



## American Federation of Teachers - New Hampshire

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Dec. 3, 2024

Commissioner Frank Edelblut  
NH Department of Education  
25 Hall Street  
Concord, NH 03301

Dear Commissioner Edelblut:

On November 14<sup>th</sup> you released a letter to local school district leaders detailing the shortfall in state reimbursement funding for exceptional special education costs. These costs have risen fastest in what we used to call “catastrophic special education aid,” which covers necessary expenses such as out of district placements, transportation costs, and occupational therapy amongst other services.

These costs are not optional for school districts, nor should they be. The State of New Hampshire has a duty to support all its students and their learning needs so they can access their public education in the least restrictive environment. Since 2021 you have flat funded this much needed special education aid in New Hampshire, despite an overall increase in the number of eligible students and the legislature increasing the maximum age of eligibility for students receiving these services. In addition, the cost of all goods and services has risen dramatically during these years due to inflation, so level funding special education aid is actually a cut in the reimbursements for covered programming and services for students that school districts planned on when they built their own budgets.

Without intervention by you, local communities will be stuck footing the bill entirely on their own - a bill currently estimated to be \$17 million statewide. Our members are already hearing concerns from both parents and administrators that this cost will necessitate cuts in other essential services or property tax hikes in cities and towns across the state. It is important to emphasize again that communities have no choice but to fund these necessary special education costs regardless of how much it may be.

This cost should not fall back on local communities, and it does not have to. As Commissioner you have the ability, and we would argue the obligation, to go to the Legislative Joint Fiscal

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Committee and ask for emergency money to cover these important and mandatory expenses. A budgeting error on your part should not mean huge tax increases for so many Granite State families. Nor should it mean weakening the robust public education our Granite State students and their families expect from their local schools.

We respectfully request that you ask the Fiscal Committee for these funds so that our students continue to get the services they need while ensuring that local property taxpayers are not left with large tax increases to cover these costs.

Sincerely,

Deb Howes

*Deb Howes*

President, AFT-NH

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Cc Honorable Rick Ladd, Chair House Education Committee

Honorable Ruth Ward, Chair Senate Education Committee

Honorable Kenneth Wyler, Chair House Finance Committee

Honorable James Gray, Chair Senate Finance Committee