



Reaching Higher NH School Funding Survey Analysis September 2020

In the winter of 2020, Reaching Higher New Hampshire released a survey which sought to gather data on the public's perception of how public schools across New Hampshire are funded, as well as how residents feel the schools in their districts are performing.

We received 744 responses from New Hampshire residents for our online survey. Outreach was conducted through social media, targeted communications, and email. Our survey sample was not random, and results should not be interpreted as reflecting the broader New Hampshire public (see the [Overall Demographics](#) section for more information). However, the data serve as a starting point for discussion and further research.

Key findings include:

- The majority of respondents agreed that their schools are doing a good job overall.
- Most respondents disagreed with the sentiment that their schools receive the right amount of funding. Of the 744 respondents, 418 indicated that they thought that per-student school funding should increase, compared to about 98 who believed that per-student school funding should decrease and 199 who believed that it should stay the same.
- Of those who responded to all three questions, 44% indicated that they believe that **state and federal** funding for public schools should increase, and **local** funding for public schools should decrease.
- Respondents typically underestimated the amount spent per-student in their district by \$2,571, or 14%.
- Overall, respondents typically underestimated the amount of funding that comes from local sources, while overestimating the amount of funding from federal and state sources. Particularly, respondents thought that 15% of funding came from federal sources, when districts receive an average of 5.1% of their funds from the federal government.
- Respondents who felt as though their tax dollars were not being used appropriately, tended to overestimate the share from federal (and, in some cases, state) sources, and underestimate the share from local sources.
- A little more than half (53%) of respondents agreed that public schools prepare students for higher education, 46% agreed that public schools prepare students for the workforce, and 36% of respondents agreed that public schools prepare students as informed citizens.

**Note: this survey closed before the statewide order to shift to remote learning.*

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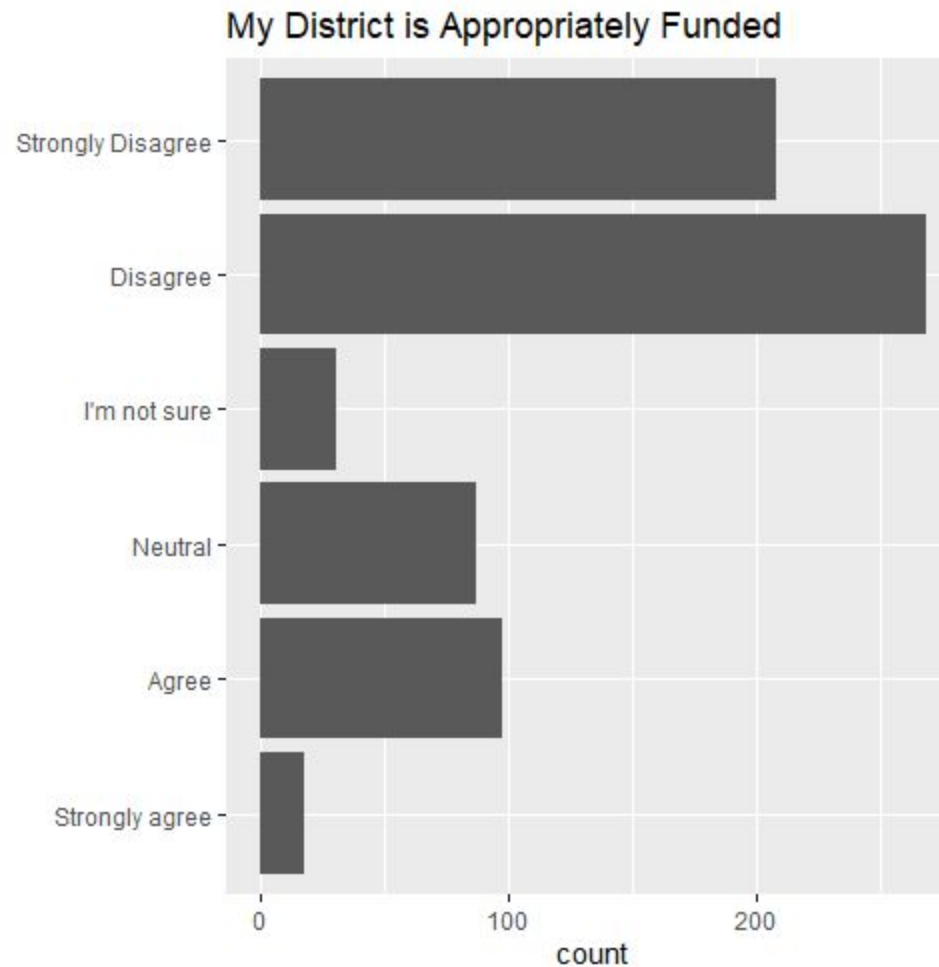
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Overall Perception of School Funding

"I believe that my school district's public schools receive the right amount of funding."

Respondents were asked if they believed that their local public schools received the right amount of funding. We did not specify the source of funding. Sixty-seven percent of respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the sentiment that their schools receive the right amount of funding, and 16% agreed with the sentiment, as shown in the chart below.



Direction of Funding Change

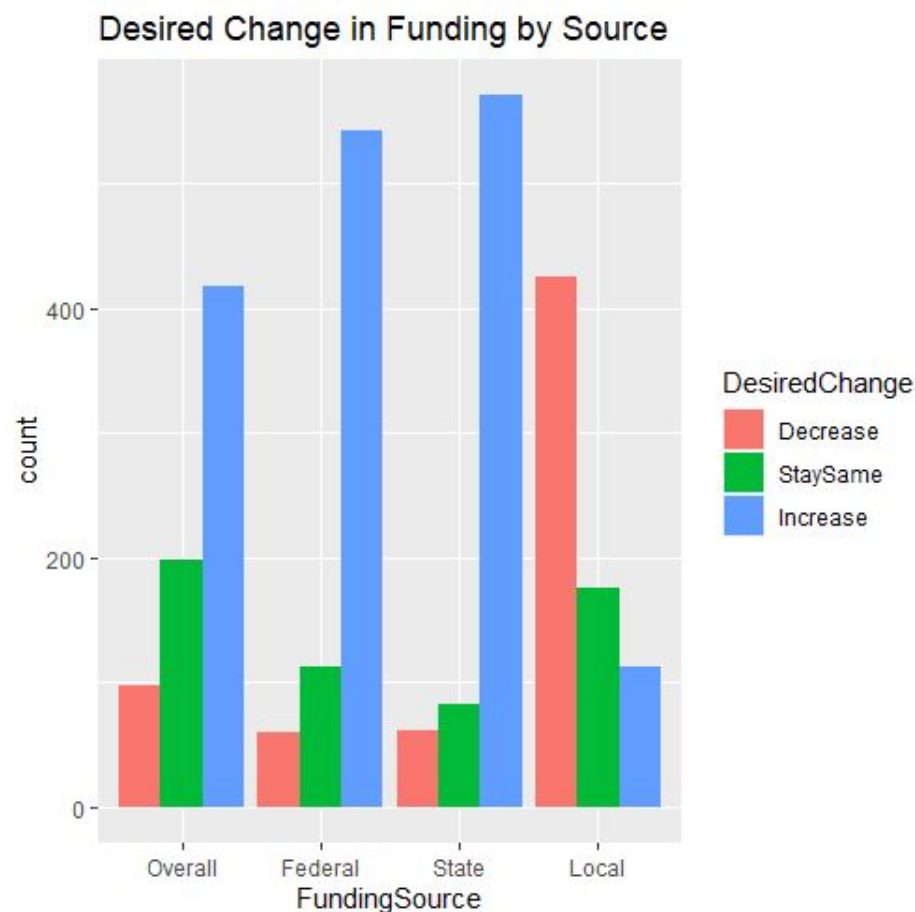
“Do you think that overall funding for public schools in your district should increase, decrease, or stay about the same?”

Survey respondents were asked about changes they would like to see in funding at various levels (overall, federal, state, and local).

- **Overall funding:** 418 respondents thought that overall school funding should increase, compared to 98 respondents who thought that overall school funding should decrease.
- **Federal funding:** 543 respondents thought that federal funding should increase, compared to 60 respondents who thought that federal funding should decrease.
- **State funding:** 571 respondents thought that state funding should increase, compared to 62 respondents who thought that state funding should decrease.
- **Local funding:** 426 respondents thought that local funding should decrease, compared to 113 respondents who thought that local funding should increase.

Of the respondents who answered the three questions:

- Forty-four percent indicated that they would like to see federal and state funding increase, and local funding decrease.
- Thirteen percent of respondents wanted all three sources (federal, state, and local) to increase.
- Six percent of respondents indicated that they would like to see all three sources decrease.



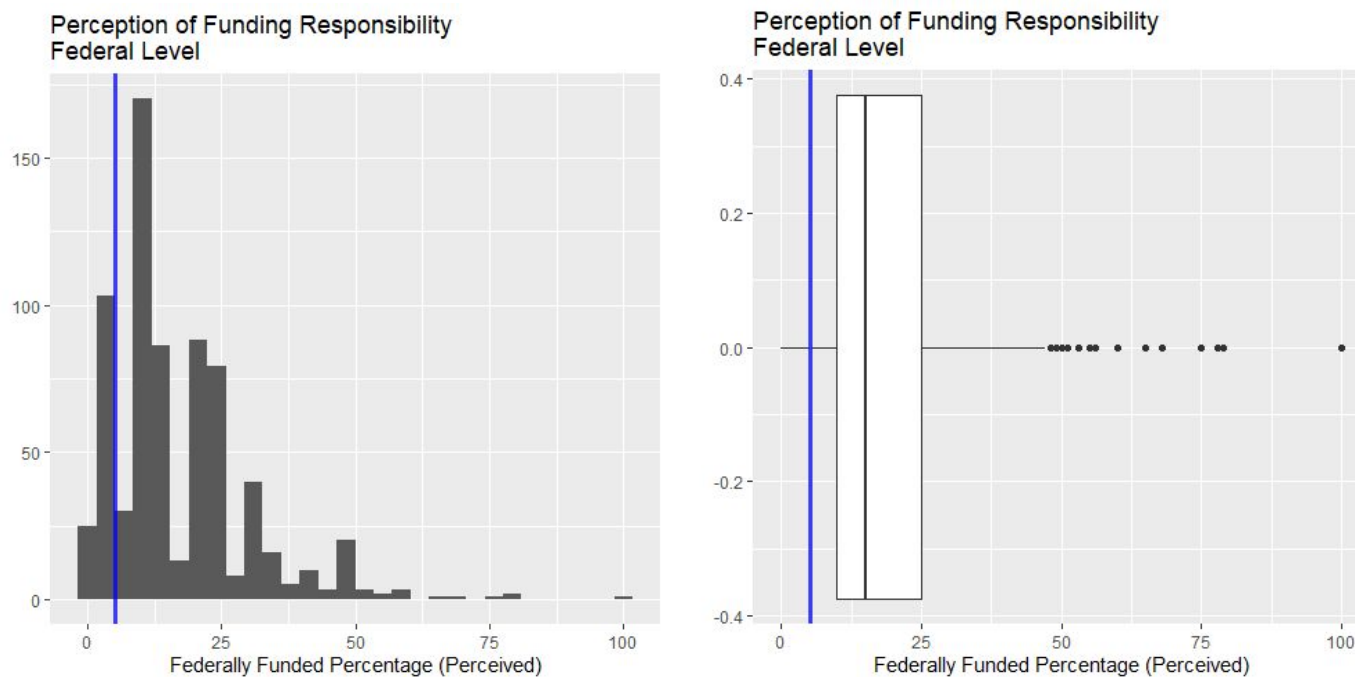
Perceived Funding Responsibility

“Based on your best guess, what percent of funding for public schools in your local school district currently comes from the [federal, state, local] government?”

Respondents were asked what percentage of school funding comes from federal, state, and local sources. Overall, respondents typically underestimated the amount of funding that comes from local sources, while overestimating the amount of funding from federal and state sources.

Federal Funding

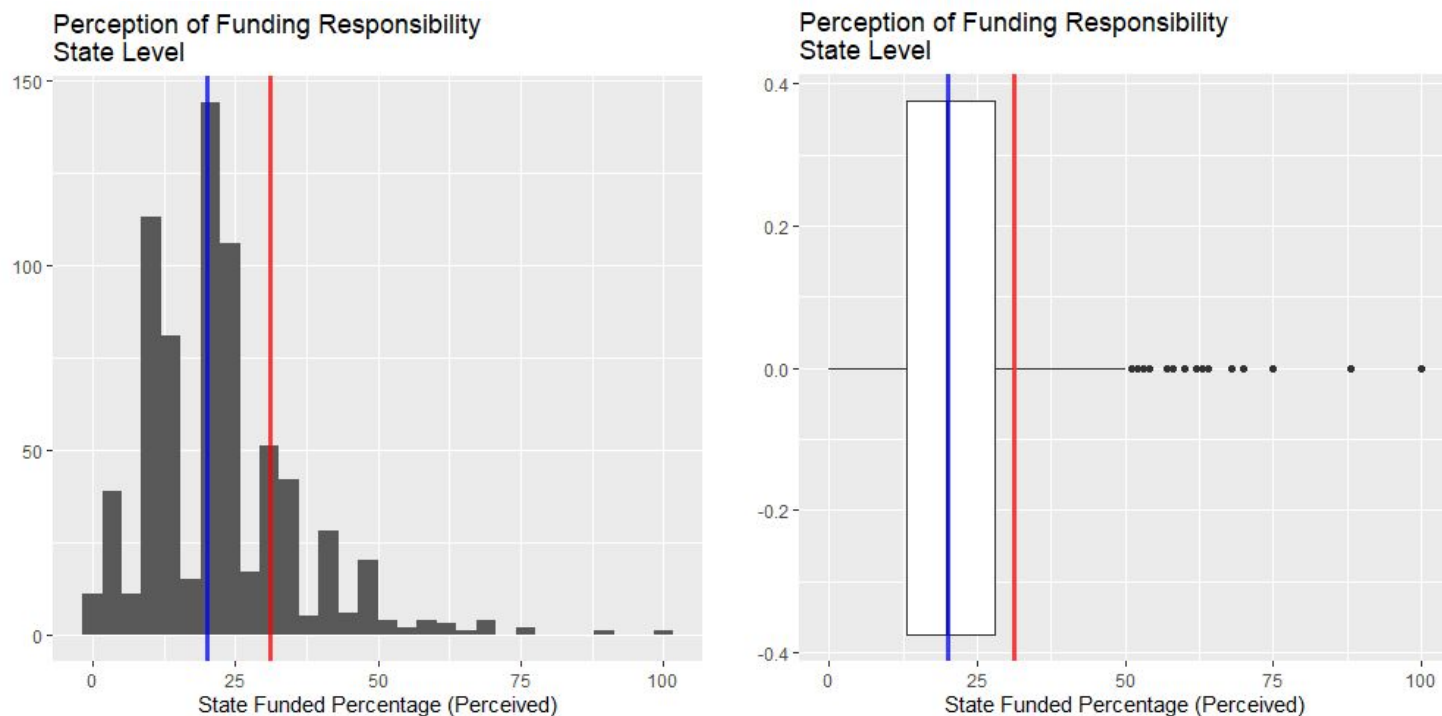
The blue line in the plots below represents the average statewide proportion of funding from federal sources (5.1%). Eighty-two percent (582 out of 710) of respondents perceived federal funding of public schools to be at a rate much higher than it actually is. In fact, the median *perceived* proportion of funding from federal sources was 15%, which far exceeds 5.1%.



State Funding

The average proportion of state-level funding varies depending on whether SWEPT (the statewide education property tax) is considered a state-level or local-level funding source.

The red line in the plots below represents the average statewide proportion of funding from state sources, when SWEPT is included as a state source (31.2%). The blue line in the plots below represents the average statewide proportion of funding from state sources, when SWEPT is included as a local source (20%).



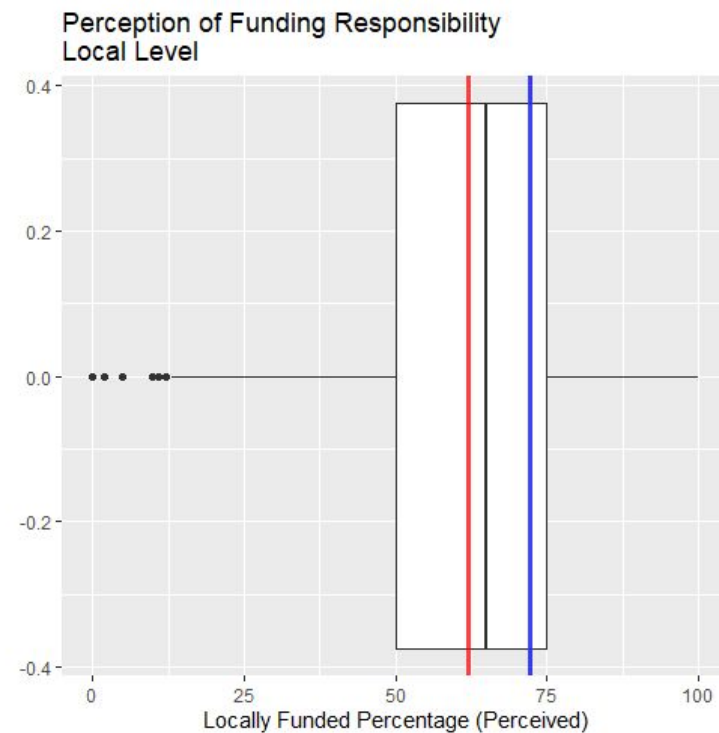
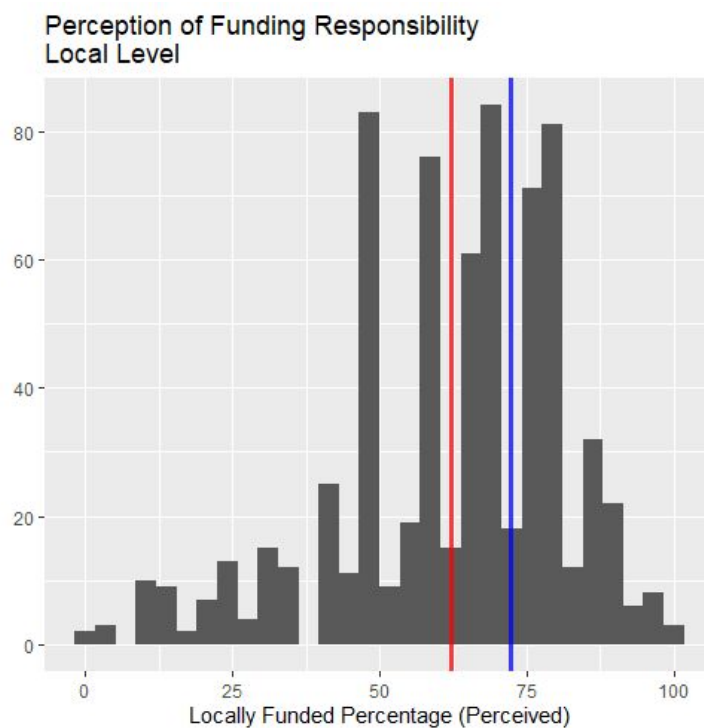
While respondents overestimated the proportion of funding from federal sources, they more accurately estimated the proportion of funding from state sources, especially when SWEPT was considered a local source.

Local Funding

Similar to the state proportion, the average proportion of local-level funding varies depending on whether SWEPT (the statewide education property tax) is considered a state-level or local-level funding source.

The red line in the plots below represents the average statewide proportion of funding from local sources, when SWEPT is included as a state source (62.1%). The blue line in the plots below represents the average statewide proportion of funding from local sources, when SWEPT is included as a local source (72.3%).

Most respondents estimated that between 50% and 75% of funding came from local sources. Additionally, there was more variability in responses compared to federal or state sources.

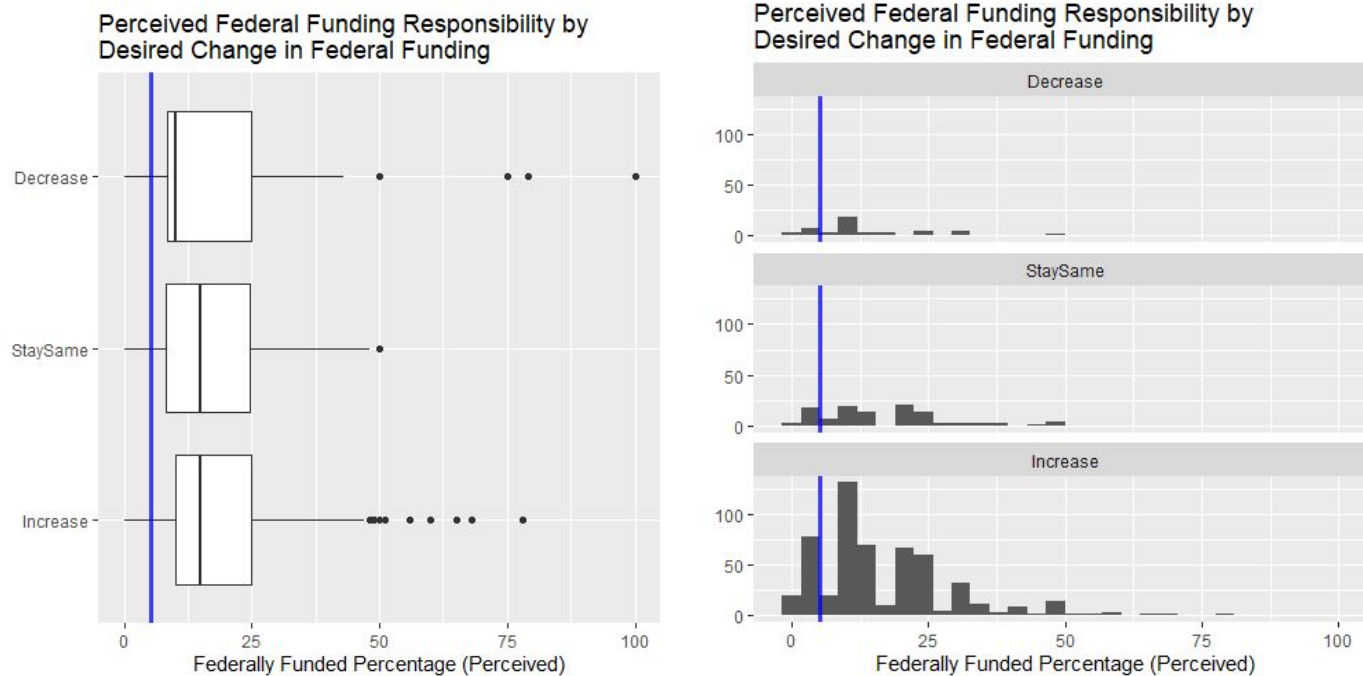


Funding Source & Perceived Funding Responsibility

This section explores respondents' attitudes about the direction of each funding source (federal, state, and local), based on their estimates of the proportion of funding that comes from each of those sources.

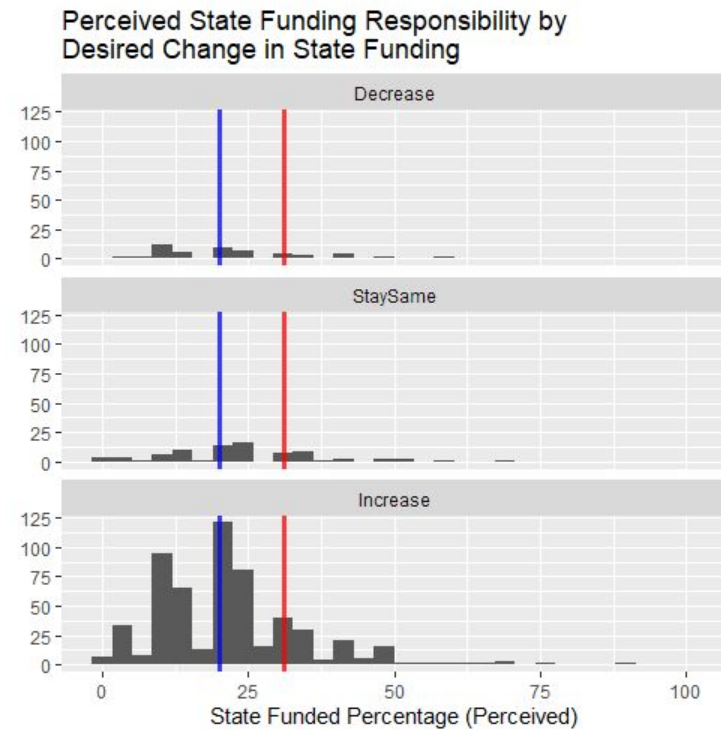
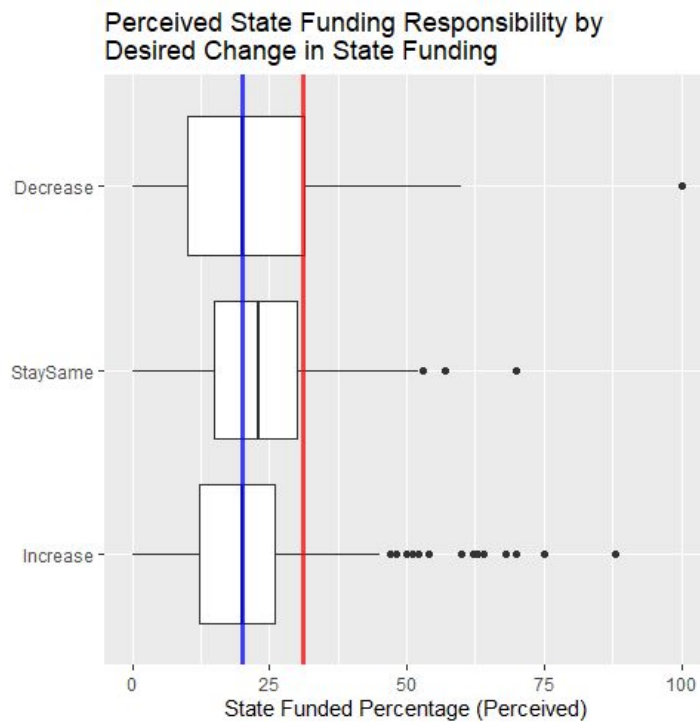
Federal Funding

The following plots explore respondent attitudes and estimates about **federal** funding. Regardless of their response to whether they wanted the share of federal funding to change, respondents tended to overestimate the share of funding that it provided.



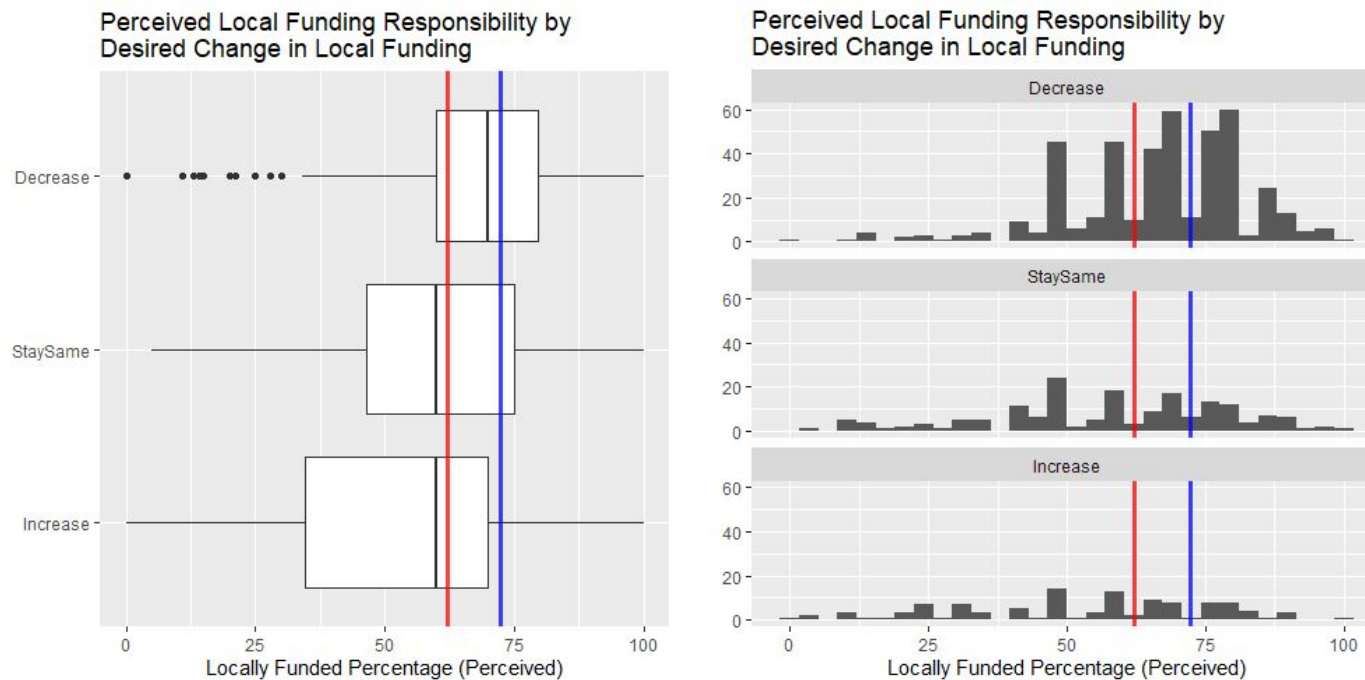
State Funding

The following plots explore respondent attitudes and estimates about **state** funding. The red line in the plots below represents the average statewide proportion of funding from state sources, when SWEPT is included as a state source (31.2%). The blue line in the plots below represents the average statewide proportion of funding from state sources, when SWEPT is included as a local source (20%).



Local Funding

The following plots explore respondent attitudes and estimates about **local** funding. The red line in the plots below represents the average statewide proportion of funding from local sources, when SWEPT is included as a state source (62.1%). The blue line in the plots below represents the average statewide proportion of funding from local sources, when SWEPT is included as a local source (72.3%).



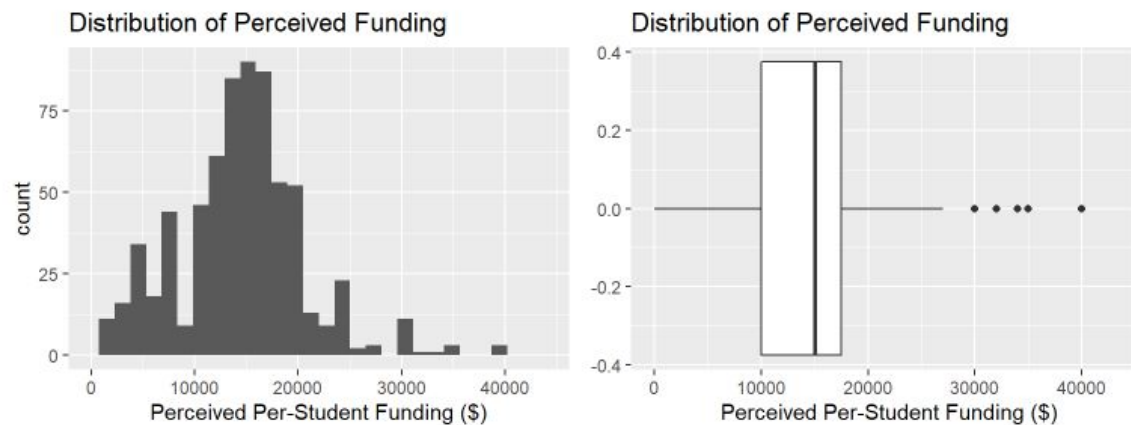
The group of respondents who would like to see a *decrease* in the local responsibility produced a median that was between the two “correct” responses. Respondents who indicated that they would like to see local funding *increase* or *stay about the same* tended to **underestimate** the amount of funding that is provided by local sources.

Estimating Per-Student Spending

“Based on your best guess, what is the average amount of money spent each year (federal, state, and local combined) for a child in public schools in your local school district?”

Respondents were asked to provide their best estimate of how much their local public school district spent each year per student. They were told that their estimate should include all funding sources.

The most frequent response (82 of 710 respondents) was \$15,000, as shown in the histogram below. Two-thirds of respondents estimated that their local public schools spend between \$10,000 and \$20,000 per year, as shown in the box-and-whisker plot on the right.

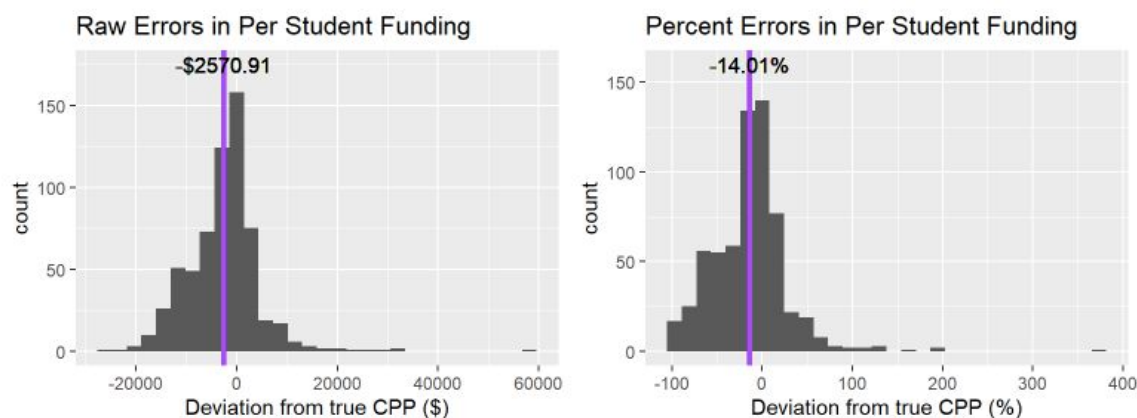


This plot does not show any responses which exceeded \$44,000 per student, per year, because the highest elementary level cost per pupil (CPP) was \$43,732 in 2019 (NH Department of Education, 2019).

Comparing Estimates to True Spending

We compared respondent per-student spending perceptions to the cost per pupil (CPP) at the elementary school level, as reported by the NH Department of Education. *Each respondent's estimate was matched with the actual per-student spending of their home district, to give a true representation of their perceptions of funding in their own community.* This was consistent with previous projects, specifically, [The Whole Picture of Public Education in New Hampshire](#). We excluded responses which were more than \$100,000 per student.

As shown below, respondents typically underestimated the amount spent per-student in their district by \$2,571, or 14%.

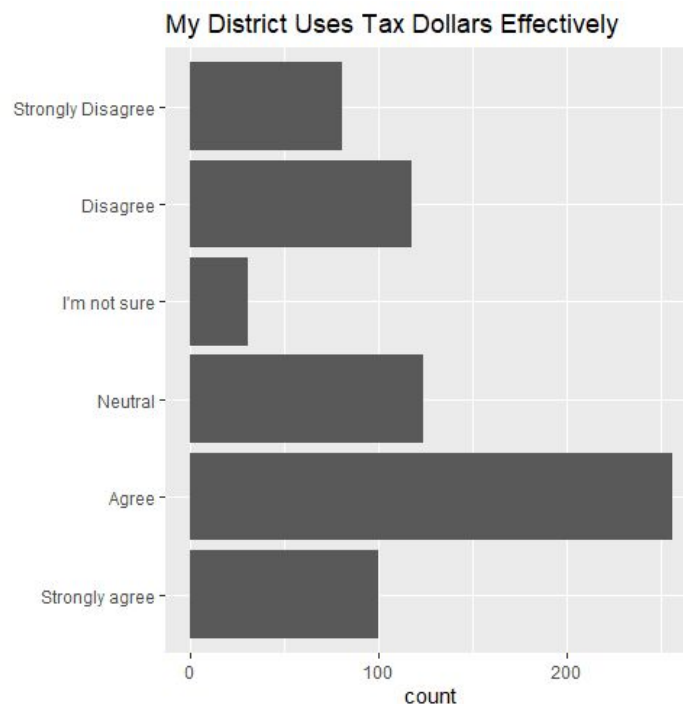


No matter how we computed the deviations (deviation from elementary school cost, district-wide average cost, or weighted cost), the results showed that respondents were underestimating per student costs.

Appropriate Spending of Tax Dollars

“I believe that tax dollars invested in my public school district are used effectively.”

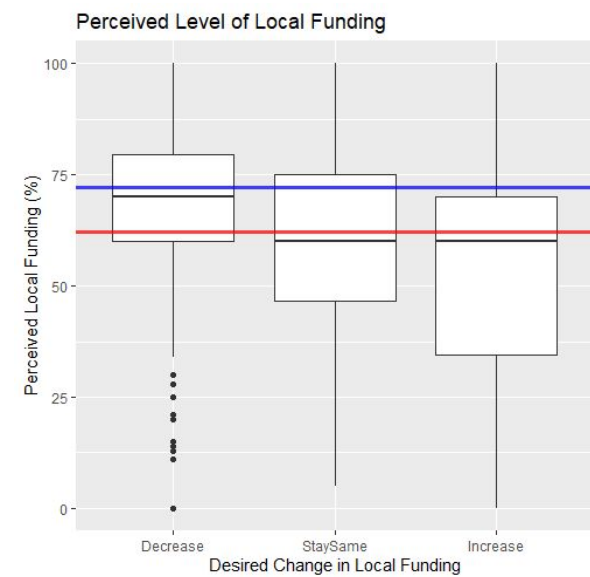
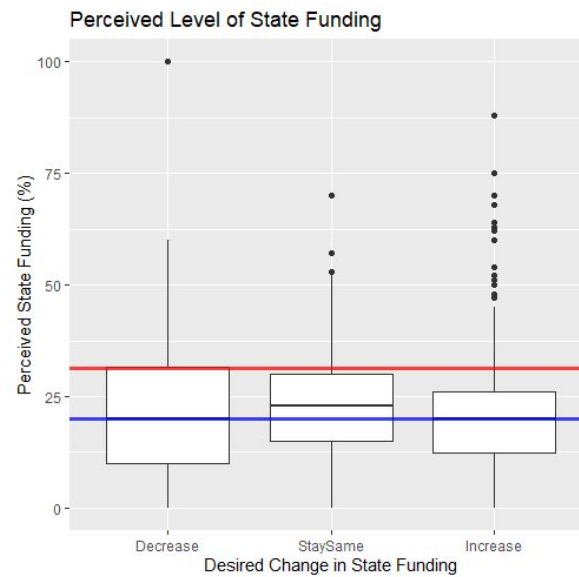
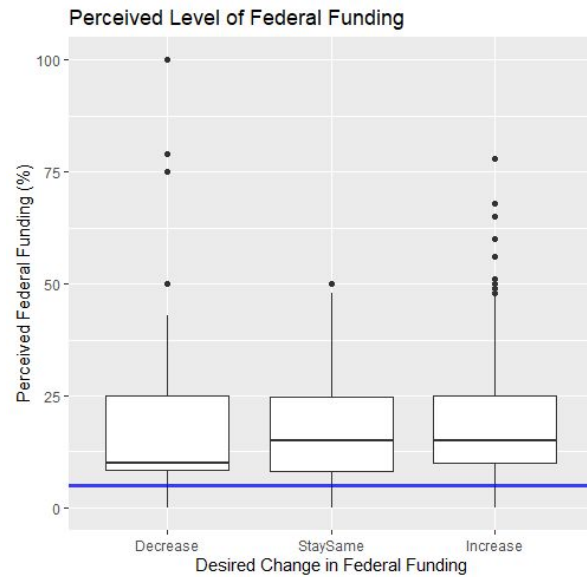
Fifty percent of respondents (356) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that the tax dollars invested in their public schools are used effectively, while 28% (199 respondents) disagreed with that statement.



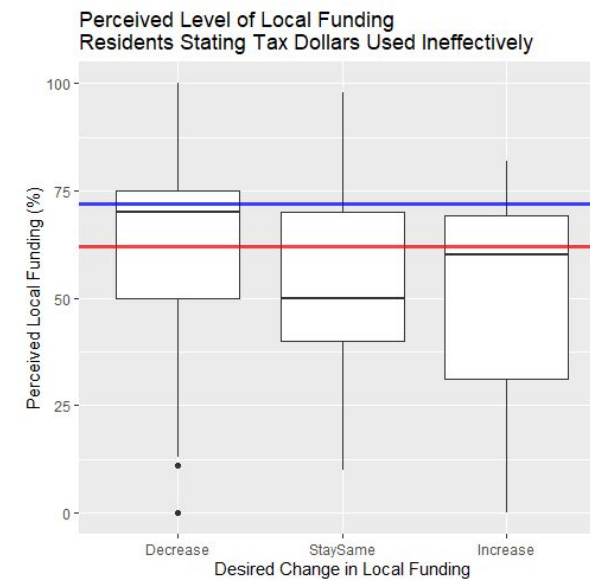
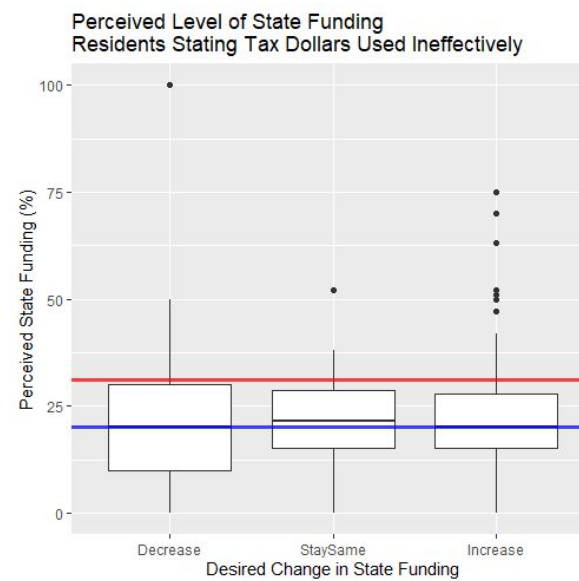
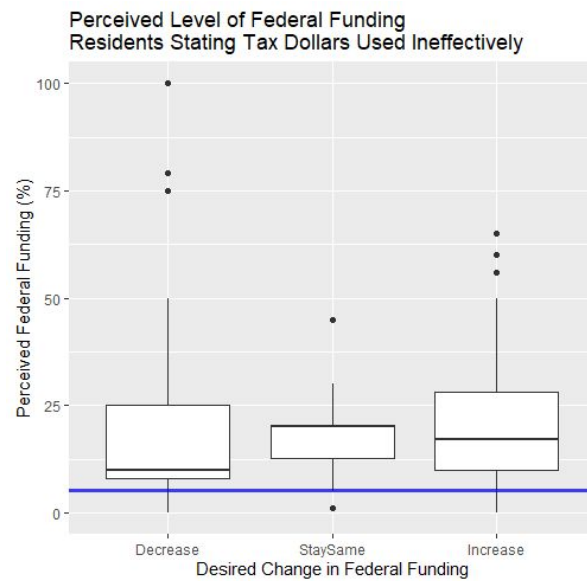
The following two sets of plots depict perceived levels of funding broken across how respondents would like to see funding levels changed. The first row includes all respondents, while the second row includes only those who feel that tax dollars are not used appropriately in their school district. The purple and orange lines represent the actual funding burden of particular sources:

- Perceived Federal Proportion: purple represents 5.1%
- Perceived State Proportion: if SWEPT is considered a state funding source, purple represents 31.2%; if SWEPT is considered a local funding source, orange represents 20%
- Perceived Local Proportion: if SWEPT is considered a state funding source, purple represents 62.1%; if SWEPT is considered a state funding source, orange represents 72%

All Respondents



Respondents who felt tax dollars are not used appropriately

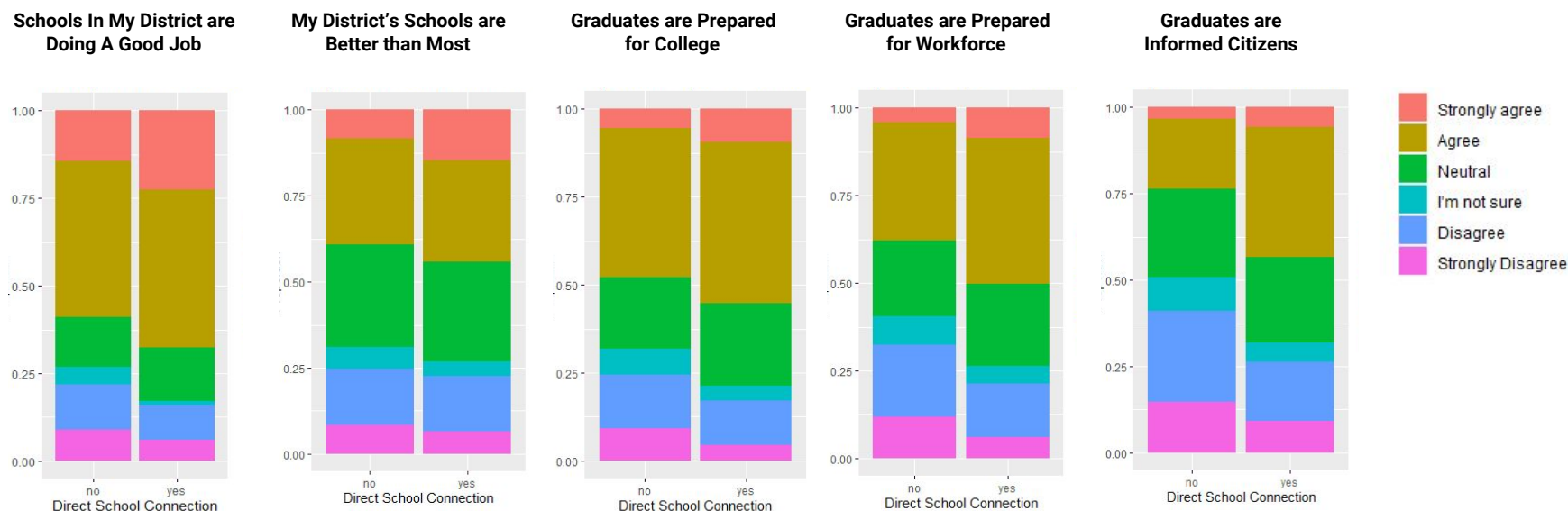


Respondents who felt as though their tax dollars were not being used appropriately tended to overestimate the share from federal (and, in some cases, state) sources, and underestimate the responsibility of local sources. The estimation error was greater in this group than in the broader sample, meaning that they tended to over- or under-estimate to a greater degree than the general sample population.

Additional Findings

Sixty-four percent of respondents (457) agreed that their schools are doing a good job overall. Respondents with a [direct connection](#) (62% of overall respondents) to the public school system have a slightly more positive view of the public schools than those respondents without a connection.

Fifty-two percent of respondents agreed that graduates from their school districts were prepared for college, 46% believed graduates were prepared for the workforce, and 36% believed their schools prepared graduates to be informed citizens.



Overall Demographics

This analysis includes 744 survey responses, each of which corresponds to a New Hampshire resident who answered at least one question related to public school funding. All education funding-related questions were optional.

Although we received responses from a wide array of individuals from New Hampshire, we want to be careful in making broad generalizations from this survey data. We were more likely to get responses from individuals directly connected to the school system and who have a passion for public education in NH. We see this in particular when we look at the breakdown of the educational attainment variable. It is clear that our pool of respondents contains an oversampling of individuals with higher educational attainment. In short, if we took a truly random sample of 744 New Hampshire residents, we would not get a sample that looks like ours, and so these results do not necessarily reflect the views of the average New Hampshire resident. **That being said, our analysis of this survey data does serve to start a discussion and identify interesting questions for further research or even focus group discussions.**

Approximately 87% of our respondents report living in New Hampshire for more than 10 years.

LengthOfResidency_State	Count
1 year or less	5
2-5 years	41
6-10 years	51
More than 10 years	647

About 98% of respondents have voted in an election in New Hampshire, at any point. The most frequent responses for town of residence were Concord (64), Manchester (46), and Dover (38).

Concord (64)	Newport (22)	Durham (11)
Manchester (46)	Marlow (20)	Henniker (11)
Dover (38)	Rochester (16)	Keene (11)
Exeter (33)	Hillsborough (15)	Stratham (11)

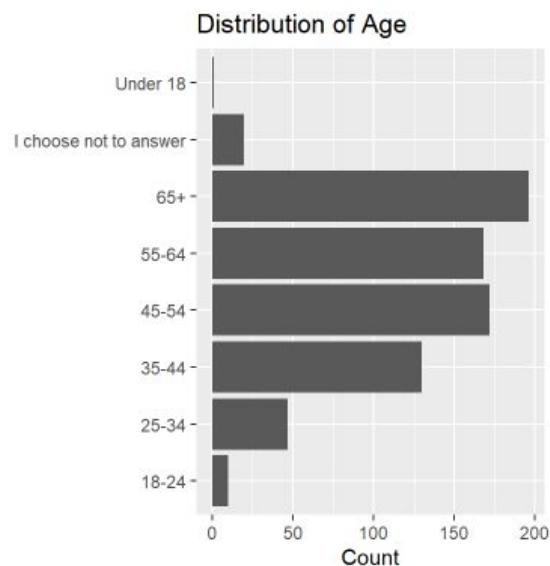
Sixty-two percent of respondents indicated that they were directly connected to public schools. We defined respondents as being directly connected to public schools if they indicated that they fell into at least one of the following groups:

- Current parent or guardian of a K-12 student
- Current middle or high-school student
- Educator
- School level administrator
- School level staff member
- District level administrator
- School board member

Two hundred and three respondents (27%) specifically indicated that they are educators.

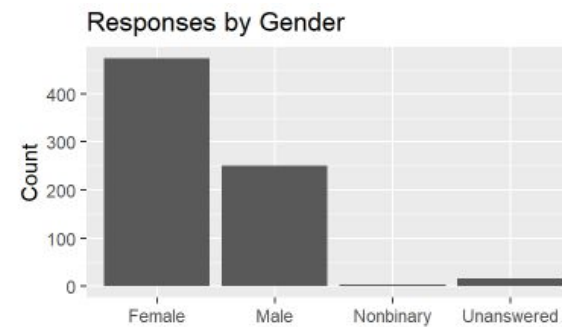
Respondents of various ages completed the survey. The distribution of age groups appears below.

Age	Count
18-24	10
25-34	47
35-44	130
45-54	172
55-64	168
65+	196
I choose not to answer	20
Under 18	1



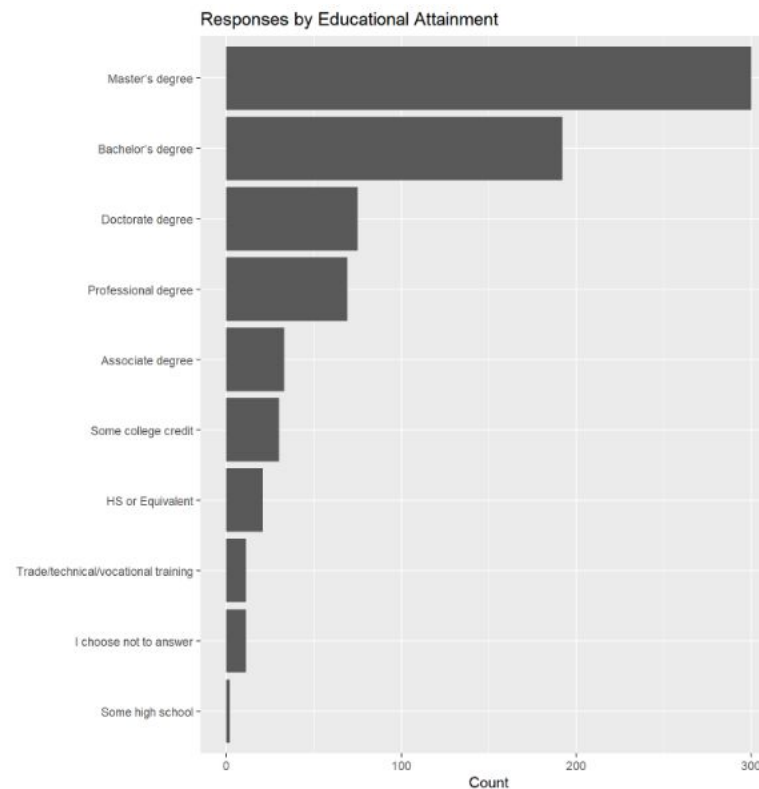
The distribution of responses by gender also appears below.

Gender	Count
Female	474
Male	250
Nonbinary	3
Unanswered	17



The distribution by education level (*Highest Degree Received*) appears below. We found that, of those who responded to the question, about 88% had earned a Bachelor's degree or higher.

HighestDegreeReceived	Count
Master's degree	300
Bachelor's degree	192
Doctorate degree	75
Professional degree	69
Associate degree	33
Some college credit	30
HS or Equivalent	21
I choose not to answer	11
Trade/technical/vocational training	11
Some high school	2



Appendix A: Survey Questions

Thank you, in advance, for taking the time to complete the Reaching Higher NH Education Funding Survey. This survey will take about 10 minutes to complete.

The purpose of this survey is to better understand how the public views New Hampshire's education funding system. **This survey is anonymous.** As such, please be as honest as possible – there are no right or wrong answers. Your answers will not be assessed individually. (An asterisk* indicates a required question.)

1. Do you currently live in New Hampshire?*

- Yes
- No

If "Yes"	If "No"
<p>2. How long have you lived in New Hampshire?*</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1 year or less• 2-5 years• 6-10 years• More than 10 years <p>3. What city/town do you currently live in?*</p> <p>4. How long have you lived in this specific community?*</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1 year or less• 2-5 years• 6-10 years• More than 10 years <p>5. Have you ever voted in New Hampshire?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Yes• No	<p>2. What state do you currently live in?*</p> <p>3. Have you ever lived in New Hampshire?*</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Yes• No

Additional Demographic Data

The responses from this page will help us ensure we are hearing from a large variety of New Hampshire residents. Again, your survey responses are anonymous.

6. Using the list of categories below, select all that best describe you.*

- Current parent/guardian of a K-12 student
- Current parent/guardian of child younger than K-12 student
- Current Middle/High school student
- Current College student
- Current Graduate student
- Educator
- Administrator, school-level
- Staff member, school-level
- Administrator, district-level
- School Board member
- City Councilor/Select Board Member/other municipality-elected role
- City/Town Budget Committee member
- Community member
- Other (please specify)

7. Please select your age.*

Under 18 18-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64 65+ I choose not to answer

8. What is your gender?* [Open-Ended Response]

9. What best describes your race/ethnicity? Choose all that apply.

- African American
- African
- Asian American
- Southeast Asian
- East Asian
- South Asian
- White
- Latin American/Hispanic
- Native American/Pacific Islander
- I choose not to answer
- Other (please specify)

10. What best describes your level of completed education? If currently enrolled, please select your highest degree received.*

- Nursery school to 8th grade
- Some high school
- High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (for example: GED)
- Some college credit
- Trade/technical/vocational training
- Associate degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Professional degree
- Doctorate degree
- I choose not to answer

School Funding Questions

11. Based on your best guess, what is the average amount of money spent each year (federal, state, and local combined) for a child in public schools in your local school district?* [Open-Ended Response]

Federal, State, Local

The next three questions ask for your best guess on the percentage of total funding for schools in your district at the federal, state, and local level. **The *total amount* for the next three questions, when adding the percentages together, should equal 100.**

12. Based on your best guess, what percent of funding for public schools in your local school district currently comes from the federal government?

13. Based on your best guess, what percent of funding for public schools in your local school district currently comes from the state government?

14. Based on your best guess, what percent of funding for public schools in your local school district currently comes from the local government?

Direction of Funding Change

15. Do you think that overall funding for public schools in your district should increase, decrease, or stay about the same?*

- Increase
- Decrease
- Stay about the same

16. Do you think that federal funding for public schools in your district should increase, decrease, or stay about the same?*

- Increase
- Decrease
- Stay about the same

17. Do you think that state funding for public schools in your district should increase, decrease, or stay about the same?*

- Increase
- Decrease
- Stay about the same

18. Do you think that local funding for public schools in your district should increase, decrease, or stay about the same?*

- Increase
- Decrease
- Stay about the same

Strongly Agree – Strongly Disagree Statements

For each of the following statements, please select from the following: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree, or I'm not sure.

19. I feel that the public schools in my district are doing a good job.*

20. I feel that the public schools in my district are doing better than most public schools in New Hampshire.*

21. I believe that my school district's public schools receive the right amount of funding.*

22. I believe that tax dollars invested in my public school district are used effectively.*

23. I believe when students in my town/city graduate from high school, they are prepared to be successful in the workforce.*

24. I believe when students in my town/city graduate from high school, they are prepared to be successful in college.*

25. I believe when students in my town/city graduate from high school, they are prepared to be informed citizens.*

Open-Ended Responses

26. What do you wish you knew/better understood about how public education is funded in New Hampshire?

27. What do you wish your local or state elected officials knew/better understood about how public education is funded in New Hampshire?

28. What other questions/comments do you have?

About Reaching Higher NH

Reaching Higher NH is a nonpartisan 501(c)3. Our mission is to provide all New Hampshire children with the opportunity to prepare for college, for immediate careers, and for the challenges and opportunities of life in 21st century NH, by serving as a public education policy and community engagement resource for New Hampshire families, educators, and elected officials.

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