

NH SCHOOL

Funding Fairness Project

*Advocating to make
school funding more equitable
for students and taxpayers alike*

Zack Sheehan, Executive Director

School Funding and Property Taxes

Overview

- Taxpayers and students are not treated equitably or fairly.
- The problem is getting worse.
- The current system is unconstitutional.



Agenda

School Funding and Property Taxes

New Hampshire's Constitutional Responsibilities

Role of Property Taxes in Funding & Resulting Inequities

Enormous Gap Between State Aid & Actual School Costs

Consequences & Implications of New Hampshire's Current School Funding System

Current and Future Steps

The New Hampshire Supreme Court's decisions in the Claremont case re-established two fundamental responsibilities:

1. The State of New Hampshire has a duty to pay for the cost of a constitutionally adequate education for every K-12 student.
2. The taxes that the State of New Hampshire uses to pay for this education must have a uniform rate across the state.



The Scope of an “Adequate Education”: Expansive and Future-Oriented

“Mere competence in the basics—reading, writing, and arithmetic—is insufficient in the waning days of the twentieth century to insure that this State's public school students are fully integrated into the world around them. A broad exposure to the social, economic, scientific, technological, and political realities of today's society is essential for our students to compete, contribute, and flourish in the twenty-first century.”

Claremont II, 142 N.H. at 474



Connection Between Defining and Funding an Adequate Education

“Whatever the State identifies as comprising constitutional adequacy it must pay for. None of that financial obligation can be shifted to local school districts, regardless of their relative wealth or need.”

Londonderry School District v. State of NH, 154 N.H. at 162 (2006)



The Constitutional Standard for Using Property Taxes for School Funding

“To the extent that the property tax is used in the future to fund the provision of an adequate education, the tax must be administered in a manner that is **equal in valuation and uniform in rate** throughout the State.”

Claremont II, 142 N.H. at 471



School Districts and Taxpayers Are Again Suing the State

- The “ConVal” suit, filed in 2019, argues that the State definition of “adequacy” is not sufficient and therefore downshifts the burden to local property taxpayers. Hearing concluded May 2nd.
- The “Rand” suit, filed in June 2022, argues that because the local property tax rates used to fund the bulk of the cost of public education are **not** uniform in rate, that is a violation of standard outlined in the Claremont rulings. Hearing is scheduled for October.



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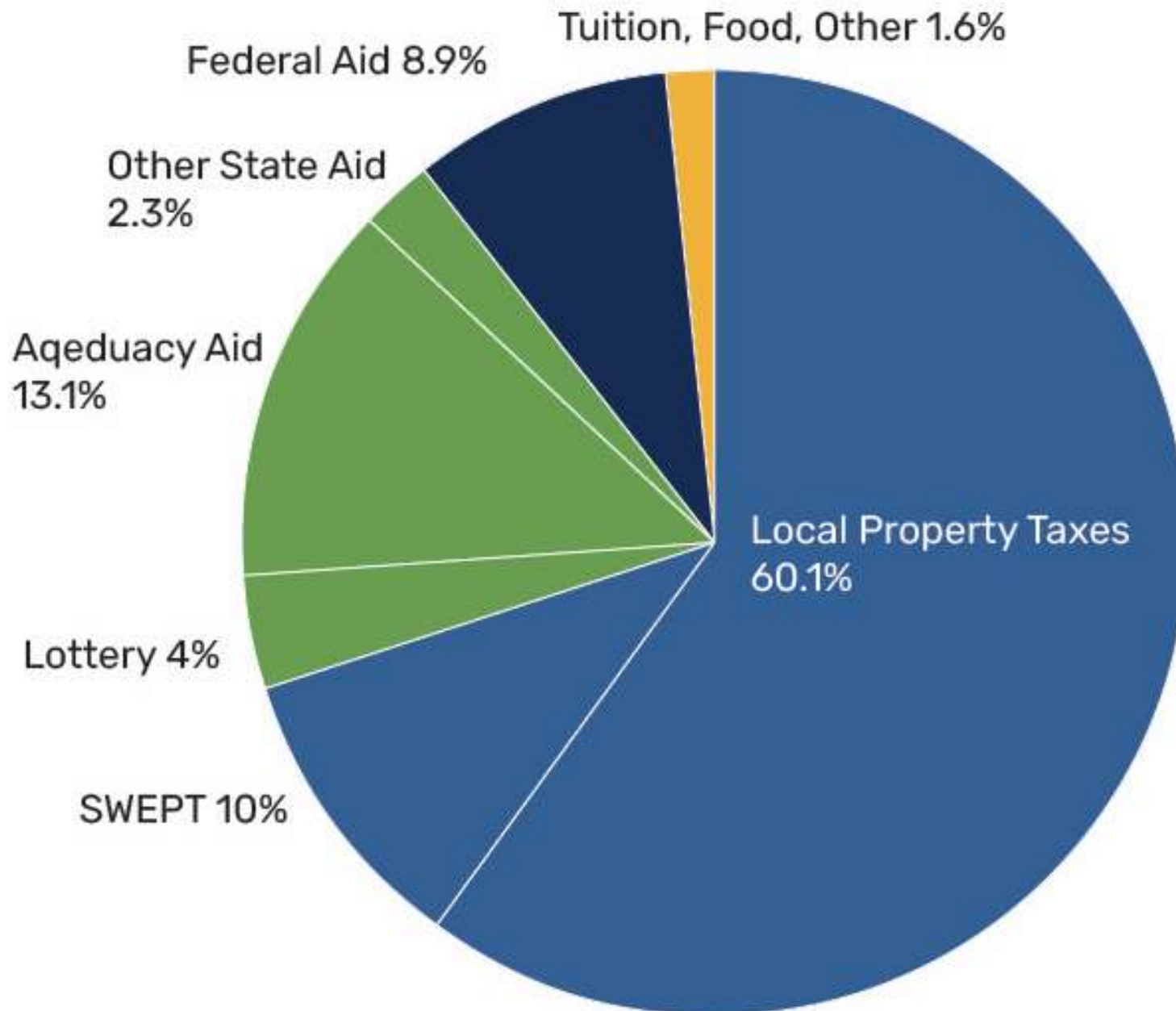
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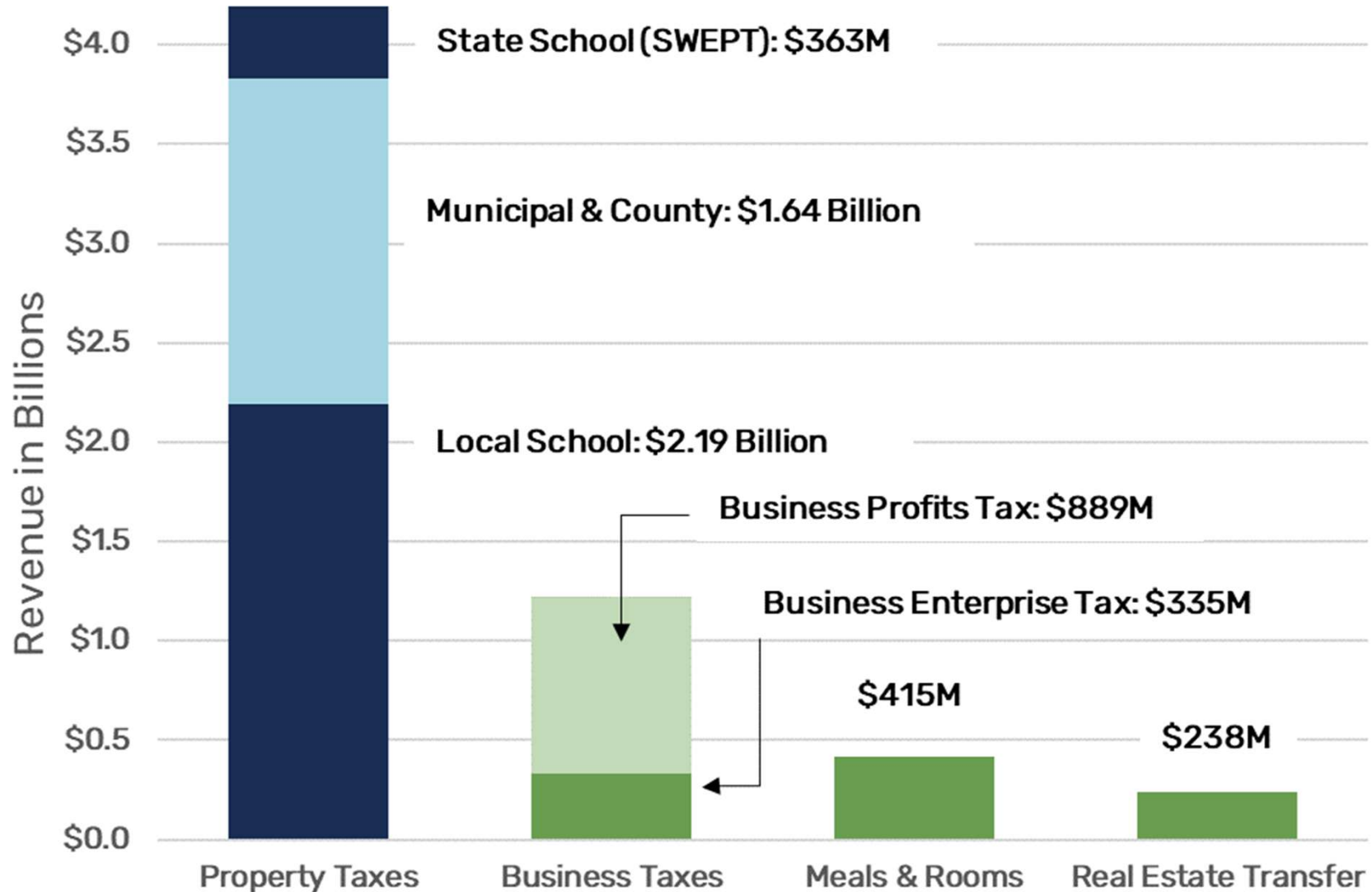
NH Relies Overwhelmingly on Local Property Taxes to Fund Public Education

2021-2022 Revenue of NH School Districts - \$3.64 billion



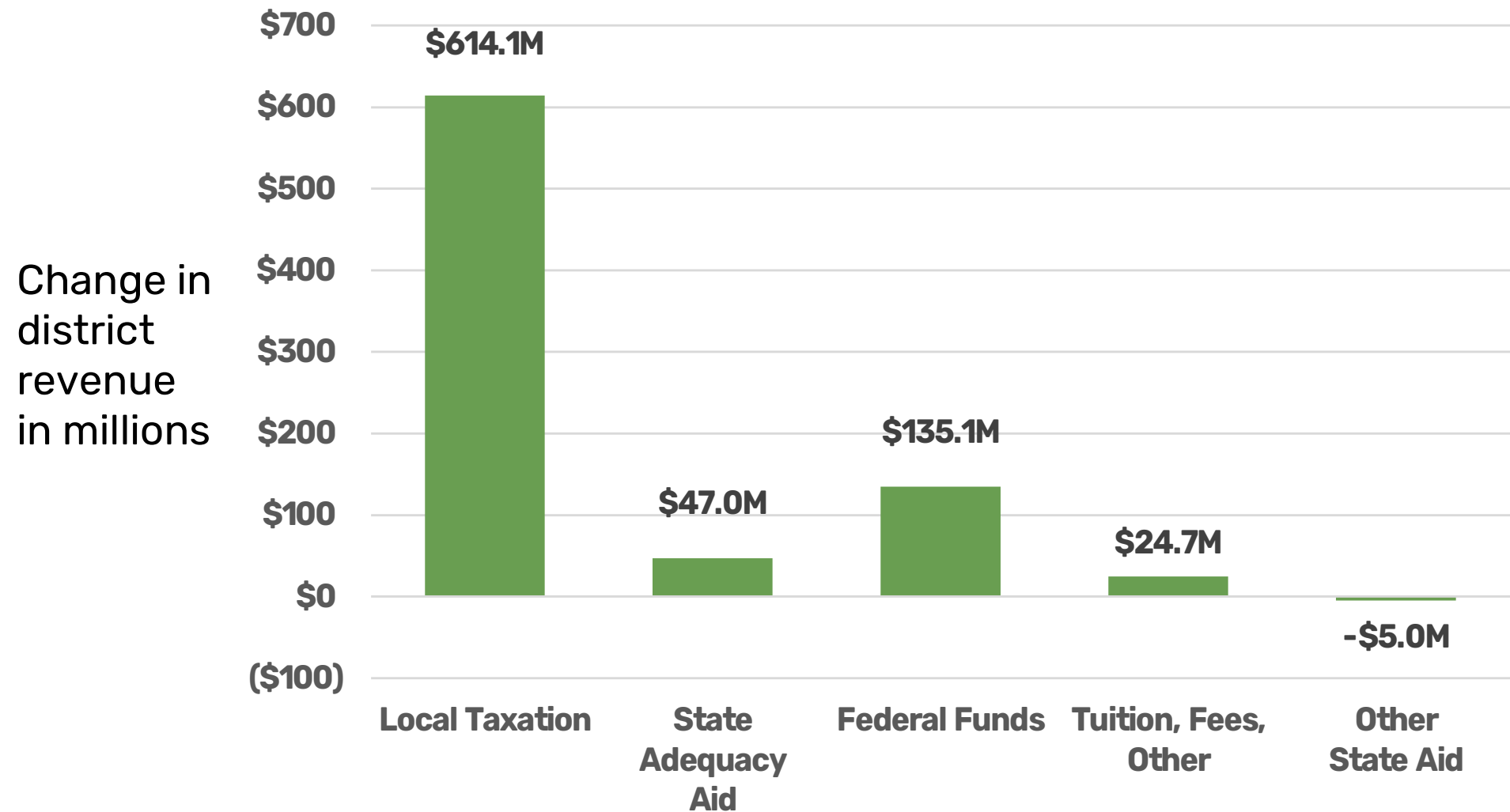
The Property Tax is the Largest Tax in NH

Tax revenue by source, 2022 (all figures in \$million)



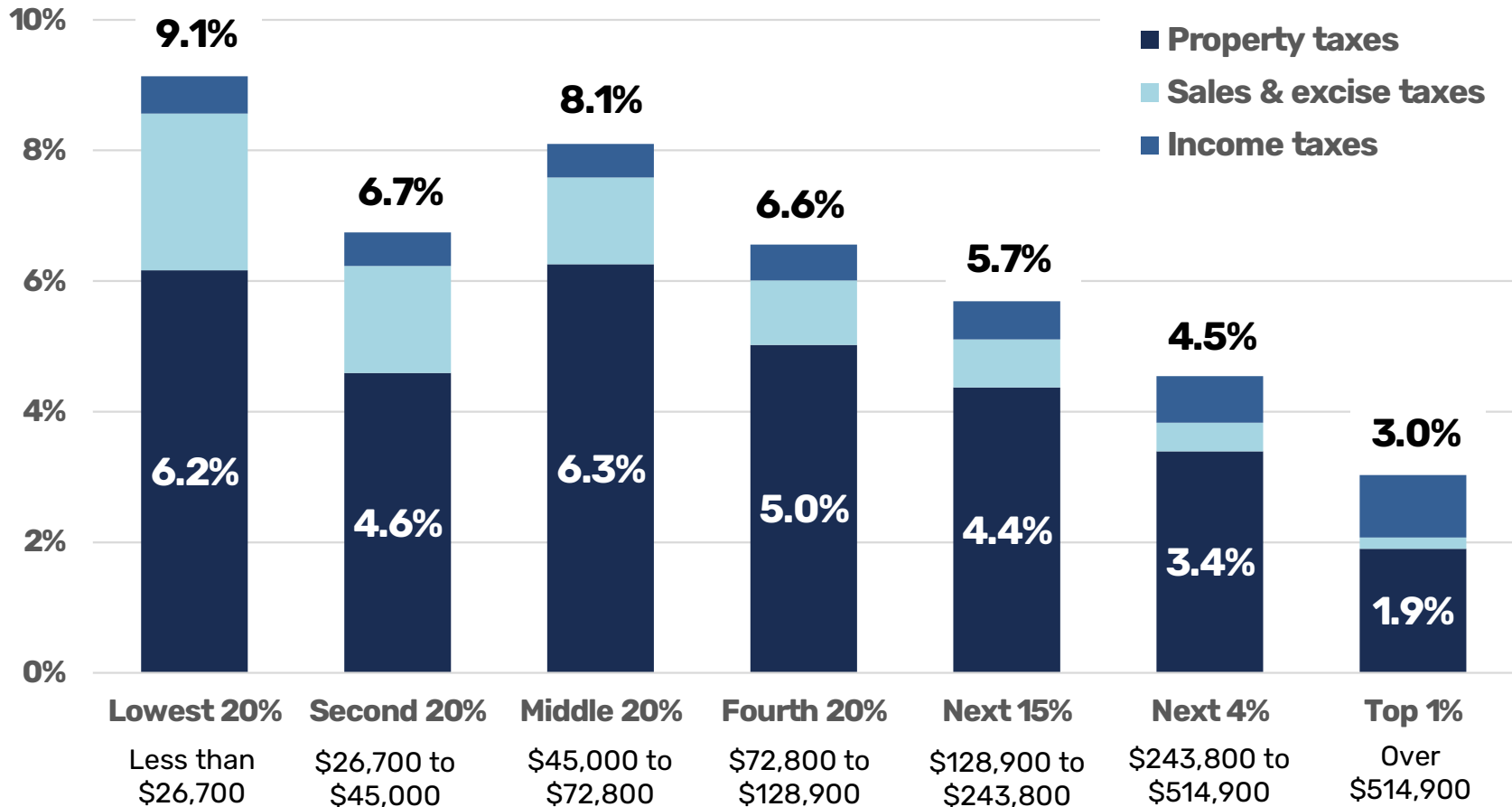
Reliance On Local Property Taxes Has Grown Over Time

Change in School District Revenue, 2012– 2022



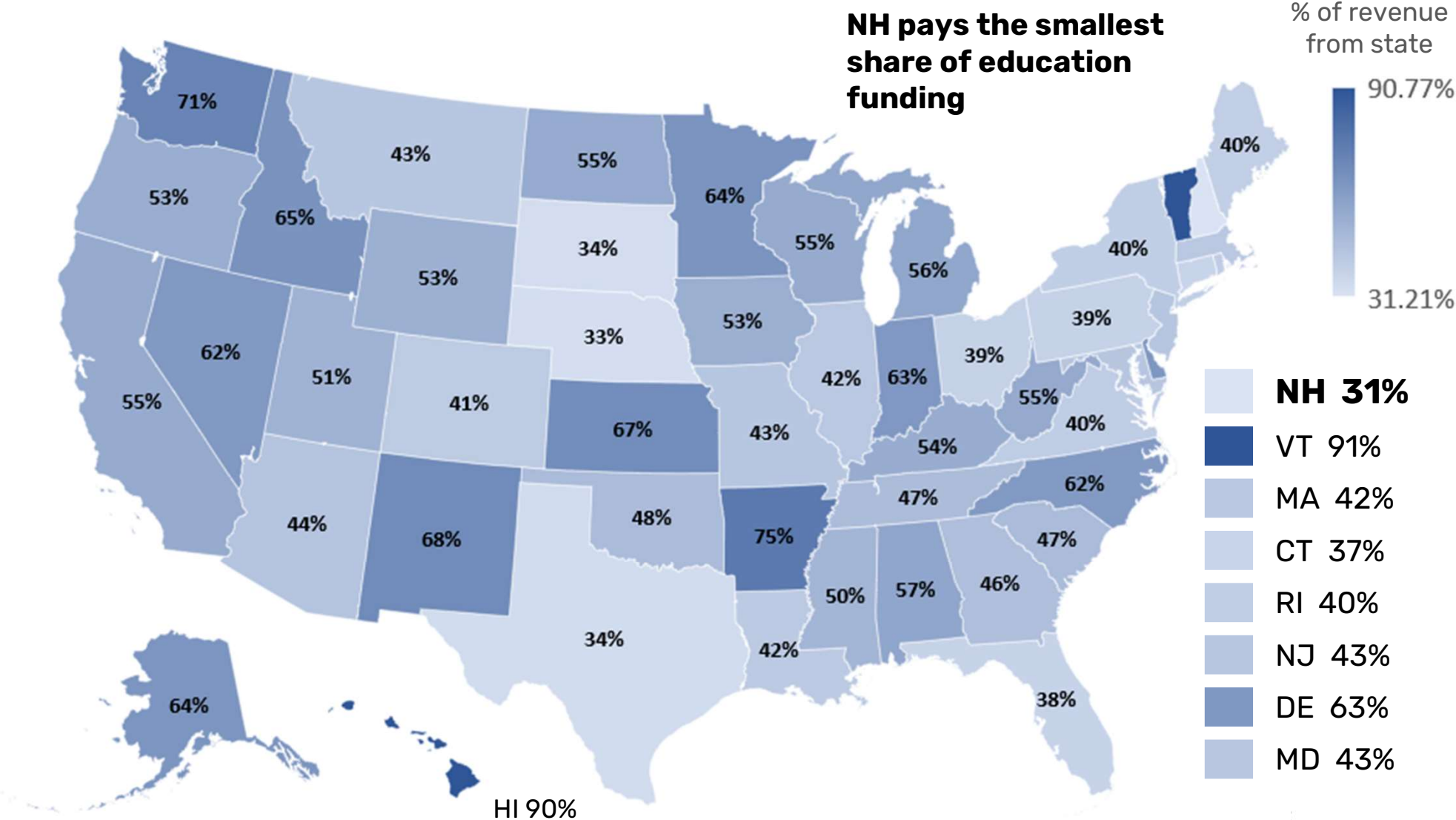
Property Tax Reliance Adds to Regressivity of New Hampshire's Tax System

Taxes as a Share of Income, by Income Group, 2018



State's Share of School Funding in New Hampshire is the Smallest in the Country

Percent of school revenue from state sources, FY 2020



Role of Property Taxes & Resulting Inequities

**The key concept for
comparing school tax rates:
Equalized value per pupil**

**How much property value
is available in a town
to be taxed to support
each student's education?**



Role of Property Taxes & Resulting Inequities

It's simple math.

Property Value	Tax Rate (Per Thousand)	Revenue Raised
\$1,000,000	\$10.00	\$10,000
\$400,000	\$10.00	\$4,000



Role of Property Taxes & Resulting Inequities

It's simple math.

Property Value	Tax Rate (Per Thousand)	Revenue Raised
\$1,000,000	\$10.00	\$10,000
\$400,000	\$25.00	\$10,000



Role of Property Taxes & Resulting Inequities

There would be no problem...

IF

The distribution of property value

AND

the distribution of students
were approximately the same.

They are not.



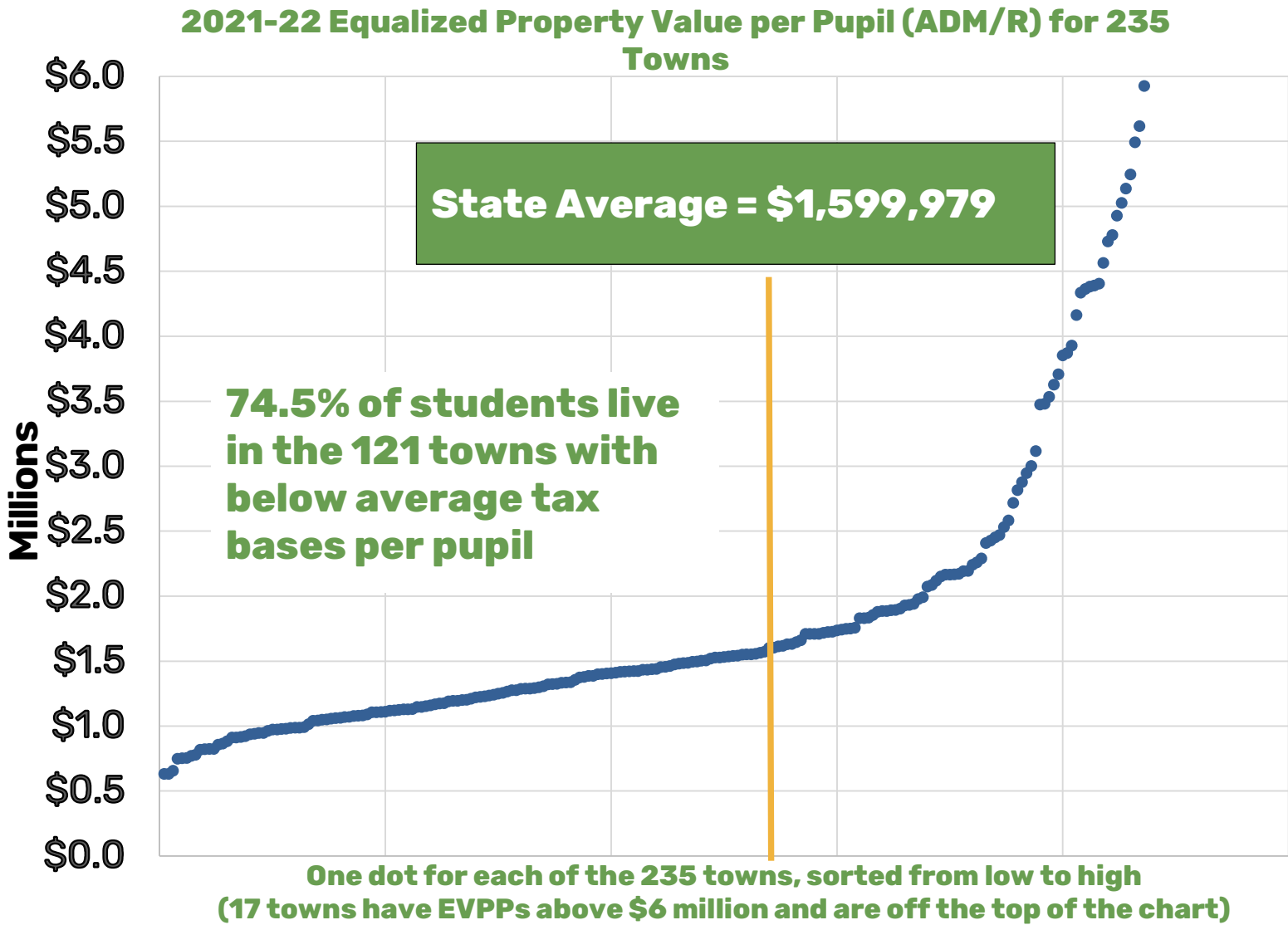
Role of Property Taxes & Resulting Inequities in this Region

Equalized Valuation and Tax Rates for Select NH Schools, 2021-22

Town	Pupils	Equalized Value Per Pupil	Equalized School Tax Rate	Amount Raised Per Pupil
Portsmouth	2,120	\$3,852,473	5.58	\$21,497
Atkinson	717	\$2,170,378	9.46	\$20,532
New Hampshire	165,039	\$1,599,979	9.74	\$15,584
Exeter	1,958	\$1,485,561	13.18	\$19,580
Londonderry	3,887	\$1,438,320	12.22	\$17,576
Nashua	10,599	\$1,432,964	8.58	\$12,295
Bedford	4,159	\$1,291,941	11.04	\$14,263
Goffstown	2,189	\$1,131,567	10.82	\$12,244
Manchester	13,039	\$1,077,057	7.91	\$8,520



Most NH Children Attend School in Communities with Below Average Property Values



Which Home Has the Larger Property Tax Bill?



“mid 1800's Victorian...Enjoy the wrap around porch on the warm summer nights...5 bedrooms, 2 full baths, and 2 half baths with ample room for everyone. Enjoy cooking with the Viking stove, granite countertops, Sub-Zero refrigerator. Large attached barn with spacious room above with 1/2 bath...”



“...2 bedroom, 1 bath contemporary... updated kitchen with soapstone countertops, antique soapstone sink and stainless refrigerator all open to the step down sun room with lots of windows, skylight, vaulted ceilings and wood stove...updated bath with stone walk-in shower with glass doors and tile floors...newer roof and central air. ”



Which Home Has the Larger Property Tax Bill?



New London

2020 market price: \$560,000
2020 assessed value: \$426,800

2020 school property tax **\$3,449**



New Boston

2020 market price: \$305,000
2020 assessed value: \$207,300

2020 school property tax: **\$3,640**



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How Adequacy Aid is Calculated

Every student receives **\$3,786.66** in “Base Adequacy”

+ \$1,893.32 for each student eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch

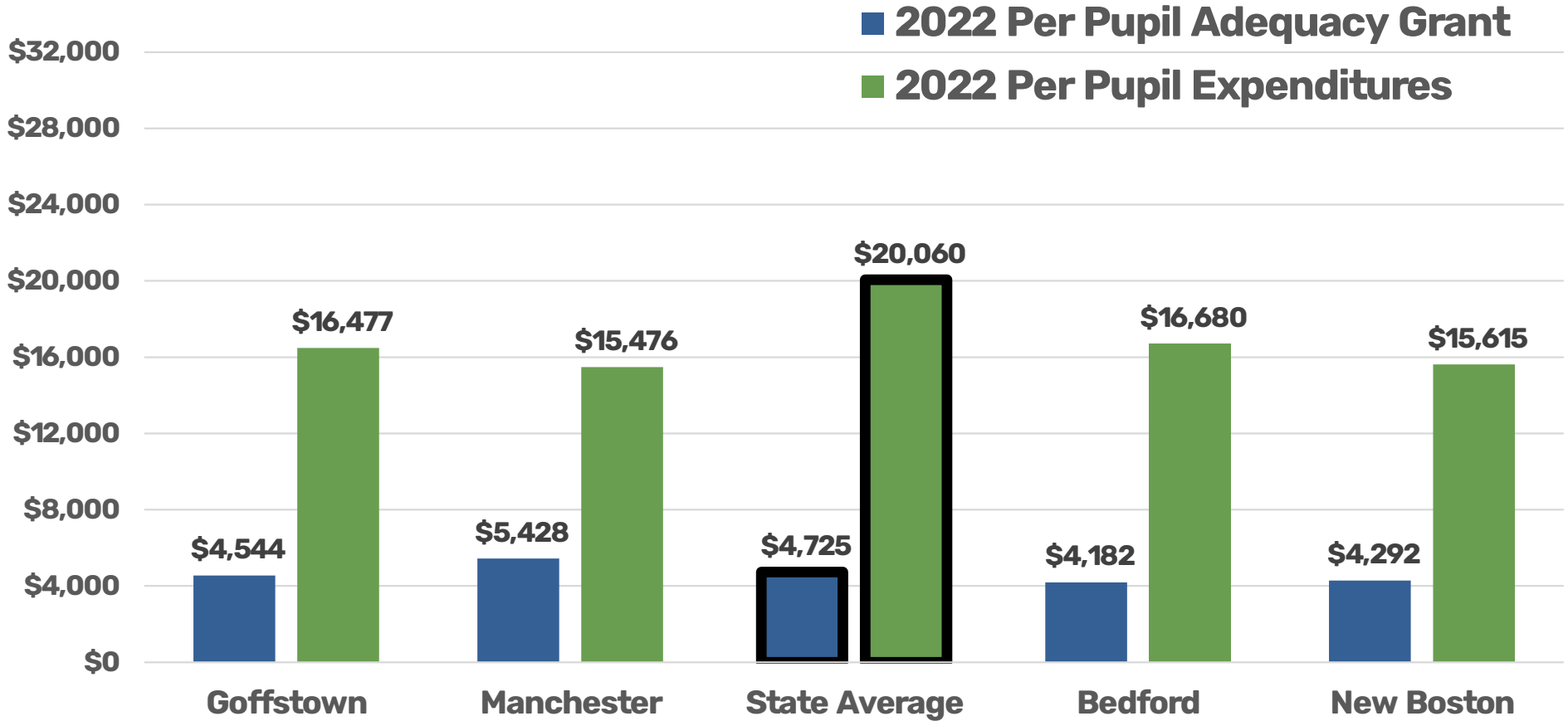
+ \$740.87 for each student who is an English Language Learner

+ \$2,037.11 for each student receiving special education services

+ \$740.87 for each 3rd grader who is below proficient in reading
(who is not already in another category)

= \$4,842 **per student on average**

Current State Adequacy Grants Fall Well Short of Costs Communities Face in Educating Children



What Does an “Adequate” K-12 Education Cost?

An Example

The State of New Hampshire said that, for Allenstown’s 511 students, an adequate education should cost **\$2,418,121** or **\$4,980** per student in 2022-23.

The Allenstown School District budget for 2022-23 was **\$12,243,949** or **\$24,197** per student.

So, let’s pare that budget down.....



So let's pare that budget down...

- Eliminate all busing (including special education busing)
- Eliminate all English Language Learner support
- Eliminate all special education contracted services
- Eliminate all special education appraisal services
- Eliminate all special education out-of-district placements
- Eliminate all supplies, copier machines, liability insurance, plumbing and heating repairs
- Eliminate all educational materials (including new textbooks)
- Eliminate all art, music, and PE equipment
- Eliminate all Chromebook technology and software contracts
- Eliminate all co-curricular clubs, sports, field trips, and student assemblies
- Eliminate two secretaries
- Eliminate three of 4 custodians



So let's pare that budget down...

Eliminate all school board stipends and fees

Eliminate all payments on the school building bond *(resulting in default)*

Eliminate all summer programs

Eliminate all food services

Eliminate the art teacher

Eliminate the music teacher

Eliminate the physical education teacher

Eliminate the behavior teacher

Eliminate all substitute salaries

Eliminate one of the 2 nurses

Eliminate both guidance counselors

Eliminate both street crossing guards

Eliminate technology support personnel

Eliminate the assistant principal



So let's pare that budget down...

Eliminate two of 17 special education paraprofessionals (and reduced special education coordinator to half-time)

Eliminate special education speech/language pathologist

Eliminate one of 7 special education teachers

Eliminate the reading specialist

Eliminate the special education secretary

Eliminate the library media specialist

Eliminate the speech language pathologist

Eliminate reduced library aid to half-time

Eliminate grounds maintenance (including plowing)

Eliminate SAU 53 costs (including the superintendent and staff) and fees for audits and attorneys



What Does an “Adequate” K-12 Education Cost?

An Example

Cut all tuition payments for 147 High School students

- Allentown budgeted \$2.2M for tuition to Pembroke Academy
- There is no way to control this line item, so it had to be cut

Budget at this point is still far above the State’s “adequacy” level

Now cut to the State’s “adequacy” level of \$2,418,121

- Nearly everything else has been eliminated, so now eliminate nearly half of the remaining teachers
- Grades K-4 would have **29 students/teacher**
- Grades 5-8 would have **38 students/teacher**
- An “adequate education” would **end in the 8th grade...**

How does anyone believe that this will provide an adequate education for Allentown’s 511 students?

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Comparing Starting Teacher Salaries

School	BA Level 1 Teacher Salary	School	MA Level 1 Teacher Salary
Dover	\$38,350	Dover	\$42,155
Manchester	\$39,250	Manchester	\$43,720
Goffstown	\$41,005	Goffstown	\$43,068
Pemi-Baker Regional	\$42,000	Pemi-Baker Regional	\$45,000
Bedford	\$42,241	Bedford	\$46,178
Nashua	\$44,200	Nashua	\$47,700
Portsmouth	\$47,867	Portsmouth	\$55,301

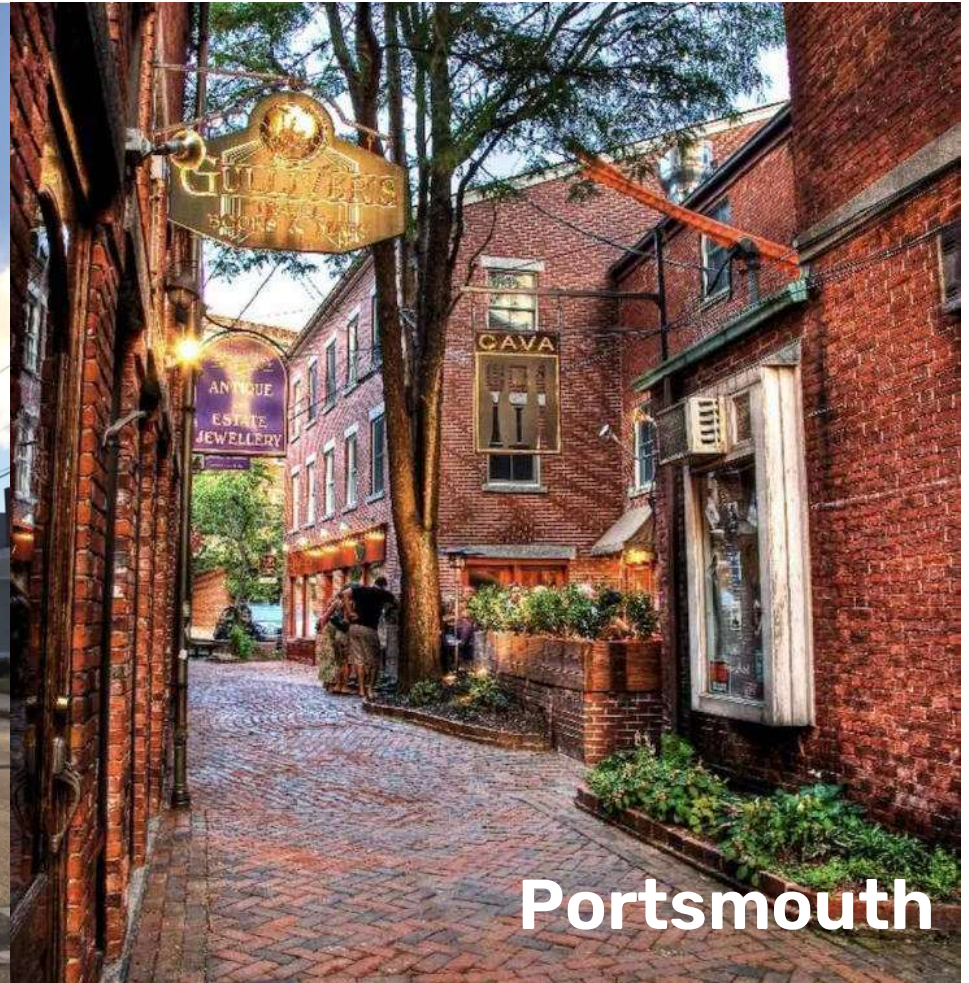
Reaching Higher NH: Strategies for Recruiting and Retaining High-Quality Teachers. Teacher Compensation in New Hampshire, 2021-2022



Current System Impedes Economic Development in Property-Poor Towns



Berlin



Portsmouth



2021-22 School Tax Rate Variations: Timberlane Regional School District

	Equalized Value Per Pupil	Combined Education Tax Rate	Tax on \$300,000 Home
Atkinson	\$2,170,378	9.46	\$2,838
Danville	\$1,069,408	14.01	\$4,203
Plaistow	\$1,455,398	12.72	\$3,816
Sandown	\$1,063,297	15.63	\$4,689



Student Metrics at Goffstown High School Compared to NH Average

	Goffstown High School	NH State Average
Post Secondary Enrollment rate	59.6	52%
NHIAA Sports	26	19
Credits Required to Graduate	22.5	24.8
AP Test Takers (% of enrollment)	15.5	10.8%
2018-2021 SAT Score	1064	1024
Graduation Rate	94.6	88%

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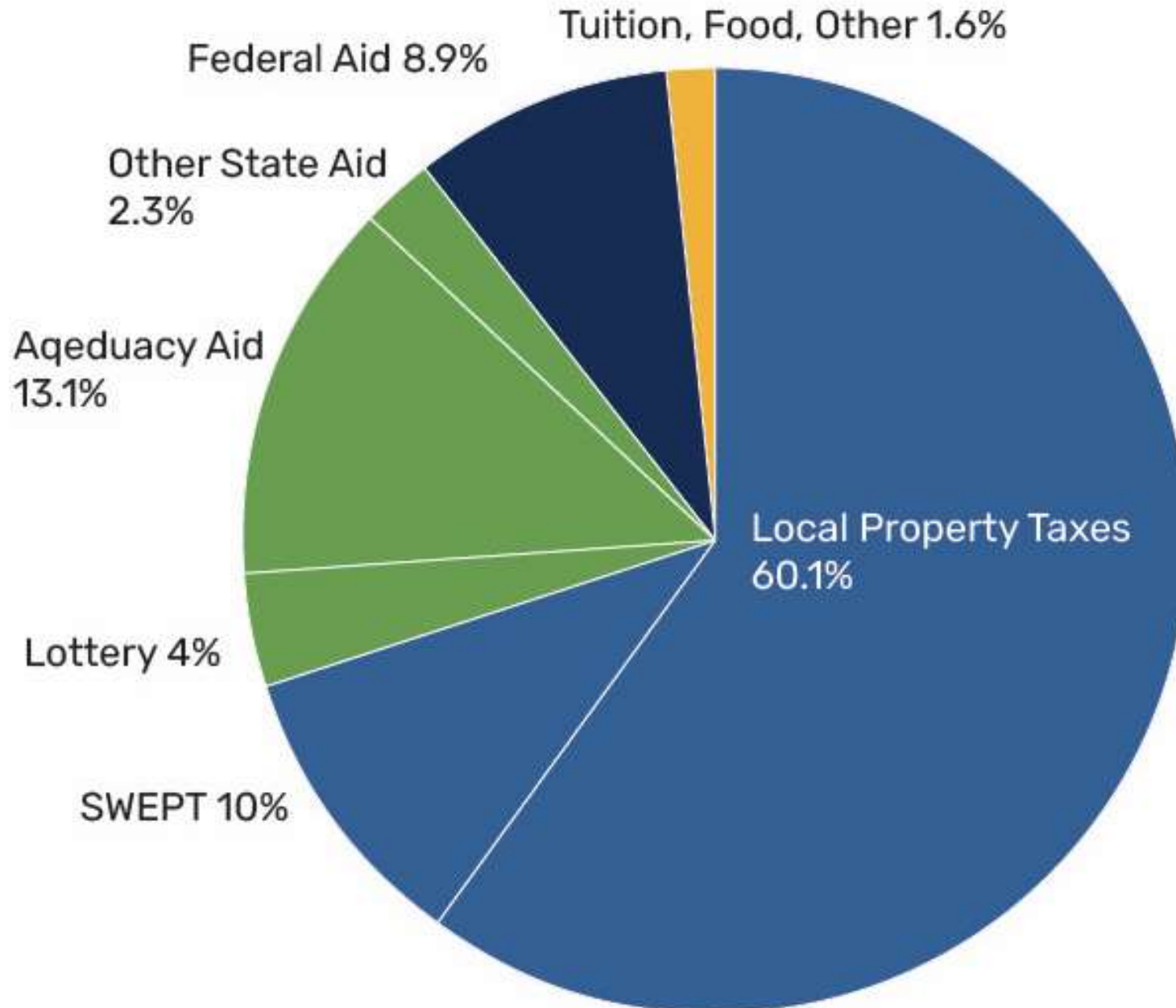
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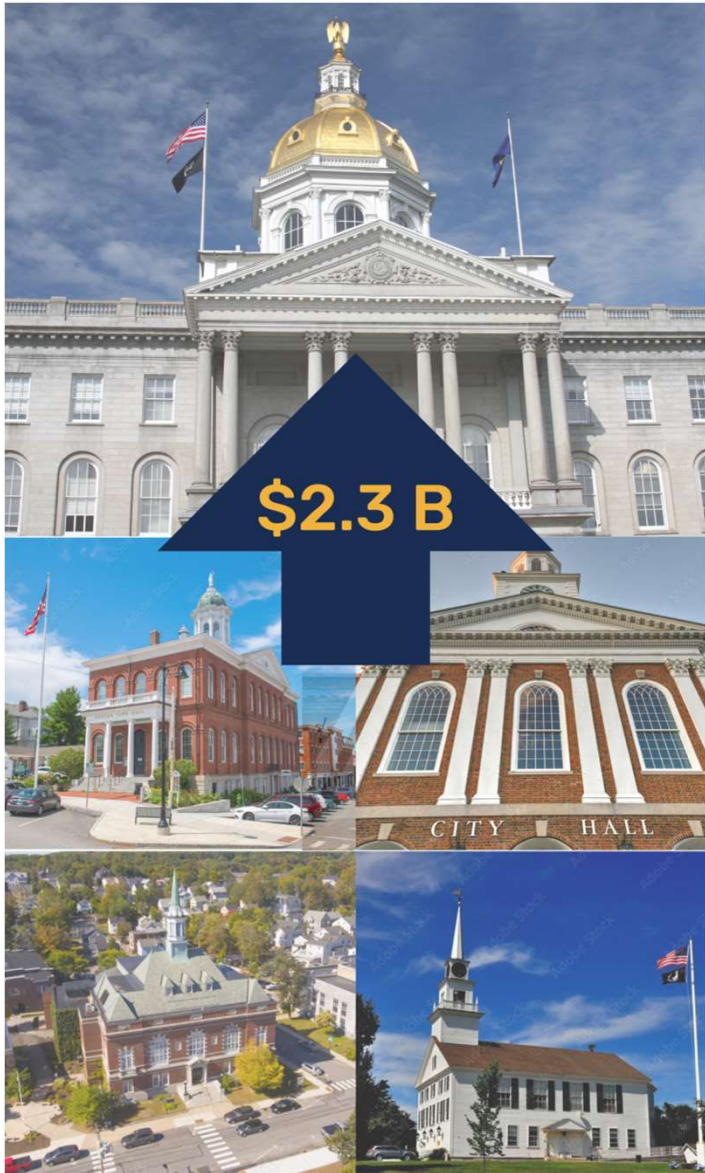
The Problem Lies with the Blue Portion of the Pie



The Heart of the Problem

**The State of New Hampshire
has shifted
public school funding
onto local
property taxpayers.**





The Heart of the *Solution*

**Shift responsibility
for providing
an adequate education
back to where the
Constitution says
it belongs:
the State of
New Hampshire**



AIR Report: Clear Diagnosis of the Problem

“The state’s current system is inequitable from both student and taxpayer perspectives. The districts serving the highest proportion of students who are economically disadvantaged spend less, on average, compared with districts serving the fewest such students. Moreover, the districts with the least property wealth per student impose the highest local education tax rates to be able to fund their children’s education.”

Equity and Adequacy of New Hampshire School Funding
American Institutes for Research, August 2020



State Budget Currently in NH Legislature

- **Governor proposed budget on February 14th**
 - Slight increase to Base Adequacy and per-student funding for students in Free and Reduced Lunch Program
 - Eliminate Stabilization Grants, resulting in public schools losing ~\$1.3 billion in need-based funding over 10 years. This would impact high-need districts like Berlin and Claremont the most
 - 200% increase in voucher funding (up to ~\$30 million/year)
- **Full House Voted on State Budget Proposal on April 6th**
 - Slight increase in need-based funding compared to Gov's proposal, with increased funding starting in FY 24 and 25
 - Decrease funding to Education Trust Fund by ~\$450 million over the biennium
 - Decrease building aid funding in ETF by ~\$174 million
- **Currently in the Senate, public hearing was on May 2nd**





Multiple Approaches Available for Generating Additional State Revenue

- **Restore prior levels / forms of taxation**
 - Return business tax rates to 2015 levels
 - Forestall elimination of the I&D tax
 - Reinstate estate/inheritance taxation
- **Extend current use of wealth taxation**
 - Institute a tax on capital gains
 - Establish a financial transactions tax
- **A true statewide property tax of about \$10 per thousand**
- **Income tax**
- **Sales tax**

School Funding and Property Taxes

Summary

- Taxpayers and students are not treated equitably or fairly.
- The state is downshifting about \$2.3 billion dollars per year to communities.
- The problem is getting worse.
- The current system is unconstitutional.
- The solution lies with state level lawmakers.



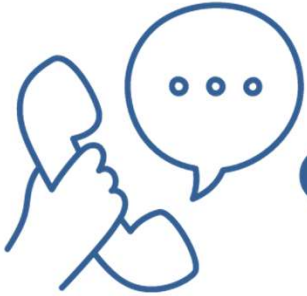
A Final Thought

New Hampshire students' educational opportunities and property owners' school tax rates should not depend on their zip codes.



Help Take Action

Get answers from Candidates running for Office



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Keep Learning





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**THANK
YOU!**

