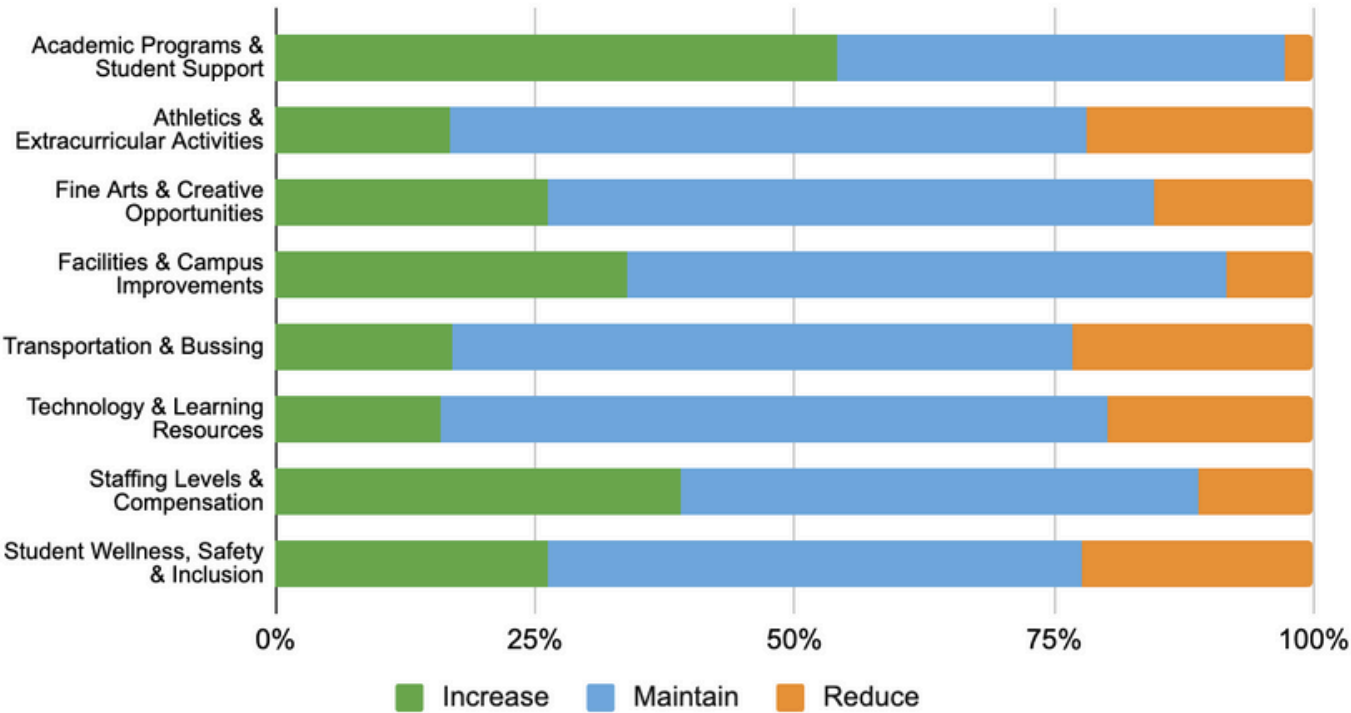
How would you adjust the following areas of the school budget?

ALL RESPONSES

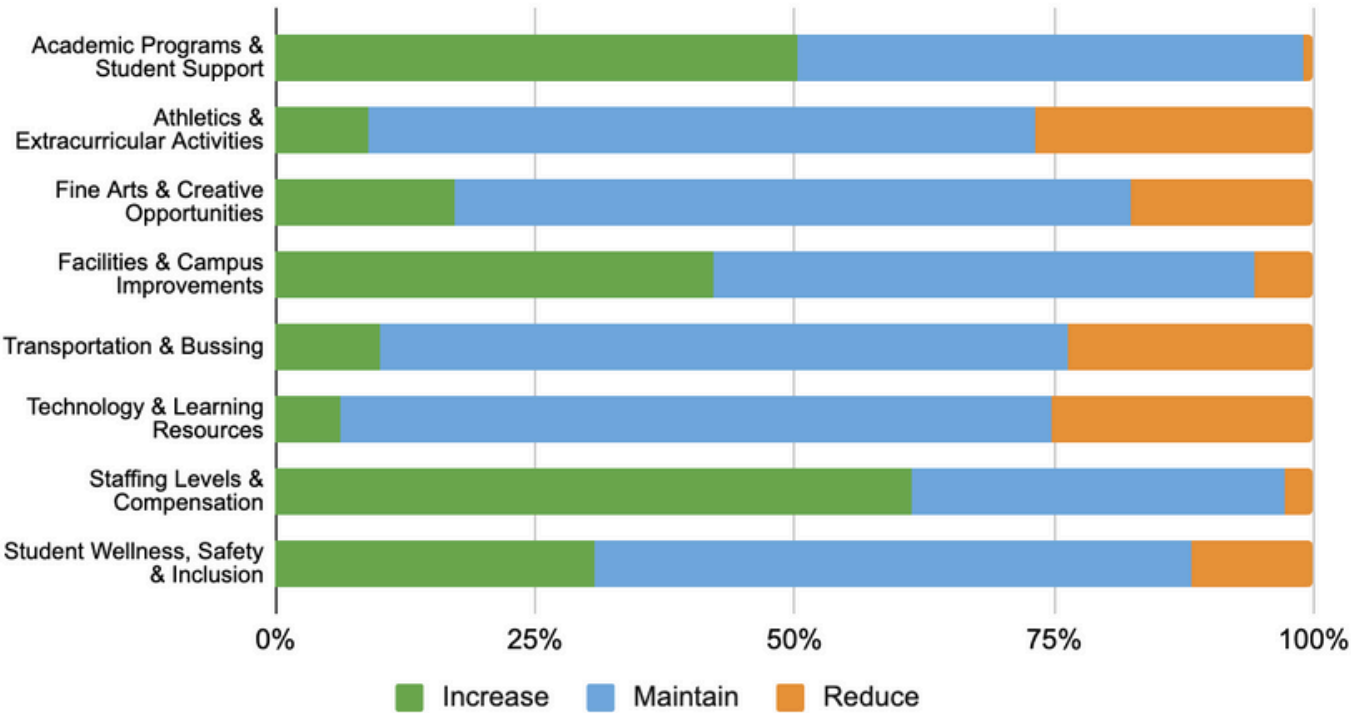


How would you adjust the following areas of the school budget?

PARENTS

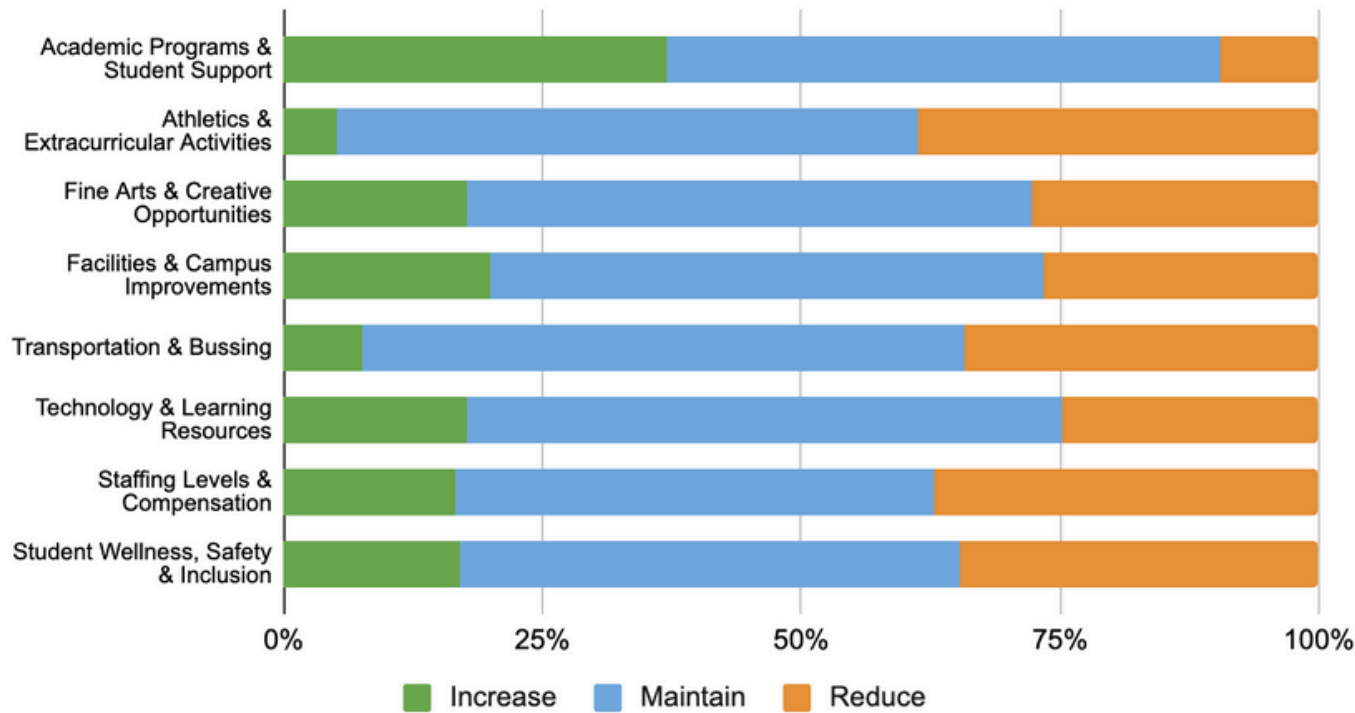


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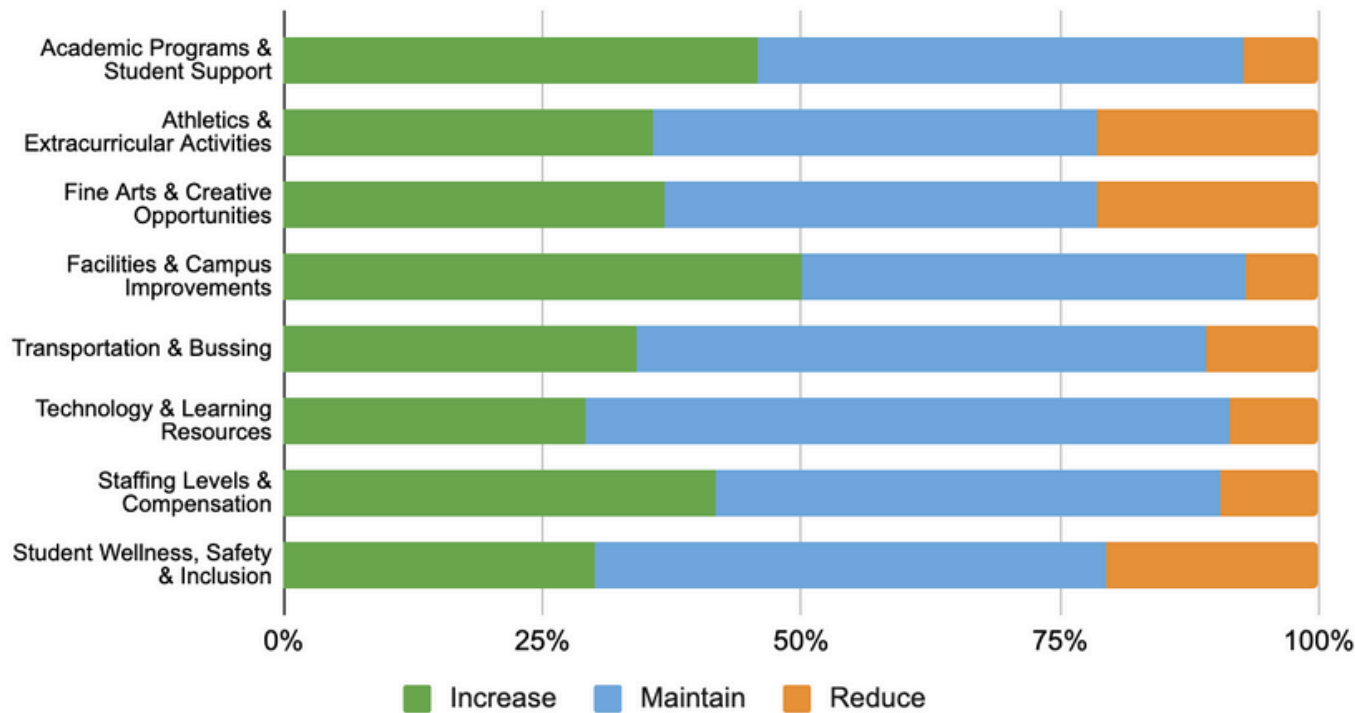


How would you adjust the following areas of the school budget?

COMMUNITY



STUDENTS



School Buildings and Facilities

Section Overview:

Vermont has critically aging school buildings that are reaching the end of their lifespans. This means that, despite dedicated and conscientious use and maintenance, the cost to maintain our buildings will increase every year to the point where maintenance costs approach a large percentage of replacement costs. This is a key area of concern for the future of EWSD. The school board designated a Facilities Committee to compare the cost of maintaining our school buildings versus determining future options for our school buildings. Regardless of our next steps, we will either be paying unprecedented amounts to maintain buildings or paying to build new facilities.

We need input from taxpayers to decide if EWSD should continue paying for increasing maintenance costs for all buildings or if we should pursue other options like closing older buildings, re-districting students, expanding facilities on EWSD land, etc. For more detailed information, check out this **Facilities Overview** from the Nov 19th, 2024 report on facilities' costs. We are proactively in the early stages of community input as we consider investing district resources to meet this need. To see more about our current buildings, please go to the **District Facilities Page** to see recent work on our buildings.

The projected cost of maintaining current building integrity through the next ten years is \$137 million. This means that regardless of our next steps, there is a cost the district will assume for our buildings.

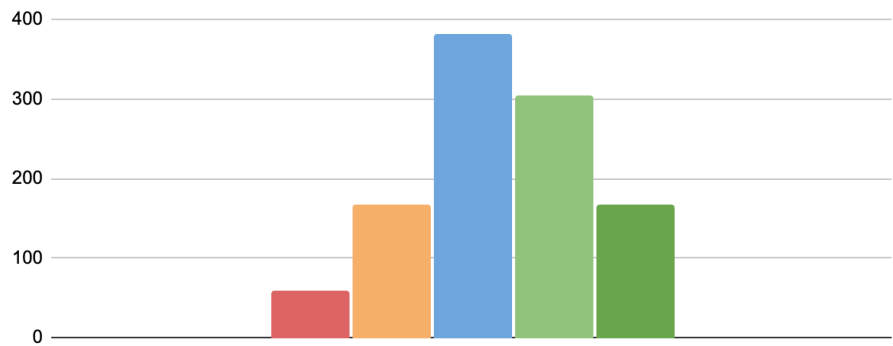
In this section, the following question was asked of participants:

What best reflects your preference for facilities funding in the FY'27 budget?

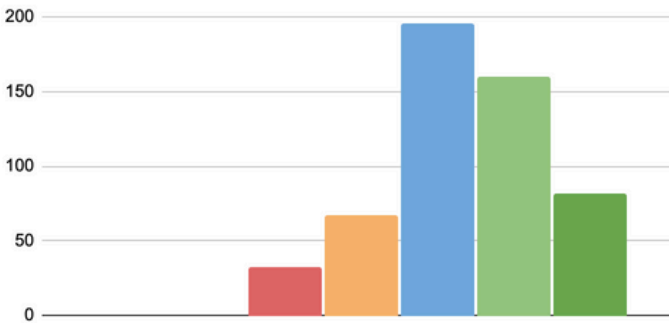


What best reflects your preference for facilities funding in the FY'27 budget?

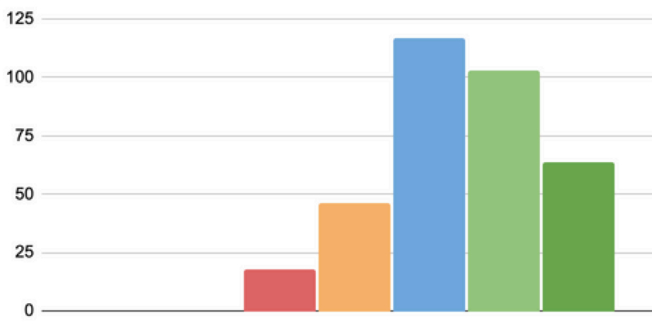
ALL RESPONSES



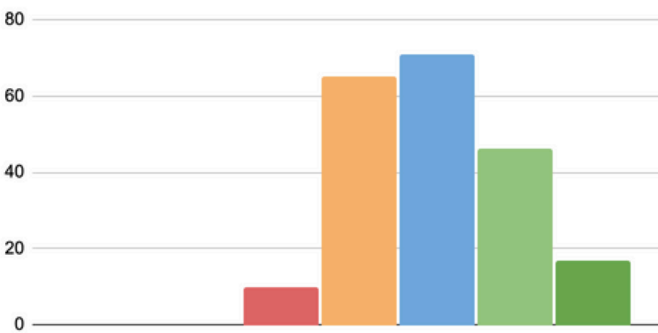
PARENTS



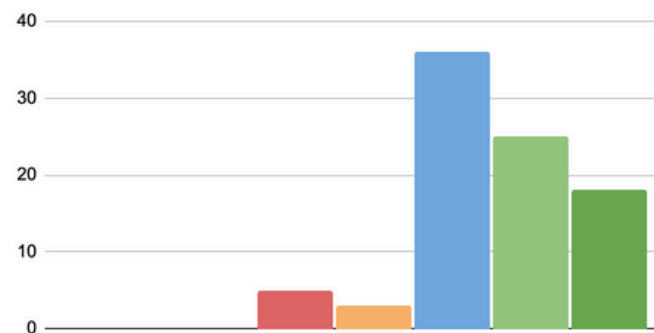
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COMMUNITY



STUDENTS



-  Reduce facilities investments to prioritize other areas, even if it means continuing to defer maintenance and improvements on aging buildings.
-  Reduce investments as stated above, but also look into closing more of the older schools buildings to try to save extra funds. Note: This may require some students to be redistricted out of EWSD due to current available space in the district.
-  Maintain current levels of facilities spending, focusing on essential repairs while delaying larger projects and new construction.
-  Increase facilities investments a bit to address some deferred maintenance and improve building conditions, prioritizing a small increase in the tax rate.
-  Significantly increase facilities investments to address deferred maintenance and look to improve building conditions through renovation or a new construction bond, acknowledging that this will lead to a greater overall increase in the tax rate.

Staffing Levels & Class Sizes

During the last budget season, the board received extensive feedback about class sizes and staffing. Class sizes throughout the district are, on average, classified as optimal based on state class size guidelines. Some survey respondents feel that classes are overcrowded, or that student need exceeds available classroom resources, but a smaller proportion of respondents feel that class sizes could be increased to offset cost increases.

80% of our budget goes to staffing, so changes here have the largest impact on our overall tax bill. **Health insurance benefits raise our tax bills the most, and because they are negotiated by the State under the Governor's direction, they are entirely outside of local board control.**

Since 2018, the cost of health insurance has increased by over \$7 million.

To be clear, that is \$7 million in increases alone, not the total cost of insurance. In that time, the budget was forced to accommodate \$7 million, which limited spending in other key areas.

Last year, staff health insurance costs went up 11.9%; for reference, that increase (not the total amount, just the increase) alone was close to the total amount of the EWSD transportation budget. This year, health insurance is projected to rise an additional 7%, resulting in a health insurance cost increase of 58% since 2018.

Since FY24, the district has gone from 907 full-time equivalent (FTE) employee positions to 808 FTE, mostly with reductions in district administrators, operational staff, and attrition of school-based personnel through retirement. These employee reductions have been made to address the ever-increasing rates of health insurance.

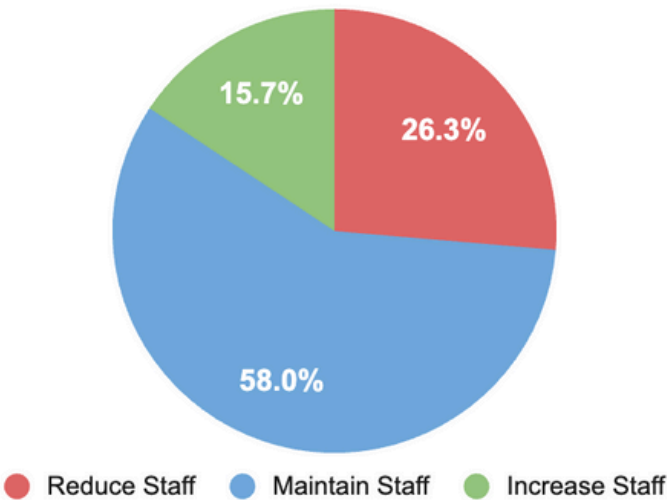
As a board, we invest in our staff as they are our single greatest asset serving our community. We are limited in mitigating the rising healthcare costs. We seek community feedback related to the difficult decisions about how to best support and invest in our staff in this context.

In this section, the following questions were asked of participants:

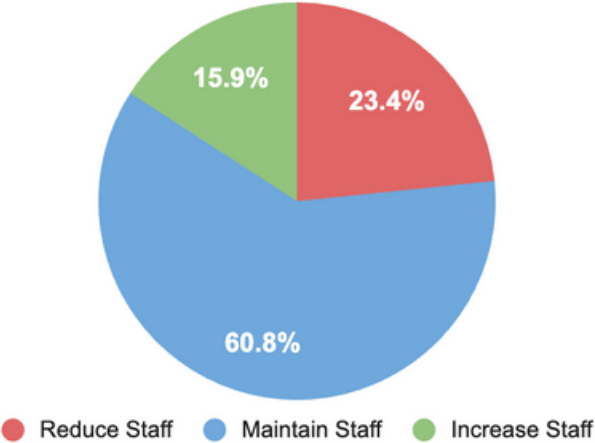
- *How do you prioritize adjusting for rising costs to staffing & benefits?*
- *In the budget, how should we prioritize class sizes? **Current Class Sizes***

How do you prioritize staffing to account for rising benefits costs?

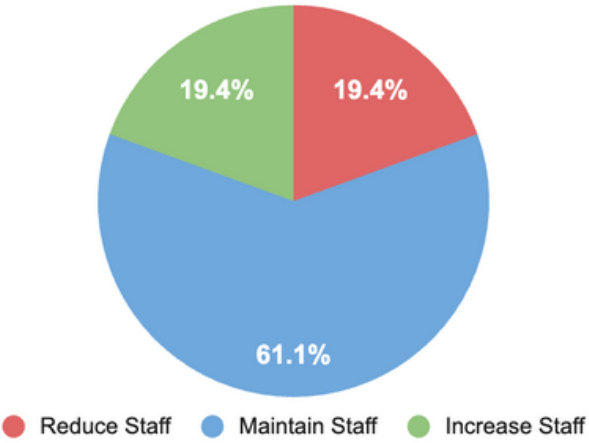
ALL RESPONSES



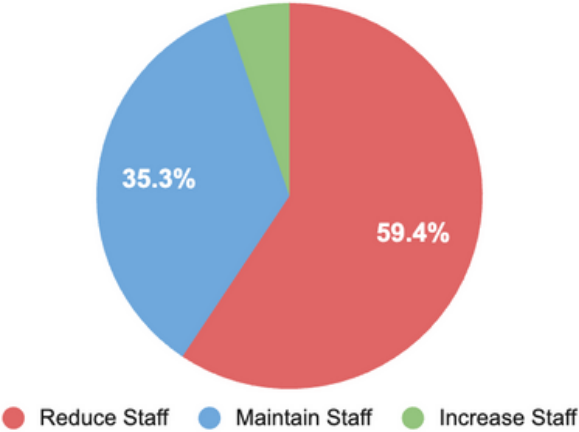
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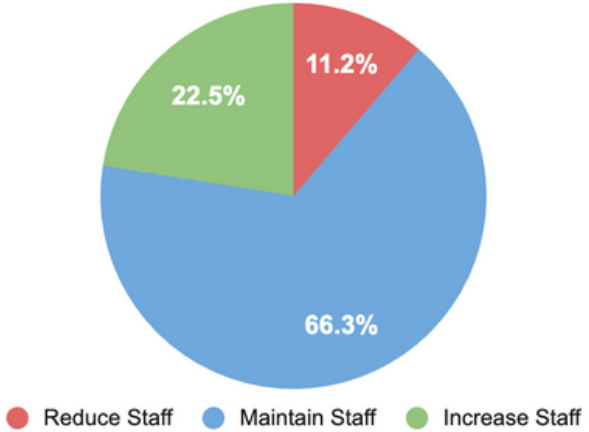
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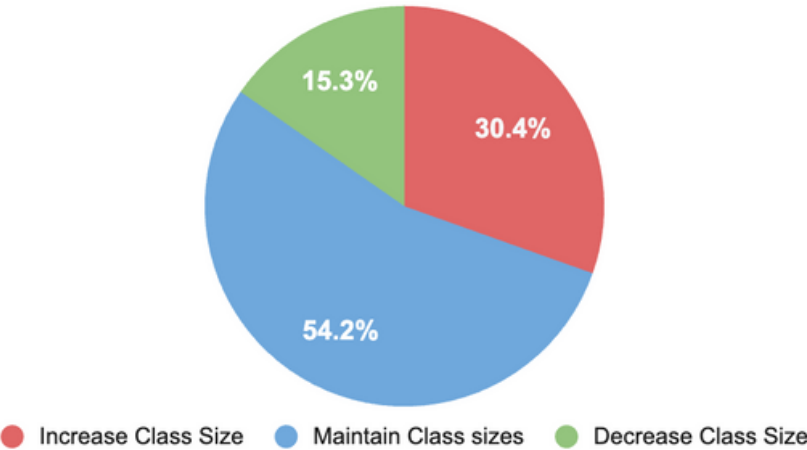


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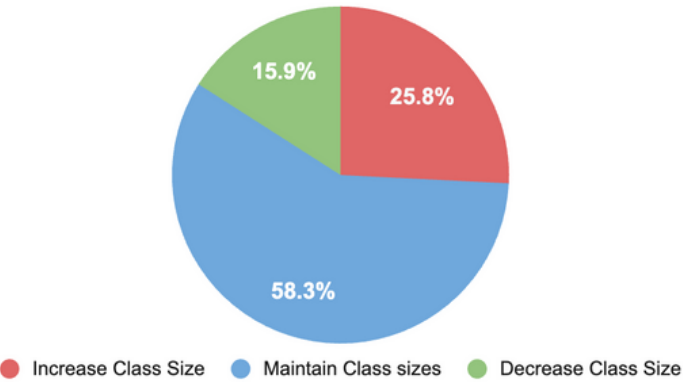


In the budget, how should we prioritize class sizes?

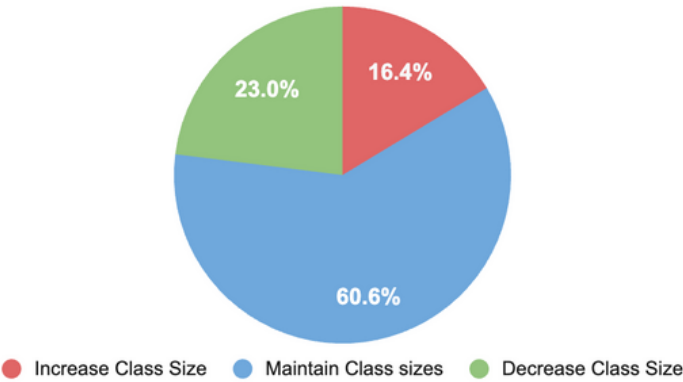
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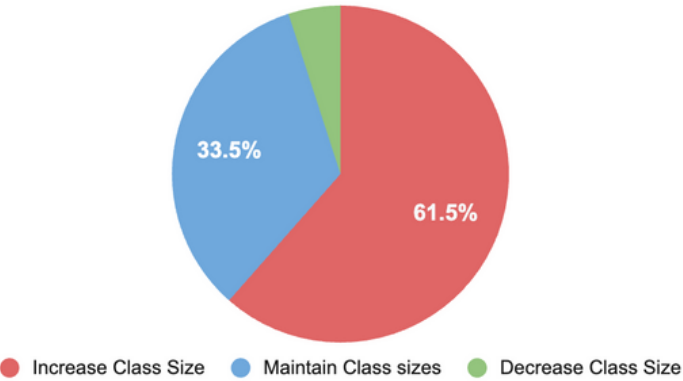
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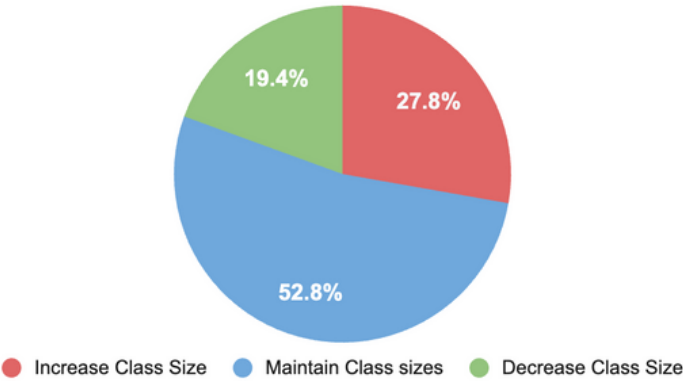
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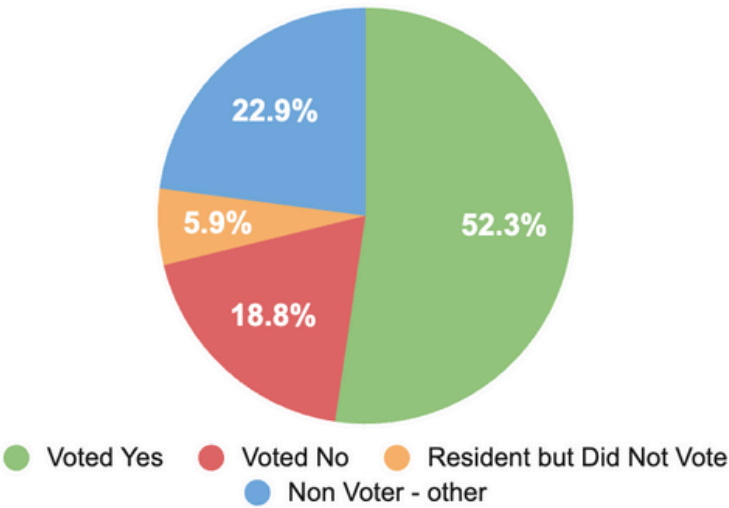


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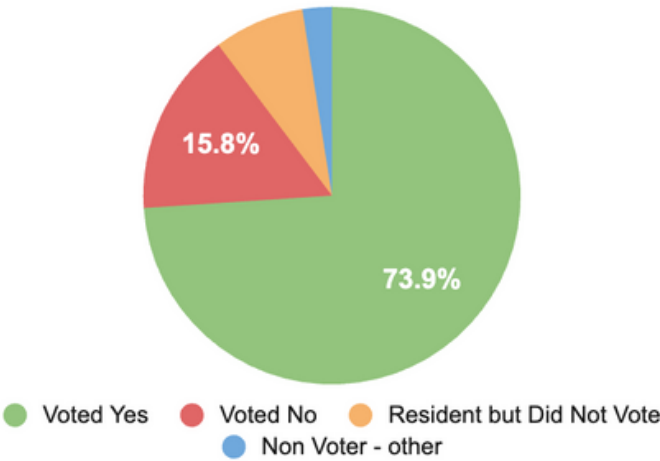


2025 Budget Vote- “How did you vote?”

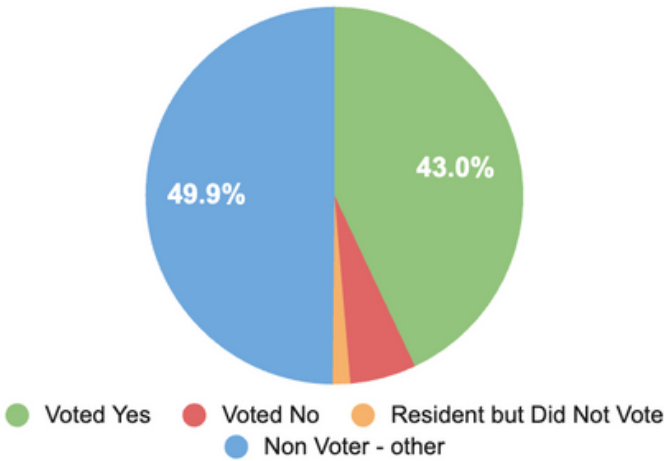
ALL RESPONSES



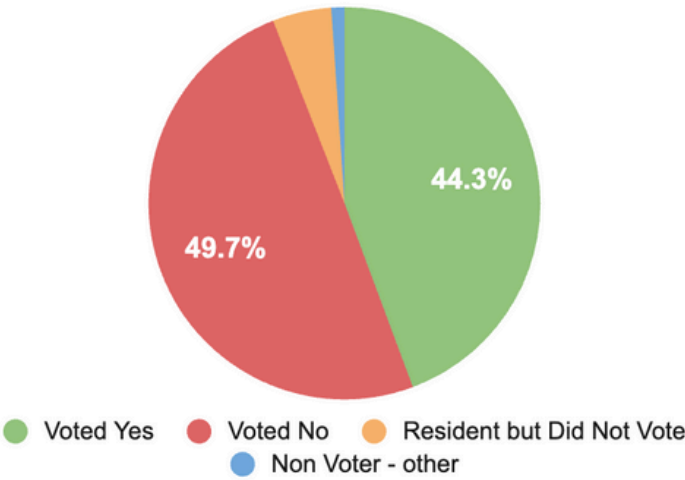
PARENTS



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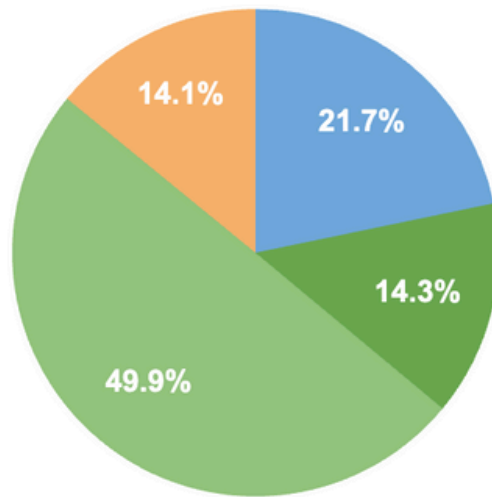


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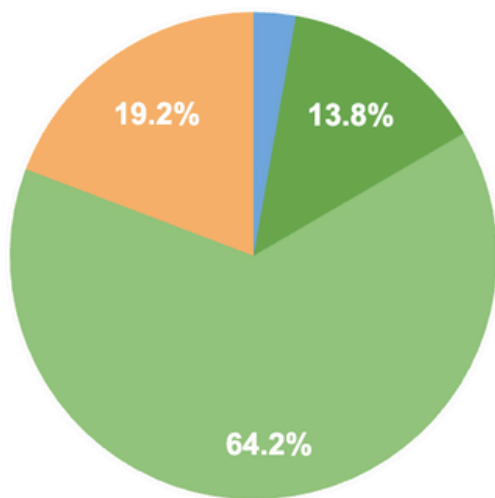


Does the tax rate impact your vote?

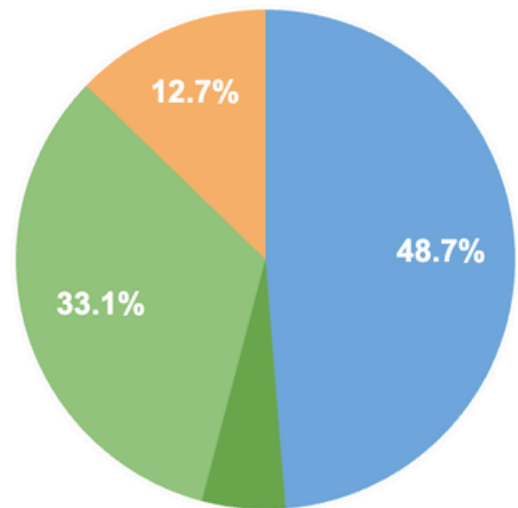
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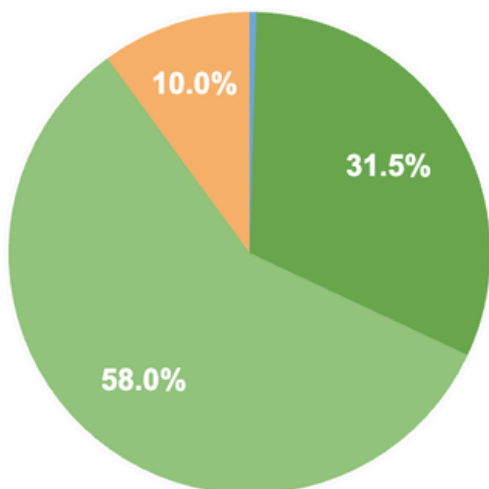
PARENTS



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COMMUNITY



- I am not an EWSD Voter
- Yes, this is the primary factor that helps me decide
- Yes, but in combination with other factors
- No

Open Response Themes:

With Federal/State constraints and costs outside of the district's control, if trade-offs need to be made, what areas should be at the top of the list to maintain?

Below are the top 10 themes that appeared in this open-response question. Topics are ranked by the frequency in which respondents addressed a topic.

1. Prioritize classroom teachers & student-facing staff, concerns about class sizes

The strongest theme was to preserve student-facing staff positions: “don’t balance the budget at the expense of classroom staff.” Respondents repeatedly say that teachers, paraprofessionals, interventionists, and special educators who see students every day should be the last thing cut. Many describe current class sizes (especially 3–5 and K–2 in Junction/Town schools) as already too large, linked to unmet academic and behavioral needs and staff burnout. People distinguish sharply between student-facing positions and coaches/consultants or other roles.

- “Cutting teachers, paras, or interventionists is NOT an option... We can't continue to support students while cutting staff who work DIRECTLY with kids every day.”
- “Do NOT cut teachers!”
- “Our class sizes are out of control... student behaviors and academic needs are not being met and parents are unhappy with class sizes.”

2. Westford Elementary & configuration of schools

Westford Elementary is highlighted with strong, conflicting opinions. Many insist it remain open, with arguments for community-identity. However, others argue the opposite—that Westford should be closed or repurposed (e.g., ARC/central office, magnet program) to reduce costs and relieve overcrowding elsewhere. Some propose reimagining Westford as a specialized program (nature-based, STEM, language, magnet) rather than closing it entirely.

- “Do not close the Westford school. It is critical to a rural community and its members.”
- “Close Westford... This space is ideal for ARC and district offices.”
- “I strongly believe Westford Elementary School should remain open, but it should be reimagined... This presents an opportunity, not a liability.”
- “Glad you consolidated Westford Middle School. I support difficult decisions that changes how things used to be”
- “While my 8th grader was moved from Westford to EMS this year, and I was ok with that, I am against consolidating the elementary or Pre-K Westford students into Essex.”

Open Response Themes:

With Federal/State constraints and costs outside of the district's control, if trade-offs need to be made, what areas should be at the top of the list to maintain?

3. Administrative and non-student-facing roles

A large number of comments call for trimming indirect roles before cutting any position that directly touches students. The recurring frame is that the system has “top-heavy” in adult-facing work while under-resourcing classrooms.

- “Reduce Admin costs.”
- “We need to start cutting jobs where people are not working directly with students...”
- “EWSD should remove administrative positions and increase class sizes as well as close schools and sell properties (if possible).”

4. Maintain core academic quality, AP/Honors, CTE & special education

Many respondents emphasize that the district’s core purpose is academics. They want to preserve ELA, math, science, social studies, as well as AP/Honors courses, CTE programming, and robust special education and interventions. Several explicitly say academics should come before athletics if cuts are necessary. There’s also support for enrichment and differentiation for both struggling and advanced learners.

- “The entire point of a school district is to EDUCATE students. We should NEVER prioritize athletics over academics.”
- “Academics are the first priority, beyond that it’s all negotiable.”
- “Academic programs and increased student support/differentiation/enrichment.”
- “Essex has had a long history of offering a diverse and rich academic experience for students. Reducing to only the "core" subjects is an awful idea that only hurts students.”

5. Facilities, overcrowding, and aging buildings

Comments repeatedly highlight building issues, especially at Hiawatha and Fleming. People describe failing infrastructure (plumbing, maintenance), tight classrooms, and inadequate specialized spaces. At the same time, others argue that some buildings should be sold or repurposed, or create newer and fewer buildings as part of a longer-term facilities strategy.

- “Building maintenance needs to be taken care of. The two big ticket items to keep a school going are instructional staff and a building in which to teach them.”
- “Start responsibly planning to close old buildings... The more you kick the can down the road, you invite future catastrophe.”
- “Invest in new school builds sooner than later - make us the regional hub as the state chases its own tail with redistricting...we can make up money selling old buildings...how can we generate revenue with excellent local programs?”
- “...Plan to close old buildings. The popular thing will always be to make no changes, but any homeowner knows that the more you do that, you will pay for it in the end. Make the hard calls to close old buildings and consolidate...”

Open Response Themes:

6. Arts, music, athletics, and extracurriculars

There is strong support for preserving arts and extracurricular opportunities, both for academic purposes and for SEL benefits. At the same time, some respondents argue that, if cuts are unavoidable, athletics and extracurriculars—not academics—should be reduced first, or shifted to more fundraising/user-fee models.

- “Keep high quality educators, necessary support staff, extra-curricular activities, performing arts.”
- “Please prioritize the arts, PE and library classes for elementary students... Full access to these ‘specials’ are essential to their success.”
- “Reduce athletics spending... move athletics to a fundraiser model as needed to offload budget pressure because while sad it will allow preservation of academics.”
- “...Ensuring every child has access to education, reliable adults, counseling, food, transportation, and extra-curriculars ensures a greater overall community...”

7. Transportation and busing

Transportation shows up in conflicting ways. Some see busing as essential for access—especially for families without reliable transportation—and want it improved. Others propose eliminating or reducing busing for students who live close to schools (particularly in Essex Junction) or replacing some routes with stipends or family responsibility to save money.

- “Bussing/transportation. Kids can’t learn if they can’t get to school.”
- “Get rid of bussing in Essex Junction as we used to not have it and were fine.”
- “Consider transportation stipends for Westford students going to Essex schools”
- “...Transportation should always be considered an essential part of the budget.”

8. Student wellness, mental health, and safety

Comments stress student mental health and behavior. They argue that counseling and SEL supports are critically needed, not extras. There’s tension between those who see SEL/mental health roles as vital and those who see them as what should be cut.

- “Student and staff overall mental health and wellbeing should be #1! School counselors, mental health professionals and clinicians should stay at the forefront of education”
- “Safe school environments must be at the top of the priority list to maintain.”
- “I want to emphasize the importance of positions that address the mental health and substance use needs of students and families. With local resources being inaccessible at times, the services and supports at schools have been essential for students, families and school staff members...”
- “Return to academics. Let other state agencies work with mental health, child nutrition..”
- “With state and federal slashing social safety nets, it is unfortunate but necessary schools provide robust mental health and social work as a community hub. They will not function without investment into these services.”

Open Response Themes:

9. Technology, curriculum purchases, and professional development spending

Respondents question whether the district is overspending on devices, software, new curricula, and consultants. Several suggest cutting back one-to-one Chromebooks, smartboards, subscriptions, arguing that they don't always improve outcomes and are often replaced after a few years. A related idea is that we should rely more on existing teacher expertise and less on purchased programs and external professional development.

- “Funding ChromeBooks for every student isn’t actually providing them with technological skills... cut way back on spending for individual technology.”
- “Stop paying for ‘plug-and-play’ curricula... It’s a waste of money to buy a curriculum and force teachers to use it, then dump more money into a new curriculum a few years later.”
- “Stop spending money on new curriculum and PD that constantly replace old ones... The amount of money that is spent on new curriculum and PD cannot possibly match the student outcomes.”

10. Tax burden, salaries, and healthcare

A noticeable subset of comments focus on affordability for taxpayers and the overall size of the education budget. Some argue the budget is “too high for our community” and call for slower salary growth. Others argue the opposite—that taxes should increase to protect programs and staffing. The predominant theme is that healthcare cost growth, not school overspending, is the core problem.

- “Simply, the school budget is too high for our community.”
- “DEMAND REDUCTION IN HEALTH CARE COSTS. THESE COSTS ARE ROBBING OUR CHILDREN OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES.”
- “I support increasing taxes to limit compromises... Our community should be improving students’ experiences, not making compromises.”
- “I am a voter who will gladly pay more taxes for quality education.”
- “If the tax rate keeps increasing, I will no longer be able to afford living in my home.”

Open Response Themes - Additional Comments Question

Below are the top 10 themes that appeared in this open-response question. Topics are ranked by the frequency in which respondents addressed a topic.

1. Health Insurance & Statewide Cost Drivers

Many respondents note that rising health insurance costs (determined by the state with no local district control) are a primary driver of school budget increases. The main sentiment shared is one of frustration, but also recognition that local boards cannot directly control these costs, which feels unfair to taxpayers, staff, and districts alike. Several individuals call for advocacy, alternative models (self-insurance), or changes in cost-sharing structures.

- “Health insurance is the #1 problem... I cannot keep paying for their insurance plus my own.”
- “Something needs to be done about the cost of premiums.”
- “The board should advocate for systemic reform at the state level.”
- “...State & country need to fix health care/insurance!”
- “Re-evaluate insurance as the expense for the best insurance program in the state is borne by taxpayers who don't have such a luxury.”
- “Can the State not do any better in negotiations than to agree to enormous rises to the health insurance premiums?”

2. Facilities & Infrastructure (immediate facilities needs, building conditions)

Facilities issues (particularly at Essex Junction and Town buildings) are a predominant theme. Respondents repeatedly note overcrowding, deteriorating structures, lack of adequate space for art/music, safety concerns, and HVAC failures. Many call for a major capital investment, suggesting new construction and potentially consolidation into fewer, more modern, larger schools. Facilities comments connect to concerns about student learning conditions and long-term community viability.

- “School infrastructure should be a main focus...”
- “We need big picture solutions... maintaining 8 aging buildings will not get better with bandaids.”
- “The situation at Hiawatha should be the number 1 priority. Something needs to happen, whether it is redistricting... or building a new building.”
- “With an uncertain future ahead for the district and state as a whole this might be the perfect year to propose a vote to fund for a new elementary school to replace facilities in Essex Junction that could host PreK through 5th grade on the Hiawatha campus. Considering the long timeline of a project of this size it would put many in the community at ease about enrollment, specials, and class sizes and also address the most aging of the city's facilities”

Open Response Themes - Additional Comments Question

Below are the top 10 themes that appeared in this open-response question. Topics are ranked by the frequency in which respondents addressed a topic.

3. Class Sizes, Staffing Levels & Student Support

Many comments highlight that class sizes have grown too large, creating strain on teachers and reducing individual student attention. Staff describe burnout, increased behavioral issues, and rising student needs. There is also repeated concern about staffing cuts, RIFs (non renewal of teacher contracts), and job instability, especially for new educators. Respondents emphasize that maintaining or increasing direct student-facing staff (teachers, mental health professionals, instructional assistants, etc) is essential for educational outcomes.

- “Class sizes are far too big... students lose out because there is one adult per 25+ kids.”
- “If we continue to cut positions, teachers will burn out and students will suffer.”
- “Teachers are drowning and stressed with students with difficult needs we can’t increase class sizes. Students are distracted by behaviors and responding to stress.”
- “Class size is the number one thing to look at. Lower class sizes means less behavior issues, more learning...meaning that admin has more bandwidth for bigger issues”

4. Administrative & Staffing Costs

A major theme is concern that administrative and staffing cost is too high. The prevailing sentiment is that administrative reductions should happen before cuts to teachers, programs, or student supports.

- “...run less administrative personnel as well as increasing class size to reduce number of teachers needed.”
- “Reduce Admin overhead and increase in-person education...Consider closing schools and creating 1 brand new Elementary + 1 brand new Middle”

5. Westford Elementary School: Preserve, Close, or Repurpose

Westford School draws strong, conflicting opinions. Some families urge the district to keep the school open, citing community identity, geography, and student well-being. Others argue that Westford is underutilized and consumes disproportionate resources, while other schools are overcrowded. Some propose creative repurposing (e.g., outdoor education hub).

- “Please do not close the Westford School.”
- “Close Westford—resources are needed in overcrowded schools elsewhere.”
- “Westford could become a nature-based or specialized program.”
- “Close Westford... This space is ideal for ARC and district offices...”
- “Keep Westford School open and return grades 6-8”
- “Please consider the cost and expenses required for continuing to have Westford School open....it is alarming to observe the resources utilized for such a low number of students... especially when other schools are bursting at the seams...There needs be a redesignation/dispersal of students to accommodate these building limitations”

Open Response Themes - Additional Comments Question

Below are the top 10 themes that appeared in this open-response question. Topics are ranked by the frequency in which respondents addressed a topic.

6. Taxes, Affordability & Economic Pressures

Many residents describe significant financial strain from rising property taxes. School budget supporters also acknowledge the need to protect vulnerable taxpayers. The tension between maintaining quality schools and keeping the community affordable is the predominant concern.

- "Taxes are unaffordable—my bill went up thousands."
- "Just increase taxes. Just do what you need to do to keep our kids safe and improve the schools. Raise the taxes - kids are more important."
- "Tax the rich. Stop taxing middle and lower class families. TAX THE RICH. They can afford school tax payments."
- "We, the tax payers can't afford to keep paying for the staffs benefits. Something needs to change. I have a disabled husband, who can't work. I am 68 years old and still work. My new tax bill shocked me."
- "We may need to move if this continues."
- "One of the issues with budget planning is that due to our current funding system, our tax rates are not directly impacted by our local choices."

7. Opinions on School Consolidation & District Configuration

Respondents are divided, but many acknowledge the long-term inefficiencies of maintaining numerous aging buildings. Some advocate for significant consolidation (one elementary school and one middle school). In contrast, others disagree with last year's consolidation efforts.

- "Combine into one or two elementary schools and a single middle school."
- "Consider closing buildings and building a new elementary + middle complex."
- "We should move towards one elementary school per town, merge to two upper elementary/middle, before one high school."
- "...Make the hard calls to close old buildings and consolidate."

8. Student Mental Health, Behavioral Needs & Tiered Supports

Many staff and parents emphasize escalating mental health and behavioral challenges across schools. Cuts to mental health positions or special educators are viewed as harmful and short-sighted. Respondents describe an urgent need to maintain or increase counseling, behavior supports, and trauma-responsive services. Several note that large class sizes worsen behavioral problems and increase the need for skilled support staff.

- "Mental health is really important—the more cuts we have, the worse it will be."
- "Counselors are overwhelmed with Tier 2 and 3 needs."
- "(Disruptive) behaviors are increasing and teachers are stressed."
- "Return to academics. Let other state agencies work with mental health, child nutrition, etc. The school system should NOT be a catch-all!"

Open Response Themes - Additional Comments Question

Below are the top 10 themes that appeared in this open-response question. Topics are ranked by the frequency in which respondents addressed a topic.

9. Curriculum, Instruction & Learning Priorities

Comments related to curriculum focus on improving academic outcomes, strengthening foundational literacy and math, and ensuring instructional quality. Some argue for reducing or restructuring electives; others call for maintaining arts and music with proper facilities. There are calls to reduce spending on new curricular programs, invest in teacher training, and promote equitable access to high-quality instruction across schools.

- "Reduce technology reliance; go back to intentional tech instruction."
- "Invest in literacy professional development and classroom resources, not new programs every year."
- "Reduce electives; keep math and literacy strong."
- "Our teachers are capable and competent. Let them collaborate to build an early literacy curriculum... '
- "Schools are under the microscope to improve test scores. Yet the response is to increase class sizes by 10 or more students and decrease the number of staff to support academic success and supports for those students of high need..."

10. Extracurriculars vs Instruction

While many value the athletics, arts, and extracurriculars, a feedback trend suggests they are "extras" that should not supersede core instruction or lower class sizes.

- "I'd rather cut a club that helps a few students than cut a staff member who helps multiple students in a day."
- "We are only required to provide an 'Arts experience' for students. EWSD currently provided inconsistent art experiences that extend well beyond what we are required to provide. These art experiences per the direction of the board, take priority over first instruction and interventions."
- "Transportation for High School sports teams should be cut. Parents/students can drive the kids... It seems crazy that sports teams have more access to busses than children whose classroom teachers can't afford buses to go on field trips [for] the entire class."
- "Make cuts to unnecessary programs. Although it's great to offer clubs and multiple sports teams, it is not necessary. Is it leaving us with less opportunities for our students? Yes, but it's also cutting extras that will allow for us to stop cutting from the daily have-tos with our students."

Message from the Board

We deeply value the insights from the over 1100 individuals who cared and engaged with their elected officials.

Our board seeks to present a budget with three things in mind:

A budget that values all members of our community

A budget that takes the needs of our taxpayers seriously

A budget that increases outcomes and opportunities for students

The board will now utilize survey findings to partner with administration, advocate at the state level, and craft a budget reflecting all members of the EWSD community.



Thank you to our community for giving your input and taking the time to be informed as we enter this school budget season!

**We thank you for your
continued engagement
with EWSD.**



**Keep up to date on all
budget information [HERE](#)**

Our Board's Commitment:

As we enter budget planning, our board remains focused on state level advocacy: holding elected leaders accountable to address the real cost drivers harming both taxpayers and students.

“We are functioning at max capacity with the bare minimum. Chittenden County is bearing far too much of the state's education burden, and health insurance is taking wildly reckless advantage of state-negotiated educator health insurance. It's hurting everyone (including the teachers it claims to be helping)”
- Survey Respondent