

**Annual  
Report to the  
Community**



# Voting Day: Tuesday, March 4

Colchester High School • 7 am to 7 pm



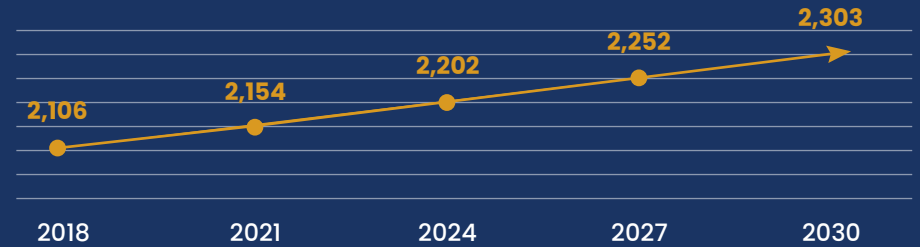
There is no deadline to register to vote. You can register ahead of time or at the polls on the day of the vote.



Plan ahead! If you can't make it to the high school on voting day, you can vote ahead of time at the Colchester Town Office or request a ballot be mailed to you. Visit [sos.vermont.gov/elections](https://sos.vermont.gov/elections) for more information.



## Student Enrollment Continues Upward Trend



CSD has 18 bus drivers, averaging 10 years of experience. The average bus does four routes a day, covering 100 miles. Would you like to drive a bus or a van? We need drivers! Call 264-5999 for more information.



The Performing Arts Center at CHS hosted 262 events last school year, including dance competitions, a Broadway showcase, a nationally renowned orchestra, and, of course, performances by our students!



# Welcome from the Superintendent

## To the CSD Community,

Our schools reflect the spirit of our community, which is focused on fostering growth, learning, and success for all students. Every day, our educators and staff work to provide caring environments where students are inspired to reach their full potential. Schools are more than just buildings; they are vibrant hubs of learning, creativity, and connection.

In November, we celebrated a monumental milestone for our district when our community came together to support the bond initiative to modernize and improve our aging facilities. This investment represents a shared vision for the future of education in Colchester, ensuring that our students and staff have safe spaces to learn and grow.

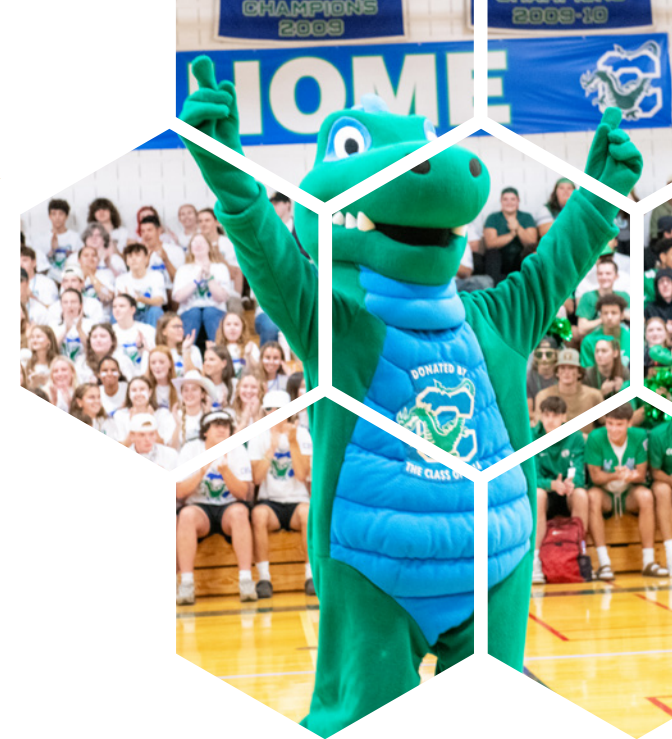
The impact of this decision will resonate for generations. Your support reaffirms the essential partnership between our schools and the community. It underscores the understanding that investing in education is investing in the future of Colchester. On behalf of the district, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to every voter, volunteer, and advocate who played a role in this transformative effort.

As we celebrate this significant step forward with the bond approval, it's important to remember that the work in our schools continues every day. We are dedicated to closing achievement gaps in math and literacy, while also teaching our youngest students vital skills in relationship-building and conflict resolution. From the classrooms where students engage in meaningful learning to the halls where they form lasting relationships, our schools are shaping the future adults of our community.

Our operational budget remains critical to sustaining this momentum and continuing to support our educators and students. This funding and community support allow us to maintain high standards of learning, uphold our commitment to student well-being, and ensure our schools continue to be places where every student has the opportunity to not only succeed but thrive. Thank you for your continued investment in shaping the future of Colchester.

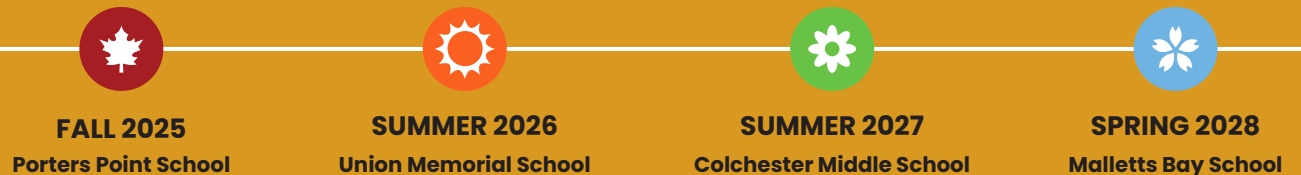


*Amy Minor*  
Superintendent of Schools



“Schools are more than just buildings; they are vibrant hubs of learning, creativity, and connection.”

## Estimated Start Dates for School Construction



# A Focus on Students

## Empowering Youth

The **DREAM Program**, launched in spring 2024 at Colchester High School, pairs CHS student mentors with youth at Malletts Bay School for a three-year mentoring relationship. Founded through the efforts of students Phoebe Richardson '24 and Fiona McHugh '25, the program fosters leadership, community connection, and personal growth. Weekly sessions feature engaging activities that encourage participants to step out of their comfort zones and



build strong mentor-mentee bonds. Leadership within the program has been driven by students, including Trinity McCarthy, who became a co-chair in the 2024-2025 school year.

## Exploring Passions

**Colchester Middle School** concluded the school year with CMS Days, an innovative end-of-year studies program. This multi-day opportunity provided all students with engaging, high-interest learning opportunities through non-traditional courses. Designed to expand understanding and spark new interests, these intensive, student-driven experiences promoted choice, encouraged enthusiasm



for learning, and strengthened connections within the school and greater Colchester community. The success of this new initiative, which will return for the current school year, was made possible thanks to the generous support of local businesses that donated their time, supplies, spaces, and expertise.

## Expanding Horizons Through Food

**Every Tuesday**, the CSD food services team brings global flavors to students with Menus of the World, an innovative program introducing



dishes from around the globe. From savory Chicken Tikka Masala inspired by India to classic Swedish Meatballs and vibrant Spanish Paella, the program celebrates diverse cuisines. Students have also enjoyed favorites like Greek Chicken Pitas with Tzatziki and English Fish and Chips, fostering curiosity and connection through food. This initiative highlights the ingenuity of our food service team, creating memorable dining experiences that go beyond the lunch tray.

## Supporting Families in Our Community

The **district's** Community and Caregiver Information Nights offered a range of educational sessions on critical topics for families. Highlights included Childhood 2.0, addressing the challenges of raising children in a digital age, and Stop the Bleed Certification, where participants of all ages learned life-saving techniques. Other sessions featured Suicide Prevention Training, which taught attendees to recognize warning signs and intervene effectively, and Hacking the Teenage Brain, which explored adolescent development

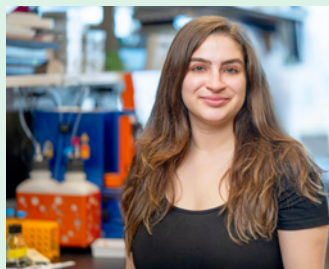


related to sleep, technology, and executive functioning. Additionally, Weight Inclusive Nutrition guided participants of all ages on fostering healthy conversations about food, health, and body image.

## Chiara Evans, Class of 2013

Research Scholar, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

I entered the Colchester School District community in kindergarten and left after graduation, unsuspecting of how much it would continually influence me as a person throughout



the rigors of college and the challenges I've faced.

Science classes with Mr. Phillips, Mr. Richey, Mrs. Bessy, and Mr. Warren fostered my curiosity of

the natural world and how things work. My English teachers, Mr. MacArdle, Ms. deLaricheliere, and Mr. Cole, encouraged my creativity through poetry and writing. In history classes with Mr. Price, Mr. Upchurch, and Mrs. Brady, I built respect for the world and where people come from. Outside of the classroom as a student-athlete, I learned discipline and determination in cross country and track from Mr. Fiske, Mr. Perry, Mr. Deane, and Mr. Landsberg.

My guidance counselor, Mr. Hall, is a great mentor. With endless care and patience, he helped me weed through college decisions. I attended Albany College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, where I earned a BS/MS in Pharmaceutical Sciences. Recently, I earned my PhD in Pharmacology from Weill Cornell Medicine while working under a federal grant and am currently working at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center studying regulation of blood cancer biology. The goal of this work is to help inform therapeutic strategies for patients. I couldn't have done all of this without CSD. The foundation I formed with my teachers and mentors allowed me to build so much, and their influence continues to inspire me.

## Patrick Neely, Class of 2025

For as long as I can remember, I have wanted to be a United States Marine. With two of my uncles, my Dad, and both grandfathers being Marines, it has always been a part of my life. My Dad being on active duty required my family to move around frequently. I had the opportunity to experience what it was like to live all around the world, including England. This environment taught me to be hard-working, caring, and a leader.

When my Dad retired from active duty in 2021, we all decided to move to Vermont. My sophomore year was my first year at Colchester High School. Transferring from a large school in California to a small school in Vermont was an adjustment. However, many of my teachers were very supportive along the way and did an amazing job teaching.

With the help of CHS, I have been able to be a well-rounded student-athlete. This led me to be recommended to attend the Green Mountain Boys State Camp. My time spent at the camp was beneficial, I had the opportunity to learn more about how our government works and how to become a good leader. My experience here and at CHS has prepared me for college and my future career as a leader in the United States Marines.



## Students Build Skills in Youth and Government Conference

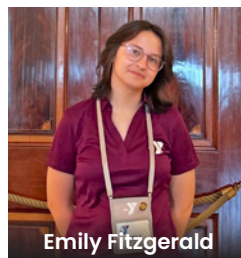


Shabnam Saini

For two consecutive years, Colchester High School has celebrated an extraordinary achievement at Vermont's YMCA Youth and Government Conference. Shabnam Saini and Emily Fitzgerald have each been elected as Youth Governors, a prestigious honor that reflects the caliber of leadership emerging from Colchester. This national program offers students the chance to write, debate, and vote on legislation in a model government setting. Earning the top seat, both Shabnam and Emily earned an all-expenses-paid trip to Washington, D.C., where they joined youth leaders from across the country to learn more about the legislative process and each other.

"I loved the authenticity and work ethic of everyone I met," Emily said. "Even though we had different political and moral beliefs, our discussions improved my patience and gave me hope for bridging divides in the future. I'm now planning on pursuing political science, using writing as a tool for awareness and change."

Shabnam emphasized the importance of youth leadership, stating, "The power of democracy has empowered us to change the world. All it takes is one voice, one speech, and suddenly your ideas are shared everywhere."



Emily Fitzgerald

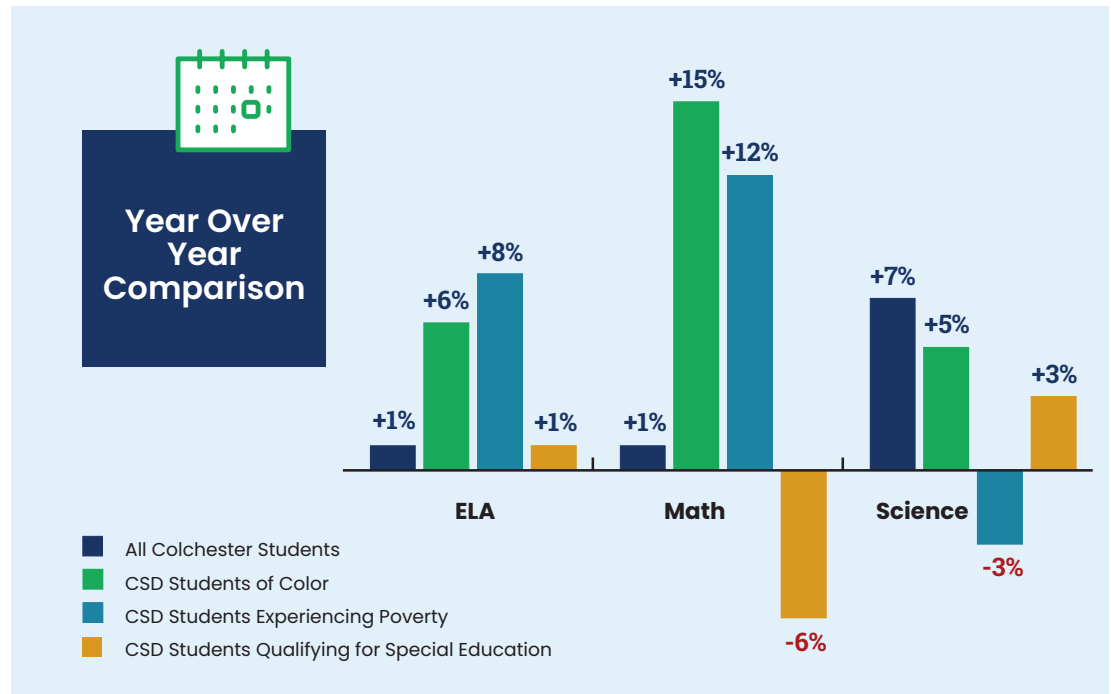
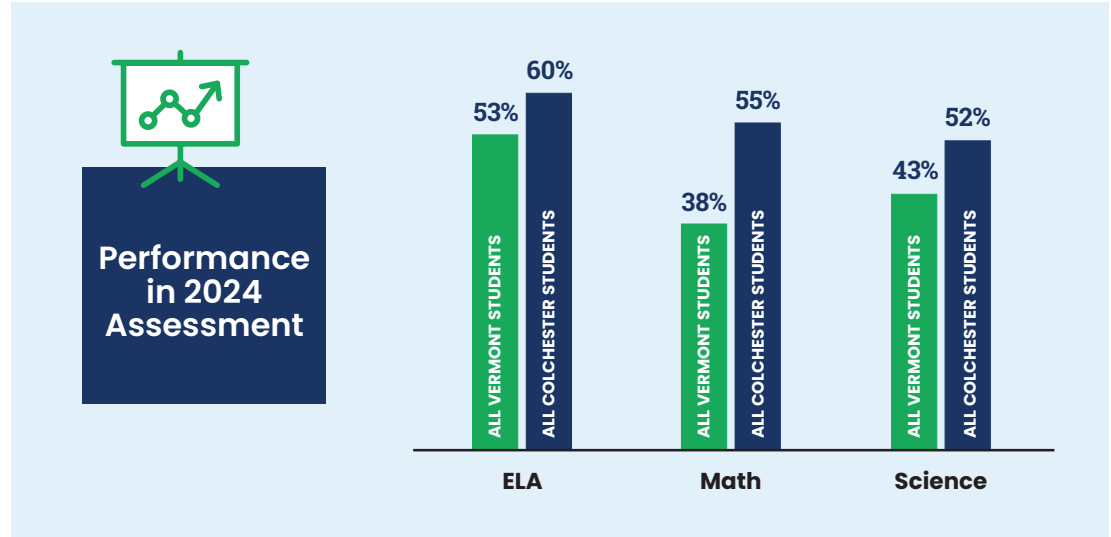
# Academics

## Colchester Students Make Progress in Vermont Comprehensive Assessments

Each spring, students in grades 3-9 take the Vermont Comprehensive Assessment Program (VTCAP) for English language arts (ELA) and math, while science is assessed in grades 5, 8, and 11. In 2024, our district performed significantly above the state average, with scores 7 points higher in ELA, 17 points higher in math, and 9 points higher in science.

Year-over-year comparisons showed gains across all three content areas, with notable improvements among students experiencing poverty, students with disabilities, and students of color. These achievements reflect the district's investments in interventionists, instructional coaching, and professional learning for educators.

While we celebrate this progress, the district remains committed to further increasing achievement and closing gaps for underserved groups, including multilingual learners. Ongoing efforts will continue to focus on providing targeted support and resources to ensure success for every student.



## Deeper Learning Reflected in VTCAP Assessment Results

This year's VTCAP results highlighted an increase in students scoring at the highest achievement level, a reflection of deeper learning and understanding of state standards. The VTCAP assessments measure student performance across four levels, with levels 3 and 4 meeting proficiency. Level 4 represents a thorough understanding of concepts, skills, and their application, demonstrating mastery of learning.

In English language arts (ELA) and math, multiple grades showed strong results, with notable growth in students achieving at level 4. These outcomes illustrate our district's focus on fostering deeper learning and ensuring students not only meet but exceed expectations. By emphasizing critical thinking, problem-solving, and application of knowledge, CSD is making strides in achieving success for all learners.

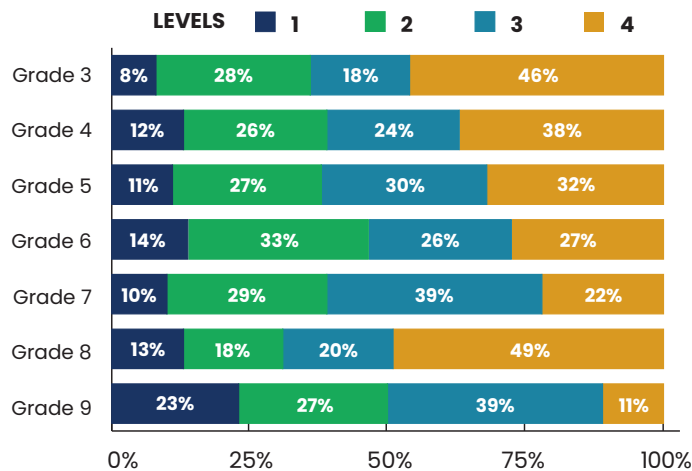
## STAR Assessments Boost Early Literacy

CSD is committed to building strong early literacy skills to support lifelong learning. Using STAR assessments in grades K-10, we monitor student progress in reading and math throughout the year, identifying strengths and areas for growth. Additionally, in the younger grades, STAR Early Literacy and STAR Reading serve as universal screening to meet the requirements of Vermont's new literacy law, Act 139, aiming to increase literacy outcomes for students in Colchester and across Vermont.

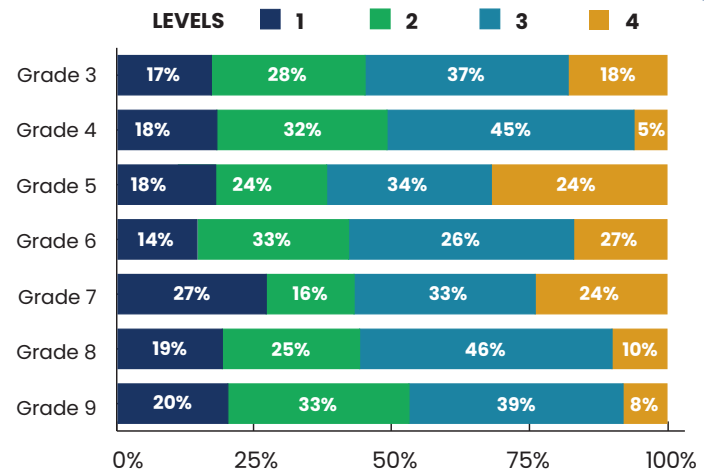
Using a blend of voter approved budget and grants, CSD has long prioritized investing in reading interventionists, regular assessments, and training in evidence-based literacy practices. Last year's results showed significant student growth in reading and math, reflecting the success of these initiatives. By combining data-driven assessments with targeted support, we are ensuring all students have the tools they need to thrive.



### 2024 VTCAP ELA Achievement Level



### 2024 VTCAP Math Achievement Level



## 2021 Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey Shows Need for Greater Mental Health Services



**35%**

of Vermont high school students reported experiencing poor mental health in the past 30 days.



**52%**

of Vermont students agreed with the statement, "I matter to people."



**3x**

LGBTQ+ students were more than 3.5 times as likely as their heterosexual peers to have made a suicide plan in the past year.



**25%**

of Vermont students reported engaging in self-harm in the past year.



**1 in 7**

Vermont students reported making a suicide plan.

Between 2016 and 2020, the percentage of children aged 3–17 experiencing depression or anxiety rose by 40%, from 14% to 19%, according to Vermont 211 and the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Student mental health declined further during the COVID-19 pandemic, with metrics showing no significant rebound.

# Committed to Mental Health

The Colchester School District is committed to addressing the growing mental health challenges faced by our students, a reflection of statewide and national trends. Recent data highlights the urgency of this issue and underscores the need for proactive and consistent support for student well-being.

In response to these alarming trends, CSD has implemented a comprehensive approach to student mental health, focusing on research-based practices, partnerships, and community engagement.

### Adoption of State Guidelines

In January 2024, the Vermont Department of Mental Health released the Vermont Model School Protocol for Suicide Prevention. This resource provides detailed procedures to support schools in suicide prevention efforts. The district is working to align its practices with these guidelines to ensure consistency.

### Howard Center Partnership

Beginning in Fall 2023, CSD partnered with the Howard Center to enhance suicide prevention strategies. As part of this collaboration:

- K-12 school counselors received training in the Columbia-Suicide Severity Rating Scale, a tool that guides suicide risk screening through clear, plain-language questions.
- The rating scale helps counselors assess whether a student is at risk, determine the severity and immediacy of the risk, and develop a support plan in collaboration with families and other agencies.

### District-Wide Consistency

A K-12 committee comprising teachers, counselors, behavior specialists, administrators, and Howard Center representatives is working to ensure a cohesive district-wide approach to suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention. This includes:

- Standardized protocols for responding to suicide attempts.
- Updated training for staff, families, and students.
- Revised handouts and resources to support students and families.





# Support Services: Attendance

## Supporting Student Attendance: A Collaborative Approach to Overcoming Barriers

Regular school attendance is crucial for student success. Students who attend consistently are more likely to succeed academically, build positive relationships, and develop essential skills for the future. However, for some students in Colchester, homelessness, poverty, and family instability often create significant barriers, leading to chronic absenteeism – defined as missing 10% or more of the school year, roughly two days per month.

Early intervention is key. By closely monitoring attendance and supporting families at the first signs of trouble, including finding out why the student is struggling to attend, we can prevent chronic absenteeism from becoming a barrier to learning, giving students the best chance for success despite adverse circumstances.

## Engaging Families and Fostering Awareness

Family engagement is a critical factor in improving attendance. When families understand the impact of absenteeism, they are more likely to prioritize getting their children to school. To raise awareness of this issue, the district has implemented several initiatives:

**Universal Attendance Procedures:** Colchester has established district-wide attendance protocols to ensure accurate and consistent data. By calibrating attendance codes, the district can better identify when students are at risk for chronic absenteeism and intervene early.

**Monthly Attendance Notifications:** To help families track their child's attendance throughout the year, the district sends monthly notifications detailing absences, late arrivals, and early dismissals. These updates help families stay informed and take action when necessary.



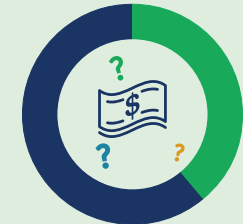
Collaborative efforts are yielding positive results. Last school year, 22 students with severe attendance issues met with school staff in partnership with the police department. **Of these students, 73% improved their attendance and did not require intervention through truancy court.**

## Addressing Homelessness and Poverty

Homelessness and poverty are often significant contributors to absenteeism. To help identify school-aged children experiencing these conditions, CSD has formed partnerships with local hotels, shelters, and community organizations like the Colchester Food Shelf. District social workers and clinicians assist families in accessing housing, food, and transportation, helping to stabilize their situations and remove such barriers to consistent school attendance.

The district identified 126 students experiencing homelessness last school year and provided tailored support to these families to ensure that housing instability did not prevent their children from attending school.

In 2023–2024



**39%**

of CSD students  
lived in poverty



**126**

students experienced  
homelessness

Colchester School District actively works to connect families with resources for food and shelter. Stability is the key to school attendance and academic and social well-being.

# 2025-26 Budget Information

On January 21, the Colchester School Board approved a budget of \$64,889,466 to support and operate the district, which results in an **estimated tax increase of 2.95%**. This proposed budget removes 14 (open) support staff positions while maintaining current academic offerings and programs to support our students. The budget also includes the first payment towards the facilities bond, additional funds for food services, and allows us to replace the failing roof at MBS.



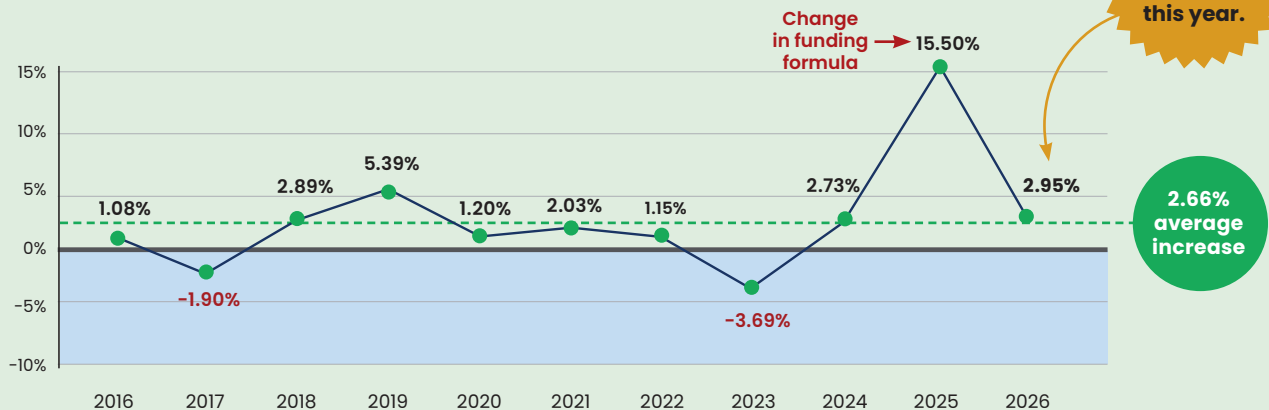
For more details about the proposed budget, scan the QR code with your phone or visit [csdvt.org/budget](https://csdvt.org/budget).



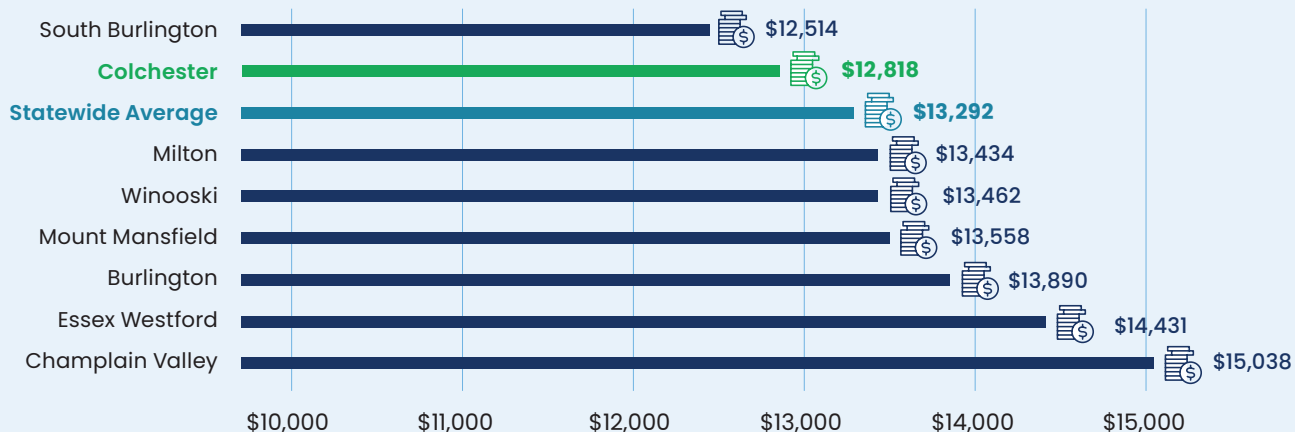
**Please note:** This information is accurate as of Feb. 3, 2025. Any changes made by legislators that impact the estimated tax rate will be posted online at [csdvt.org/budget](https://csdvt.org/budget).

## A Tradition of Low Spending

Vermont's education funding formula changed last year under Act 127, resulting in an unusual spike in taxes. Colchester has been and continues to be a low-spending district. The proposed tax increase of 2.95% for FY'26 is back in line with what voters have come to expect. **Over the past decade, Colchester taxpayers have averaged an educational tax increase of just 2.66%.**



## FY'25 Comparison of Spending Per Pupil



# How Would This Proposed Budget Affect You?

## If your household makes **less than \$115,000**

If you earn less than \$115,000, you will qualify for a property tax credit, which is applied to the following year's tax bills and is limited by your income. These credits are capped.

Household Income	FY25 Taxes Current Year	FY26 Taxes Proposed Budget	Estimated Annual DECREASE
\$50,000	\$1,190	\$1,173	-\$17
\$60,000	\$1,428	\$1,408	-\$20
\$70,000	\$1,666	\$1,642	-\$24
\$80,000	\$1,904	\$1,877	-\$27
\$90,000	\$2,142	\$2,112	-\$30
\$100,000	\$2,380	\$2,346	-\$34
\$110,000	\$2,618	\$2,581	-\$37

## If your household makes **more than \$115,000**

If you earn more than \$115,000, you will pay taxes based on your assessed property value.

Property Value	FY25 Taxes Current Year	FY26 Taxes Proposed Budget	Estimated Annual Increase
\$200,000	\$3,640	\$3,747	\$107
\$250,000	\$4,550	\$4,684	\$134
\$300,000	\$5,460	\$5,621	\$161
\$350,000	\$6,370	\$6,557	\$188
\$400,000	\$7,280	\$7,494	\$214
\$450,000	\$8,190	\$8,431	\$241
\$500,000	\$9,100	\$9,368	\$268



About 70% of Vermont households receive a property tax credit based on their income. In Colchester, these households will see their taxes decrease.



The tables above provide general estimates of potential tax impacts based on income and property value. These figures represent average scenarios and may not account for individual circumstances, exemptions, or specific tax situations. For personalized information, please consult a tax professional.

## Understanding the Ballot When You Vote

**SCHOOL ARTICLE**

**ARTICLE 15**

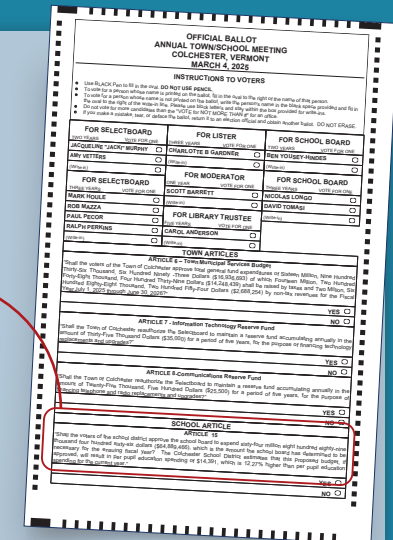
"Shall the voters of the school district approve the school board to expend sixty-four million eight hundred eighty-nine thousand four hundred sixty-six dollars (\$64,889,466), which is the amount the school board has determined to be necessary for the ensuing fiscal year? The Colchester School District estimates that this proposed budget, if approved, will result in per pupil education spending of \$14,391, which is 12.27% higher than per pupil education spending for the current year."

YES

NO

This number is strictly a comparison in per pupil spending; it is not the tax increase. **The estimated tax increase is 2.95%**, and it will not appear on the ballot.

When calculating spending per student, Vermont uses a formula that adjusts student counts to account for higher or lower costs of educating certain students.





59 Rathe Rd, PO Box 27  
Colchester, Vermont 05446

RESIDENTIAL CUSTOMER  
COLCHESTER, VT 05446

## Your Future Starts Here

From substitutes to food service, administrative assistants, paraeducators, and everything in between, we are looking for individuals to join our team! Schedules and pay vary by job. Review a listing of our current openings and hear what it's like to work here directly from some of our employees at [csdvt.org/jobs](https://csdvt.org/jobs).



Colchester School District partnered with USPS to deliver these reports for only 12¢ a household.

Stay in touch: 802.264.5999

