



2024
Annual Report



COLCHESTER
SCHOOL DISTRICT





Voting Day

Tuesday, March 5
7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.
Colchester High School

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

Can't make it to the polls on Town Meeting Day? Vote early at the Colchester Town Office or request a ballot be mailed to you sos.vermont.gov/elections

Off to a Great Start

In addition to the 75 children who attend preschool at MBS, the district partners with more than 48 local preschools, providing financial assistance through Act 166 to approximately 190 students so they can receive high-quality preschool instruction.



By the Numbers



Colchester School District operates and maintains five school buildings, one alternative program building, and 180 acres of land.



The district has 2,151 students enrolled in grades K-12, a size that has remained stable from year to year.



A Look at Student Demographics

- 6% Asian
- 5% Black/African American
- 4% Hispanic/Latino
- 80% White
- 4% Two or More Races
- 1% Other

Meals Served Last Year



197,265
breakfasts



241,364
lunches





From the Superintendent

Dear Colchester Community Members,

As a school district with strong and consistent enrollment, I believe we are on the move, and our students are leading the way! Over the past year, we have strengthened student leadership, adopted an equity policy, unveiled a student-designed equity mural at CHS, and amplified student voice in our decision-making. Leadership clubs at our secondary schools are thriving, with growing membership and recognition at regional and state levels. These clubs are driving numerous initiatives to ensure everyone feels welcome in our schools. Excitingly, the middle school IDEA Club has been asked to present their equity work at the Vermont Middle Level Conference next month!

In the early years of preschool and elementary education, children undergo significant annual growth in their learning journey. Recognizing the crucial role of early education, our district has dedicated considerable resources to enrich the development of new skills in these formative years. I firmly believe that the advancements our students achieve stem directly from the collaboration among our pre-K and elementary schools, teachers, and families.

Having been a science teacher, I understand the importance of classroom instruction during the school day. As both an administrator and a parent, I also acknowledge the profound impact of involvement in activities and cocurriculars that take place outside of the classroom. Students who are involved in their school community are more engaged, have stronger school connections and have better academic outcomes. We want to celebrate our students, their accomplishments, and what matters most to them.

Our district's success is attributed not only to our exceptional teachers and staff, dedicated families, and hard-working students, but also to valued community partners like you. Your commitment is integral to our school system as we strive to prepare each student for success in life by providing an enriching, welcoming and safe environment. We hope this annual report provides insights into our efforts to foster a culture of continuous improvement that plans for the promising future ahead.

Sincerely,

AMY MINOR, Superintendent of Schools



“Students who are involved in their school community are more engaged, have stronger school connections and have better academic outcomes.”



Notable Successes this Year

- CMS choral students were asked to perform at an event for top education leaders nationwide.
- CHS choral students performed their first opera, “Dido and Aeneas,” in January.
- CHS won the D1 Girls Soccer State Championship.
- The CHS Speech Team won the State Championship three years in a row.
- The CHS Debate Team holds five state championships.

We Are Colchester



Student Leaders at Work

In the heart of Colchester schools are student leaders championing inclusion. Middle school students have grown their IDEA Club, and our high school SJA Club is one of the most active on campus. These students are forming youth-adult partnerships and sparking impactful peer-to-peer education. The magic happens when they connect with younger peers—like the IDEA Club’s Reading for Equity project and when SJA mentors visit our K-2 students. These clubs are personal connections that shape a more inclusive future, one classroom at a time.



Empowering Growth

The CSD Support Staff Mentoring Program is a cornerstone in providing support and guidance to our employees. The implementation and success of this mentoring initiative plays a pivotal role in retaining high-quality educational support staff, which betters the positive outcomes for our students. The program focuses on fostering the development of essential skills for working with students, facilitating a smooth acclimation to school routines, and nurturing strong collegueships among our new employees.



Compassion in Action

The district has seen a steady increase in families who are experiencing poverty. Our students and staff actively look for opportunities to lessen the burden through various community drives. Recognizing food insecurity as a significant obstacle, our school community came together this winter, donating more than 1,482 pounds of food and \$800 to the Colchester Community Food Shelf.

The percent of CSD students living in poverty has risen.

● 2008-09: **23%** ● 2012-13: **28%** ● 2022-23: **38%**



Soccer Joy After 30 Years

The CHS varsity girls' soccer team clinched their first championship in three decades, overcoming a history of close calls in the title match. Led by the dedicated Coach Paul, a staunch believer in their talent, the squad consistently showcased passion and skill throughout the season. Fueled by a collective desire to break the three-decade-long championship drought, the team displayed resilience in the face of adversity. Their triumph not only marked a significant achievement for the team but also brought pride to the entire community of Colchester. During regular season games, one could commonly spot elementary-aged kids proudly donning their local team jerseys, watching their teenage role models in action on the pitch. The championship match was no exception to this scene. The unforgettable team etched their names in history, and their exhilarating victory undoubtedly inspired the next generation.

ALUMNI HIGHLIGHT

Danielle Whitham, Class of 2016

Graduate Research Assistant at Clarkson University

I was a part of the Colchester School District from K-12. There were many impactful teachers throughout my early schooling who ultimately led me to where I am today. In middle school, Mrs. Kendrick's science class opened my eyes to the possibilities in science. I really found my passion for chemistry in high school. I took Mr. Richey's chemistry course as a sophomore and fell in love with the subject. While I fell in love with science and chemistry, I was also a student-athlete participating in both soccer and softball, which also helped shape me into who I am today.

I decided to pursue a degree in chemistry at Clarkson University while playing softball. The rigorous courses I took at CHS helped prepare me for collegiate-level courses. During my undergraduate education, I started doing research in a bio-chemistry and proteomics laboratory and was also a teaching assistant for general chemistry. I decided to pursue a Ph.D. in chemistry at Clarkson following the completion of my bachelor's. This has given me the opportunity to expand my knowledge and research skills while also giving back to my community.



“While I fell in love with science and chemistry, I was also a student-athlete participating in both soccer and softball, which also helped shape me into who I am today.”

In March of 2022, I returned to CHS to Mr. Richey's AP Chemistry class to present the research that I have done and share how my time in CSD allowed me to have such opportunities. I am currently getting ready to defend my thesis and graduate with my Ph.D. and hope to further my work in cancer research.

Assessing Academic Progress

Statewide assessments offer a standardized method to gauge how well students are grasping the curriculum and meeting educational standards. Last spring, Vermont implemented a new statewide assessment called the Vermont Comprehensive Assessment Program (VTCAP). The exams are given to students annually in grades 3-9 and cover literacy and math.

The exams are designed to be challenging. Scoring at 100% would require complete mastery of every concept. The average student will encounter questions on subjects they haven't mastered yet and even concepts they haven't been taught. The district's average scores were well above state averages in literacy and math and had improved from last year. Our students with disabilities also saw improvement over last year's assessment.

While the results show some exciting areas of growth, the scores show achievement gaps for students experiencing poverty, disability and students of color. The district

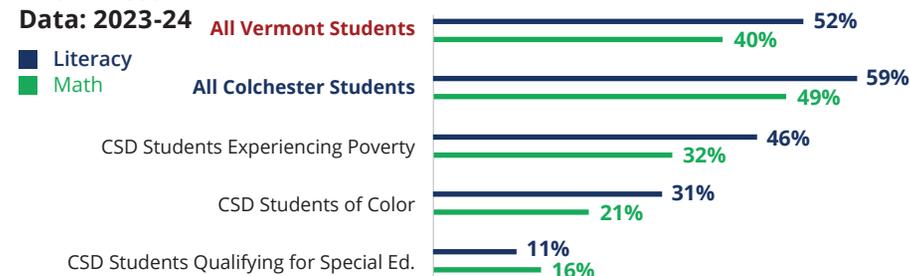
How we're boosting student support and instruction:

- Adding literacy and math interventionists for direct student assistance
- Offering focused training and coaching to educators on instructional strategies
- Investing in evidence-based instructional materials
- Conducting regular assessments to familiarize students with exam formats

is committed to improving overall achievement for every student.

These assessments are an important tool for measuring the success of the district's instructional strategies and providing feedback to help educators refine their approaches. Also, comparing our district's performance with other districts in Vermont helps us identify areas of strength and areas that may need improvement.

VTCAP Test



CURRENT STUDENTS HIGHLIGHT

Sulaiman and Emran Rasooli, CHS Class of 2024
Afghan refugees attending Champlain College in the fall.



Sulaiman Rasooli, CHS Senior



Emran Rasooli, CHS Senior

In 2021, cousins Sulaiman and Emran made the devastating decision to flee Afghanistan with their families after the Taliban launched an assault on the provincial capitals and assassinated Sulaiman’s father.

“We had the ideal life in Afghanistan; we were a middle-class family. Everything was going very well until the Taliban came. We just hid for the first two weeks, trying not to get hurt, then we went to the airport. The whole process of getting out was really scary. It was so crowded and the Taliban kept shooting up in the air to warn us not to come too close. My youngest sibling was only three. We got lucky to get out; it seemed impossible, but it happened.”

After a harrowing journey with Sulaiman’s mother and young siblings, they were able to seek refuge in Poland. While they were grateful for the safety, they spent the next year and a half being relocated by the Polish government every few months. Not knowing the language, they could not access education or secure adequate employment.

Relief finally came last year, in 2023, when they were approved entry

“When we came to Colchester High School, Mr. Hall, the school counselor, was right there. We can’t even describe Mr. Hall — he’s not just a counselor or an advisor, he’s like family now. The teachers at CHS have been really helpful and friendly.”

.....
into the US and eventually settled in Colchester. As they acclimated to American culture and learned English, they have relied on the goodwill of our community to chart their path forward, knowing most who pass by them have no idea the unimaginable events that took place before they walked the halls of Colchester High School.

“We had lost a lot of time in school, and we didn’t want to lose more. When we came to Colchester High School, Mr. Hall, the school counselor, was right there. We can’t even describe Mr. Hall, he’s not just a counselor or an advisor, he’s like family now. The teachers at CHS have been really helpful and friendly. They

give their lunchtime to meet with us if we need it to keep us on track. At CHS, we have the same opportunities that everyone else has.”

Coming from families of highly educated doctors and engineers, receiving a proper education is a requirement. “Education is very important to our family, but it is so different here in the US. In Afghanistan, the education system is not based on what the student thinks, it’s based on what the student should think. But in the US, colleges wanted us to write about things we like or that are interesting to us. Before this, we never had the chance to think about those things.”

Even through remarkable adversity, they have persevered. Both were recently accepted to Champlain College, Sulaiman to study cyber security, and Emran received a full scholarship to study business administration. They are content to stay close to family in their new hometown. “We’re happy with where we are now and the people we’re connected to, and who have helped us. We want to be able to help them someday, too.”

Increasing Access to Education

When our students are trying to access education, they may encounter barriers such as disabilities, mental health struggles, substance issues, limited English proficiency, homelessness, truancy, and other life challenges. Our faculty and staff work together to support these students by removing or lessening their barriers so they can benefit from the high-quality education that our schools offer.

We have a multi-layered support system involving various intervention resources. From classroom assistance to accessible supplemental support, our approach scales up as needed to connect students

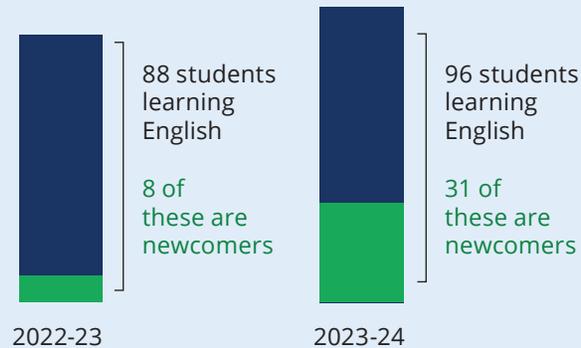
with appropriate resources such as a social worker, multilingual teacher, school engagement clinician, behavior specialist, etc. Providing early support is pivotal for student success.

We are always seeking solutions to lessen the strain on our support systems. Pressure on the system can happen when we lose staffing, have an unanticipated influx of students with specific needs, or when a unique data trend instead becomes a new normal. We continue to evaluate our systems of support to ensure no matter what the circumstances may be, every student can access their education.



Rise in Multilingual Learners in Our School District

We're privileged to have students from diverse cultures in our community, and we are committed to helping further their education. Newcomers are students who have recently arrived in the US and speak little to no English.



More than 36 different languages are spoken in the homes of Colchester students.

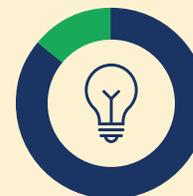


The most often requested translations are Nepali, Swahili, Vietnamese, and Arabic.

Positive Gains Working with Mental Health Clinicians

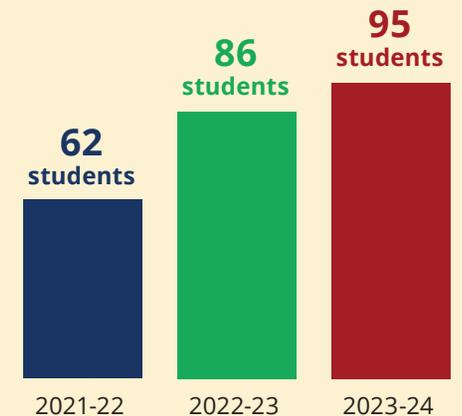


76%
Students with improved behavior at school



86%
Students with improved academic outcomes

Increase in Students Experiencing Homelessness





Fostering Social and Emotional Growth

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is an integral part of education and human development. SEL is the way we acquire the knowledge and skills to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, achieve goals, feel empathy for others, establish supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.

One of the ways Colchester School District has integrated SEL is by adopting an SEL-specific curriculum called Second Step. These evidence-based lessons are taught in preschool through 8th-grade, allowing students to learn and practice concepts that will help them have positive relationships, manage emotions, and set goals. For example, a 4th-grade lesson might show students how to consider another person’s point of view and to say what they want or need respectfully.

Just like in traditional academics, simply delivering the instruction isn’t enough. We need to know which SEL skills our students have successfully

acquired and which still need work so we can adjust our lessons and individual support accordingly. To do this, the district has begun using the DESSA, an evidence-based SEL assessment tool, in grades K-8. In addition to helping us determine lessons that would benefit a whole class or grade, this nationally standardized assessment also recommends interventions for students based on their individual scores. It helps us proactively address student needs rather than relying on negative student behavior indicators.

As we look to the future, we have started to expand usage of the DESSA to our high school students. For K-8, the assessments are completed through teacher observations of the students. At the high school level, we’re looking into incorporating a student self-screener which will capture student voice and give students immediate feedback and the choice to steer their own learning.

SEL Skills Assessment	Fall 2022	After Intervention and Instruction	Spring 2023
Self Awareness	67%		88%
Self Management	47%		70%
Social Awareness	31%		42%
Relationship Skills	44%		52%
Responsible Decision Making	62%		85%

DESSA K-8 Student Assessment Scores: This data is a snapshot of 128 students in grades K-8 who were identified as needing greater intervention to improve SEL skills.

Act 127: Changes to Vermont's School Funding Formula

In 2022, the Vermont legislature passed Act 127, a law related to improving student equity by adjusting the school funding formula and providing education quality and funding oversight. The simplified intention of Act 127 is to direct education money toward students who need it the most. The law goes into effect for the upcoming school year and addresses that certain categories of students cost more to educate, such as those experiencing poverty, those with limited English proficiency, and/or those who attend rural or small schools.

Recognizing that districts without

a significant population of students in the described categories would likely see substantial tax increases using the calculations of the new funding formula, the law offers a five-year transition period that protects residential taxes from increasing more than five percent per year if the district's local budget meets certain qualifications.

Colchester will be impacted by the changes in the funding formula and has qualified for the five percent tax cap protection. The caveat is that this cap is applied before the Common Level of Appraisal (CLA) is calculated into the funding formula.

What Do Act 127 and the CLA Mean For Colchester?

The proposed operating budget for the school district is a 9.59% spending increase over last year, largely due to inflation rates for supplies, professional services, food, transportation and equipment, and from increased costs in wages and benefits. Once calculated into the state's new funding formula, the proposed budget would have led to a 5% increase in educational taxes; however, Colchester's CLA adjustment results in an estimated tax increase of 15.50%.



Approximately 80% of the increase in educational taxes is attributed to the Town of Colchester's CLA adjustment, a factor that is completely outside of the control of the school district.



The simplified intention of Act 127 is to direct education money toward students who need it the most.

Important Note:



This is the first year school districts are using the new funding formula and lawmakers have acknowledged that has not gone as expected. As this report was being finalized, the legislature began signaling that they may change elements of the funding formula that would impact the estimated tax rate, however, they were unable to make a decision before we needed to go to print. This information is accurate as of February 5, 2024. If changes are made by legislators after that date, they will be posted online at csdvt.org/budget.

What is the Common Level of Appraisal (CLA)?



The CLA is one of the variables in the funding formula that is set by the state. It also has a significant impact on the local educational tax rate. The CLA measures how close a community's assessed property value is to its fair market value. Essentially, when home values increase without being reappraised by the Town, the assessed value of the properties falls below fair market value and the CLA attempts to make up for the discrepancy by increasing the educational tax rate.

Properties in Colchester haven't been appraised since 2013, making the disparity between assessed property value and fair market value the largest it has been in at least 14 years. This means that educational taxes are now responsible for making up the difference. The school district does not have the authority to conduct a town reappraisal to redistribute how the owed taxes are collected; only the Town of Colchester does. Until an appraisal is completed, taxpayers in Colchester can expect to see a higher educational tax rate.

2024-25 Budget Information

On January 16, the Colchester School Board approved a budget of \$57,425,957 for the support and operation of the district. Approval of this budget by voters would permit the school board and administrators to advance academic planning, support student needs, and maintain the district's facilities and grounds used by students and the Colchester community.

Remaining fiscally conservative continues to be important to the school board. Over the last 10 years, Colchester School District has consistently been one of the lowest-spending districts in Chittenden County. The district works hard to provide high-quality education in a way that values every cent provided by taxpayers.

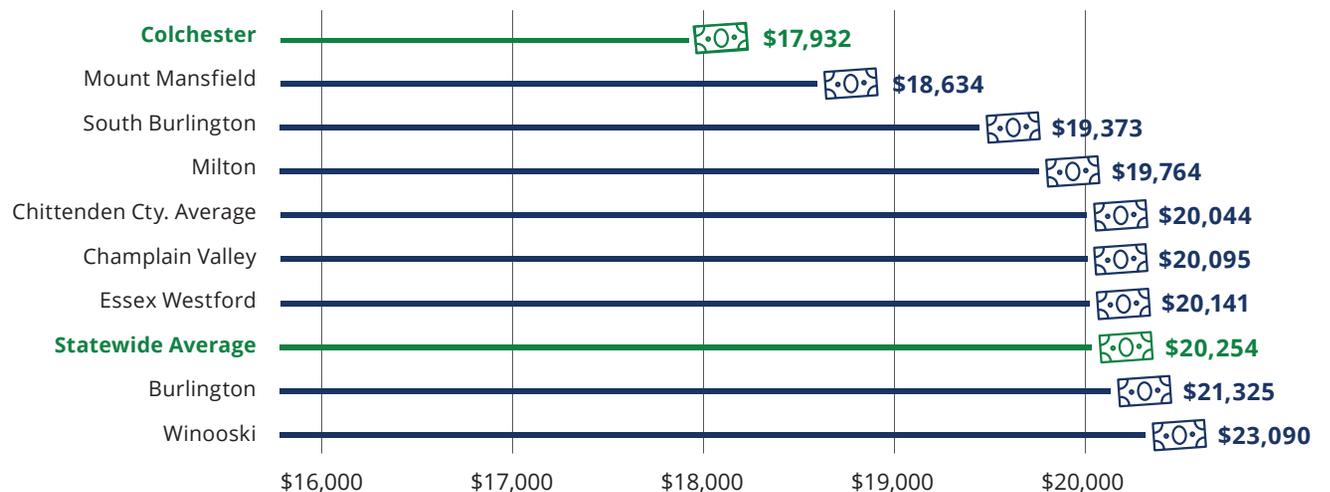
A Tradition of Low Spending

Over the past decade, Colchester taxpayers have averaged an annual increase of just 1.53% in educational taxes, with two of those years having decreased taxes. The estimated tax increase for FY'25 is an abnormality and a result of factors, like the CLA, that are completely out of the control of the school district.



1.53%
average
increase

FY'24 Comparison of Spending Per Equalized Pupil



How Would The Proposed Increase Affect You?

If your household makes less than \$128,000

Approximately 60% of Colchester households make less than \$128,000 a year and are eligible to receive a property tax credit. This allows them to pay taxes based on their household income instead of the value of their home.

Household Income	FY 2024 Taxes Current Year	FY 2025 Taxes Proposed Budget	Estimated Annual Increase
\$50,000	\$1,023	\$1,253	\$230
\$60,000	\$1,227	\$1,504	\$277
\$70,000	\$1,432	\$1,755	\$323
\$80,000	\$1,636	\$2,005	\$369
\$90,000	\$1,841	\$2,256	\$415
\$100,000	\$2,045	\$2,507	\$462
\$110,000	\$2,250	\$2,757	\$507



EXAMPLE: If your household makes \$80,000 per year, your taxes are estimated to increase by \$369 per year or \$30.75 per month.



80% of the increase in educational taxes is to adjust for the Town's low assessment of property values, known as the Common Level of Appraisal. The school district does not have control over that percentage.

If your household makes more than \$128,000

Approximately 40% of Colchester households make more than \$128,000 a year and pay taxes based on their property value, as assessed by the Town of Colchester. 

Property Value	FY 2024 Taxes Current Year	FY 2025 Taxes Proposed Budget	Estimated Annual Increase
\$200,000	\$3,162	\$3,653	\$491
\$250,000	\$3,953	\$4,566	\$613
\$300,000	\$4,744	\$5,479	\$735
\$350,000	\$5,534	\$6,392	\$858
\$400,000	\$6,325	\$7,305	\$980
\$450,000	\$7,115	\$8,218	\$1,103
\$500,000	\$7,906	\$9,132	\$1,226



EXAMPLE: If your home's assessed value by the town is \$350,000, your taxes are estimated to increase by \$858 per year or \$71.50 per month.

This column shows the Town of Colchester's assessed value for your home, often much lower than its fair market value. Check for your home's valuation on the Town's Grand list: colchestervt.gov/619/Grand-List



Please note: This information is accurate as of February 5, 2024. Any changes made by legislators that impact the estimated tax rate will be posted online at: csdvt.org/budget.

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.



59 Rathe Rd, PO Box 27
Colchester, Vermont 05446

RESIDENTIAL CUSTOMER
COLCHESTER, VT 05446



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



Stay in touch: 802.264.5999

Follow us:  