

# Answers to Key Questions about School Funding in Chester

September 2023

New Hampshire’s public school system – and the way in which money is raised to pay for it – touches the lives of all Granite Staters yet can often be challenging to understand. Listed below are a few questions you might have about how schools are funded in Chester along with helpful facts and figures in response. After reading them, we hope you’ll better understand some of the inequities plaguing our school funding system.

## What Does Chester Spend on Public Schools? How Does It Compare to Other Communities?

The 1998-99 school year was the last school year before the State of New Hampshire, in response to the Supreme Court’s *Claremont* rulings, increased the amount of aid it provides to pay for an “adequate” education. That year, Chester spent \$5,402 per elementary school student, or 91 percent of the typical (or median) town’s spending. In the school year 2021-22, Chester spent \$17,409 per elementary pupil, which was 73 percent of the NH Median.

Figure 2 compares spending per elementary pupil in Chester and the state average for the past fifteen years. It shows that spending in Chester has been below the state average and was \$2,651 per pupil below the state average in 2022.

Figure 1

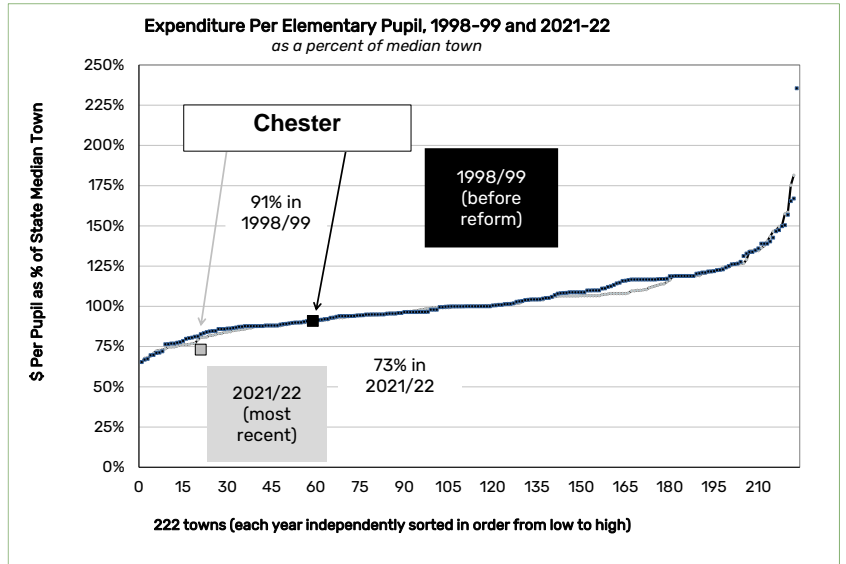
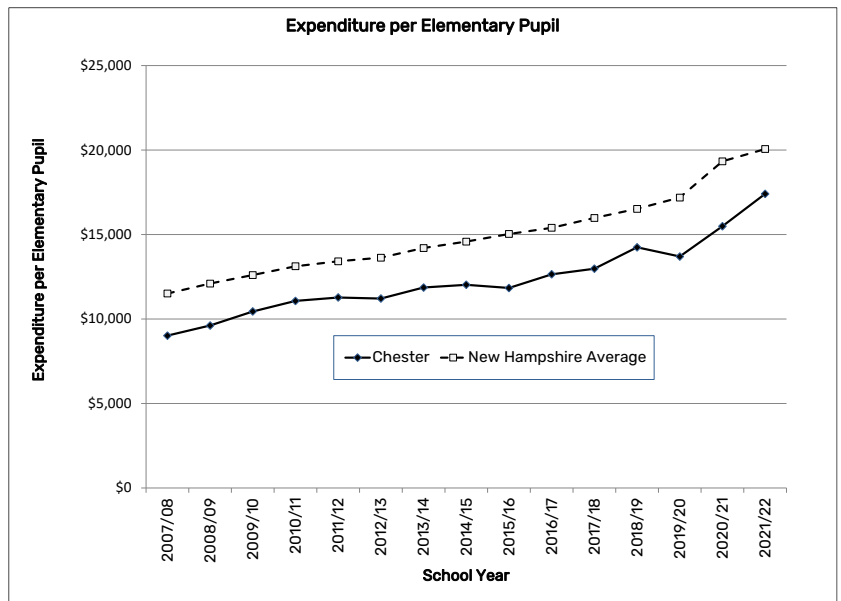


Figure 2



New Hampshire’s public school districts spent \$3.47 billion during the 2021-22 school year. Of that amount, 39 percent was dedicated to regular classroom instruction, 19 percent to special education, 10 percent to administration, 8 percent to building operations, and the remainder was devoted to transportation, food services, and other purposes.

As shown in the table, the proportion of Chester School District’s spending on regular instruction is more than the state average, and spending on special programs is lower. Chester’s proportion of spending is less than the state average for support services.

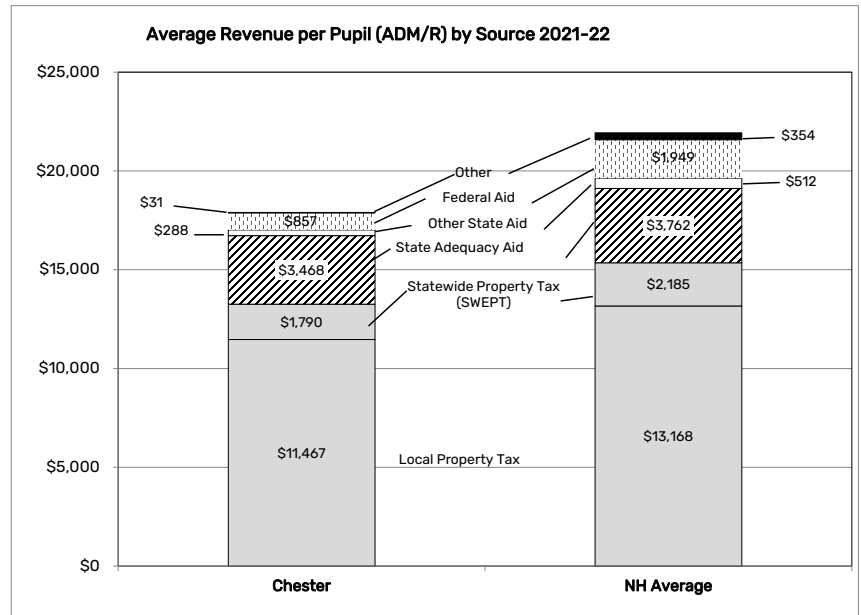
Spending by Type	Percentage	
	Chester	NH Average
Regular Instruction	56%	39%
Special Programs	13%	19%
Vocational Programs	0%	1%
Other Instructional Programs	1%	2%
Student Support Services	5%	8%
Instructional Support Staff	4%	4%
Administration	9%	10%
Plant Operations	5%	8%
Pupil Transportation	6%	5%
Food Services	2%	2%
Bond & Note Interest	0%	1%
Other Expenses	0%	0%
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

### How Does Chester Pay for Public Schools?

Figure 3 shows all the various revenue sources that Chester uses to pay for its students’ education, measuring them on a per-pupil basis. It also compares Chester’s revenue sources to the New Hampshire average. As this figure makes clear, local property taxes are the major source of revenue for public schools across the state.

During the 2021-22 school year, Chester School District’s total school revenue was \$17,901 per pupil, much less than the state average of \$22,066. Property taxes (local plus statewide) provided \$13,257 per pupil or 74% percent of the overall amount, more than the state average of 70%. Chester received \$3,468 state “adequacy” aid per pupil. The state average aid was only \$3,762.

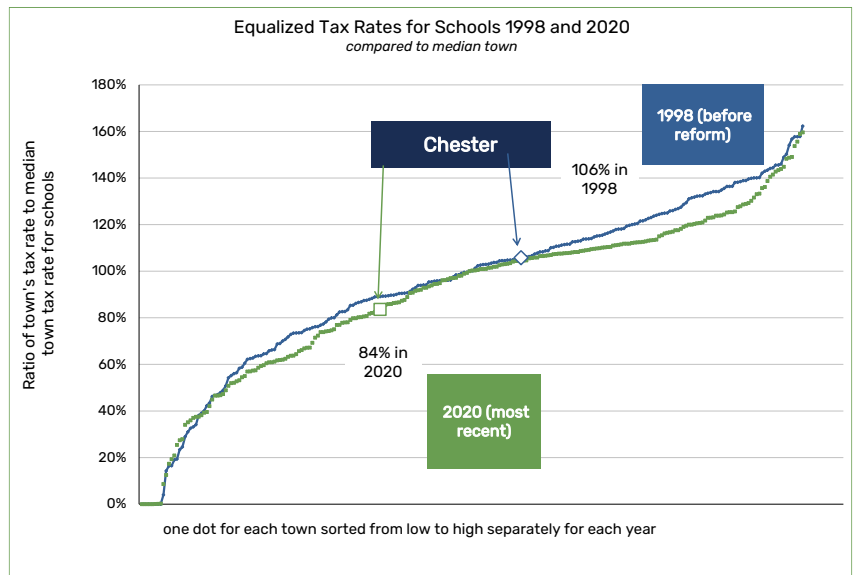
Figure 3



## How Do Chester's School Property Tax Rates Compare to Other Communities?

1998 was the last tax year before the state responded to the Supreme Court's *Claremont* rulings and introduced new aid to pay for an "adequate" education. That year, Chester's equalized property tax rate for its schools was \$19.72 per \$1,000 of property value. This rate was 106% of the median town. In 2021, the equalized school property tax rate in Chester was \$10.50 per \$1,000 of value (a \$8.99 local tax rate plus a \$1.51 state tax rate, which is retained locally). This was 97% of the median town.

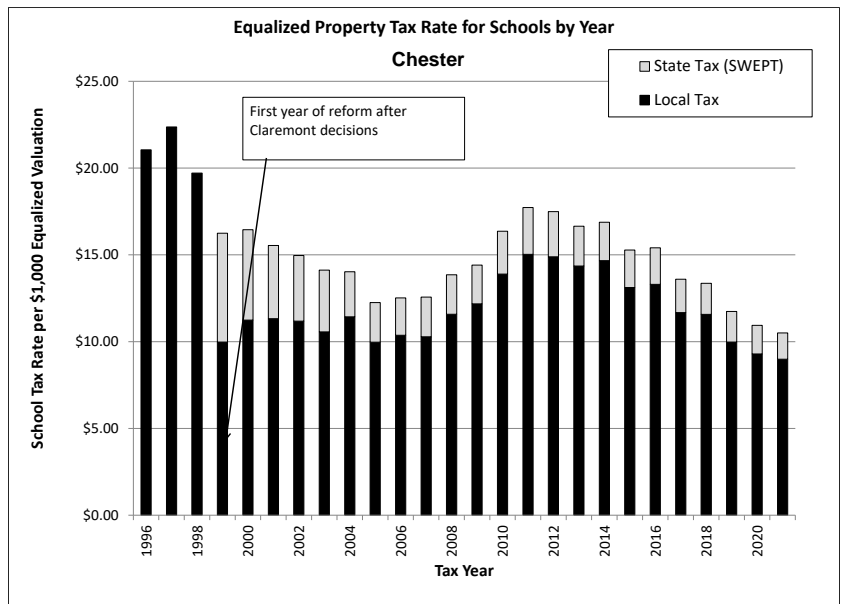
Figure 4



## How Has Chester's School Property Tax Rate Changed Over Time?

The reforms enacted in 1998 imposed the Statewide Education Property Tax (SWEPT). In 1999 its rate was \$6.27 per thousand equalized valuations in Chester. Also, in 1999 the state began the distribution of its new "adequacy aid" to each district. The result for Chester was a sudden reduction in its equalized tax rate from \$19.72 per thousand in 1998 to \$16.25 in 1999. The 2021 equalized rate was \$10.50.

Figure 5



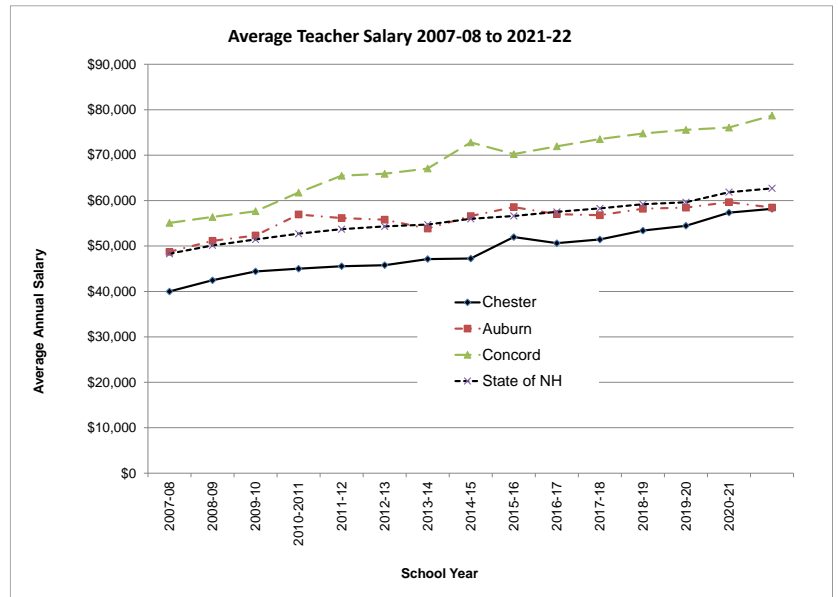
## How Much Do Teachers Earn in Chester?

In 2007-08 there were 46 teachers in Chester. In 2021-22 there were 47 teachers.

In 2021-22 the average teacher salary in Chester was \$58,178. This was 7% less than the state average of \$62,695. Since 2008, Chester's average teacher salary has remained below the state average, and surrounding communities.

Chester's average teacher salary increased by 45% from 2007-08 to 2021-22. At the same time, the Consumer Price Index increased by 36%. During the same period, the average salary in Portsmouth increased by 58%.

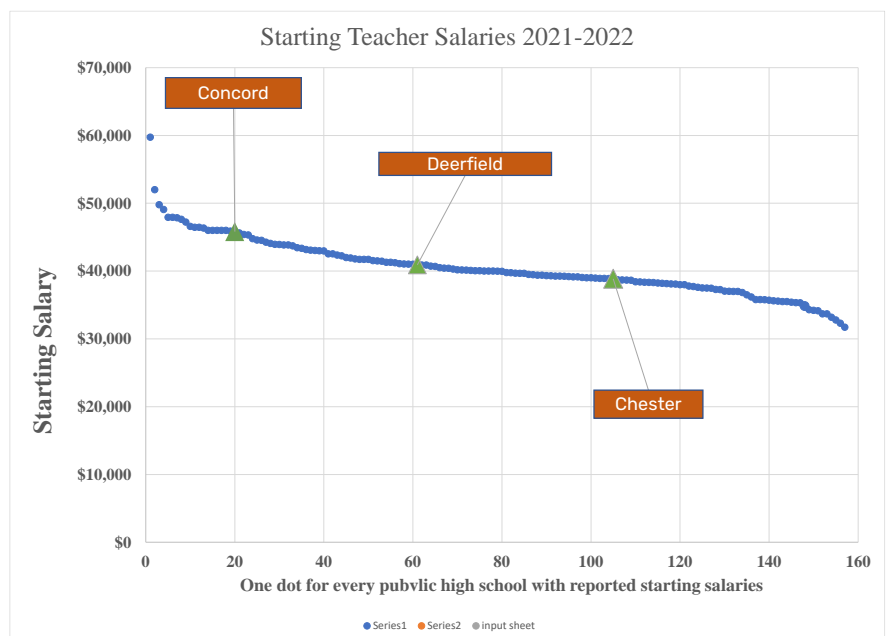
Figure 6



Average teacher salary is affected by two things: the actual salary schedule of a district and the number of years of teaching experience among the teachers. Teacher salary schedules generally increase salaries as teachers gain experience through years on the job. It is therefore possible for two districts that have identical salary schedules to have different average salaries. The salary of a newly recruited teacher depends on the district's salary schedule, not on the average teacher's salary.

On the other hand, starting salaries show us what a recent college graduate (bachelor's degree) could earn as a first-time teacher in a district. This is important for hiring and retaining quality teachers over the long term. The starting salaries for teachers with a bachelor's degree in New Hampshire ranged from \$31,712 to \$59,752 in the 2021-22 school year.

Figure 7



Chester School District had a starting salary for its teachers of \$38,855 for the 2021-22 school year. Chester's starting salary for teachers was 4% lower than the state average of \$40,479 in 2021. Figure 7 shows Chester, Deerfield, and Concord starting salaries in comparison to all others in the state. As seen, Chester falls behind Concord and Deerfield.

## What Does Chester Spend on Special Education?

Under federal and state law students with physical, mental, or learning disabilities require special additional services to support their learning. An Individual Education Plan (IEP) is created for each student. The cost of these services is tracked within the overall spending of each district.

As shown in this table, in 2021-22 Chester spent \$2,697,371.58 for these additional services.

Function	Amount
Instruction	\$1,684,781.61
Instruction Related	\$666,762.58
Administration	\$177,093.66
Legal	\$1,494.00
Transportation	\$149,239.73
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$2,679,371.58</b>

During that year, Chester had 142 students with IEPs. On average, this was an additional \$18,868 for each student. In the state overall there were 30,393 such students; the total cost was \$842,738,008, and the average cost per student with an IEP was \$27,728. The average cost for extra services for each student with an IEP in Chester was much less than the average throughout the state.

## How Do Property Values in Chester Compare to Other Communities?

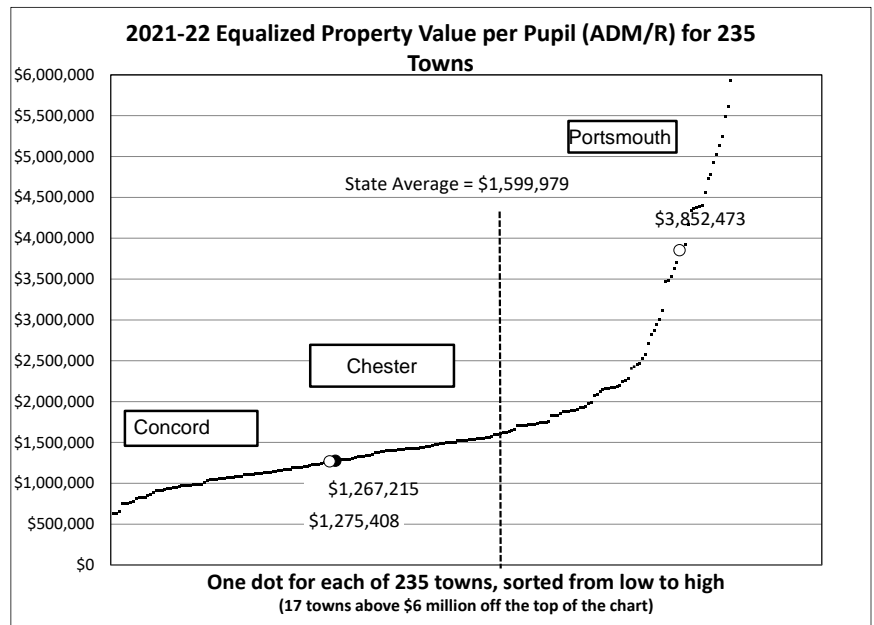
The most important statistic that relates to the ability of different towns to raise taxes for the purpose of their schools is Equalized Property Value per Pupil or EQVP. EQVP essentially provides an answer to the question, "What resources are available to be taxed in our town for each of the students whose education we pay for through our school budget?" The higher a town's EQVP, the lower the school property tax rate it needs to use to generate a set sum of money.

In 2021, Chester had \$946,014,946 of equalized property valuation and 742 students (as measured by average daily membership in residence or ADM-R). This means that Chester's EQVP that year was \$1,275,408. The state average EQVP was \$1,599,979. Chester had 80 percent of the state average.

Clearly, there is not a level playing field when it comes to the ability of towns' property tax bases to support their schools.

*Note: Data used in this report are taken from reports and spreadsheets of the NH Department of Education (Equalized Valuation per Pupil, Cost Per Pupil by District, Average Daily Membership Based Upon Attendance and Residence (ADM)).*

Figure 8



*Average Class Size by School, and DoE25 Extract for State Profile Data for various years). Such data are reported by New Hampshire school districts to the Department. Tax rates printed on town tax bills are not equalized and cannot be compared among towns. Using equalized data allows an apples-to-apples comparison among town tax rates and property values.*