

# Chapter 3

On this project, Prismatic sought the input of a variety of constituents, using a variety of methods. The overall objectives of the constituent input activities were to:

- ◆ gather information on impacts from the current configuration of ConVal schools
- ◆ identify major and minor preferences for various potential reconfigurations
- ◆ identify potential opportunities and barriers to implementing any recommended reconfiguration of schools
- ◆ assess equity of ConVal schools (perceived and actual)
- ◆ assess the general background knowledge of constituents in the areas of best practices in education, the current status of the ConVal district, and previous district considerations of reconfiguration
- ◆ assess the general appetite for and tolerance of change among constituents

This chapter provides summaries of the constituent input, organized by constituent group and input activity.



## Student Input

### Student Surveys

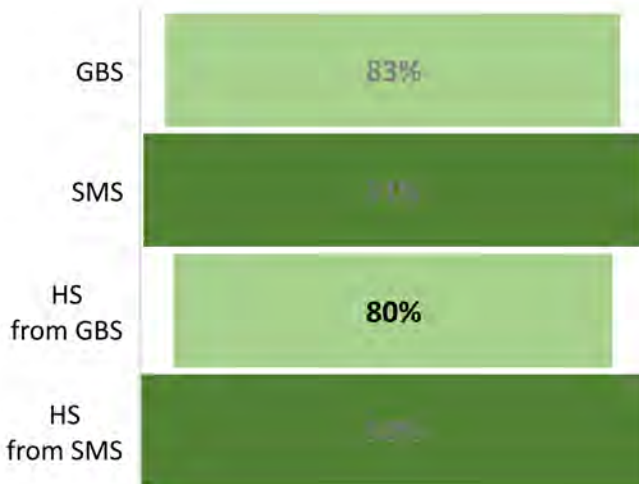
Prismatic offered online, anonymous surveys to middle and high school students and conducted student focus groups from September 18 through October 10, 2023. The survey instruments were slightly different between middle and high school students, with some questions in common. To participate, students had to have parental permission, as required by NH state law, which led to lower participation rates. A total of 201 students provided valid survey responses:

- ◆ 40 Great Brook
- ◆ 97 South Meadow
- ◆ 4 Dublin 5<sup>th</sup> grade
- ◆ 60 ConVal high school students

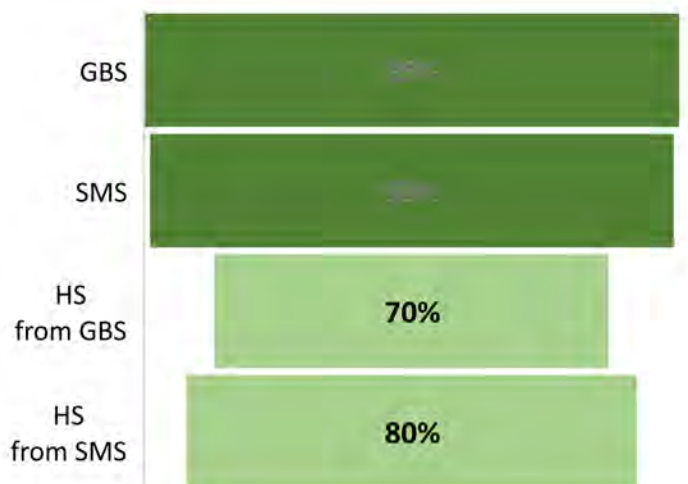
Complete results are provided in Appendix A. There were not enough surveys completed to do analyses by elementary school, but there were responses from students who attended each elementary school. Among the middle school respondents, there were enough responses to analyze results from GBS compared to SMS.

Regarding their ConVal elementary school experiences, a majority of the middle and high school students indicated positives experiences.<sup>1</sup> Those from GBS feeder schools were somewhat less positive than those from SMS feeder schools, but within the margin of error.

I had a great experience in my elementary school.



I had at least 2 really good friends in elementary school.

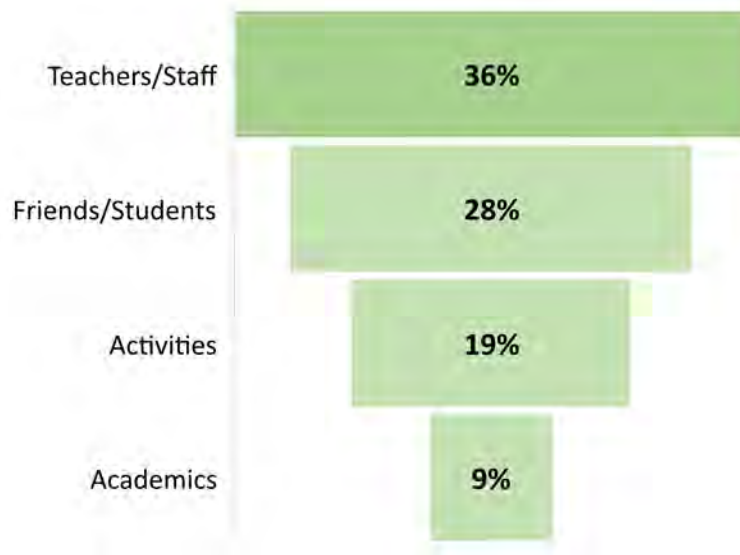


<sup>1</sup> In reporting survey results in this chapter, “agreed” includes all who responded “strongly agree”, “agree”, and “slightly agree” except where noted. Breakdowns by these categories are available in the appendix.

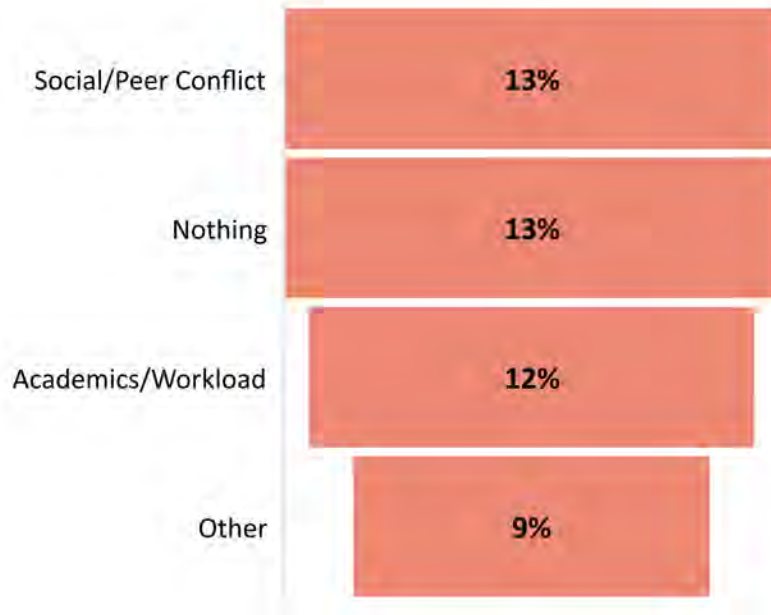
I am still really good friends with my friends from elementary school.



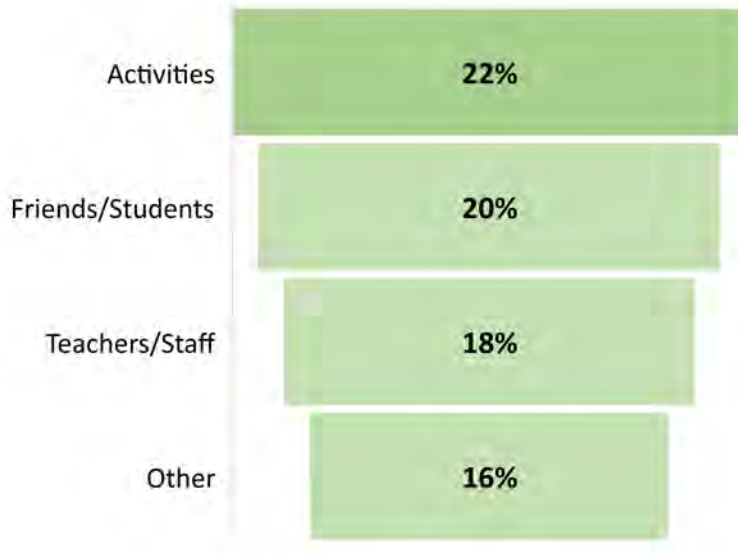
When asked to name the “best part” of their elementary school experience, middle school students most frequently pointed to teachers and staff, specifically highlighting influential teachers and positive student-staff relations. This was followed by responses highlighting the importance of friendships and student dynamics, then by responses around specific activities and opportunities for learning and academics.



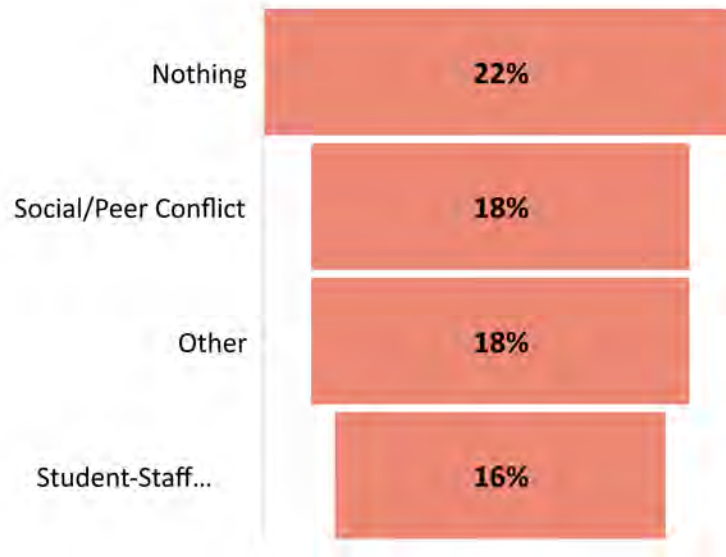
When asked to identify the “worst part” of their elementary school experience, middle schoolers identified social/peer conflicts (such as bullying and difficulties forming friendships) at the same rate as “nothing”. Another 12% mentioned issues related to academics, including concerns about the curriculum and workload, and 9% shared issues in other areas.



High school students were also surveyed on the “best” and “worst” parts of their elementary school experiences. When asked to name the “best part” of their elementary school experience, high school students most frequently highlighted the activities offered, followed by friendships and social interactions, then appreciation for the teachers and staff.



When asked to identify the “worst part” of their elementary school experience, high school students most frequently indicated they could not pinpoint any negative aspects. This was followed by difficulties in forming and maintaining friendships, dissatisfaction in other areas, and issues with teachers and staff.

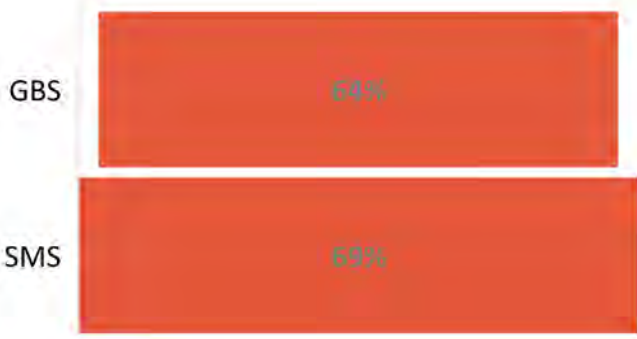


Current students at both middle schools had similar positive perceptions. Similar majorities of current GBS and SMS students agreed that:

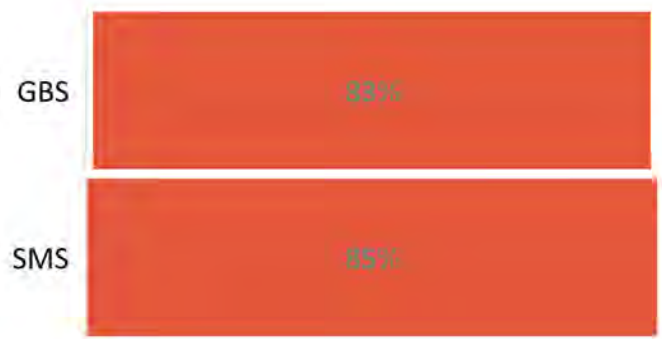
- ◆ Their school can be described as a good place to learn (83% GBS / 89% SMS).
- ◆ Their current classes are interesting (80% / 83%).
- ◆ They feel happy at their school (85% / 84%).
- ◆ They feel welcome and accepted at their school (95% / 81%).
- ◆ There are plenty of clubs at their school (90% / 80%).
- ◆ There are plenty of sports options at their school (80% / 84%).

However, in most cases, a majority of the current middle school students wanted more opportunities. Both groups would like more STEM courses and the opportunity to learn a world language. GBS students were satisfied with their arts elective options, but SMS students were not.

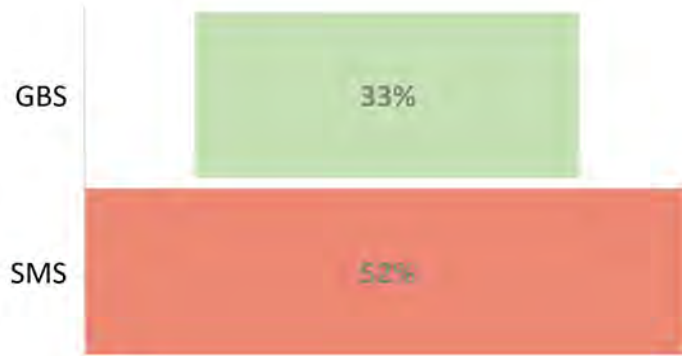
I would like more options for STEM courses.



I think middle school students should be able to learn a world language such as Spanish or French.



There are not enough electives in arts at this school.



Finally, a proportion of middle school students were open to the idea of increasing the size of their middle school. Nearly half of each group (46% GBS and 43% SMS) agreed with the statement, "I think it would be great if there were more students at this school."

## Student Focus Groups

Prismatic conducted student focus groups September 26-28, 2023. All participants had parental permission. A total of 51 students participated in 6 focus groups:

- ◆ 2 Great Brook groups – 1 with 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> graders and 1 with 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> graders, 19 in total
- ◆ 2 South Meadow groups – 1 with 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> graders and 1 with 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> graders, 17 in total
- ◆ 2 high school groups – 1 with students from Great Brook and 1 with students from South Meadow, all 9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> graders, 15 in total

The middle schoolers previously attended all the ConVal elementary schools. Thinking about the best and worst parts of their elementary school, they offered these comments:

- ◆ Those who attended AES characterized their teachers as “memorable and kind to everyone.” They also described AES as a “small school” where they got to know each other.
- ◆ Those who attended PES characterized their teachers as “really nice” and noted that “some were really good” teachers.
- ◆ Those who attended the smaller schools noted:
  - “Awesome teachers” but also that class sizes were “kinda small” which was viewed as a good thing sometimes and sometimes “You wished you had more people. When you are stuck with the same kids for 4 years it gets boring.” – BES/Pierce
  - They liked that it was small, “everyone got to know each other.” – FES
  - The best part of GES was the starting time - GES
  - There were not too many students – DCS and TES
  - Classes were “insanely small,” this was a good and bad thing - HES

When asked what they would have changed about their elementary school, they offered these comments:

- ◆ The specials schedule, such as doing art for 5 days and then no more art for 2 months, made it “hard to remember what you learned.” – BES/Pierce
- ◆ Change some of the teachers – DCS, GES, and PES
- ◆ Putting older students with younger students for specials was “annoying.” – GES
- ◆ They need more rooms. The school was a “multipurpose room and 2 hallways.” They wouldn’t leave the classroom except for specials and recess. – HES
- ◆ Make the schedule for specials “more even” instead of “random” – TES

Compiled responses to other focus group questions are provided in the table below.

Question	Middle School Student Responses
Going to a smaller school can sometimes make it tough to make friends. Did you see that challenge in your elementary school? Were some kids sometimes left out of friend groups?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ There were mixed opinions, with some saying “yes” and some saying “no.” One said it was easier to make friends because of how few kids there were. One said there were “definitely kids no one wanted to be friends with” at their elementary.</li> </ul>
Coming into middle school, did you feel prepared for middle school academics? Were there subject areas that you wish you had spent more time on in elementary school so that you would have been more prepared for middle school?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ There were mixed opinions, with some saying “yes” and some saying “no.” Some characterized the challenges as being mostly due to COVID. A few noted that their ES did not focus on science or social studies, so they were behind in those subjects. Several said they felt “totally ready” for MS math.</li> </ul>
In your classes now, do you notice differences in academic preparation across students from different elementary schools?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ There were mixed opinions. Several noted specific observations such as their ES prepared them better for math. Others noted lower skills in science and social studies. One former GES student said that former PES students knew more than GES students in “pretty much everything.”</li> <li>◆ Among 8<sup>th</sup> grade focus group participants, some students said they did not learn in ES some things that come up in their 8<sup>th</sup> grade classes.</li> <li>◆ One student suggested, “4<sup>th</sup> grade teachers should talk and compare what they are teaching” so that “everyone is on the same page about things.”</li> <li>◆ In 1 of the 4 focus groups, the general consensus was “not really.”</li> </ul>
Does this middle school have all the academic opportunities you’d like to have? If not, what is missing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Several expressed a desire for world languages, including Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, French, Latin, and Arabic.</li> <li>◆ Several expressed a desire for a “life skills” class that would teach things such as how taxes work.</li> <li>◆ Individuals expressed a desire for higher math classes, computer programming, auto shop, and open enrollment into Algebra I.</li> </ul>
Does this middle school have all the clubs, sports, and extracurricular opportunities you’d like to have? If not, what is missing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ There was no consensus around any 1 item. Requests included: tennis, bass fishing, lacrosse, dance, motocross, paintball, ultimate frisbee, rock climbing wall (for GBS), disc golf, badminton, and ski club.</li> </ul>
How do you feel about the size of this middle school? There are a lot more kids here than most of you had in elementary school. How do you feel about that?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Several said that the size of their MS was “just right.”</li> <li>◆ A few said there was just enough students.</li> <li>◆ “Everyone has their own group.”</li> </ul>
The adults in ConVal have been talking about reconfiguring the district. That could mean that some	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Among the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders, the consensus was that merging ES would be negative. They worried about the lack of</li> </ul>



Question	Middle School Student Responses
<p>elementary schools would be merged together. Do you have any thoughts about that possibility? Does that sound like it could be a positive or negative change? Why?</p>	<p>space in a consolidated school. They worried that teachers would lose their jobs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Among the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders, there was no consensus in 1 of the groups, while the other group consensus was that it would be okay to merge. One said the district should keep a school in each town. A few noted that merging some would be okay. Some had concerns about the length of bus rides. One stated that having a separate school with 8 kids in a class “doesn’t make any sense.” A former DCS student said that it might be good for DCS specifically because of the extremely low number of students there.</li> </ul>
<p>What do you think of the idea of one ConVal middle school? Does that sound like it could be a positive or negative change? Why?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ There was no consensus opinion among the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders. Some worried that a combined MS would be overfull and that class sizes would be too large. Some worried about the impact on sports competitions. Some worried about the length of bus rides.</li> <li>◆ There was some support for merging MS among the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders. “It would be cool to see new people.” But they also worried whether all the MS students could fit into 1 building and about the length of bus rides.</li> </ul>
<p>What do you think of the idea of putting all ConVal students in grades 7 through 12 in the current high school? Does that sound like it could be a positive or negative change? Why?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ The 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders were generally indifferent about the idea, but stated they like having grade 5-8 together.</li> <li>◆ The 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders were highly negative about this idea. They expressed concerns about younger students being bullied.</li> </ul>

The high schoolers previously attended AES, BES/Pierce, FES, GES, and PES. Thinking about their elementary school, they offered these comments:

- ◆ Those who attended AES and PES liked the larger size of those schools. There were “more chances to make friends” and they “had more friends.” They noted that not all of their teachers were great.
- ◆ Those who attended the smaller schools noted that having fewer teachers meant stronger connections with them. However, they “didn’t learn a whole lot” and “teachers ran out of stuff to do with us.”

Compiled responses to other focus group questions are provided in the table below.

Question	High School Student Responses
<p>Going to a smaller school can sometimes make it tough to make friends. Did you see that challenge in your elementary school? Were some kids sometimes left out of friend groups?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ “Yes” was the general consensus.</li> <li>◆ “There were already some AES kids who were left out and they were still left out when HES kids came in 4<sup>th</sup> grade.”</li> <li>◆ At BES/Pierce, it was “all just pairs, not a big group.”</li> <li>◆ At FES, all the students in the graduating class were friends.</li> <li>◆ At GES, “no matter how hard you try, there would still be kids left out.”</li> <li>◆ “Even at PES it was hard sometimes” but 2 noted that PES promoted “inclusion” of all students and saw it as a good thing. Students got in trouble with teachers if they were perceived as “leaving people out.”</li> </ul>
<p>Coming into middle school, did you feel prepared for middle school academics? Were there subject areas that you wish you had spent more time on in elementary school so that you would have been more prepared for middle school?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Some felt prepared, some did not.</li> <li>◆ Some felt less prepared for the social aspects of MS.</li> <li>◆ Some wished there had been more math and science in ES.</li> <li>◆ Some wished that classes were better “defined” in ES. ES didn’t keep the same topics at the same time each day. It was more “whatever” in ES.</li> </ul>
<p>In your high school classes now, do you notice differences in academic preparation across students from the different middle schools?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ GBS offered an extended learning program (ELP) that was not offered at SMS.</li> <li>◆ SMS offered a year of Spanish for some 7<sup>th</sup> graders that was not offered at GBS.</li> <li>◆ Former GBS students felt: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ they were generally prepared for 9<sup>th</sup> grade. A lot of the classes are “really easy.”</li> <li>○ those who took Algebra I at GBS are less prepared for Algebra II than their SMS counterparts.</li> <li>○ SMS had “more opportunities to chunk kids into different abilities” and that “GBS didn’t have advanced classes.”</li> </ul> </li> <li>◆ Former SMS students felt: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ they were better prepared for Algebra II than GBS students, that GBS students “learned it a different way.”</li> <li>○ GBS students were less prepared for an honors math class.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>Does this high school have all the academic opportunities you’d like to have? If not, what is missing?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Some regular and honors classes are taught in the same classroom. They would prefer separate classes.</li> <li>◆ There is no honors option for physical science for 9<sup>th</sup> graders.</li> <li>◆ They are hesitant to try online French class because it is online. Also, they cannot earn an A+ in online classes so it negatively impacts GPA.</li> <li>◆ They noted the loss of classes such as honors Biology, precalculus, and AP physiology because of low enrollment and the loss of teachers.</li> </ul>

Question	High School Student Responses
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ One noted the availability of “great CTE programs.”</li> <li>◆ One wanted the option to learn French.</li> </ul>
<p>Does this high school have all the clubs, sports, and extracurricular opportunities you’d like to have? If not, what is missing?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Multiple comments about the good variety of sports.</li> <li>◆ “Everyone has an opportunity to do something.” However, all clubs are after school, which means some may not be able to participate.</li> <li>◆ “You can create your own club – just need 3 people and 1 adult.”</li> </ul>
<p>How do you feel about the size of this high school? There are a lot more kids here than most of you had in elementary or middle school. How do you feel about that? Is this school too large, too small, just right? Why?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ “Everyone overplayed how big this school is. Everyone said we were going to get lost but it only took 2 days to figure it out.”</li> <li>◆ There are “enough kids that if you don’t want to see someone you don’t have to.”</li> <li>◆ “It could be bigger and it would be okay.”</li> <li>◆ They did not find it difficult to mix with students from the other MS. Good friends from last year are now “irrelevant.” There are “whole new friend sets.”</li> </ul>
<p>The adults in ConVal have been talking about reconfiguring the district. That could mean that some elementary schools would be merged together. Do you have any thoughts about that possibility? Does that sound like it could be a positive or negative change? Why?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ “It depends on the kid’s personality as to whether the small schools are too small.”</li> <li>◆ In merged ES, “academics would be better.” They “wouldn’t have to learn with kids that aren’t at your level.”</li> <li>◆ Three previously attended schools outside of ConVal with much higher enrollments. One of those found the larger school “stressful.” The other 2 had no criticisms of the larger schools.</li> <li>◆ Two held negative views of multi-grade elementary classes. Both noted that the teachers of them repeated the earlier-grade curriculum in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year.</li> <li>◆ Participants felt that “smaller class sizes are better” and several expressed that 20 should be the maximum size. One shared that their ES class size of 15 was “nice” and that having multiple classes of the same grade level allowed students to “get a break from some kids” and that teachers “could switch kids between classes.” Several noted concerns with how the busing would work.</li> <li>◆ One said, “Combining schools would definitely not be a bad idea.”</li> </ul>
<p>What do you think of the idea of one ConVal middle school? Does that sound like it could be a positive or negative change? Why?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ “No” was the initial general reaction in both groups.</li> <li>◆ The current 2 MS are “not alike at all.” SMS students are “the favorite children.”</li> <li>◆ Several spoke positively of the chance to get to know new people in 9<sup>th</sup> grade.</li> </ul>
<p>If the middle schools were combined, what would be the biggest challenge?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Differences in current sporting programs/options. “SMS takes sports more seriously than GBS.” “GBS is not a ‘sports school.’ It’s more a band and choir school.”</li> </ul>

Question	High School Student Responses
<p>What do you think of the idea of putting all ConVal students in grades 7 through 12 in the current high school? Does that sound like it could be a positive or negative change? Why?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ “No” was the initial general reaction in both groups.</li><li>◆ If they had to choose between merging ES and merging MS, they would merge the ES. Making the ES classes bigger from the start would be better. There was general consensus around this idea in 1 group and some support for it in the other group.</li><li>◆ There were concerns about the wide variations in maturity levels between 7<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders.</li></ul>

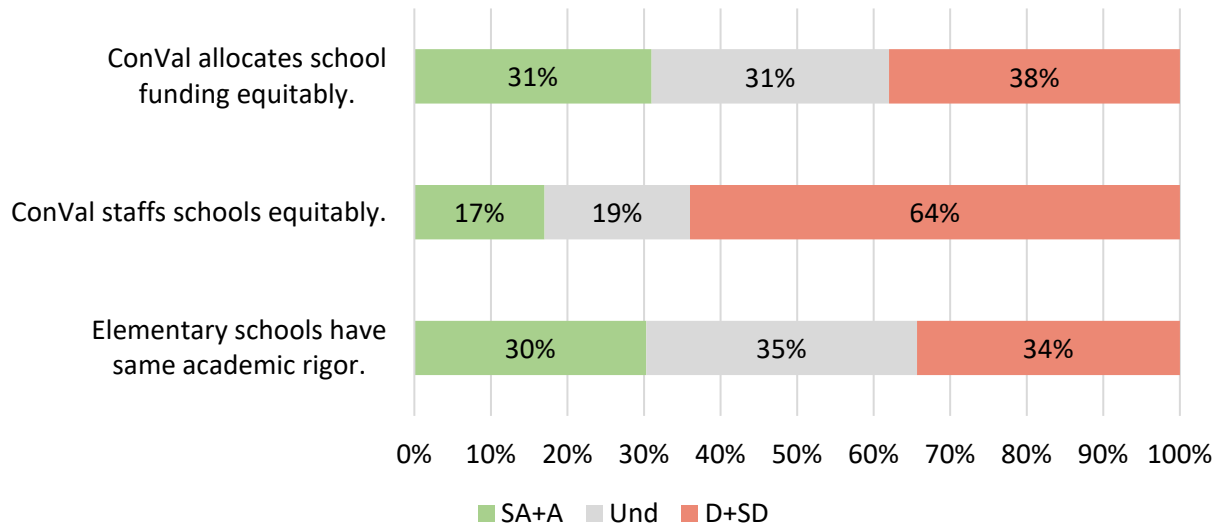
## Staff Input

### Staff Surveys

Staff who responded to the September community survey had the opportunity to complete a section of questions focused specifically on their experiences and perceptions. A total of 138 staff members completed the survey, approximately 34% of all staff. Complete staff survey results are provided in Appendix B.

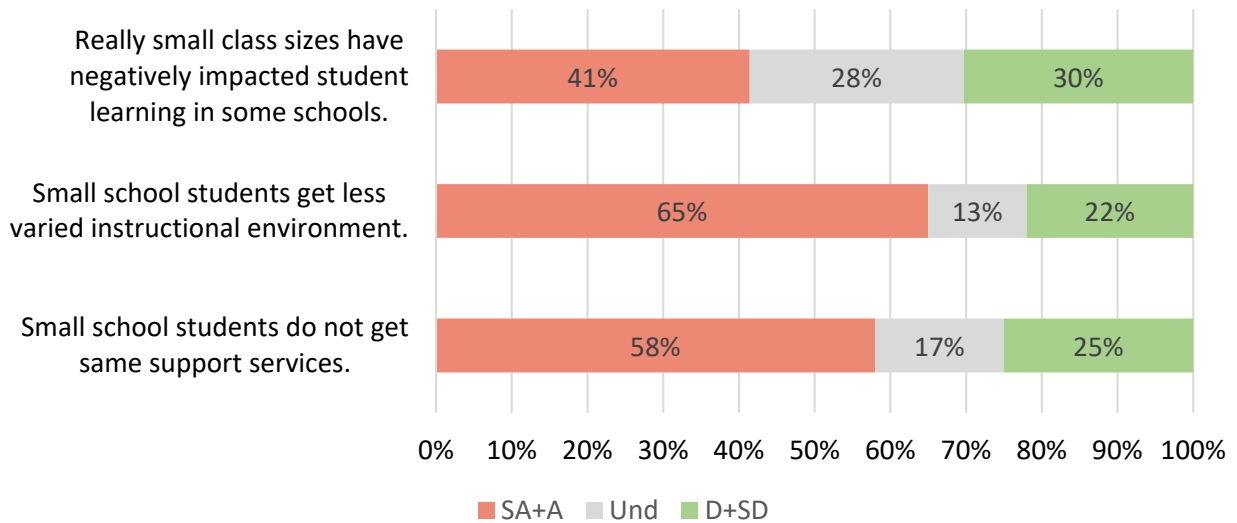
Staff respondents came from all ConVal towns except Sharon, as well as from outside the district. Slightly less than half (42%) have children currently enrolled in the district. Most respondents (67%) were school administrators, classroom teachers, or other certified staff.

Among staff, there were mixed opinions regarding equity of funding across schools. There were also mixed opinions regarding equality of academic rigor across the elementary schools. However, a majority of staff did not feel that the district staffs its schools equitably.



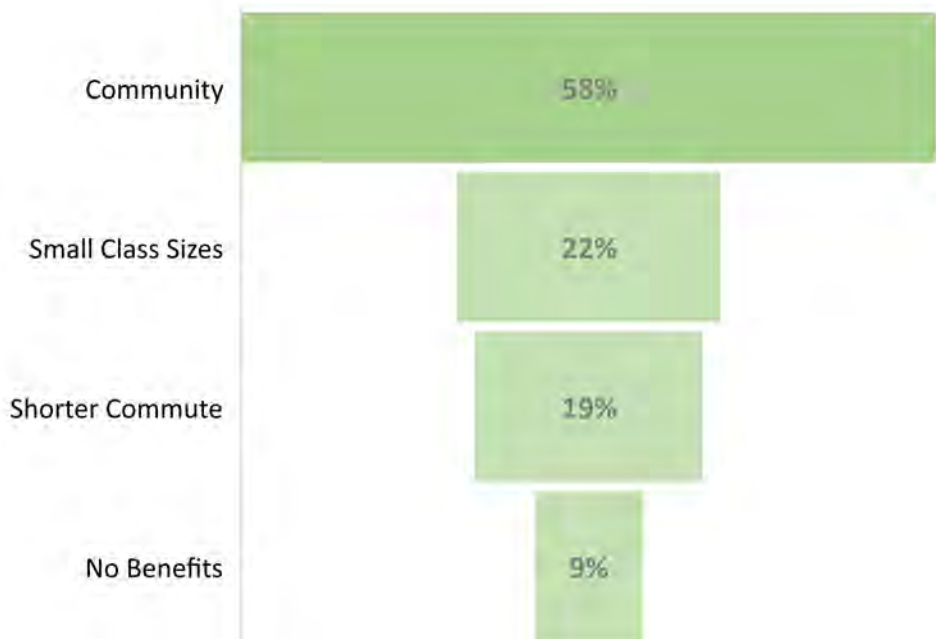
Among staff, there were mixed opinions as to whether really small class sizes has negatively impacted student learning in some schools, but a slightly higher percentage of staff felt that it did have a negative than did not. There was a bit more consensus regarding perceptions of two other negative effects of smaller elementary schools. A majority of staff felt that students in smaller elementary schools get less

opportunities for a variety of instructional environments, such as varied small groupings and also that they do not get the same level of support services as those in larger elementary schools.



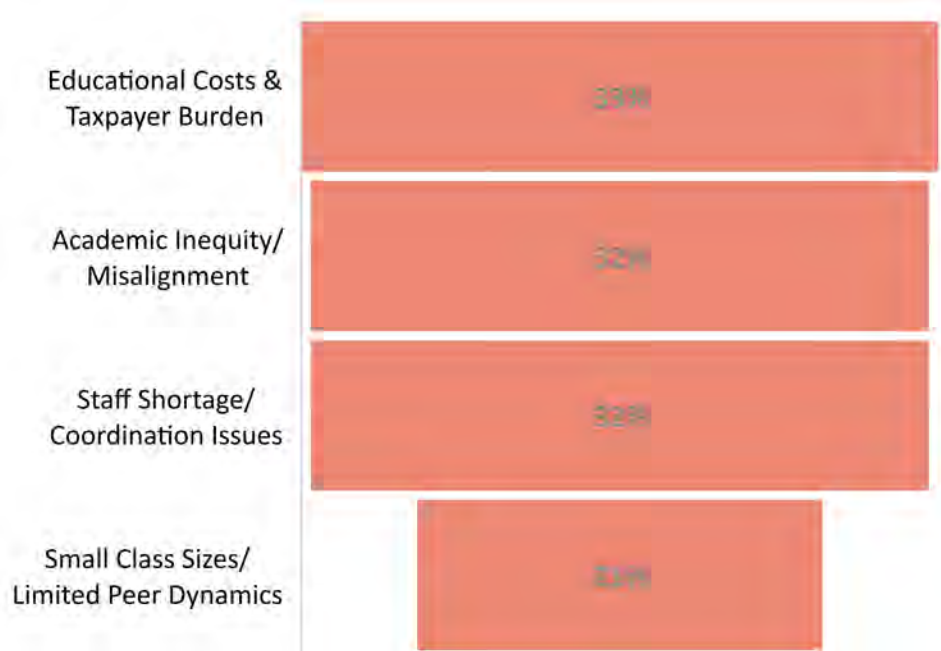
When asked to name the best elementary school in ConVal, nearly half (47%) stated they did not know. The only school with more than 10% of the staff votes was PES, which was named by 26% of staff as the best. When asked to identify the “best part” of having 8 elementary schools, only 22% of staff identified small class sizes. A majority instead identified some type of community, such as “sense of community”, “our youngsters have a connection to the town they live in” and “community ownership of schools.” The 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> most frequent responses were shorter commutes and no perceived benefits.

Staff Perceptions of the “Best Part” of Having 8 Elementary Schools



When asked to name the “worst part” of having 8 elementary schools, staff most frequently mentioned educational costs and burdens on taxpayers as well as academic inequity/misalignment. The 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> most frequent responses were related to staffing problems and small class sizes.

Staff Perceptions of the “Worst Part” of Having 8 Elementary Schools



## Staff Focus Groups

Prismatic conducted staff focus groups September 26-28, 2023. A total of 54 staff participated in 9 focus groups:

- ◆ 2 Principal groups – 1 with elementary, 1 with middle school
- ◆ 4 Teacher groups – 1 with elementary, 1 with middle, 1 with high school, 1 with elective teachers
- ◆ 3 Special Education groups – 1 with teachers, 1 with coordinators, 1 with service providers

Principals from all ConVal elementary and middle schools participated in focus groups. When asked if the town will “die” if the elementary school goes away, they offered these comments:

- ◆ All but 1 said the town would not die if the elementary school went away.
- ◆ Some small schools feel the school is part of the culture of the town. It does present challenges to maintain the community feeling if the town school is closed.
- ◆ Some noted a fear that houses will not sell as well if there is no elementary school in the town.
- ◆ Others did not feel that closing the school would impact whether families moved to the town. They felt that kind of talk was a scare tactic to force into the district into stagnation.

Thinking about what their school is lacking, principals offered these comments:

- ◆ Some need special education teachers, math teachers, and/or CTE teachers.
- ◆ Some currently share nurses, counselors, psychologists, behavior support, specialists, art, and music.
- ◆ As cohorts change, some special education resources are limited. For special education caseloads – if there is only 1 person at a school, they have the whole caseload.
- ◆ There is no consistent staffing beyond a teacher in a classroom.
- ◆ Personnel is needed – no matter the number of students, each school often has the same number of resources – 30 students or 90 students – same staff. Each year, schools are squeezed to cut personnel. There is a smaller cohort of adults to do all the duties. Some functional things have to be done no matter the size of the school.
- ◆ Smaller schools lack the resources to cover, especially if anyone is out or if there are vacancies.
- ◆ Safety has become an issue. There is an uptick in behaviors. There are only so many people for crisis teams. There is limited support staff, even beyond resourcing and equity, that you can offer students.
- ◆ Some towns have disproportionate resources. There are trust funds in some towns which allow students (who already have resources) to go to museums, field trips, etc. If there is no trust, it is



up to PTOs to try to provide similar opportunities. This is hard when a school's families are not well off.

- ◆ Some of the smallest schools noted a need for access to a school psychologist and counselor but that they are using existing staff to meet their needs (even though those staff members are not psychologists/counselors).
- ◆ Building upgrades are needed (asbestos, missing ceiling tiles, dated).

When asked how they would rate the quality of education provided in their school and how it compares to schools in surrounding districts, principals offered these comments:

- ◆ There is a beauty to small schools, to know each student. When you look at culture and climate, they have a more positive climate than surrounding districts. When you look at assessment data, they have questions about why there are differences.
- ◆ They noted that ConVal has had lots of staff turnover and some teachers have alternate certifications. They do not believe that other districts have as much turnover.
- ◆ In ConVal, student support resources are shared across schools. The result is that ConVal is not able to equitably offer support to students.
- ◆ ConVal is “weird” compared to other districts. They are not sure if other districts have single class schools and mixed grade level classes. Nevertheless, ConVal students do “fine” academically.
- ◆ Some noted the large discrepancy within the district as far as student performance on state assessments. They noted they have not done a deep dive to determine why there are differences and better understand the differences. They feel ConVal is good at aligning but there is room for improvement to find out how to counteract if students come in with less vocabulary, skills, etc.
- ◆ The HS is more aligned with Milford and Emerson than the schools are at the elementary level. ConVal has different resources than other districts with over 1,000 students. It is often easier to handle multiple schools with over 1,000 students than the schools in ConVal with 110 kids because of the lack of resources.
- ◆ ConVal provides a strong education. The neighboring towns possibly are not of the same caliber. There is a greater socioeconomic challenge for some of those towns. ConVal is better than neighboring towns.
- ◆ ConVal needs to expand world language, CTE course offerings, and afterschool opportunities.
- ◆ ConVal has limited course offerings for HS students once they complete the required 26 credits to graduate.

Compiled responses to other focus group questions are provided in the table below.

Question	Principal Responses
<p>How does the size of your school impact the quality of education?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Several expressed that teachers are unable to collaborate with common grade levels, unable to share materials, and work in strange silos.</li> <li>◆ Consensus was that the current monthly virtual district check-in is not sufficient and the lack of collaboration negatively impacts students.</li> <li>◆ “We do not have opportunities for collective efficacy.”</li> <li>◆ One said it was harder to find staff for a small school, because of the location of the school.</li> <li>◆ Principals agreed that there is an impact on students when they must have multi-grade classes due to student numbers. This also causes more of an impact on staff, requiring more preparation time.</li> <li>◆ “If a student and staff member do not have a good relationship, it could present a challenge” since there are few options to move a student at each grade level.</li> <li>◆ A principal from a smaller school stated that smaller schools allow for more porous classes, students are not stuck in a grade level. They gain a month or so by looping up and having them for another year.</li> </ul>
<p>How are your teachers working to become better teachers? Are they engaging in PLCs? Something else?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ PES has common planning once per week when they meet as a PLC with principal or other teachers. They also meet every other week with their math coach/admin.</li> <li>◆ Other schools reported they do not officially follow a PLC process. “There are district virtual meetings once per month for teachers to connect with teachers at other schools, but it has not been strongly maintained.”</li> <li>◆ There has been some cross pollination for some professional development (OGAP training, LETRS training). There are opportunities for broader PD to allow natural connections to occur.</li> </ul>
<p>Is the community engaged in your school? If so, how?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Most noted they have highly involved and engaged community members, parents, and organizations.</li> </ul>
<p>What does your school do best? What are the opportunities for improvement?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Several agreed that every student belongs to everyone in the ES buildings in ConVal. Staff automatically take care of all children and are true team members. If there is a gap, they turn to a neighbor to try to fill it.</li> <li>◆ They shared several strengths for ConVal - social emotional supports, outdoor learning, play space education, and strong community support.</li> <li>◆ Most agreed that there needs to be more of a focus on identifying why there is a difference in proficiency levels between schools.</li> <li>◆ Principals shared additional opportunities for improvement</li> </ul>

Question	Principal Responses
<p>Overall, the district is below state average in math and reading. How could reconfiguration help to improve things in these areas</p>	<p>which included a need to make the curriculum performance-based and grounded in skills, additional Tier 2 support, more resources, teacher collaboration, and more academic opportunities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Most principals agreed that the level of expertise of teachers is vastly different in every school. The key is equitable resources, collective efficacy, and maintaining the sense of community.</li> <li>◆ Some principals shared that people have much expertise, but they are unable to leverage resources because they are trying to keep the boat afloat - above and beyond what the education challenges are.</li> <li>◆ Principals agreed that the more teachers collaborate, the better the opportunities for kids. “If state testing is the benchmark, bringing teachers together to look at curriculum, really do PLCs would make a difference. If you are in the same building, you can work together.”</li> <li>◆ One principal suggested that reconfiguration would help with the alignment of core values and progress measures.</li> <li>◆ Some principals believe reconfiguration can help with the availability of staff and support. “There would be more opportunities to mix up groups across the building for both literacy and math. Coaches could help as well.”</li> <li>◆ One shared that there would be less teachers to hire with reconfiguration, which is helpful with the current shortage.</li> <li>◆ Several expressed that students go into middle school at different levels. With more resources available with consolidation, planning and coordination could address the current gaps.</li> </ul>
<p>Have you thought about what options might be best for district students? What are they?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Several options were suggested: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Consolidate some ES and keep 4-6 open</li> <li>○ Offer vouchers for students who live far from schools</li> <li>○ If schools remain open, have towns fund their own school</li> <li>○ Consolidate MS and move 5<sup>th</sup> graders back to ES</li> <li>○ Have one K-2 school and one 3-4 school</li> <li>○ Make some ES schools K-2 or 3-5 and consolidate MS</li> <li>○ Offer school choice when consolidating</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>What do you think of the idea of one ConVal MS? Does that sound like it could be a positive or negative change? Why?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Most agreed this would be a good option if enough space is available.</li> </ul>
<p>What do you think of the idea of putting all ConVal students in grades 7 through 12 in the current HS? Does that sound like it could be a positive or negative change? Why?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Most agreed that this would not be a good option for students because of the vast difference in ages and maturity of middle and high school students.</li> </ul>

Question	Principal Responses
What kinds of evidence to support a given recommendation will be most compelling to the families in your school?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ They expressed that some families will want smaller class sizes.</li> <li>◆ One expressed that small towns adore their small schools but some do not like how much they cost.</li> <li>◆ Others felt that communities need to know how the schools and towns can benefit from the reconfiguration options and better understand the potential long-term impacts of larger schools.</li> </ul>

Teachers from all elementary, middle, and high schools were represented in the focus groups. Thinking about the quality of education provided in ConVal and how it compares to schools in surrounding districts, they offered these comments:

- ◆ It is not equitable within the district. Smaller schools do not get the same resources. AES and PES get art more often, small schools get it every 6 weeks.
- ◆ ConVal is way ahead of everyone else with curriculum. ConVal is behind in science. Resources are spread thin. One counselor may have to cover 3 buildings. Schools need behavioral support and a counselor each day.
- ◆ ConVal has more resources, serving more towns and a much larger population. There are lots of offerings at all levels that were not available in other districts. The quality is good because of resources. ConVal is more rigorous and is more supportive of staff, students, and families. SAU leaders do not wear as many hats and are more supportive.
- ◆ ConVal is lucky to have towns that continue to support the school budget and families that value education. Students get a better education. Some do slip through and do not get as much. Those who are motivated can get more (example is the German club at HS).
- ◆ ConVal has lots of dedicated and talented teachers in the district who care about the students and their lives.
- ◆ Allocations are currently made by numbers and not the needs (trauma, student need, experience of educator).
- ◆ ConVal has gone downhill. It was incredible; now it does not feel as good. It is not as dynamic as it was.
- ◆ Some surrounding towns have more money and resources.
- ◆ Education, PD, and opportunities are top notch.
- ◆ As far as progressiveness of curriculum, it feels that other areas are about 2 years behind ConVal.
- ◆ Combination classes are everywhere. There is such a staff shortage and staff are stretched so thin that you are unable to plan on having a para.

- ◆ Some are shocked by the schema of kids in district. Even those who struggle always shock me with the depth of things they can do. Students work together and understand things at a different level.
- ◆ One librarian must travel between 3 schools. Because things are done by numbers, one can only take it so far.
- ◆ ConVal is due for something new for language arts. Right now, the district is back to “do what you can do and pull from what you have.” There is not much consistency across elementary schools. Some teachers are not using the parts of the curriculum they do not like.
- ◆ There are big differences between schools. Math Coach = higher scores; Math with Fidelity = higher scores.
- ◆ All schools have the same access to curriculum; it is just not implemented the same.
- ◆ Some need Responsiveness to Intervention (RTI) and Title I for Reading and Math.
- ◆ There are still some places where there are different ways of doing things and some kids come to school more advanced.
- ◆ ConVal students are not just taking tests - they are encouraged to problem solve and think critically. Academic, co-curricular, and athletic opportunities are excellent.

Thinking about what their school is lacking, elementary teachers offered these comments:

- ◆ PES and AES have more staff so they get behavioral students (PES) but lack the trained, quality staff needed.
- ◆ Scores are down because they are evacuating classrooms or waiting on interrupting behaviors to be supported/addressed because they are waiting on staff. There is a limited number of trained staff. The whole district needs a service to support social emotional needs. They need to bring behavioral supports to elementary schools.
- ◆ Social emotional needs are so much greater, separate from behavior. Guidance counselors are needed in every building. Trying to get someone to do threat assessment is tough (waiting on support). Kids are missing vital access to much needed social emotional/behavioral supports.
- ◆ Some schools need increased access in general – social emotional, art, music, library. Some have access every day. Smaller schools do not have technology integrators in the building each day, so there is no Chromebook support or library access when they are not there.
- ◆ There is a need for space for students with mental health challenges. They need a place where they can be respected, to preserve integrity. Teachers do not want students to experience trauma from other students while they are in school. ConVal needs people who are trained and know how to do this. Getting that support is not easy to access.
- ◆ There are not enough resources nor enough trained people.
- ◆ Some vacancies are unfilled and there are no applicants.

- ◆ Teacher salaries used to be okay. Now ConVal needs to pay higher salaries above what is offered in neighboring districts to fill vacancies. There is little to no housing or childcare around ConVal. ConVal is no longer one of the higher-paying districts for teachers, nurses, paras, etc.

Thinking about what their school is lacking, middle and high school teachers offered these comments:

- ◆ School facilities need work. It is very run down, with cracks in the floor covered with duct tape. The bathroom needs to be remodeled. It has not changed in 35 years. The AC died a couple of weeks ago. The zones are not consistent. Teachers try to make it a pleasant space for the kids but the holes in the carpet, stains, carpets that cover asbestos, carpets being over 30 years and taped down, water and sewage issues make it tough. The water from faucets often looks like tea. One cannot drink out of most of spigots in the building. All teachers have buckets to catch drips when it storms.
- ◆ They feel a need for more playing fields, a cafeteria, a conference room, a performing arts space(s) that can be used as a public facility. They could also use an outdoor amphitheater (like Keene – spotlight booths, sound, sound walls, lighting, etc.).
- ◆ There are several facility issues: the direction doors open, overall safety and security, doors do not close or lock because of warped door frames, no standardization for structures and procedures, lack of handicapped buttons to open doors.
- ◆ Consolidation may help with food service options.
- ◆ Many science teachers do not have clean water for experiments.
- ◆ Teachers need space for storage and supplies.
- ◆ The high school programs get cut often. Students expect the buildings to be the pinnacle. The high school building is not an adequate representation of the amazing things staff do and what students get. Nothing has been updated in over 10 years in the front office.
- ◆ “Carpet in the music area is so rank.”
- ◆ They lack sufficient substitutes and paras. They are understaffed.
- ◆ Some high school students come in early/late because they have open blocks in their schedule. ConVal does not have enough teachers or classes to offer high school students.
- ◆ Some rooms are oddly shaped, too small, too large. Space is not utilized appropriately.
- ◆ Improvements are sporadic. One secondary school needed 6 science labs, but only received 4. Parts of the school are “very oppressive.”

Compiled responses to other focus group questions are provided in the table below.

Question	Teacher Responses
<p>What do you like or dislike about current service levels in special education, itinerant staff (SLP, OT, PT, para availability, psych services)?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ The consensus was that there is not enough OT, SLP, psychologists, or paras to cover the need because resources have to be shared among schools. They felt those in support roles are literally running from place to place to serve students. When services are missed, they are unable to be made up.</li> <li>◆ MS often must “make do” with what they can get. More students are in crisis and need more support than in years previous. IEPs are written conservatively because of this.</li> <li>◆ Charter schools are getting funds. Special education services are provided to charter schools from ConVal as well. Sharing those services really pulls from ConVal. They must travel between ConVal schools and support the charters.</li> <li>◆ Teachers agreed that OT, PT, and paras do a terrific job.</li> <li>◆ Recently special education teachers and paras have had to handle arranging transportation for students with IEPs. Paras are missing classes to handle transportation. Some students even leave school early because of transportation issues.</li> </ul>
<p>What do you like or dislike about inclusion services? Is there enough support for inclusion, behavioral assessment, and management strategies?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Teachers shared that the lack of time and resources are huge issues. Without co-planning time, they are unable to effectively co-teach. “We have to be careful not to do push in unless appropriate (shows peers that the student can’t read).”</li> <li>◆ Teachers agreed that the Life Skills and Emotional Support programs are successful.</li> <li>◆ “ConVal made inclusion a very important part in the past, then they stopped caring as much...same with co-teaching. Some students get the services but then it just goes away. We are not using it system-wide. Students in low level math classes are supported, but they are no longer supported when they move up to higher levels of math. We are lacking systematic supports to keep the execution of services.”</li> </ul>
<p>How does the size of your school impact the quality of education?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Several expressed that in small schools, everyone pitches in to support students in ways they would not have time to support if in larger schools (for example, an office admin may help a child read).</li> <li>◆ Those from smaller schools felt all teachers know all students. They see benefits to everyone knowing all students.</li> <li>◆ A downside to smaller schools recognized by several teachers is the lack of access to support personnel (nurses, reading specialist, counselors, etc.).</li> <li>◆ Some teachers felt that students receive more one-on-one instruction in smaller classes.</li> <li>◆ Teachers also explained the challenge of combination classes that small schools face. “Combination classes require more</li> </ul>

Question	Teacher Responses
	preparation, planning, thinking ahead in the curriculum to give kids what they need on academic level.”
Overall, the district is below state average in math and reading. How could reconfiguration help to improve things in these areas?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Teachers agreed that access to tutoring, reading/math coaches, Rtl, and Title I support would improve student achievement and may be possible with reconfiguration and combining resources.</li> <li>◆ Curriculum alignment and shared instructional resources were mentioned as positive steps that could be taken if schools merged.</li> <li>◆ Teachers shared that some students can be left out when the schools/classes are “too small,” especially when the student is not like other students or has different needs.</li> </ul>
Have you thought about what options might be best for district students? What are they?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Some options were shared, including:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Creating K-2/3-5 elementary buildings</li> <li>○ Creating 1 MS. “Merging MS would shrink the gaps and inequities between 2 MS. It would create the same opportunities for academics and coaching.”</li> <li>○ Add PK in all ES</li> <li>○ Keep 2 ES open as PK hubs – one in the north and another in the south end.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
One of the potential options for reconfiguration would involve the merging of some ES. Assuming that no teachers or principals would lose their jobs, what are your thoughts about that possibility? Does that sound like it could be a positive or negative change? Why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Several teachers expressed concern about the amount of time students spend on the bus. It was not believed that increased bus times would be beneficial for students.</li> <li>◆ Other concerns included increased class sizes, and lack of available space in ES remaining open.</li> <li>◆ One suggestion was to utilize vacant school buildings for professional development for staff since a PD facility does not currently exist in the district.</li> <li>◆ Teachers were hopeful that if merger occurs, all students could have access to the same support.</li> </ul>
What do you think of the idea of 1 ConVal MS? Does that sound like it could be a positive or negative change? Why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Most teachers did not feel that merging MS would be beneficial because of the difference in cultures, and how large the school would become if merged.</li> <li>◆ One teacher suggested that the current model allows students to start off in a small school then go to a larger school in MS before transitioning to an even larger school in HS.</li> </ul>
What do you think of the idea of putting all ConVal students in grades 7 through 12 in the current HS? Does that sound like it could be a positive or negative change? Why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Teachers agreed that students in grades 7-8 should be kept separate from students in grades 9-12 for safety reasons.</li> </ul>
Thinking about the district as a whole, are there any education areas in which the district is currently considered lacking by	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Teachers suggested the addition of world languages at the MS and more languages at the HS, additional health courses, additional elective courses, advanced science courses, visual/performing arts classes, and additional CTE courses.</li> </ul>



Question	Teacher Responses
the community? Could these potentially be addressed through reconfiguration or funds freed from reconfiguration?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Transportation for afterschool activities is an issue teachers felt could be provided more easily if there were fewer schools.</li> <li>◆ Teachers agreed that mental health services would be more accessible with fewer schools.</li> <li>◆ Some believe a reduction in the tax rate may be beneficial to community members.</li> </ul>

Special education teachers, coordinators, and service providers were represented in 3 focus groups. Questions and responses are captured below.

Question	Special Education Staff Responses
Describe how paraprofessionals are utilized across the district.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ There is some lack of understanding by regular teachers of the role played by paraprofessionals.</li> <li>◆ Paraprofessionals are assigned 1:1 to students and follow them all day, others are assigned directly to special education classrooms and work in that setting all day.</li> <li>◆ There are specially trained paras working with autistic and other emotionally involved students. The related services staff (SLP, PT, OT) have specially trained paras that work directly with students under the guidance of the therapists.</li> <li>◆ There is some concern about the lack of enough training and supportive guidance for many paras.</li> <li>◆ There is also concern that overuse of paras might inhibit students from developing and adapting as much as they might without the extra adult.</li> </ul>
Describe the complexity of children’s needs that you serve and how services are delivered.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Groups shared that resource serves all disabilities in a push-in/pull-out inclusion model. All students spend time in regular classes with support.</li> <li>◆ One challenge is that there is little or ineffective training for push-in inclusion for regular education teachers. The same was said to be true of paras.</li> <li>◆ Participants shared that there is inconsistent communication and support for the push/pull model up in the chain of command above teachers. “It feels at times that there is not a continuum of services, only inclusion.”</li> <li>◆ The effort and support of the coordinators was reported as a strength.</li> </ul>
How do you see the various ideas regarding district reconfiguration affecting the students you serve?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Overall, 1 group felt that some changes are needed but they are not in favor of any plan that would send 5<sup>th</sup> grade back to the ES. The feeling was that the groups and friendships available in small schools are too limited for years on end, which makes adjustment to next levels difficult for many students and particularly so for special education students.</li> <li>◆ 1 group explained that it is an overwhelming transition for all students coming from the small ES to the larger MS. They reported that socially they do not know how to relate and are</li> </ul>

Question	Special Education Staff Responses
	<p>not accustomed to the group settings typical of larger schools. This concern is more pronounced with special education students. From that standpoint, participants believe reconfiguring ES would be helpful.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Participants explained that budgets are being reviewed and worked on across the district and it is common knowledge that excess costs of maintaining the small schools and transportation costs impact all budgets. They expressed that the district needs to be able to focus on the essential resources that all students need.</li> </ul>
<p>If you were up to you to make a reconfiguration decision what would it be?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ The consensus of the group was to move to 4 ES, including possibly 1 building housing all PreK students.</li> <li>◆ The consensus of another group was that 2 or 3 ES should be sufficient. They also felt that a PreK-3 school configuration might work. Plans should include before/after school programming at remaining schools.</li> </ul>
<p>What do you hear from around the community regarding reconfiguration planning?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Staff expressed that there seems to be a difference this time with people realizing change needs to occur.</li> <li>◆ They shared that there are some issues to resolve in people’s minds regarding increased taxes and declining property values.</li> <li>◆ “We often hear that small schools are an investment in kids but so are the larger schools. People need to remember that and get to what is best for all kids!”</li> <li>◆ It was shared that for communities, there must be a shift from thinking about town schools to district schools and what is best for all students. In that shift, ConVal must convince voters by showing the benefits in terms of more resources and programs for all students.</li> </ul>
<p>What is your maximum caseload of students that you serve?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Speech depends on who is in the assigned school but 40 is typical with less if there are autistic and other severely disabled students. Groups usually have 3 students.</li> <li>◆ Groups are not done in the small schools because there are not enough students needing the service to do a group.</li> <li>◆ Caseloads for psychologists are usually 25, with 12-15 typical at a time.</li> <li>◆ Psychologists are generalists in the district, not just doing testing. They provide individual therapy mostly but some do groups as needed and appropriate.</li> <li>◆ For OT, 12 at a time is high but caseloads can range up to 40 or 50. They serve groups when they can and when there are enough at a site to do so but they also provide individual therapy.</li> <li>◆ PT is an individual therapy.</li> </ul>
<p>Describe the annual student re-evaluation and new evaluation and its impact on caseload.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Evaluation caseloads change annually. Most therapists work evaluations in around the therapy schedules.</li> </ul>

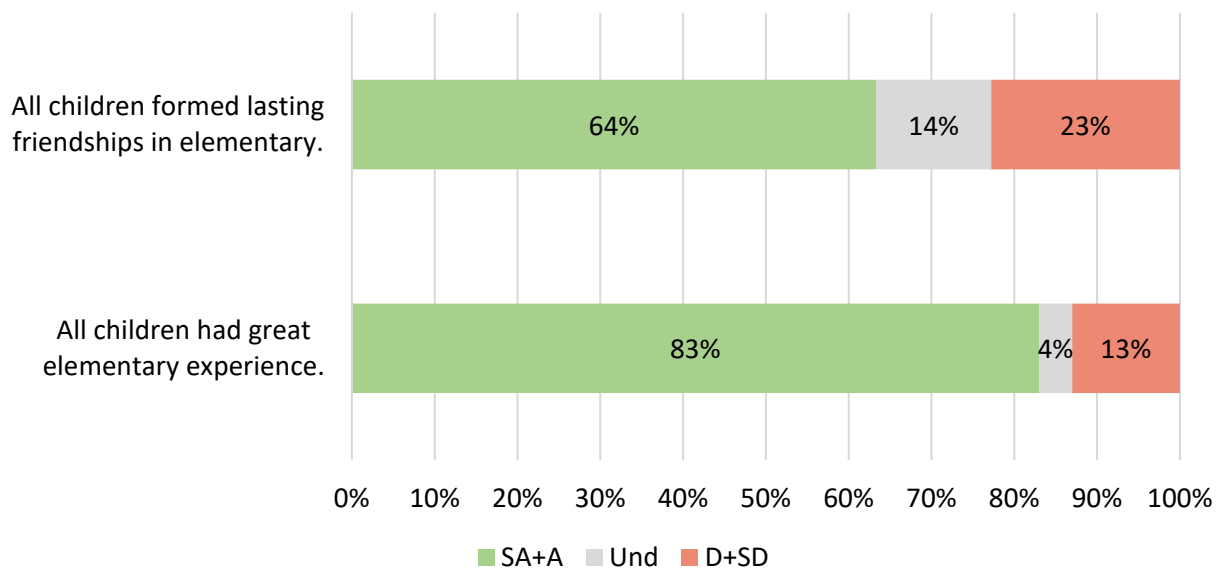
Question	Special Education Staff Responses
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ SLPs must do an evaluation before discharging a student from service.</li> <li>◆ Case management and time for IEP meetings was reported as an issue. Providers also must complete paperwork for Medicaid billing.</li> </ul>
<p>Do you receive mileage reimbursements?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ The consensus was that if they go to more than 1 school in a day, they can receive mileage reimbursement from the district.</li> </ul>
<p>What are your thoughts about the spaces you occupy for therapy, testing and case management work? Are they adequate, too small, large??</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ At most schools, providers share spaces that are not adequate.</li> <li>◆ At PES, 3 SLPs share one space for therapy, testing, and case management work. OT/PT also share a space at PES. Problems with noise, lack of privacy for conferences with parents, or even just making a phone call were reported.</li> <li>◆ Other schools were also reported to have space issues. AES has OT/PT and SLP sharing space.</li> <li>◆ Providers reported worse problems in the smaller schools. DCS lacks adequate space for OT work, no privacy, and no phone. HES has a therapist and special education sharing space with the same sorts of problems. BES/Pierce lacks adequate space for therapies. This is an area of need that should be looked at in the reconfiguration planning.</li> </ul>

## Parent Input

### September Survey

On the September community survey, a total of 482 respondents indicated they have children currently enrolled in ConVal schools. They had the opportunity to complete a section of questions focused specifically on their experiences and perceptions. Parent respondents came from all ConVal towns and had children enrolled in all ConVal schools. Complete results are provided in Appendix B.

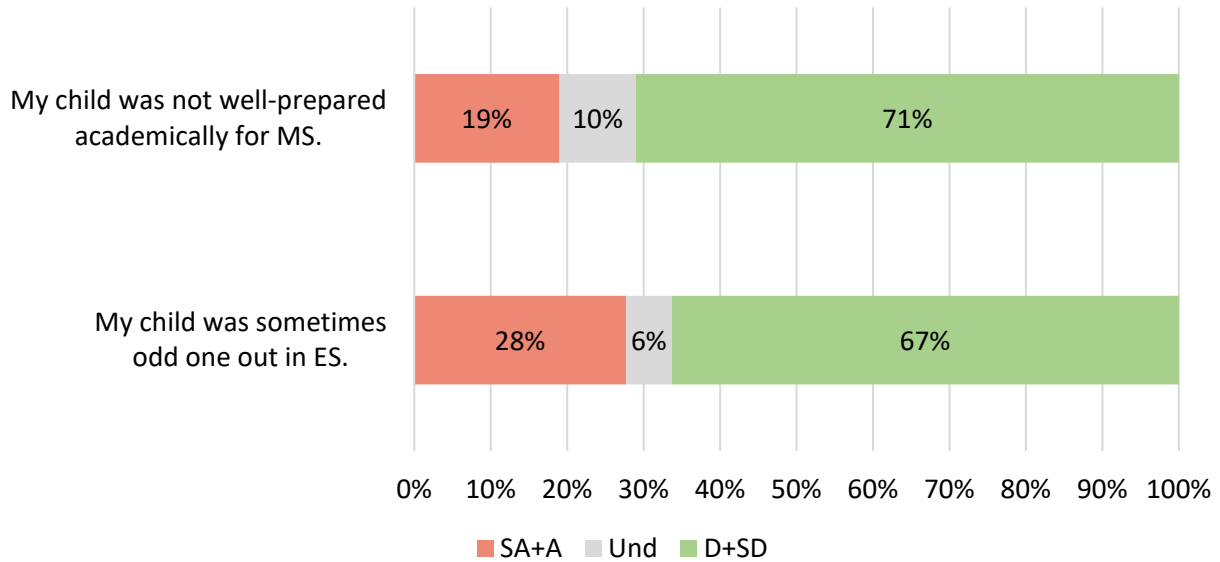
A majority of ConVal parents felt that their children formed friendships in elementary school that lasted through high school. A larger majority felt that all their children had a “great” experience in their elementary school.



At the town level, there were variations for these questions. Cell shading indicates towns where the percentage is more than 5 points above or below the average.

Town of Residence	% of Parents Who Felt All Children Formed Lasting Friendships in ES	% of Parents Who Felt All Children Had a Great Experience in ES
Antrim	Insufficient # of Responses <sup>2</sup>	67%
Bennington	57%	86%
Dublin	Insufficient # of Responses	90%
Francestown	77%	85%
Greenfield	Insufficient # of Responses	92%
Hancock	77%	80%
Peterborough	51%	81%
Sharon	Insufficient # of Responses	Insufficient # of Responses
Temple	Insufficient # of Responses	Insufficient # of Responses

Among parents of children who graduated from a ConVal elementary school, 19% did not feel they were academically well-prepared for middle school. A higher percentage of parents felt that 1 or more of their children was at least sometimes the “odd one out” in elementary school.

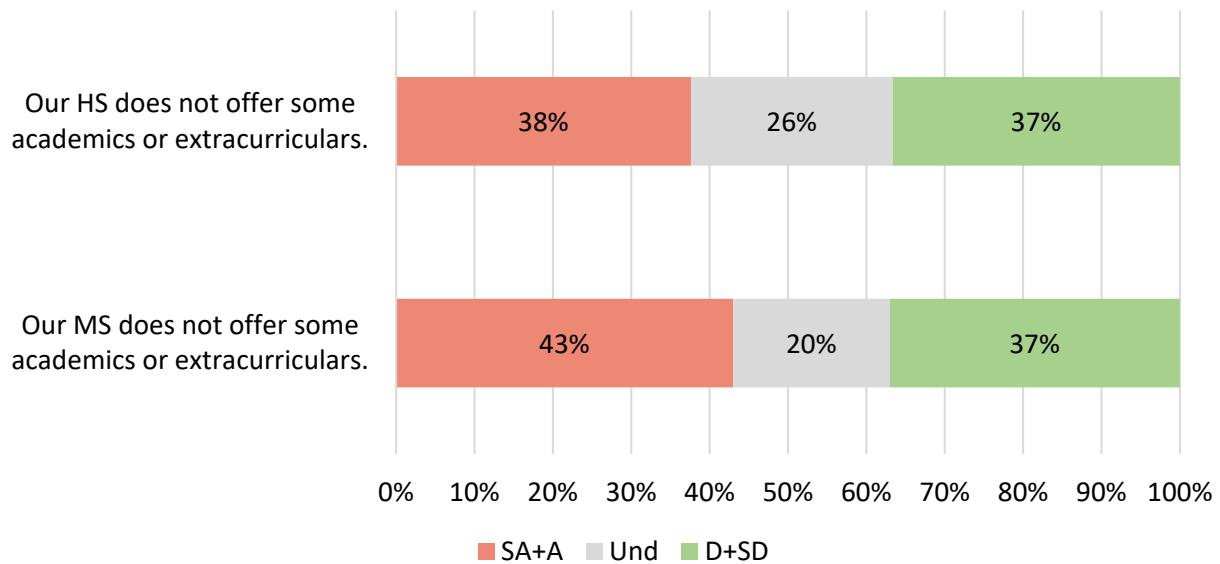


<sup>2</sup> Towns needed to have at least 30 responses to the question (not including “NA” responses) to be considered to have sufficient data for analysis.

At the town level, there was some variance for these questions. Antrim, Greenfield, and Peterborough parents had more negative than average opinions on both questions, while Hancock parents had more positive than average opinions on both. Cell shading indicates towns where the percentage is more than 5 points above or below the average.

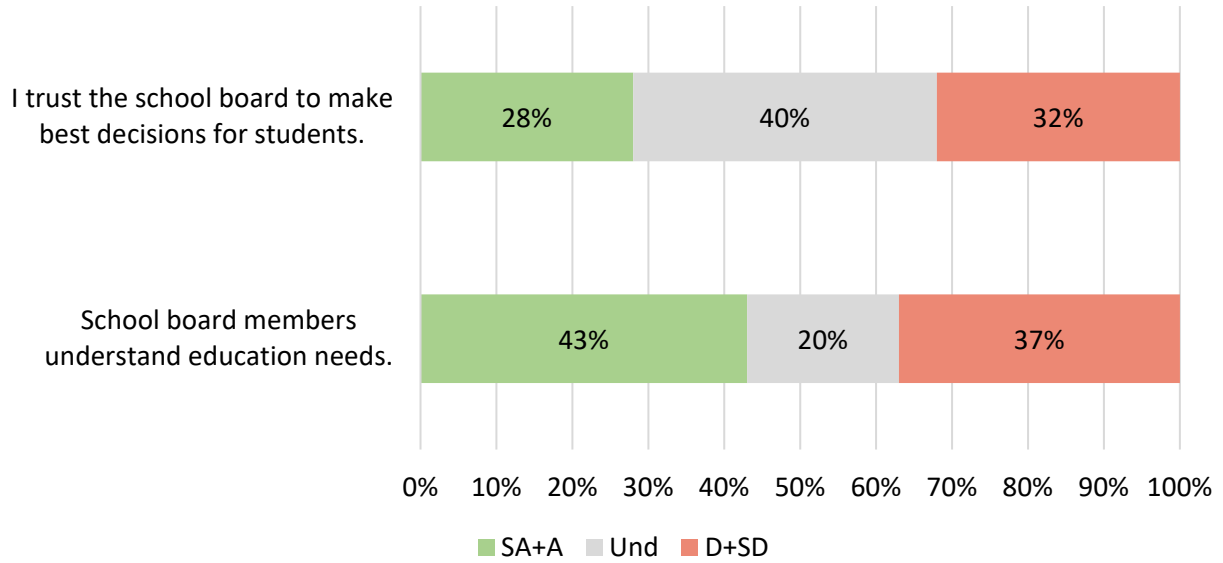
Town of Residence	% of Parents Who Felt 1+ Children Were Not Well-Prepared for MS	% of Parents Who Felt 1+ Children Was “Odd One Out” Sometimes in ES
Antrim	27%	39%
Bennington	22%	27%
Dublin	Insufficient # of Responses <sup>3</sup>	23%
Fracestown	20%	28%
Greenfield	22%	29%
Hancock	9%	27%
Peterborough	22%	30%
Sharon	Insufficient # of Responses	Insufficient # of Responses
Temple	19%	Insufficient # of Responses

Thinking about academic or extracurricular opportunities they would like their children to have, larger proportions of parents felt that both the middle schools and the high school lacked some than the percentage that was satisfied with opportunities. They were slightly less satisfied with middle school opportunities than high school opportunities.



<sup>3</sup> Towns needed to have at least 30 responses to the question (not including any “NA” responses) to be considered to have sufficient data for analysis.

Thinking about their trust in the ConVal school board to make the best decisions for students, the largest percentage of parents was undecided. However, the largest proportion of parents felt that school board members understand the educational needs of students.



## General Community Input

### September Community Survey

The September community survey received a total of 1,555 responses, with input gathered from all 9 towns in the ConVal district. Participants were invited to share their perspectives on statements concerning finance, school size, and academics, using a scale from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” The reported percentages in this analysis reflect combined agreement, which includes both “strongly agree” and “agree” responses of each statement. Complete results are provided in Appendix B.

#### Finance

Respondents from each town were asked to share their opinion on statements related to various fiscal considerations. Such considerations included school consolidation, fair budget allocation, tax relief, effective use of financial resources, and their understanding of financial matters in the district.

When asked whether ConVal should consider reducing the number of district schools if student enrollment continues to decline, a majority (56%) agreed it should be on the table. However, there were wide variations among the towns, with Greenfield, Peterborough, and Sharon residents being the most willing to look at reconfiguration options, while Dublin, Frankestown, and Temple residents were the least willing.

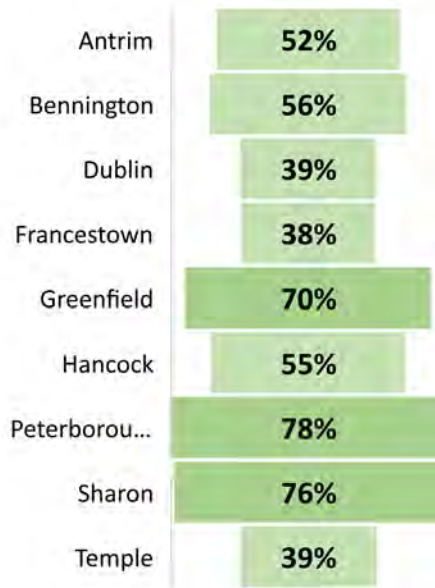
A large majority of residents thought it was important to spend about the same amount of money per student across the ES (71%). Each town exceeded 60% agreement on this. Antrim residents felt the most strongly about this (81%). Temple residents felt the least strongly (64%), but it was still a majority.

When considering a preference for reduced costs with the same academic rigor, most respondents overall (65%) indicated a shared desire for cost savings while upholding academic standards. This was most popular in Greenfield and Peterborough (each 78%), and least popular in Frankestown (51%), but it was still a majority.

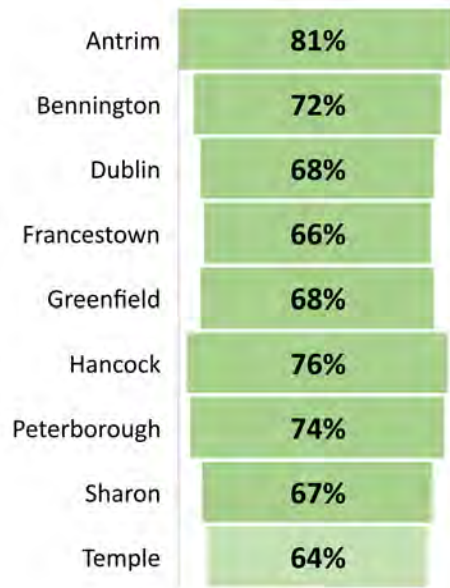
A majority of respondents overall believed that the current school configuration is not the best use of financial resources (54%), including a majority of residents in 6 of the 9 towns. Peterborough residents felt most strongly about this (78%). Less than a majority of Dublin, Frankestown, and Temple residents agreed that the current configuration was not the best use of financial resources.



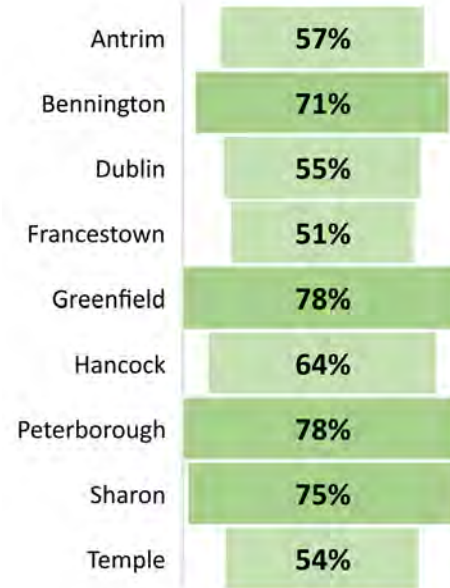
If ConVal student enrollment continues to decline, we should look at options for reducing the number of schools.



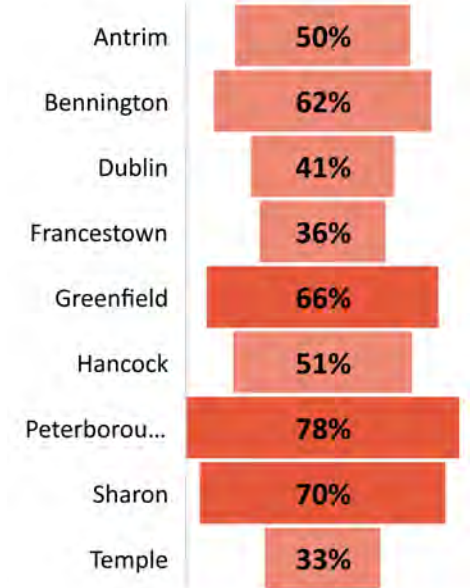
I think it is important that ConVal spend about the same amount of money per student across the elementary schools.



If ConVal can deliver the same academic rigor, I would prefer the district do that at a reduced cost to taxpayers.



The district's current school configuration, with low-enrollment elementary schools, is not the best use of financial resources.



Overall, only 21% of respondents agreed that the community understands the finances of the school district. Among the towns, only Dublin, Peterborough, and Temple residents differed substantially from this average.

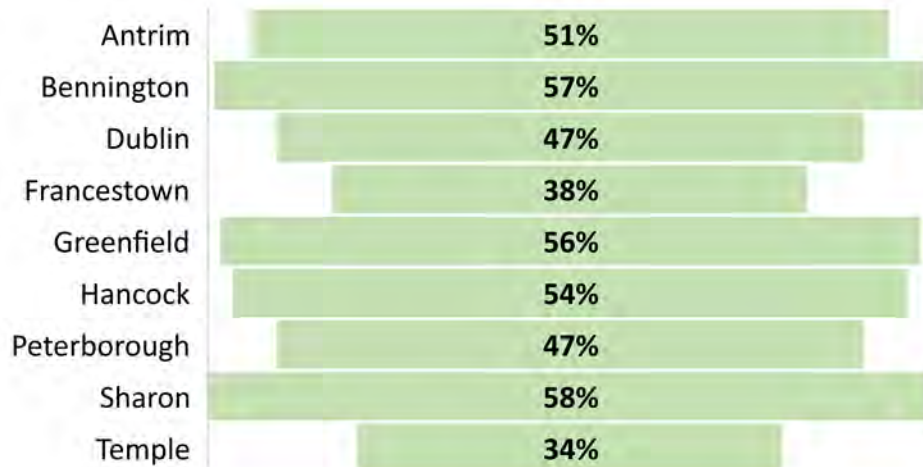
The community understands the finances of the ConVal school district.



### School Size

When asked to consider at what level of student enrollment ConVal should consider closing a school, nearly half of respondents indicated that it should be when enrollment is less than 50 students (49%). A majority of residents in Antrim, Bennington, Greenfield, Hancock, and Sharon agreed with a 50-student line. Less than a majority of residents in Dublin, Francestown, Peterborough, and Temple agreed with a 50-student line. Residents of Temple were the only ones where a majority said that ConVal should “never” consider closing an elementary school (56%).

Once a ConVal elementary school has less than 50 students, we should consider closing it.

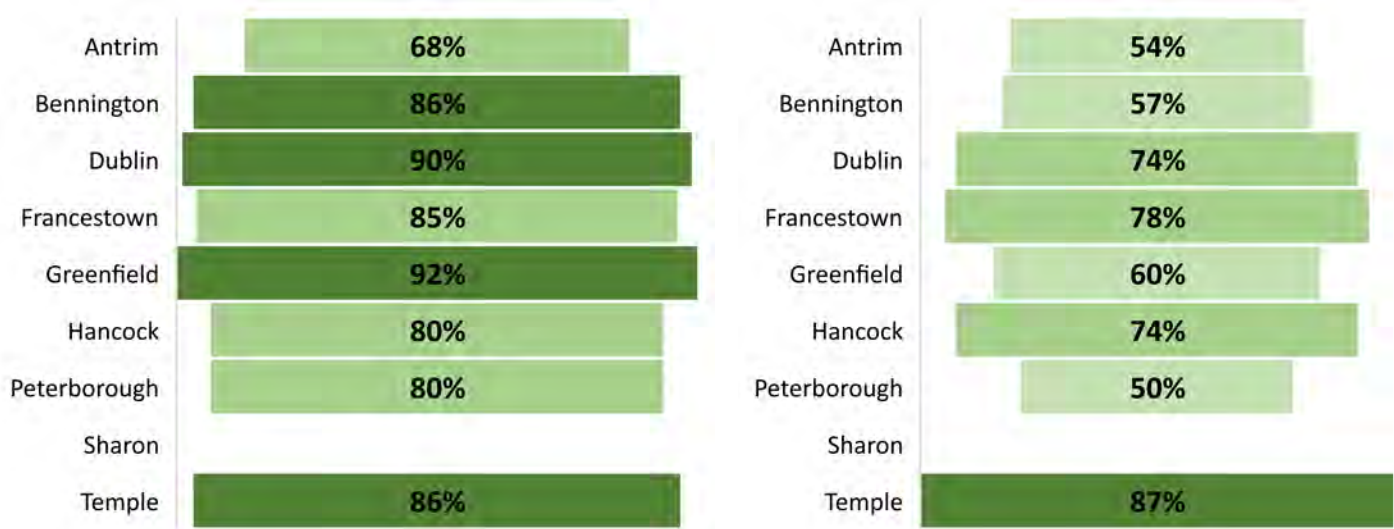


### Academics

A majority of current district parents indicated that all of their children had a “great” experience in elementary schools (83%). A majority of parents within each town said the same.<sup>4</sup> A majority of parents overall (67%) and within each town also reported that their children formed long-lasting friendships during their elementary school years.

All of my children had a great experience in their elementary school.

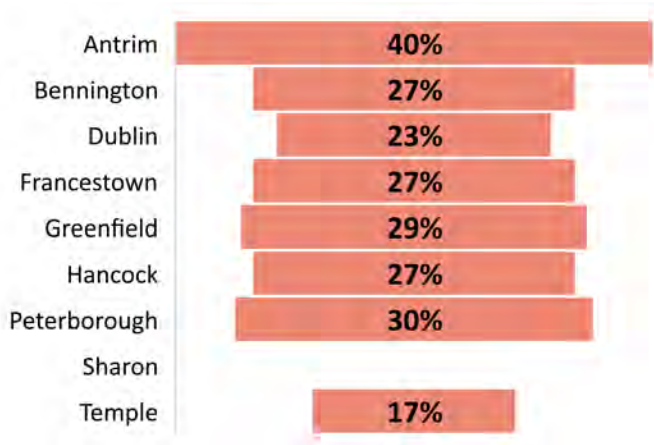
All of my children formed friendships in their elementary school that lasted through high school.



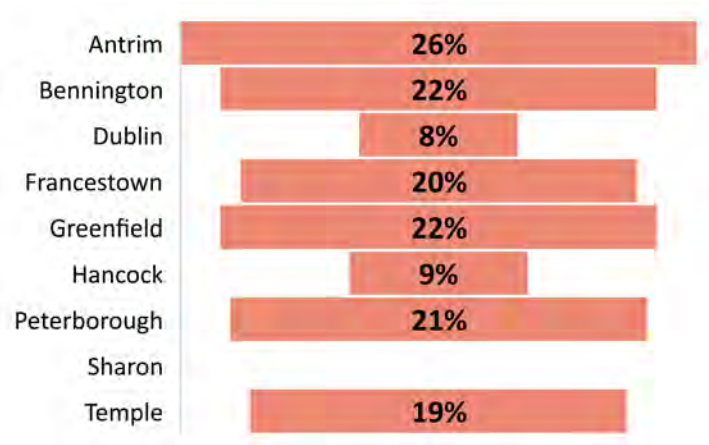
Districtwide, 28% of parents noted that 1 or more of their children was sometimes the “odd one out” in elementary school. Antrim parents were most likely to say this (40%) and Temple parents were least likely (17%). Additionally, 18% of parents felt that 1 or more of their children was not well-prepared for middle school academics. Antrim parents were most likely to say this (26%) and Dublin parents were least likely (8%).

<sup>4</sup> Due to a low response rate for these questions in Sharon, its percentages were omitted from this analysis.

One or more of my children was sometimes the "odd one out" in elementary school.

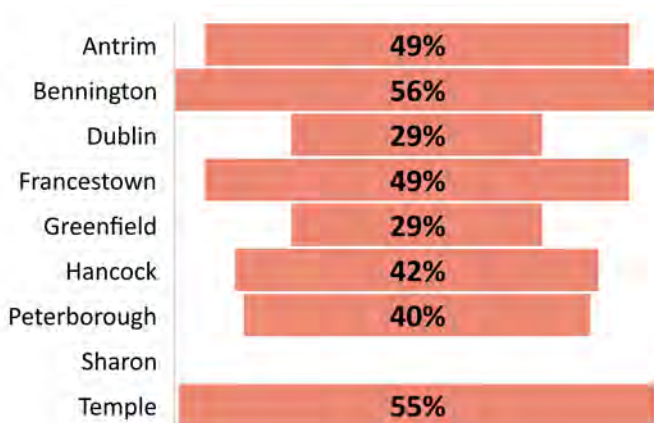


Academically, one or more of my children was not well-prepared for middle school.

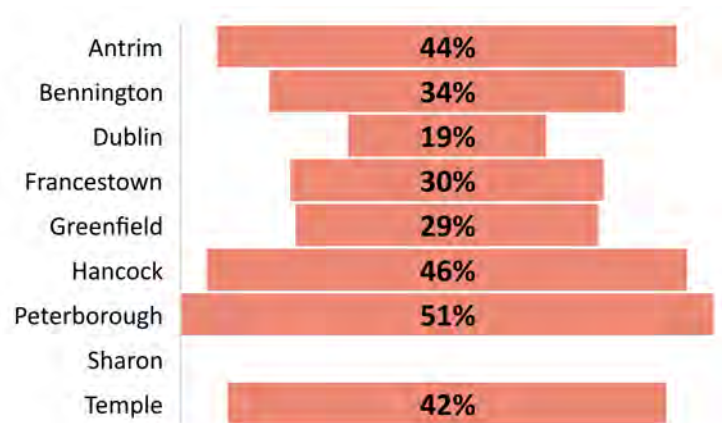


As for opportunities at the middle and high schools, a portion of parents expressed a desire for more options for their children. Regarding middle school, 44% of parents indicated that some academic or extracurricular opportunities were lacking. A majority of Bennington and Temple parents were not satisfied with middle school options. Regarding high school, 37% of parents indicated that some academic or extracurricular opportunities were lacking. A majority of Peterborough parents were not satisfied with high school options.

Our middle school does not offer some academic or extracurricular opportunities I would like my children to have.

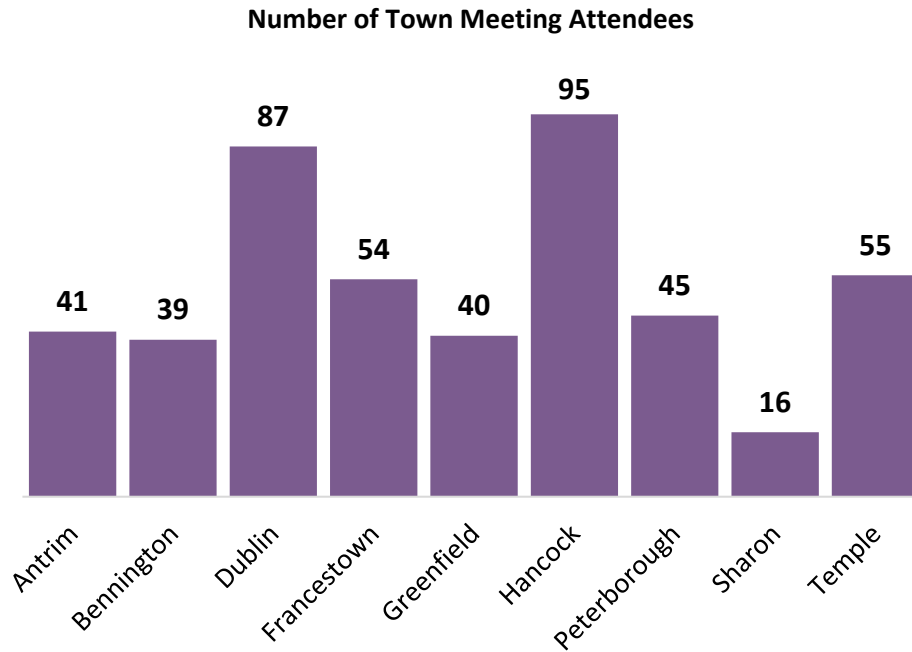


Our high school does not offer some academic or extracurricular opportunities I would like my children to have.



## Town Meetings

Prismatic hosted a town meeting in each of the 9 towns. The 1st was held in Sharon on September 19, 2023; the last was held in Hancock on October 5, 2023. A total of 472 residents signed into a town meeting. Attendees were not required to sign in and Prismatic noted that some chose not to do so. Town/district officials did not typically sign in, so were additional to the 472.



Prismatic offered town meeting attendees several different methods by which to provide input:

- ◆ **Online Survey** – Prismatic provided 4 laptops for residents to complete the September community survey.<sup>5</sup>
- ◆ **Token Polling** – Prismatic gave attendees 4 tokens labelled 1-4 and asked them to place the #1 token into their first choice of the offered options, #2 token into their second choice, etc. Participants were not required to use all tokens and some chose not to.

Two of the 4 options were voted #1. Dublin, Frankestown, Hancock, and Temple selected keeping all elementary schools and moving grades 5 and 6 to them. Antrim, Bennington, Greenfield, Peterborough, and Sharon selected combining only some of the elementary schools.

<sup>5</sup> Two other stations, Video Input and Chat with the Consultant, were available, but largely not of interest to attendees.

Option	Antrim	Bennington	Dublin	Fracestown	Greenfield	Hancock	Peterborough	Sharon	Temple
“Keep ConVal just like it is now, even if it is more expensive than other options and likely means reduced options for middle school and high school students.”	#4	#4	#2	#1	#4	#3	#4	#4	#2
“Keep all the elementary schools, but move grades 5 and 6 back to them to help fill them up. This could save money, but would likely reduce academic and enrichment options for students in grades 5 and 6.”	#2	#3	#1	#2	#3	#1	#3	#3	#1
“Combine only some of the elementary schools in order to provide students with better academic/enrichment options and save some money.”	#1	#1	#3	#3	#1	#2	#2	#1	#3
“Combine as many schools as possible (including perhaps the middle schools) in order to provide students with better academic/enrichment options and save money.”	#3	#2	#4	#4	#2	#4	#1	#2	#4

- ◆ **Be a Board Member** - Prismatic gave attendees a single \$1 million bill and asked them to decide which of the offered options they would choose to fund if they were a school board member.

Three of the 5 options received the highest funding. Antrim, Dublin, Fracestown, Hancock, and Temple most frequently chose to fund retaining their small-town elementary school. Bennington, Peterborough, and Sharon most frequently chose to fund expanding academic options. Greenfield most frequently chose to fund lowering property taxes by not spending the \$1M.

Option	Antrim	Bennington	Dublin	Fracestown	Greenfield	Hancock	Peterborough	Sharon	Temple
“Retain our small-town elementary school.”	17	7	48	41	0	36	3	0	36
“Improve our town, such as purchasing a new fire truck, improving roads, etc.”	2	1	0	0	7	1	1	0	0
“Expand student academic options at the middle or high schools, such as starting a World Languages Program, enhancing advanced coursework options, etc.”	11	10	1	1	1	14	19	9	5
“Improve student options at the middle or high schools, such as adding more sports, expanding music/theater activities, etc.”	6	9	0	1	3	1	6	1	1
“Lower property taxes by not spending those funds.”	1	6	7	3	13	8	13	6	6
Total Votes	37	33	56	45	24	60	42	16	48

- ◆ **Respond to Questions** – Prismatic provided 3 thought questions and asked residents to provide their responses on sticky notes.

Thought Question	Town	Areas of Frequent Response
What does a great school have?	Antrim	<i>Great teachers Community involvement/connection</i>
	Bennington	<i>Qualified staff Non-academic programming (before/afterschool, enrichment)</i>
	Dublin	<i>Great/caring teachers Small class sizes</i>
	Fracestown	<i>Great teachers/strong leadership Community connection/engagement</i>
	Greenfield	<i>Happy/good/great teachers</i>
	Hancock	<i>Great/dedicated teachers Small class sizes</i>
	Peterborough	<i>Great/engaged teachers Academic rigor, challenging curriculum</i>
	Sharon	No items
Temple	<i>Great teachers Small class sizes Community involvement/connection</i>	

<b>Thought Question</b>	<b>Town</b>	<b>Areas of Frequent Response</b>
What is the best part about having a school located in this town?	Antrim	<i>Low travel time/proximity Sense of community</i>
	Bennington	<i>Close to home Community pride/activities</i>
	Dublin	<i>Small class size Sense of community</i>
	Francestown	<i>Close to home Sense of community</i>
	Greenfield	<i>Sense of community Convenient location</i>
	Hancock	<i>Community connection Nearby location</i>
	Peterborough	<i>Proximity/shorter bus ride/close to community</i>
	Sharon	N/A
	Temple	<i>Close to home Community connection/sense of community</i>
What town service of facility is currently lacking in this town?	Antrim	<i>Community center</i>
	Bennington	<i>Road/sidewalk maintenance Senior/adult/multi-generational activities or center</i>
	Dublin	<i>Outdoor recreational items (community garden, lake access) Housing/affordable housing</i>
	Francestown	<i>Daycare, childcare, PreK, 5<sup>th</sup> grade Elder services/care</i>
	Greenfield	<i>Recreational facilities/programming</i>
	Hancock	<i>Affordable housing/housing/elder housing Internet/cell service</i>
	Peterborough	<i>Housing/affordable housing Recreational opportunities Day care/childcare</i>
	Sharon	No items
Temple	<i>Childcare</i>	

As this town meeting format was unfamiliar to ConVal residents, several voiced frustrations that there would be no official presentation from Prismatic or chance for residents to speak to each other in a larger audience format. However, several expressed support for this format, understanding the intent to allow everyone to be heard.



## Online Community Forum

The Online Community Forum was available to ConVal residents October 23-27, 2023. Complete results are provided in Appendix D. Participants could:

- ◆ submit a question for Prismatic to answer
- ◆ respond to the prompt “The 2022-23 student assessment data do not seem to indicate a relationship between smaller schools and better student achievement. What are your thoughts?”
- ◆ respond to the prompt, “The 2022-23 financial data show a wide variation in the cost per student at the school level. What are your thoughts?”
- ◆ react to and/or respond to comments left by other residents

The online system used does not provide a count of the number of unique forum participants but Prismatic noted that at times more than 20 residents were active on the forum at the same time. Results of the forum include:

- ◆ Q&A – residents submitted a variety of questions. Prismatic was able to group some similar questions together and in total provided 40 responses. Several asked about the purpose of the project, the project timeline, Prismatic’s background, and what data are being collected. No one question area predominated.
- ◆ Regarding the question of the apparent lack of relationship between smaller schools and better student achievement shown in the data for ConVal elementary schools, residents made 13 comments. There was no strong pattern in the responses. Sample responses included:
  - *I agree that there is no clear relationship between smaller schools and better student achievement. It would be helpful, also, to see average class sizes. I know that in Peterborough, the town with the largest elementary school, class sizes still remain relatively small...There is a sweet spot in which a school is small enough for a student to feel known and not lost in the shuffle, but large enough to provide a vibrant school community with many opportunities. I think that PES, even as the largest elementary school, falls into that sweet spot.*
  - *If we were to look at the education field in general we would find that ConVal elementary schools have tiny class sizes in the grand scheme of things.*
  - *How is that possible, when one of the smaller schools, Franchestown, has the best score. Seems there is a direct relationship between size and results.*
  - *You can’t say that because one of the small schools has relatively high test scores that there is a clear relationship between smaller schools and better student achievement. Consider the low scores at some of the other small schools, and, importantly, consider the fact that Franchestown tested 16 children and Peterborough tested 91. Such a small number is easily affected by a small number of high- or low-performers.*

- ◆ Regarding the question of variations in costs per student across the ConVal elementary schools, residents made 24 comments. There was no strong pattern in the responses. Sample responses included:
  - *I think that as a whole people don't like change. I also think that it's pretty eye-opening to see how much more per student it costs for several of the smaller schools.*
  - *How much of those costs are fixed and how much is related to student costs?*
  - *Fixed costs are the problem. Plus, the geographic distribution makes it costly to provide support to younger or temporary teachers, deliver special ed services and resource teachers. I suspect this lies at the heart of the performance issues in the smaller schools and that would mean those students are cheated.*

### October Community Survey

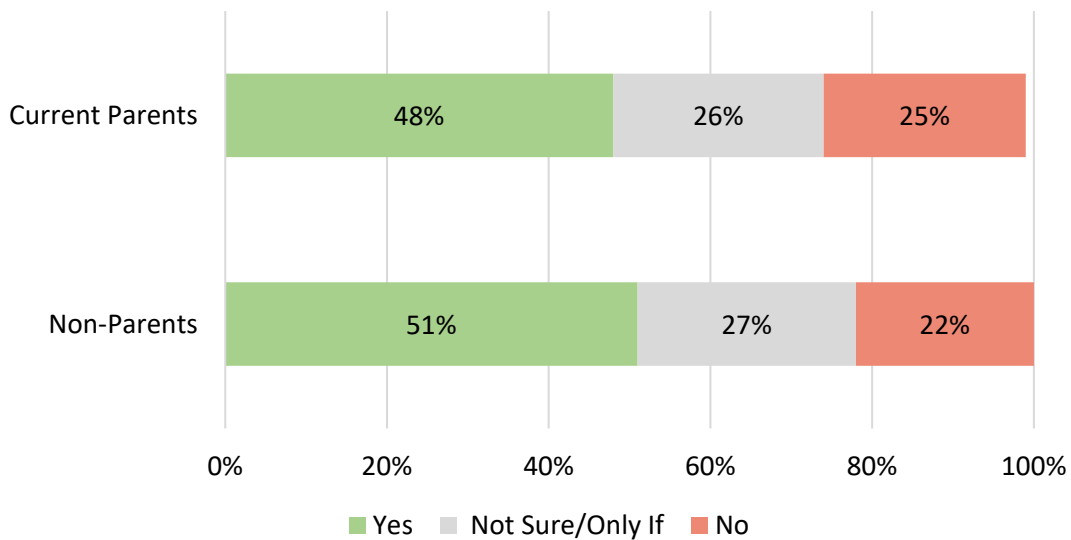
The October community survey received a total of 405 responses, with input gathered from all 9 towns in the ConVal district. However, not enough survey responses were received from Antrim, Bennington, Greenfield, or Sharon to be able to complete analyses at the town level. Of the 405 responses, 31% indicated they are the parents of current ConVal students. Parent respondents came from all ConVal towns. Complete results are provided in Appendix B.

The October survey focused on asking residents whether they would support various reconfiguration options. In general, there was little difference in the level of support for various options between current parents and non-parents. All options presented had some level of support. Four options had nearly the same levels of support – close to half of respondents supported these options:

- ◆ reduce the number of elementary schools to 5 or 6
- ◆ more likely to support closing some elementary schools if it means the district could offer PreK at remaining elementary sites
- ◆ more likely to support closing some elementary schools if it means the district could offer afterschool care at remaining elementary sites
- ◆ more likely to support close some elementary schools if it means the district could offer more academic opportunities at the high school

A substantial 48% of current ConVal parents voiced their support for a reconfiguration option that would decrease the number of elementary schools to either 5 or 6 schools. This approval extends beyond the parent demographic, as non-parents within the district also signaled their support for this option (51%).

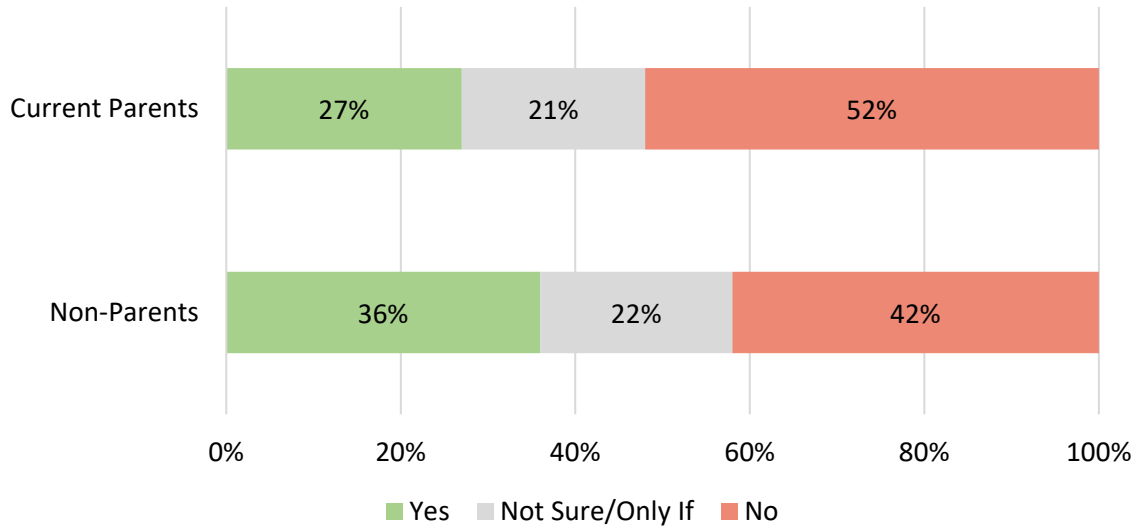
Would you be supportive of a plan that reduced the number of elementary schools from 8 to 5 or 6 schools?



However, when considering a reconfiguration that would reduce the number of elementary schools to 3 or 4, support diminished. A majority of current ConVal parents (52%) disagreed with such an option,

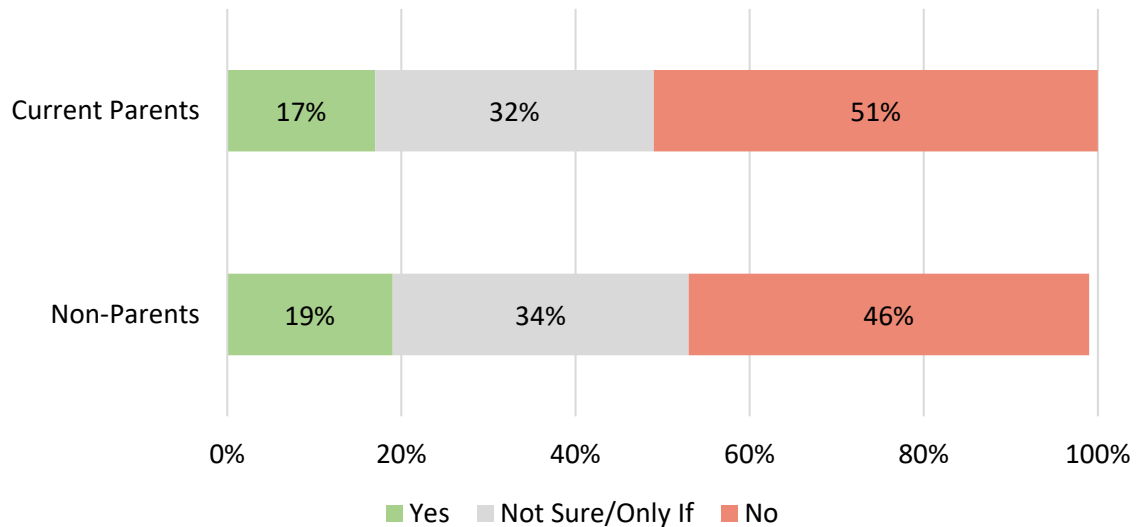
with only 27% expressing support. Similarly, non-parents were mainly against this option (42%), with only 36% in favor.

Would you be supportive of a plan that reduced the number of elementary schools from 8 to 3 or 4 schools?



Respondents were also asked if they would support a plan that allocated an equal amount of money per student across all elementary schools, even if resources were unevenly distributed. Both parents and non-parents largely opposed such a plan. Current parents primarily disapproved, with 51% against. Non-parents shared similar sentiments, with 46% expressing disapproval.

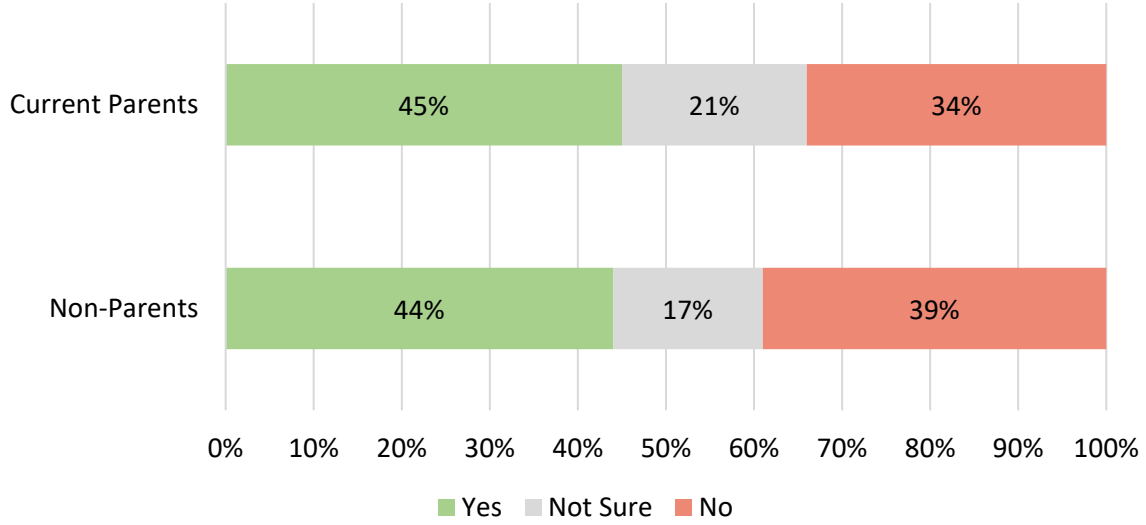
Would you be supportive of a plan that spent the same amount of money per student across elementary schools even if that meant some elementary schools would not get the same resources as others?



When asked if they would be more inclined to support the closure of some elementary schools if it resulted in the district being able to provide PreK at all remaining elementary sites, both parents and

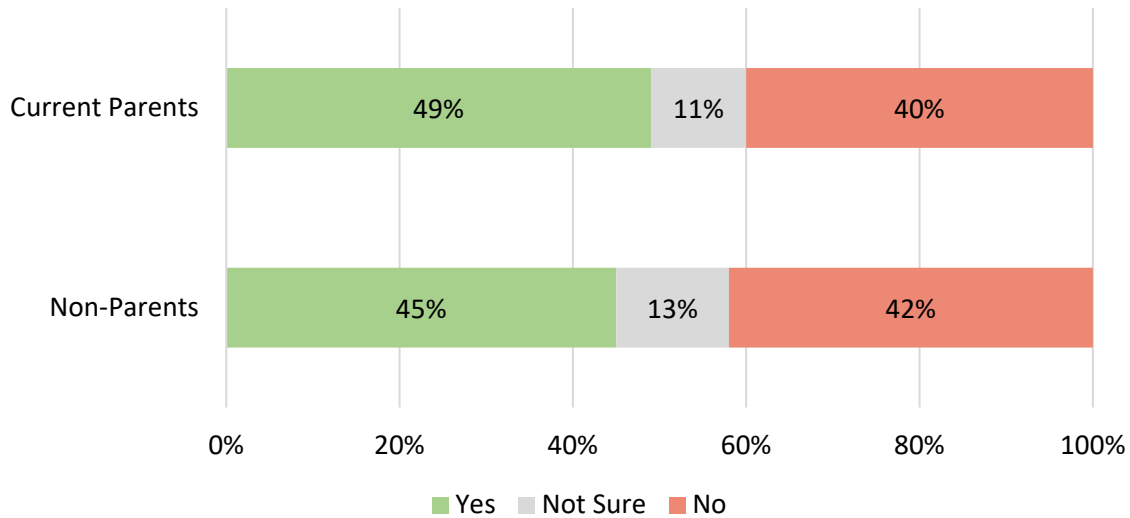
non-parents indicated agreement. A substantial 45% of current parents expressed approval, while non-parents echoed this sentiment closely (44%).

Would you be more likely to support the closing of some elementary schools if it meant the district could offer PreK in all remaining elementary sites?



Respondents were posed a similar question regarding afterschool care. Nearly half of current parents (49%) expressed approval, indicating their support for elementary school closures if afterschool care could be provided at the remaining elementary sites. Likewise, 45% of non-parents showed agreement with this approach.

Would you be more likely to support the closing of some elementary schools if it meant the district could offer afterschool care in all remaining elementary sites?



When presented with the possibility that ES closures could potentially lead to increased HS academic opportunities, both parents and non-parents were more supportive of ES closures. Current parents supported this option at 46%, while non-parents were in favor at 43%.

Would you be more likely to support the closing of some elementary schools if it meant the district could offer more academic opportunities at the high school?

