

Wynantskill Union Free School District Optimization Study



June 27, 2025

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Chapter 1: Acknowledgements:

The successful completion of the Wynantskill Union Free School District Optimization Study was made possible through the leadership and foresight of the Board of Education. Their commitment to being fully informed and their willingness to engage in transparently discussing the history, current needs and future challenges of the broader school community, exemplify the values of the Gardner-Dickenson family.

We extend our sincere appreciation to the more than 292 unique and separate stakeholders who contributed their time, insights, and perspectives to this process. This includes forty-seven (47) dedicated staff members, seventy-eight (78) community participants across four (4) public forums, ninety-eight (98) individuals who responded to the districtwide survey providing 619 individual survey extended responses, sixty-three (63) students who participated in structured interviews, and six (6) stakeholders who engaged in private consultations. In addition, the active involvement of the district's administration and each member of the Board of Education, both collectively and individually, strengthened the depth and quality of this study.

The scale and sincerity of stakeholder participation throughout this process were both impressive and deeply impactful. This high level of engagement reflects a shared commitment to the future of the Wynantskill Union Free School District and stands as a strong example of community-centered educational planning.

Chapter 2: Introduction

The Wynantskill Union Free School District has long been recognized for fostering a supportive, student-centered learning environment rooted in academic excellence and community values. As the district looks to the future, it is essential that its next steps be informed by the voices and experiences of those most deeply connected to its mission. In response to the evolving educational landscape, the district has undertaken a comprehensive Optimization Study to examine current conditions, engage stakeholders meaningfully, and collaboratively shape a sustainable, future-focused vision.

This initiative is being facilitated by the Schmitt Leadership Group, LLC, an experienced team of educational leaders with a proven record of guiding school districts through strategic planning and improvement efforts. The Optimization Study methodology is centered on transparency, thoughtful analysis, and elevating stakeholder perspectives to ensure that recommendations reflect the needs and aspirations of the entire school community.

Over the course of the study, input was collected from a diverse cross-section of stakeholders, including the Board of Education, district leadership, faculty, staff, students, and community members. Each voice brought valuable insight, from historical context to present-day concerns and future aspirations. This level of engagement fostered a spirit of shared responsibility and mutual understanding, enabling the Optimization Team to identify key themes.

In addition to qualitative stakeholder feedback, a comprehensive review and analysis of quantitative data was conducted. This included but was not limited to state aid runs, enrollment trends, student achievement data, and a wide range of financial metrics, such as tax rates, tax

levy history, expenditure patterns, reserve levels, both restricted and unrestricted fund balance accounts.

The study also reviewed the district's communication platforms, including its website, social media presence, and Parent-Square notifications, to evaluate the effectiveness of outreach and engagement with the community.

The Optimization Study explored data to arrive at core findings, contained in the Executive Summary to capture the strengths and challenges of the Wynantskill Union Free School District. These findings, confirmed by broad stakeholder input, will inform strategic priorities, address risk, and support the district's pressing sustainability issues while preserving its core values.

To ensure internal validity, all suppositions were tested against multiple independent data sources, including enrollment trends, state aid runs, financial reports, and student performance metrics, stakeholder interviews, and interview/survey responses. This triangulation of data reasonably and consistently affirms the accuracy and reliability of each finding.

The key findings include:

1. Obligations/Contracts: transportation, tuition, collective bargaining agreements
2. Demographics: enrollment trends, achievement, performance outcomes
3. Pedagogical Demands: academic, instructional programs, offerings
4. Resource & Facility Management: financial health and infrastructure
5. Culture, Climate & Community Engagement: community priorities
6. Long-Term Sustainability: future-readiness, resilience and direction forward

Chapter 3: Optimization Study Team Members

Schmitt Leadership Group LLC, founded in 2018 by Mrs. Kathleen and Dr. Brian Schmitt, provides instructional, organizational, and leadership consulting to faculty, staff, boards of education, and supporting organizations. Schmitt Leadership Group collaborates with and provides access to educators willing to share expertise on instructional design, effective leadership strategies, special education, and organizational change. Consultants include former superintendents, school leaders, veteran teachers, and former NYS Principals and Teachers of the Year.

Mr. Robert J. Breidenstein has 38 years of experience in education, having served in leadership capacities in rural, suburban, small city school districts as an Elementary and Secondary School Counselor, Middle School Assistant Principal, Elementary Principal, Director of Special Education, Assistant Superintendent for Pupil Services, and until his June 2022 retirement, as the Superintendent of the Salamanca City Central School District in New York. Mr. Breidenstein currently serves as the Executive Director of the New York State Association of Small City School Districts.

Mr. Breidenstein has a wealth of professional experience as an educational turnaround specialist facilitating substantial improvements in student achievement, strategic planning, school finances, construction, state and federal advocacy, leadership transitions, hiring, mentoring, and contract negotiations. In addition to working as a public school district educator,

Mr. Breidenstein has been an advocate, presenter, and leader at the national, state, and local levels. He is a registered by the NYS Commission on Ethics and Lobbying concentrating on Educational Advocacy. Mr. Breidenstein resides in West Seneca, NY.

Dr. Joshua R. Meyer is the Superintendent of Boquet Valley Central School District in New York, where he has led the district since its founding merger in 2019. A seasoned educational leader, Dr. Meyer played a key role in the consolidation of Westport and Elizabethtown-Lewis Central School Districts, navigating the complex financial, operational, and community dynamics of school reorganization. He holds a doctorate in educational leadership, with his dissertation focusing on best practices in school district mergers. Dr. Meyer is also President of Meyer Merger Studies & Consulting, where he advises school districts on consolidation, long-range planning, and financial sustainability. Widely recognized for his expertise in school finance and district restructuring, Dr. Meyer continues to guide Boquet Valley CSD toward academic innovation and fiscal responsibility.

Dr. Brian Schmitt is a nationally certified school superintendent, completing the AASA National Superintendent Certification Program in 2017 and the Lamar University Superintendents Academy in 2014. He has a Doctorate in Executive Leadership and a Master of Science in Education from St. John Fisher College. Dr. Schmitt has over twenty-five years of classroom and leadership experience. He presents annually at multiple local, state, and national conferences including AASA, NYSCOSS, Rural Schools Association, and NYSSBA. He currently serves as a member of the Executive Committee for NYSCOSS, the Horace Mann League, and the Western New York Education Service Council. He has expertise in leadership, school improvement, STEM classroom and instructional design, facilities management, building community schools, grant writing, leadership and instructional coaching, and board-superintendent relationships. Dr. Brian Schmitt became the Superintendent of the Genesee Valley Central School District in 2012. Prior to Genesee Valley, Dr. Schmitt served as a leader in Hannibal CSD, East Irondequoit CSD and Fairport CSD and as a Spanish Teacher in rural, urban, and suburban districts.

Chapter 4: Process and Data Collection and Methodology

The Wynantskill Union Free School District (UFSD) Optimization Study was designed to provide a thoughtful, data-informed assessment of the district's present state and outline a pathway to guide future decision-making in a challenging fiscal climate. The primary purpose of the study is to gather, interpret and verify stakeholder perspectives, including those of the Board of Education, superintendent, administrators, faculty, staff, students, and community members, regarding the long-term sustainability and success of the district.

This comprehensive analysis evaluates the fiscal, demographic, and instructional realities facing Wynantskill UFSD. The study integrates both quantitative data and qualitative insights, aligning findings with the district's core mission:

Every One • Every Day • In Every Way • Together

Guided by seven (7) foundational belief statements, the study affirms the district's commitment to ensure:

1. Every student has the capacity to learn and succeed.
2. Student achievement depends on collaboration among schools, families, and the broader community.
3. High expectations are essential to help each learner reach their full academic potential.
4. Respect, dignity, and value are extended to all members of the school community.
5. A safe, inclusive, and respectful learning environment fosters student belonging and lifelong learning.
6. Multiple pathways and measures should be used to evaluate success.
7. Fiscal responsibility must balance student needs with community resources.

Throughout the process, the Optimization Team undertook a comprehensive analysis of enrollment patterns, financial metrics, and the district's instructional program history to ensure the study reflected both the district's foundational values and its present-day realities. The methodology was grounded in inclusive and transparent stakeholder engagement, offering all participants meaningful opportunities to contribute their perspectives, pose questions, seek clarification, and collaboratively examine potential solutions.

This engagement was structured across three strategic planning horizons: the immediate term (2024–2025), the near future (2025–2026), and the long term (2027 and beyond). All findings are substantiated through multiple, independently validated data sources and present a reliable and accurate representation of the district's current condition.

Optimization Study Timeline:

- January 2025: Initial Engagement Meeting with Schmitt Leadership Team and District
- February 2025: Team On-Boarding
- February 2025: Optimization Team/District Consultation to schedule stakeholder interviews
- March 2025: Interviewed students in grades 7-8, staff interviews and community forums
- March 2025: Stakeholder interview debriefing, clarification
- April 2025: Data analysis
- April 2025: Optimization Team/District process check in and data discussion
- May 2025: Optimization Planning meeting (data findings, scheduling confirmation)
- May 2025: Survey Launches
- May 2025: Community Forums and BOE presentation
- June 2025: Survey Closes
- June 2025: Preliminary survey findings analyzed and shared with the District
- June 2025: Optimization Team/District process check in, calendar alignment for June Executive Summary presentation to BOE (June 12)
- June 12: BOE Presentation of Executive Summary
- June 2025: Final Report writing and editing
- June 27, 2025: Final Report submitted to district
- July 1, 2025: Final Report Q&A at BOE Re-Organizational meeting

Purpose and Structure of Engagement

The Optimization Study aimed to assess the district's current state and explore future opportunities through robust stakeholder input. The process engaged a broad cross-section of the Wynantskill community to:

- ❖ Identify shared priorities
- ❖ Assess concerns alongside opportunities for long-term sustainability
- ❖ Discuss the district's legacy and potential pathways forward

Engagement methods included in-person forums, individual and small-group interviews, remote meetings, and survey feedback.

Engagement Activities Overview

Community Forums and Public Presentations

- ❖ Four (4) Stakeholder Forums (March 18 [2 sessions] & May 22 [2 sessions])- 78 total community participants
- ❖ Two (2) Board of Education Community Updates – March 20 and May 22, 2025
- ❖ One (1) Executive Summary Presentation to the BOE- June 12, 2025
- ❖ One (1) Final Written Report and Recommendations Presentation- July 1, 2025

Student, Staff, and Leadership Interviews

- ❖ Sixty-three (63) students in grades 7–8, over 8 small group sessions, 40 minutes each
- ❖ Forty-seven (47) Faculty and Staff Members– Individual and small group interviews over multiple days
- ❖ Seven (7) District Administrators and Supervisors- over 45–75-minute interviews
- ❖ Five (5) Board of Education Members– Individual interviews, 30-40 minutes each
- ❖ Three (3) Board of Education Workshops/Presentations– held in March, May, and June 2025
- ❖ One (1) Optimization Team Participation in Dr. Timbs' Financial Presentation- May 2025

Private Stakeholder Conversations

- ❖ Six (6) One-on-One or Small-Group Private Conversations– Including taxpayers, families, staff, and board members

Survey Engagement

- ❖ Ninety-eight (98) Community Survey Respondents- Provided 618 short and extended responses

Engagement Totals

- ❖ 927 documented instances of stakeholder engagement across forums, interviews, surveys, and meetings.

- ❖ Engagement spanned January to July 2025 and involved students, staff, families, community members, and board members.

Conclusion

The scope, frequency, and depth of participation in the Optimization Study demonstrate a broad and meaningful cross-section of stakeholder engagement. As such, the findings and recommendations are regarded as valid, well-informed, and reflective of community values and priorities.

Chapter 5: Stakeholder Interview Summary and Analysis

A. Student Voice Summary: Immediate Needs and Urgent Priorities

As part of the Wynantskill Union Free School District Optimization Study, the Optimization Team conducted direct engagement with the 7th and 8th grade student body on March 4, 2025. In small group settings held in the newly renovated Community Connect Room, students participated in candid, solution-focused discussions centered on their educational experiences, academic and extracurricular opportunities, and vision for an improved learning environment.

The student-focused interview sessions offered meaningful insight and established a valuable foundation that underscores the significance of the Optimization Study. Students consistently expressed a desire for broader opportunities, more engaging and rigorous learning experiences, and a stronger sense of connection to their school community. Their voices present a compelling call to action, highlighting the urgent need for strategic improvements across several key areas.

Summary of Key Student Themes

1. Demand for Expanded Co-Curricular Opportunities

Students consistently expressed frustration over the limited availability of extracurricular activities, particularly in grades 7 and 8. The absence of diverse, developmentally appropriate offerings, especially in athletics, the arts, clubs, and enrichment were cited as a major gap in the student experience. The students universally expressed a strong, unwavering desire for more expanded opportunities for after-school activities that build community, cultivate talents, and foster engagement.

2. Academic Rigor and Relevance

While confident in their ability to meet higher academic expectations, students stressed that rigor must be delivered through interactive, hands-on, and modern instructional approaches. Traditional worksheets and lecture-based lessons were described by the student stakeholders as uninspiring. Students vocally advocated project-based learning, real-world applications, and increased integration of technology and laboratory experiences. Student leaders emerged during the Optimization Team interviews and made clear, they need academic offerings to be more challenging, more readily available and expand significantly. Students simultaneously expressed frustration that the district is probably not able to move in this direction because of a variety of factors including money, facilities, staffing and “old school teaching” strategies.

3. Inadequate Athletic Facilities

Students across all groups, even those not currently involved in athletics, voiced concerns about the poor condition of athletic fields and gym facilities, often citing safety risks and the district's inability to field competitive teams due to low participation. They strongly advocated for improved athletic infrastructure and suggested adding sports such as volleyball, lacrosse, and e-sports to increase engagement and competitiveness. In the absence of expanded offerings, students supported forming athletic partnerships with other districts. Their feedback emphasized that having the opportunity to participate matters more than starting positions, reflecting a strong, shared desire to compete, belong, and be part of a team.

4. High School Preferences Reflect Desire for Elevated Opportunities

Student interest in high school selection beginning in September of 2025, particularly Troy and Averill Park, reveals a growing disconnect between the offerings currently available at Wynantskill and student aspirations impacting their future school experiences. Many students who preferred Troy High School cited its robust academic content and comprehensive co-curricular opportunities, including access to advanced coursework, arts, athletics, and clubs that support both personal development and college/career readiness. Those favoring Averill Park often made their decision based on family ties and peer influence, noting that friends or siblings had attended and had positive experiences.

Importantly, student commentary reflected a clear differentiation between academic rigor, relevance, and emotional resonance. Many expressed a strong desire to attend a high school environment that balances rigorous academic expectations with social and emotional support tailored to the developmental needs of teenagers. They are seeking a program that does not simply offer more, but that aligns with their lived experiences, learning styles, and personal well-being, a school culture where academic challenge is met with relational connection, relevance, and responsiveness.

5. Transportation

Students offered thoughtful, firsthand observations about the district's transportation system, often describing their experiences as inconsistent. Although students did not provide detailed examples, their comments suggest further inquiry. Regionally and throughout NYS, transportation stressors are a common reality in spite of the best efforts of drivers, support staff and administration.

6. Facilities, Modernization, and Physical Environment

The school was described as "drab," "old," and "uninviting." Students made a direct plea for facility upgrades, citing the importance of a safe, welcoming, and modern learning space. This includes improvements to common areas, classroom technology, and general aesthetics to better reflect a 21st-century learning environment.

7. Student Voice and Inclusion in Decision-Making

The district's cell phone policy, backpack, locker utilization, bell schedule, assemblies and ancillary policies were a symbol of a larger issue: students feel that their voices are not included in shaping school policies. They called for more consistent enforcement of rules, greater fairness, and a genuine seat at the table when decisions impacting their daily lives are made.

The students felt comfortable sharing their ideas with the Optimization Team, and their feedback is considered a reliable and authentic representation of student voice.

8. School Size and Peer Dynamics

Students expressed differing views on the value of a small school environment. Many appreciated the close-knit atmosphere, strong peer relationships, and individualized attention that a smaller cohort provides. Conversely, others voiced a preference for greater academic and co-curricular opportunities, increased diversity, and dynamic social experiences typically found in larger school systems. As the district evaluates future alignment options, it must carefully weigh these contrasting priorities to ensure students' varied needs and aspirations are meaningfully addressed.

Conclusion and Call to Action

The findings from this initial student engagement session are both clear and urgent. Students are calling for more opportunities: instructional, co-curricular and interscholastic, that better meet their needs and reflect a dynamic, future-refocused school culture. They are asking not for luxury, but for expanded opportunities.

The Optimization Team suggests that the district act to address these student priorities:

1. Expansion of co-curricular options
2. Expansion of more interactive instructional strategies
3. Improvement of athletics, physical infrastructure or at a minimum expanded opportunity
4. Inclusion of student voice in district governance

This moment presents not only a challenge but a tremendous opportunity to reshape the educational experience in Wynantskill UFSD. The students have spoken persuasively and constructively and are deeply invested in their future.

B. Staff, Community Stakeholder Engagement

The Optimization Team engaged approximately forty (40) staff and seventy-five (75) community members through interviews, small-group discussions, and forums. Staff shared concerns about professional sustainability, instructional consistency, student needs, and the long-term viability of the district. Community participants reflected on the district's history, values, and mission, emphasizing the importance of maintaining a strong local school system. While pride in the district's culture was evident, stakeholders emphasized absent systemic change, current efforts are not sustainable. Key concerns included heavy workloads, communication gaps, operational inefficiencies, and financial uncertainty.

Key Findings

1. Professional Sustainability and Staff Well-Being

Staff feel overwhelmed by increased responsibilities, scheduling limitations, and role overload, particularly in a small-school model where cross-role versatility is necessary but increasingly unsustainable. Staff repeatedly referenced multitiered responsibilities (e.g., the 6–8 model,

singleton roles) that stretch capacity and impact their ability to deliver high-quality instruction consistently. This directly correlates with staff retention risks and burnout.

Future District Focus: Qualitative feedback across 40+ staff members expressed a shared concern for the long-term professional viability without structural or workload relief.

2. Instructional Disruptions and Program Design

Frequent instructional disruptions, stemming from coverage gaps, professional development scheduling, and inadequate staffing, undermine classroom effectiveness and hinder staff from delivering rigorous instruction or meeting remedial needs with consistency. Both instructional staff and community members identified substitute coverage issues, frequent interruptions, and staffing instability as significant barriers to instructional continuity. The middle school configuration (Grades 6–8) was cited as especially problematic, with educators struggling to meet curriculum expectations and establish a cohesive program identity.

Future District Focus: Stakeholder input highlights operational inefficiencies tied to scheduling models, certification gaps and grade-level curriculum, affecting instructional quality.

3. Organizational Culture, Role Clarity, and Leadership Visibility

While the dedication of the administrative team and their commitment to students, staff, and the district is recognized and appreciated, stakeholders have expressed a desire for a more visible leadership presence during daily routines such as arrival, dismissal, and transitions. Staff indicated that consistent, engaged leadership in these moments would help strengthen morale and allow for timely, responsive support. Students have requested increased academic rigor, and staff feedback indicates a need for more programmatic guidance to implement effective instructional strategies. There is also an underlying acknowledgment that, within a small system, capacity is limited. It is therefore important to ensure that expectations remain realistic and sustainable for all involved.

Future District Focus: The governance team should explore opportunities to limit instructional interferences that mitigate movement towards a more rigorous instructional program, especially in the upper intermediate and middle level grades. The staff and instructional leaders have expressed a profound desire to be part of this discussion and journey.

4. Financial Sustainability and Labor Impact

Staff expressed deep concerns regarding financial stability, job security, and the future of their profession in the Wynantskill UFSD. Uncertainty around program realignment or consolidation, paired with stagnant local and state funding formulas, budget constraints and dwindling resources, has elevated anxiety levels. The teachers' union has advocated for transparent dialogue and collaborative problem-solving to protect jobs and maintain program integrity.

Multiple professional and non-instructional stakeholders explicitly connected financial stressors to increased workload, reduced programming, and concerns about future employment.

To honor this legacy and uphold the district's mission, it is incumbent upon the district's leadership team to fully explore all options without preconditions or exclusions to ensure the continuation of a high-quality educational program. These options may include, but are not limited to, expanded tuition-based partnerships for middle school students, revision of existing contracts for tuition agreements and transportation contracts, expansion of co-curricular or athletic consolidations or the potential merger with a suitable educational partner that shares the district's core values and commitment to student success.

Leadership, collaborative problem-solving, and community engagement are essential requirements to create an enduring and sustainable future. Consistent with the district's mission: ***Every Day • In Every Way • Together***, any action taken must preserve the spirit of "togetherness", so all stakeholders are able to contribute in a meaningful way to develop solutions.

Future District Focus: Across stakeholder groups, there was a consistent and palpable sense of apprehension regarding the long-term sustainability of the district in its current configuration. Many stakeholders expressed an urgent call for action. Action to preserve the core tenets of the district. Action to maintain the values of the Gardner-Dickinson experience. Action that acknowledges its history but also moves towards a vibrant future.

5. Community & Stakeholder Engagement: *Reflecting the Voices of Families, Alumni, and Community Stakeholders*

Throughout the study, community members expressed deep affection for the district by recognizing its historical significance, strong relationships, and consistent commitment to providing a safe, nurturing environment for children. There was also a shared sense of urgency regarding the district's ability to provide both a rigorous and challenging educational experience for students, for the middle school level, where constraints in enrollment, staffing needs, proper certification expertise, and program breadth are noticeably limiting student opportunity.

The following key themes emerged from community commentary, highlighting both cherished strengths and areas in need of thoughtful reorganization:

Pride in Tradition and Community Connection- The district is seen as a cornerstone of the community. Generations of families have attended the Gardner-Dickinson School, and many alumni return as staff or remain active in the district through volunteerism or governance. The small-school setting fosters a family atmosphere where children are known by name, educators

maintain long-term relationships with students, and families feel a deep sense of trust and safety. These bonds were described as irreplaceable and foundational to the district's identity.

Limitations Due to Size and Enrollment- While the small size contributes to strong relationships, it also presents significant programmatic and operational challenges. Families and staff expressed concern that dwindling enrollment and staffing reductions have resulted in fewer extracurricular opportunities, limited arts programming, and insufficient student participation to support athletic teams. Many families cited specific examples such as the lack of band and chorus, difficulty staffing musicals or adding requested clubs, and the inability to field full, competitive sports teams as pervasive symptoms of structural constraints.

Concerns About Middle School Programming and Identity- The middle school level (grades 6–8) emerged as the most critical point of discussion and concern. Many families shared that their children's experiences during these years were hindered by the district's inability to offer a full spectrum of courses, activities, and enrichment. In the current model, students spend three years with the same teachers, which may lead to either strong relationships or challenges for those who struggle to connect. Families described a lack of cohesion and identity for the middle school grades and indicated that the grade structure and offerings need reevaluation.

Competitive Disadvantages and High School Transitions- Stakeholders expressed similar sentiments to the students about when they transition to Troy, Averill Park, or other high schools, they benefit from enhanced programming and extracurricular offerings. Many families, especially those from Little Red, actively choose to transfer before middle school to gain access to improved music, athletics, and academic programs. There is strong appreciation for high school choice, but a substantial number of community members expressed frustration that too many secondary options are limiting the opportunities for the larger Wynantskill community to enjoy a PK-8 comprehensive program. Concerns were voiced about inconsistent preparation when students transition to grade 9 and limited options during the key middle school years. The current tuition agreements were praised for offering flexibility, but several community members questioned their long-term financial sustainability given the variable cost implications.

Financial Sustainability and Structural Reorganization

Participants clearly understand the financial needs of the district. Comparisons with other districts showed that tax burdens are high while offerings remain narrow. Community members suggested that reorganization may be necessary to preserve the district's values while enhancing opportunity. Families were open to the possibility of merging the middle school grades with a neighboring district that shares similar values and a strong sense of community, academic commitment, and student-centered priorities. Any potential action, stakeholders noted, must be rooted in preserving the close-knit, personalized culture of Wynantskill while providing expanded options for students.

Communication and Parent Engagement- While some families praised the improved use of *ParentSquare* and digital updates, others cited communication gaps. The desire for more outreach and an expansion of parental involvement was voiced often as was an appreciation for leadership that listens and responds to feedback. There is a clear consensus on the value of further improving communication.

Exploring Reorganization- Given the sustained concerns regarding finances, program and academic preparation, the community appears increasingly open to serious investigation of structural reorganization. To address articulated concerns, any future consideration must:

- ❖ Expand academic and elective course offerings
- ❖ Provide consistent access to sports, music, and clubs
- ❖ Improve peer group diversity and social opportunities
- ❖ Alleviate staffing strain and improve professional development for educators
- ❖ Enhance financial efficiency through shared services or tuition-based models
- ❖ Recognize the pressing needs of the transportation, food service and the buildings and grounds departments

Stakeholders with children in grades Pre-K through 5 expressed high satisfaction with the current academic program and student support systems. However, many voiced concerns about their children's future readiness for high school, citing program limitations, financial pressures, and long-term uncertainty. Nearly all emphasized the importance of preserving the distinctive Gardner-Dickinson experience, characterized by small class sizes, student-centered learning, and strong teacher-student relationships, regardless of any future changes. They advocated maintaining these core values in an opportunity-rich educational structure, if reorganization becomes necessary.

Curriculum, Special Education, and Student Differentiation- While concerns about curriculum and programming emerged throughout the stakeholder engagement process, it is important to clarify that the focus of the Optimization Study was not, and should not be interpreted as, a comprehensive evaluation of curriculum, instructional content, or pedagogy. Instead, the study represents a high-level assessment of district-wide trends, strengths, and challenges as reported by stakeholders, program participants, and the broader community.

Within that context, notable concerns were raised regarding gaps in both special education services and enrichment opportunities for advanced learners. These issues are not solely instructional but are tied to broader uncertainties related to staffing capacity, financial constraints, and the long-term sustainability of programs essential to delivering comprehensive

academic experience. Special education staffing shortages and placement concerns suggest systemic challenges that may compromise IEP compliance and equity. Similarly, the reduction of accelerated academic offerings, particularly at the middle school level, has impacted preparation for high school for students.

While student performance is generally viewed as strong, stakeholders voiced concerns that educational opportunities are becoming more limited. Concerns include rising financial pressures and the need for increasingly specialized staff expertise which make it difficult to maintain high quality programs. Furthermore, staff have reported challenges in accessing professional development opportunities due to time limitations and the solitary nature of their positions, which adversely impacts instructional quality and innovation. To address these challenges, the district should prioritize investment in embedded professional learning and collaborative networks that support staff growth without disrupting instruction, while also working to remove structural barriers that threaten the long-term viability of high-quality educational experiences.

Uncertainty and Communication Needs- Given unsubstantiated rumors about the future of the district, a sense of anxiety and instability across stakeholder groups exists. The dissemination of accurate and timely information will expand trust as the district wrestles with challenging decisions. The fear of impending change can overshadow the thoughtful work already underway. Stakeholders recognize the need to explore options, but they seek reassurance that their voices will be included in the process and that changes will be clearly communicated.

Future District Focus

Student, staff, and community input strongly supports revising the district's high school tuition agreements to a narrower, more sustainable model. Moving forward, the district should reduce or eliminate the practice of placing students in six or seven different high schools to enhance consistency, equity, and long-term viability and to reduce the growing burden in the transportation department. The Optimization Team reviewed secondary high school placements, and a narrowing of placement scope could provide some financial relief to the district.

Additionally, stakeholders should be reassured that any substantial programmatic changes will involve considerable community input and transparency.

Stakeholder Trend Analysis

Topic Summary

Stakeholder Agreement of Topic	Topic
All Constituents	<u>Academics are compromised (excluding elementary school)</u> because of low enrollment, limited options and financial resources
All Constituents	There is uncertainty about the viability of the <u>district's survival in the future</u>
Parents, Faculty & Staff, Community, Administration, BOE, Private Stakeholders	Even with thoughtful planning and communication, <u>staff retention and recruitment are a pressing risk factor</u> that will impact the future of the district
Faculty & Staff, Administration, BOE	<u>Staff members are committed to the district</u> but are gravely anxious about the sustainability of the district
All Constituents (but vary on timeframe)	The district will need to <u>make difficult decisions within a short (3 months), moderate (6 months) and long (12 months) timeframe</u>
All Constituents	All decisions will need to <u>implement a thoughtful communication</u>
Parents, Faculty & Staff, Community, Administration, BOE	Staff <u>recruitment and retention</u> is a pressing immediate concern
All Constituents	<u>Finances are a substantial, urgent concern</u> with little realistic hope of a solution from Albany or Washington DC
Students, Private Stakeholder	Students want <u>expanded programmatic opportunities</u>
All Constituents	Community is <u>realistic that change must occur</u>
Faculty & Staff, Administration, BOE	<u>More face-to-face interactions</u> and less email communications are warranted
All Constituents	<u>Stakeholders agree there is an urgency to act.</u>
All Constituents	Elevated <u>academic rigor is a priority</u>

Chapter 6: Electronic Survey Data and Results

The Optimization Team launched a stakeholder survey on April 25, 2025. The survey remained open until June 2, 2025. There were ninety-eight (98) stakeholder respondents. The survey included direct responses and extended response options which elicited 618 responses. Extended responses are included in the appendices of the Optimization Study report with personally identifiable information and inappropriate comments redacted. The Optimization Team discussed the survey with school leaders on June 3, 2025, but did not share any individual responses prior to presenting its findings.

The intent of the community survey was to better understand stakeholder perspectives and inform future planning. The first section of the survey (Q:1-5) focused on respondent

demographics, including their relationship to the district, length of affiliation, age, and whether they had children currently enrolled in the district, along with the grade levels of those children.

Subsequent questions (Q6-8) explored perceptions of program quality, identifying both key strengths, such as small class sizes and a strong sense of community, and anticipated challenges over the next five years, including financial constraints, staffing limitations, and declining enrollment. Respondents provided input (Q:9-11) on student readiness for high school, with several highlighting the need for expanded middle school offerings to improve transitions. Preferences regarding class sizes indicated strong support for maintaining a personalized learning environment.

Survey questions (Q: 12-14) related to sustainability and yielded a growing concern about the district's long-term financial viability. Respondents offered mixed opinions about the potential for supporting tax increases. Budget priorities most cited included staffing, student services, and extracurricular opportunities. Participants provided feedback on preferred communication methods (Q: 15), emphasizing email, website updates, and community forums as the most effective ways to stay informed. Open-ended responses (Q: 17-20) reflected a deep commitment to the district's values and legacy, with suggestions focused on strengthening staff recruitment and retention, increasing transparency, increasing academic and extracurricular offerings. Additionally fostering stronger community relationships emerged frequently throughout the survey.

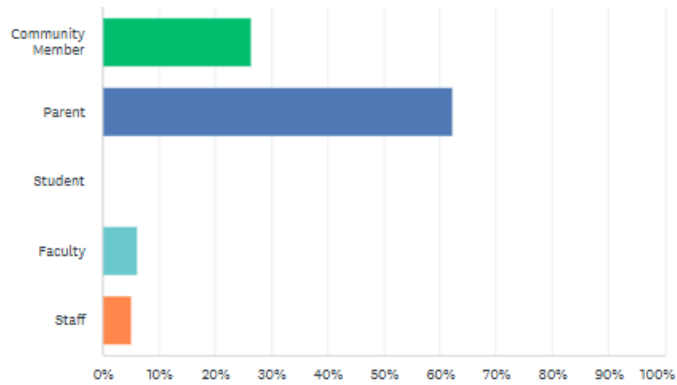
The findings collectively highlight the community's commitment to preserving the core identity of the district, while also recognizing the need to proactively confront emerging fiscal and programmatic challenges. Detailed extended responses from survey participants are included in the appendices of the Optimization Report. Survey data charts are included below:

Q1



Please select your affiliation with Wynantskill UFSD:

Answered: 98 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Community Member	26.53%	26
Parent	62.24%	61
Student	0.00%	0
Faculty	6.12%	6
Staff	5.10%	5
TOTAL		98

Analysis:

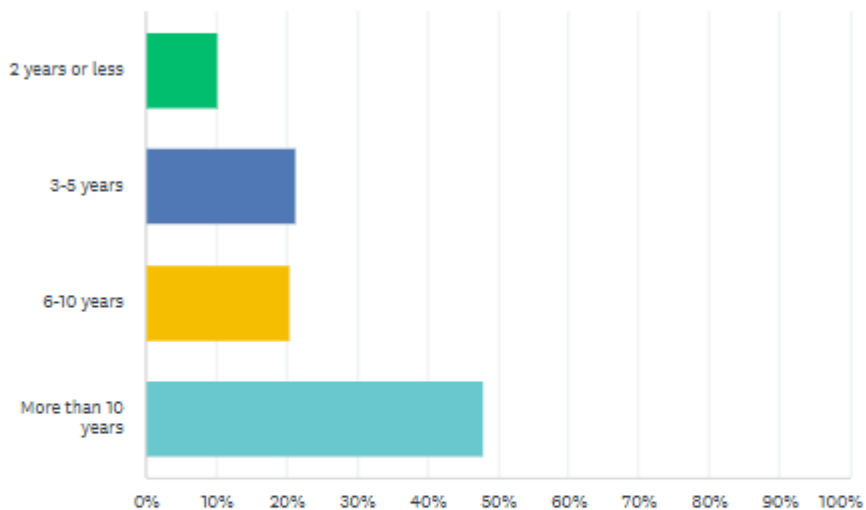
One hundred percent (100%) of survey respondents self-reported as adults.

Q2



How long have you been associated with Wynantskill UFSD?

Answered: 98 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
2 years or less	10.20%	10
3-5 years	21.43%	21
6-10 years	20.41%	20
More than 10 years	47.96%	47
TOTAL		98

Analysis:

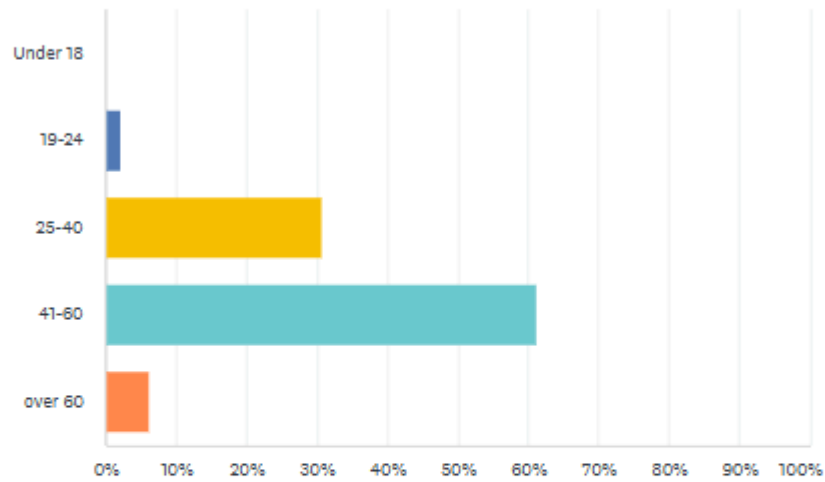
More than sixty-eight (68%) percent of survey respondents self-reported association with the Wynantskill UFSD for over six (6) years. This data indicates a deep familiarity with the district and suggests awareness of the current educational and economic state.

Q3



What is your age group?

Answered: 98 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Under 18	0.00%	0
19-24	2.04%	2
25-40	30.61%	30
41-60	61.22%	60
over 60	6.12%	6
TOTAL		98

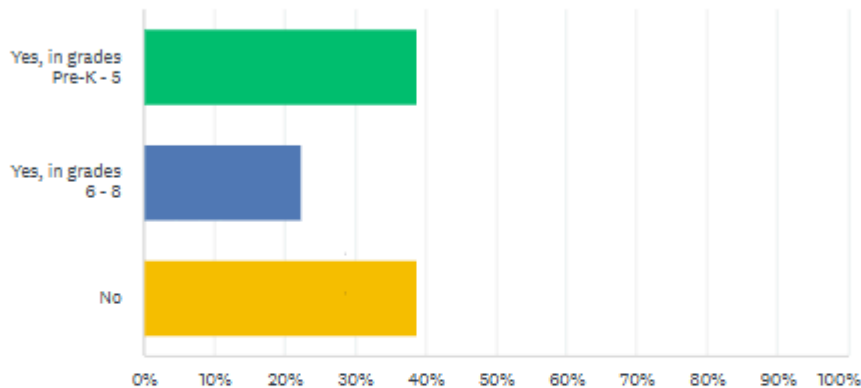
Analysis:

Of the survey respondents, ninety-eight (98) percent self-reported being over the age of twenty four (24) years old.



Do you currently have a child enrolled in Wynantskill UFSD?

Answered: 98 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes, in grades Pre-K - 5	38.78%	38
Yes, in grades 6 - 8	22.45%	22
No	38.78%	38
TOTAL		98

[Comments \(57\)](#)

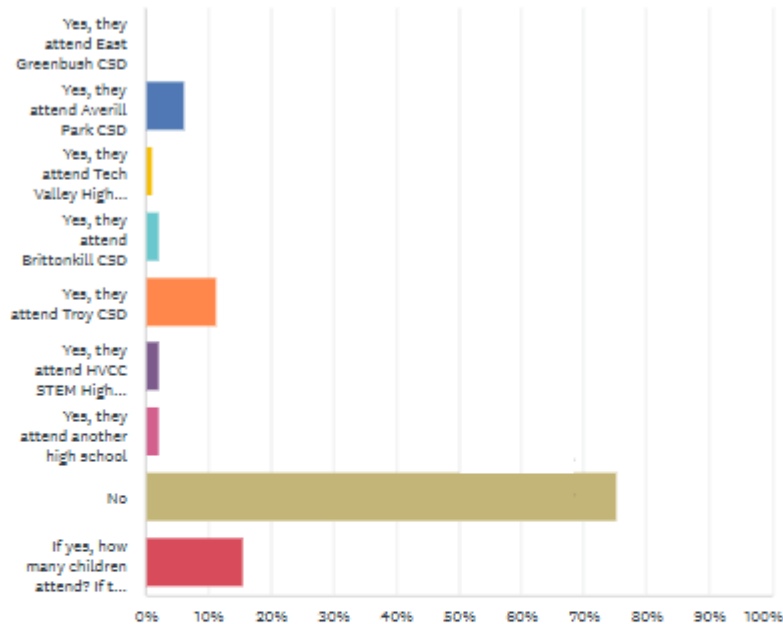
Analysis:

The demographic breakdown aligns with typical survey trends, with a higher proportion of responses coming from elementary families. A strong primary age focus is a common pattern in school-related surveys. Additionally, the number of “no” responses, indicating no children currently enrolled in the district, reflects broader community demographics, where most residents do not have school-aged children in the system. This group represents an important demographic to consider during the decision-making process, particularly when evaluating potential reorganization options that could impact the entire community.



Do you currently have any students in grades 9-12?

Answered: 97 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Yes, they attend East Greenbush CSD	0.00% 0
Yes, they attend Averill Park CSD	6.19% 6
Yes, they attend Tech Valley High School	1.03% 1
Yes, they attend Brittonkill CSD	2.06% 2
Yes, they attend Troy CSD	11.34% 11
Yes, they attend HVCC STEM High School	2.06% 2
Yes, they attend another high school	2.06% 2
No	75.26% 73
If yes, how many children attend? If the high school is not listed, please include the name of the high school.	Responses 15.46% 15
Total Respondents: 97	

Analysis:

The breakdown of secondary school placements serves as a useful reference point for ongoing discussion and analysis. Survey responses indicate that most participants do not currently have a child enrolled in high school. Among those who do, the second most frequently selected option was “Other,” which may reflect private school enrollment, homeschooling, or attendance in a neighboring district where employees may enroll their children under the terms of a collective bargaining agreement without a formal tuition arrangement. Consistent with historical patterns, Troy City School District and Averill Park Central School District remain the two most common public high school destination with private schools a close third choice for students in grades 9–12. Internal documents confirm secondary placements in 2024-25 as follows:

24/25 Student Placement Statistics (September 2024)

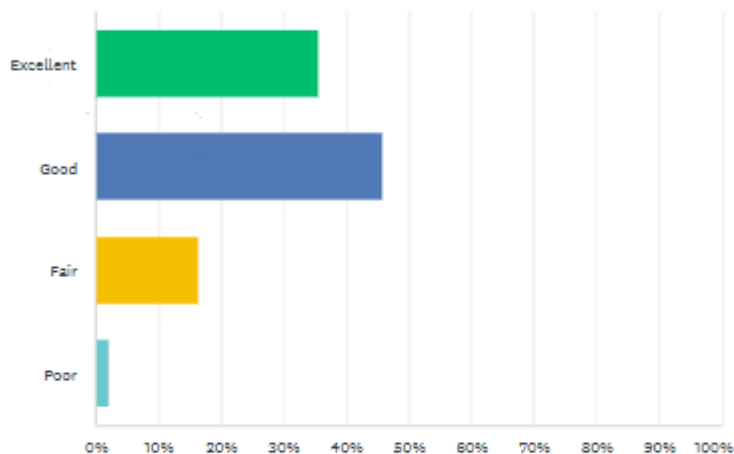
Secondary Placement	Students
Averill Park HS	54
Brunswick HS	8
East Greenbush	9
Troy City	38
PTECH HVCC	13
Tech Valley HS	5
Private Placements (varied grades)	36
Home School	8
Wildwood	2
BOCES	18

Q6



How would you rate the overall quality of education at Wynantskill UFSD?

Answered: 98 Skipped: 0

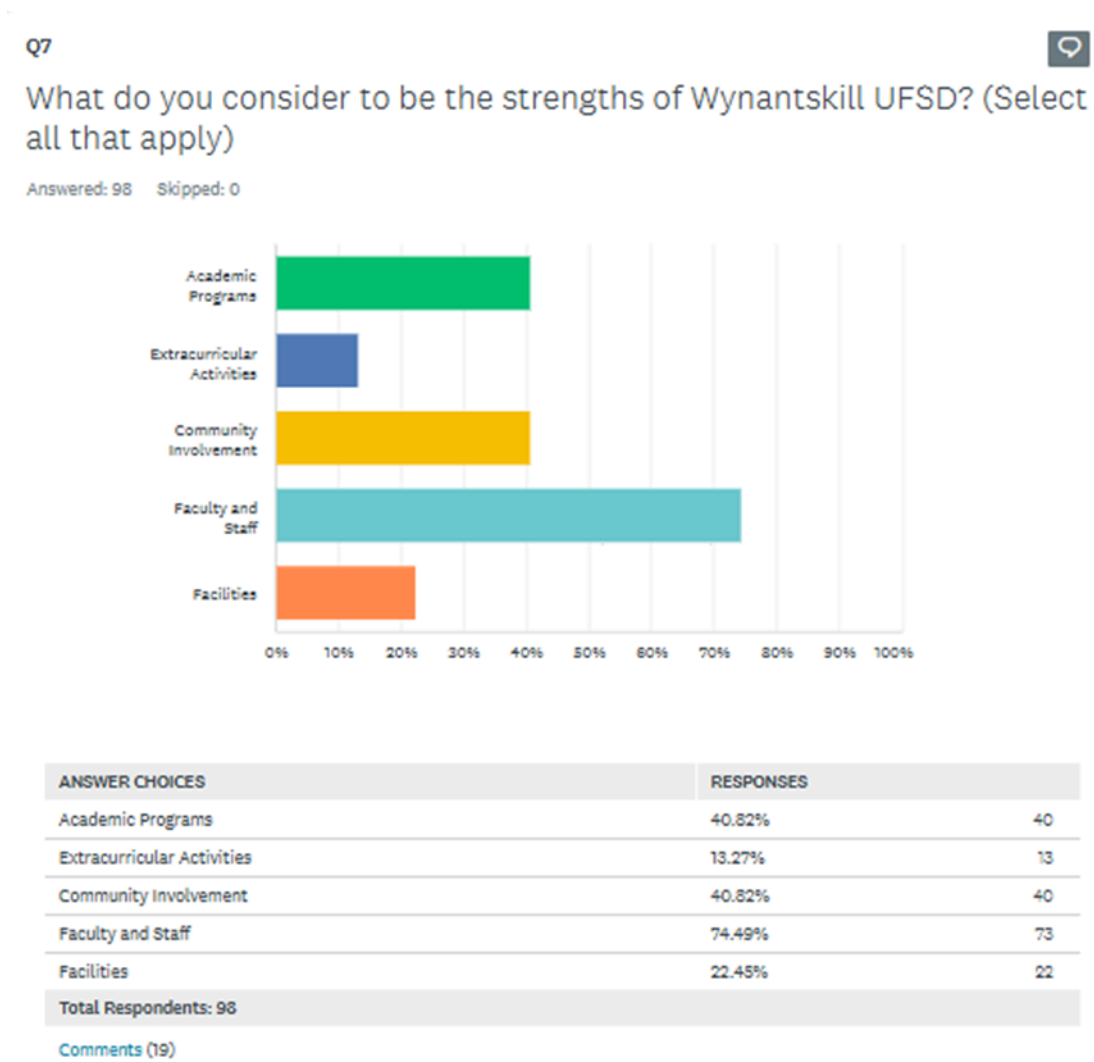


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Excellent	35.71%	35
Good	45.92%	45
Fair	16.33%	16
Poor	2.04%	2
TOTAL		98

Analysis:

More than eighty-one percent (81%) of survey respondents rated the overall quality of their child's education as good or excellent. Stakeholder interviews consistently affirmed that the

district meets or exceeds performance goals, provides a strong elementary program, and sustains a solid graduation rate. New York State Education Department test data supports this perception, showing the district performs comparably to state benchmarks. However, concerns emerged around the middle school program, where financial constraints, limited lab-based learning, reduced access to advanced coursework, and other challenges were cited as potential obstacles to student success. Further inquiry into the middle school program is recommended.

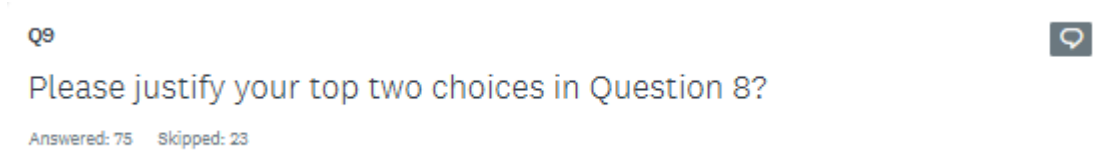
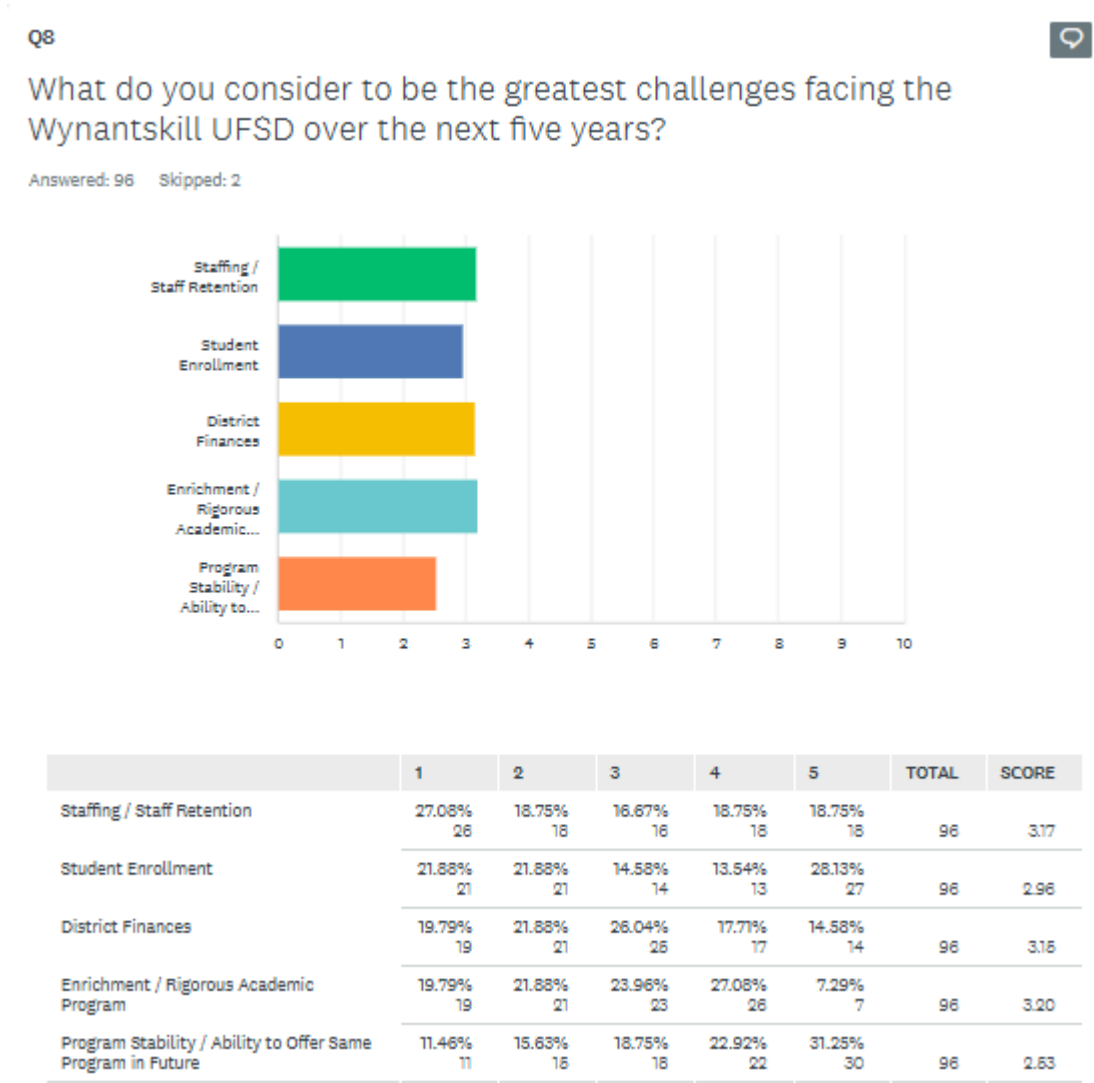


Analysis:
Survey respondents overwhelmingly identified the district's faculty and staff as a core strength. Survey and interview responses consistently praised staff for their dedication, visibility, and commitment to students. Community involvement and the overall quality of academic programming were often cited as a visible strength of the district. Stakeholders also described the district as a caring and engaged school culture.

In contrast, respondents expressed clear concerns in multiple key areas. Prominent themes emerged including the limited availability of extracurricular activities, clubs, and access to music or performance-based programs, which many felt hindered student enrichment beyond the

classroom. Facilities were also frequently mentioned as a challenge. While the building’s small community feel and historical value were deeply appreciated, there was widespread recognition that the campus requires modernization. Concerns were raised about the financial implications of any upgrades, with some fearing that increased debt could further constrain existing academic and extracurricular offerings.

Student interviews echoed these concerns, particularly emphasizing that limited access to high-tech computers and laboratory-based instruction diminishes the quality of their middle-level educational experience and limits their readiness for more advanced coursework.



Analysis Questions 8 & 9:

Survey responses reveal growing concern about the district’s escalating fiscal and programmatic challenges over the next thirty-six (36) months. Stakeholders identified key instructional priorities:

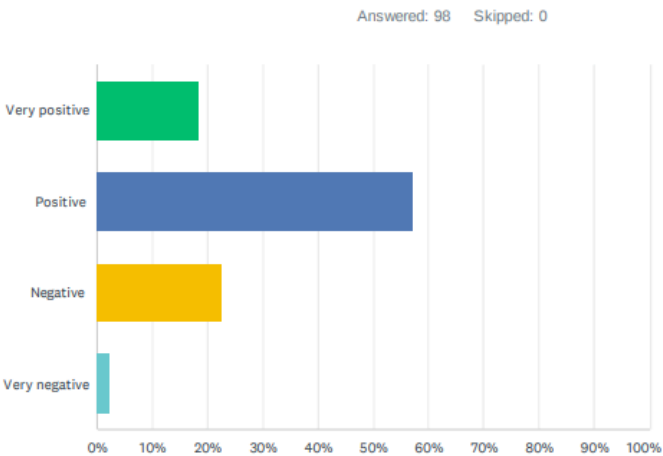
- 1. Limited educational rigor across current programming
- 2. Apprehension about district finances
- 3. Staffing retention/recruitment obstacles

Each of these priorities is closely linked to financial constraints.

Students, staff, and community members also expressed significant apprehension about the district’s capacity to maintain a balanced, high-quality educational experience. A shared concern emerged across all groups: the recruitment and retention of qualified staff. Specific issues include certification gaps among new hires, staffing shortages, particularly at the middle level, and a perception that financial instability is discouraging potential educators from joining Wynantskill UFSD.

Underlying these issues is a unifying theme: long-term financial sustainability. While not always visible in daily operations, it continues to shape public confidence and the district’s strategic direction. Combined with fluctuating enrollment and uncertainty about the district’s future structure, these fiscal pressures are creating widespread unease. To address these challenges, the district must engage in a transparent, collaborative, and forward-thinking planning process. It will take collective leadership, open dialogue, and commitment to ensure long-term stability.

Q10 Do you feel students are prepared to transition into the high school of choice?

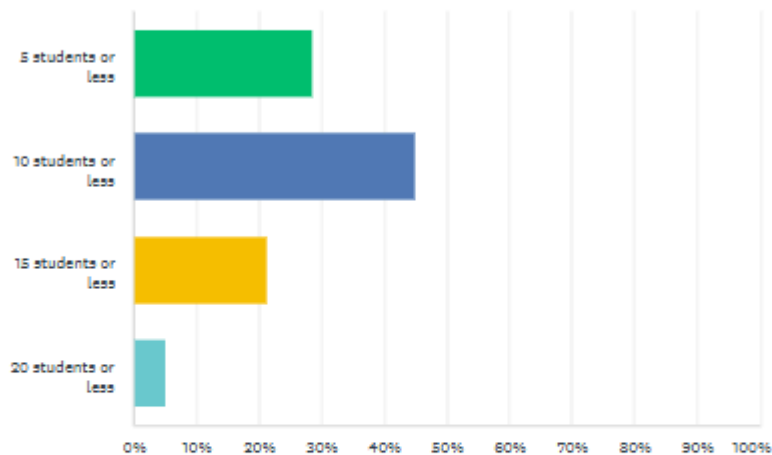


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Very positive	18.37%	18
Positive	57.14%	56
Negative	22.45%	22
Very negative	2.04%	2
TOTAL		98



When do you believe a class size is too small?

Answered: 98 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
5 students or less	28.57%	28
10 students or less	44.90%	44
15 students or less	21.43%	21
20 students or less	5.10%	5
TOTAL		98

Analysis Questions 10 & 11:

Overall, most respondents (73.47%) indicated that their child or children feel positively or very positively prepared for high school. However, student stakeholder feedback presents a more nuanced perspective. Many students expressed concerns that their academic program lacked the rigor necessary to fully prepare them for the high school experience they envision.

Specifically, students cited limited access to hands-on learning experiences and a noticeable absence of laboratory-based instruction in the sciences. Additionally, several students noted a lack of opportunities for academic acceleration, particularly in music and the fine arts, areas they felt lacked both depth and availability. Similarly, staff members felt they were constrained in the pace of instruction because of other pedagogical demands (i.e. scheduling, remedial requirements, limited resources, etc.). Collectively, these real and perceived deficits diminish the overall impact and effectiveness of the educational experience.

Interestingly, there was no clear consensus regarding ideal class size. While some respondents valued the smaller class sizes traditionally associated with the district, others did not view size as a determining factor. This suggests that class size preferences may be shaped more by individual history and experience than by instructional research or student performance data.

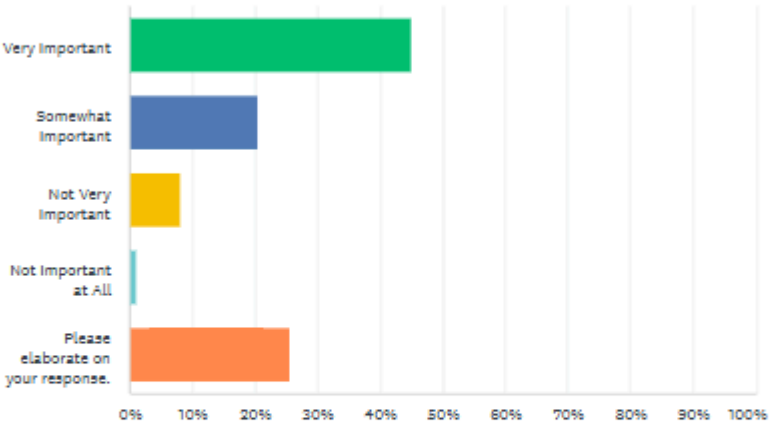
From the student perspective related to class sizes, students consistently voiced some frustration with the fact that there is no variability in their instructional, peer, and social groups, citing, *“I love my friends, and I love my school, but sometimes I need a break from them. Spending all day long with them as a 7th and 8th grader is just too much.”* This sentiment reinforces the need to consider not just academic structure but also the social-emotional dynamics of a small cohort environment.

Q12



How important is it to you that Wynantskill UFSD continue as a Pk-8 school district?

Answered: 98 Skipped: 0

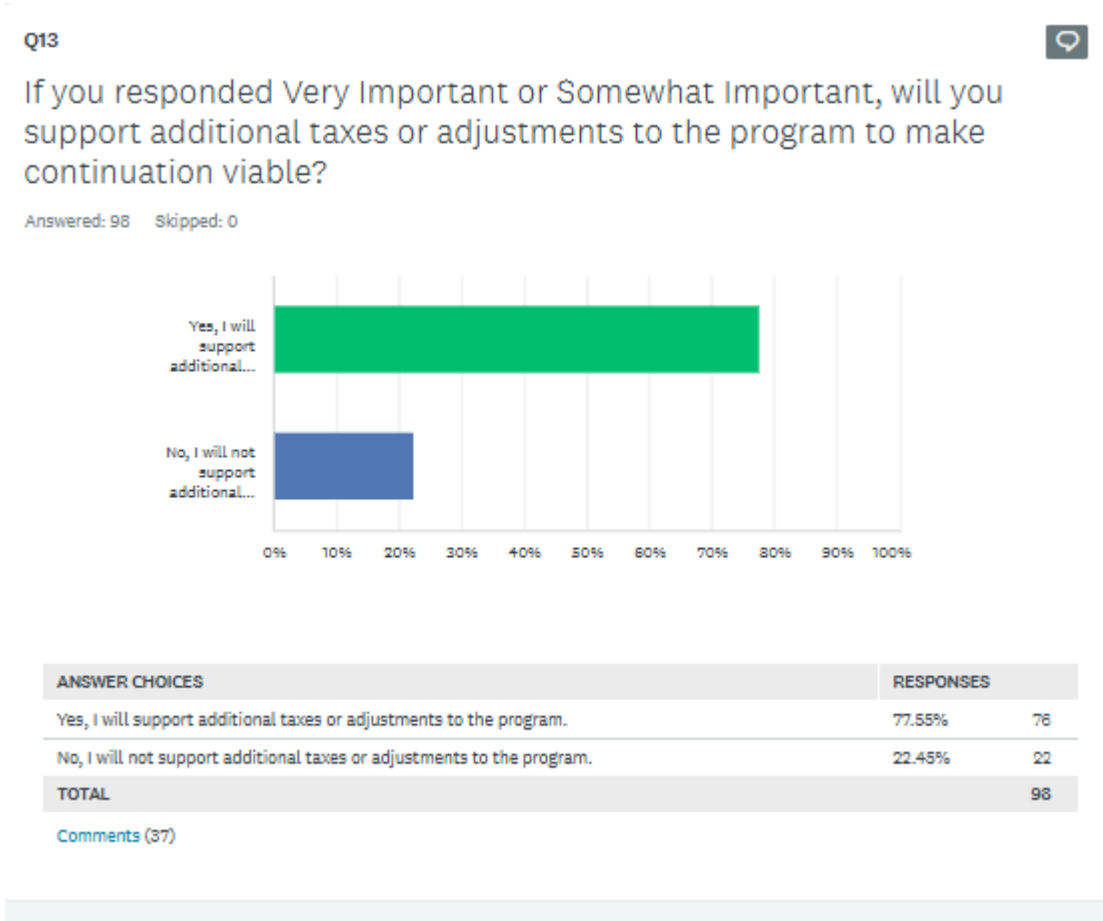


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Very Important	44.90%44
Somewhat Important	20.41%20
Not Very Important	8.16%8
Not Important at All	1.02%1
Please elaborate on your response.	Responses25.51%25
TOTAL	98

Analysis:

The history and climate of the Wynantskill Union Free School District are deeply woven into the fabric of the community, a source of pride, identity, and enduring connection for generations of families. It is not an exaggeration to say the community loves its school district. There is an overwhelming and genuine love for the district, and stakeholders across all groups express a strong desire for it to remain viable and vibrant. At the same time, there is a growing and realistic recognition that change is necessary. Financial pressures and programmatic limitations have made it increasingly clear that thoughtful re-organization is no longer just an option, but an imperative.

How that change is approached, and more importantly, how it is communicated, will be critical. A transparent, inclusive process that respects the values and legacy of Wynantskill UFSD will go a long way in alleviating community fears and building support. By centering student needs while preserving the small, personal learning environment that defines Gardner-Dickinson, the district has an opportunity to shape a sustainable future that honors its past.



Analysis:
Via survey responses and interview sessions, stakeholders expressed a willingness to support reasonable tax increases to preserve the high-quality academic programming the community values. However, despite a conservative approach to the development of the annual budget and spending plan, fiscal stressors facing the district are both immediate and severe. As presented by Dr. Rick Timbs to the Board of Education in May 2025, even with a proposed, protracted 5% annual tax increase through 2030, the district is projected to face significant financial hurdles over the next thirty-six (36) months. This prediction assumes no additional budget expenditures, no capital improvements, no added debt service (building projects), no additional high-cost student placements. Any of these added budgetary allocations would accelerate this time frame. Parenthetically, the NYS Electric Bus mandate will substantially accelerate this timeline. The full Timbs analysis is included in the appendix of this report.

Absent a substantial infusion of capital, including but not limited to a reworking of the New York State Foundation Aid formula, or expanded federal financial support, existing programs,

offerings, and staffing levels are reasonably predicted to be in grave jeopardy by the 2028–2029 school year. Such an outcome would fundamentally compromise the district’s ability to program, staff, and operate its facilities at current levels. In the most generous of cases, maintaining the status quo is unrealistic.

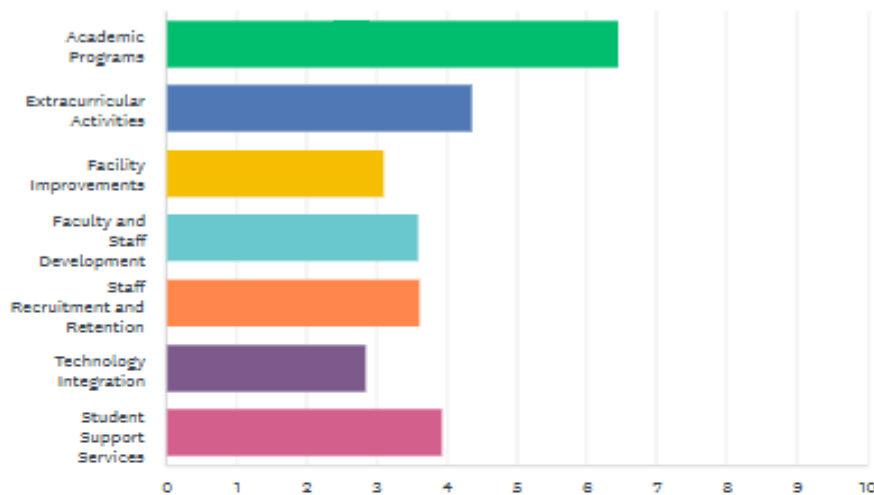
Moreover, without the ability to meet rising costs associated with programming, operations, and contractual obligations, class sizes would likely increase, and staff compensation would fall behind regional benchmarks. This would exacerbate an already fragile foundation for staff recruitment and retention, further threatening the district’s long-term viability.

Q14



How should Wynantskill UFSD prioritize its budget in the coming years?
(Rank in order of importance)

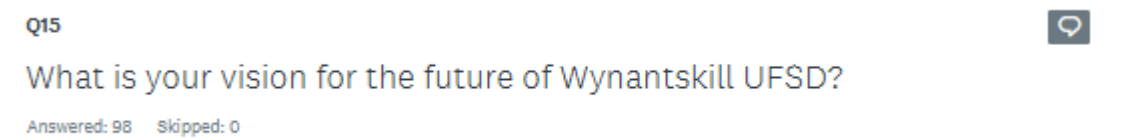
Answered: 98 Skipped: 0



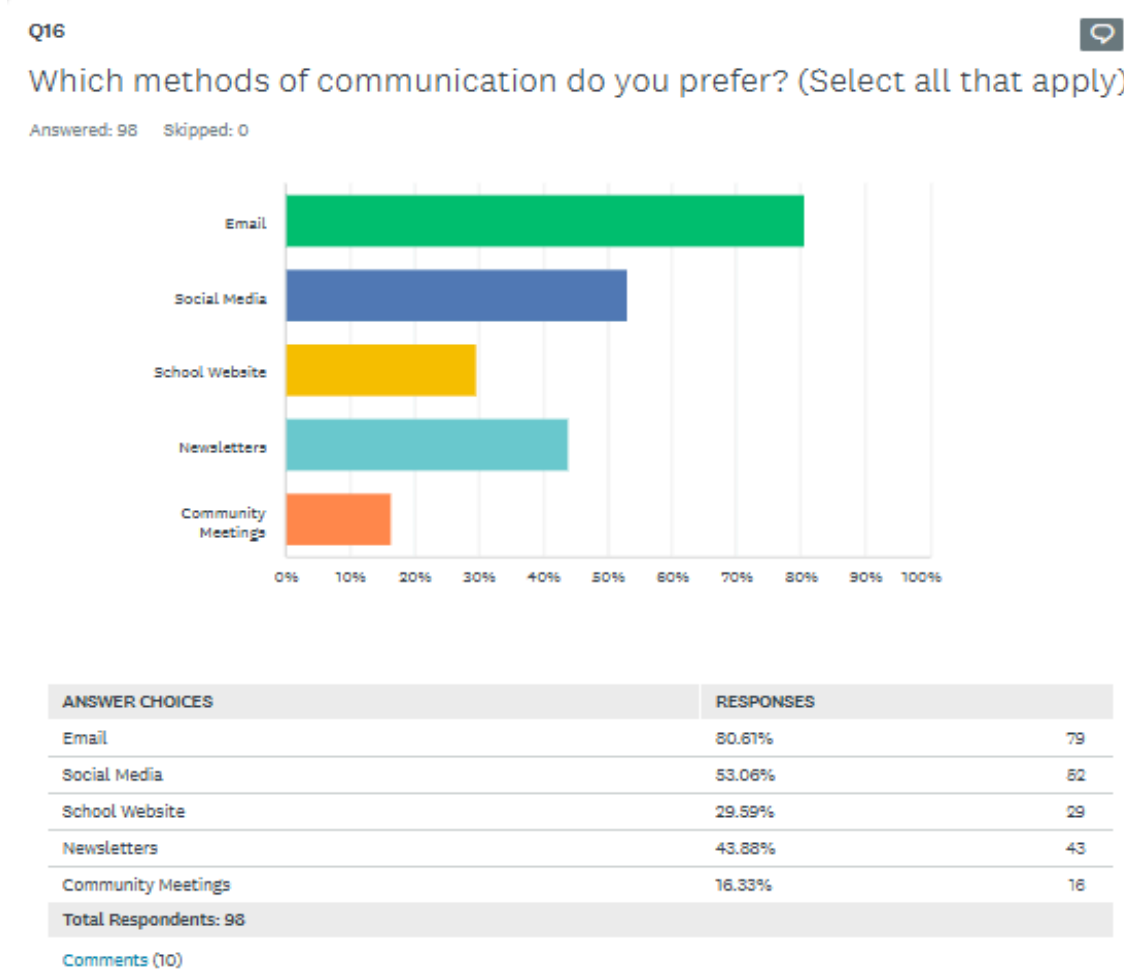
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	TOTAL	SCORE
Academic Programs	68.37% 67	19.39% 19	7.14% 7	2.04% 2	2.04% 2	1.02% 1	0.00% 0	98	6.47
Extracurricular Activities	2.04% 2	29.59% 29	27.55% 27	14.29% 14	7.14% 7	9.18% 9	10.20% 10	98	4.37
Facility Improvements	2.04% 2	5.10% 5	14.29% 14	15.31% 15	27.55% 27	16.33% 16	19.39% 19	98	3.12
Faculty and Staff Development	3.06% 3	12.24% 12	15.31% 15	21.43% 21	21.43% 21	13.27% 13	13.27% 13	98	3.61
Staff Recruitment and Retention	10.20% 10	10.20% 10	10.20% 10	18.37% 18	14.29% 14	25.51% 25	11.22% 11	98	3.62
Technology Integration	2.04% 2	6.12% 6	10.20% 10	17.35% 17	13.27% 13	23.47% 23	27.55% 27	98	2.86
Student Support Services	12.24% 12	17.35% 17	15.31% 15	11.22% 11	14.29% 14	11.22% 11	18.37% 18	98	3.95

Analysis:

Survey and interview data indicate strong community support for investing time and resources into instructional programs, extracurricular activities, student services, and staff development. These priorities align closely with student expectations, parent preferences, and staff-identified needs, all aimed at enhancing the overall quality of education within the Wynantskill Union Free School District. Investment in these areas reflects the core beliefs and ethos of the district. Stakeholders recognize and acknowledge, to remain competitive and provide a dynamic educational experience, additional resources will be required.



Analysis
A deeper analysis of the vision for the district contains the following questions 17-20.



Analysis
Data supports a robust level of communication with stakeholders. One potential area for expanded effort may be increased district engagement with residents who do not currently have children enrolled in the school system.

Q17



Staff recruitment, retention, and hiring continues to challenge school districts. What strategies would you suggest to improve the recruitment, retention, and hiring practices of Wynantskill UFSD?

Answered: 73 Skipped: 25

Q18



Do you have any suggestions for how Wynantskill UFSD may improve communication with the community?

Answered: 98 Skipped: 0

Q19



How can Wynantskill UFSD improve its relationship with the community?

Answered: 98 Skipped: 0

Q20



Please provide any additional information, comments, or suggestions you have regarding the future of Wynantskill UFSD.

Answered: 98 Skipped: 0

Analysis (Questions 15, 17-20)

As outlined in the appendices of this report, the volume and depth of community engagement and feedback reflect a community that cares deeply about the future of its school district. Every perspective shared holds value, and every idea contributes meaningfully to better navigate a viable pathway into a new, dynamic future. The journey ahead will need to focus on academic excellence, leadership, engagement and support for our students. This work will be shaped by collective input and discussion. While starting these conversations can be difficult, especially when they touch on deeply held traditions and personal histories, approaching them with openness, respect, and fairness will allow the Wynantskill community to thoughtfully plan for a strong and sustainable future.

Community Vision and the Path Forward: A Balanced Call for Sustainable Transformation: The Wynantskill community has clearly articulated a strong and unified desire: to preserve the district's deeply rooted traditions and identity while taking bold, thoughtful steps to secure its long-term sustainability. This vision is not about resisting change, it is about guiding change in a way that reflects the values, priorities, and voices of all stakeholders.

Preserve What Matters, Plan for What's Next:

Stakeholders are proud of Wynantskill's history, its close-knit environment, and the personalized educational experience it provides. Generations of families have passed through Gardner-Dickinson, forging lifelong connections and community pride. At the same time, there is a growing consensus that the current model, as beloved as it is, may not be viable without adjustment. The community is calling not for the abandonment of tradition, but for the thoughtful evolution of a system that must adapt to survive.

The Case for Reorganization: Not Resistance, But Readiness:

While some community members are hesitant about reorganization, particularly with specific districts, the prevailing sentiment is not opposition to change, but a demand for change that is transparent, data-informed, and aligned with community values.

The following beliefs are widely shared:

- ❖ The status quo is unsustainable amid mounting fiscal stress.
- ❖ Reorganization must be collaborative and inclusive, not top-down.
- ❖ All viable options, whether internal restructuring or external partnerships, should be openly discussed.
- ❖ Local voice and community identity must be protected in any structural change.
- ❖ Exploration of an option must include an analysis of both the fiscal and emotional impact.

Instructional Priorities and High Expectations for Educators:

Stakeholders expressed both pride in the district's educators and frustration with inconsistent levels of instructional quality. Key themes include:

- ❖ Performance accountability for tenured staff.
- ❖ The need for purposeful instruction, especially after standardized testing periods.
- ❖ Concern over inexperience among new hires, with a call for stronger mentorship.
- ❖ A desire to balance innovation with traditional, in-person teaching, rather than relying excessively on technology.
- ❖ Awareness of social distractions, such as social media, that compete with student focus.

The message is clear: Support our educators, but accountability and excellence are expected from every member of the organization.

Rebuilding Trust Through Clear and Inclusive Communication:

Residents want to be informed, engaged, and invited in. They do not want decisions to be made in silos or surprises to emerge without community input. Recommendations to improve communication include:

- ❖ Regular town halls to promote open dialogue.
- ❖ Expanded newsletters that reach beyond current families.
- ❖ A stronger social media presence to increase transparency and access.
- ❖ Informal events and community forums that build connection and trust.

This is not just a request for information, it is a call for ongoing collaboration between the district and every member of the community, including those without children in the school.

Strengthening Relationships Through Openness and Engagement:

Residents deeply value their role in the district's journey and want to partner with school leaders in shaping its future. They ask for:

- ❖ Inclusive engagement that recognizes all residents as stakeholders.
- ❖ Transparency in sharing successes and struggles alike.
- ❖ A shift from formal interactions to meaningful, everyday connections.

By fostering a culture of listening and response, the district can expand trust, reduce anxiety, and harness the full strength of its community.

Moving Forward: Embracing Change with Integrity and Inclusion:

Wynantskill residents understand that change is coming—not by choice, but by necessity. The fiscal and programmatic pressures are real, and the district must evolve or risk losing the very elements that define it.

But how that change occurs will define the district's future. The community is asking leadership to:

- ❖ Approach reorganization with honesty, humility, and inclusion.
- ❖ Maintain the best of Wynantskill's legacy while addressing the realities ahead.
- ❖ Engage in a transparent process that honors community voice and values.
- ❖ Pursue a future that prioritizes student outcomes, program growth, and fiscal health.

Conclusion: A Community in Search of Balance

Wynantskill is not a community divided; it is a community that cares. It is one that values its past, understands its challenges, and wants to chart a responsible path forward. The next steps must be grounded in trust, focused on students, and shaped by the belief that with courage, collaboration, and care, the district can both honor its history and secure its future.

Chapter 7: Data Metrics and Analysis:

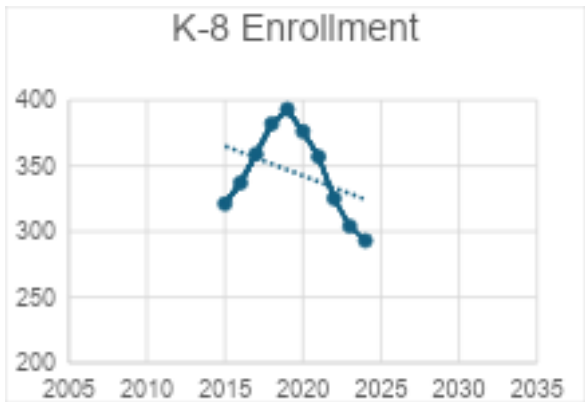
This section of the Optimization Study presents data and analysis related to enrollment trends, live birth rates, Foundation Aid allocations, per-student costs (including county-level comparisons), class size metrics, salary and benefit expenditures, reorganization and merger

aid projections, and performance results from New York State Grades 3–8 assessments. Any future action would necessitate a deeper analysis of the district finances, neighboring district finances, tax rates, tax levy information and transportation factors. This could be completed in a Feasibility Study should the district opt to pursue this additional information.

It is important to note that financial data may have changed slightly after the adoption of the 2025 NYS Budget. Accordingly, while this data set reflects the most current and accurate information available as of mid-May 2025, future analysis would be necessary as part of a Feasibility Study.

Further discussion and an in-depth analysis of these topics would be explored as part of a full reorganization feasibility study, should the district choose to pursue that option. Based on the enrollment chart provided and the supporting narrative, here is a structured analysis of Wynantskill CSD K–8 enrollment data (2015–2024) with trends and future implications:

7.1 Enrollment Data Summary (2015–2024)



Year	Enrollment
2015	321
2016	335
2017	357
2018	376
2019	393 (peak)
2020	373
2021	354
2022	324
2023	304
2024	293

Enrollment Trend Analysis and Future Implications

Between 2015 and 2019, the Wynantskill Union Free School District experienced a period of sustained enrollment growth, increasing by seventy-two (72) students, a 22.4% rise over four years. This expansion aligned with strong local birth rates from 2007 to 2014, where annual births consistently exceeded forty-five (45). During this time, the district likely benefited from stable housing patterns and a supportive demographic base that sustained its student population.

However, beginning in 2019, enrollment entered a period of notable decline. By 2024, the student population had decreased by approximately 100 students, representing a 25.4% drop from the 2019 peak. This downward trend correlates with significantly lower birth rates beginning in 2015, most notably a sharp decrease to just twenty-five (25) births in 2017. The lower birth cohorts are now entering the elementary grades, impacting enrollment figures. The data may also reflect other contributing factors, such as out-migration or a decline in the number of young families moving into the district.

Looking ahead, projections indicate continued enrollment decline, though at a slower pace, with total enrollment expected to stabilize around 278 students by 2035. Birth data from 2019 to 2021 suggests modest stabilization, with births ranging from thirty (30) to thirty-two (32) children annually. This may lead to a new, smaller enrollment baseline that persists in the next decade unless offset by changes in housing or demographic patterns.

Strategic Implications

The projected decline has significant implications for district planning. Facilities and staffing structures may need to be re-evaluated and "right sized" to reflect a smaller student population. Options such as multi-grade classrooms, shared instructional services, or regional partnerships may be necessary to maintain operational efficiency. Program continuity is another area of concern. Smaller enrollment may limit the district's capacity to offer a comprehensive range of academic programs, extracurricular activities, and enrichment opportunities. Collaborative arrangements with neighboring districts could help preserve student access to a full and well-rounded educational experience.

Conclusion

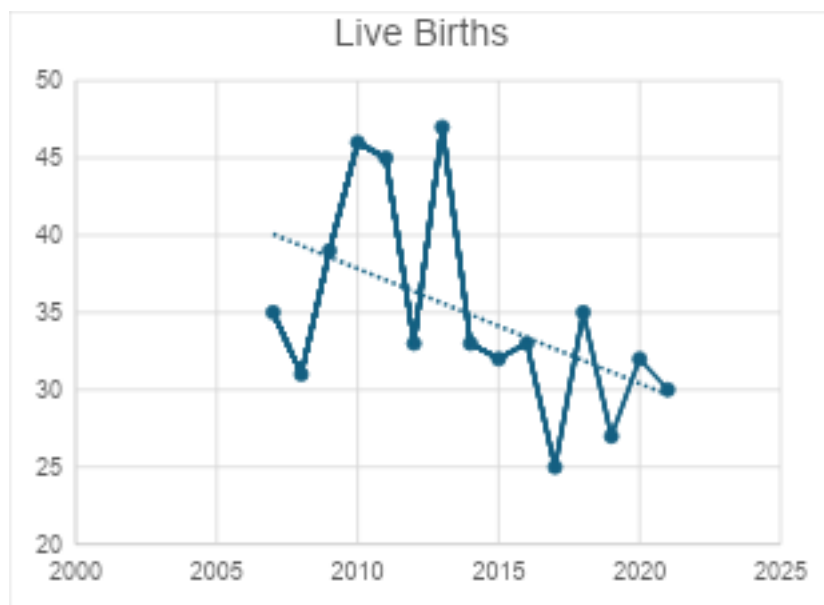
Community and economic development trends must be approached with tempered expectations. Survey responses and demographic data indicate a clear pattern: fewer families with multiple children are residing in the district, and birth rates remain low. Without a significant and sustained influx of new families, enrollment is likely to continue its downward trajectory. While housing market shifts could theoretically support stabilization, current indicators suggest that such growth is uncertain at best. Therefore, projections must realistically plan for continued enrollment decline, with any potential uptick viewed as an exception, not a foundation for long-term planning.

Recommendations

- ❖ Develop a long-term facilities and staffing strategy based on a projected enrollment of approximately 278 students.
- ❖ Initiate ongoing community engagement to discuss the district's future educational model and long-term viability.
- ❖ Establish annual reviews of live birth data, housing developments, and demographic trends to inform proactive decision-making.

Data source: <https://data.nysed.gov/enrollment.php?year=2015&instid=800000039573>

7.2 Birth Rate Trend Summary and Enrollment Planning Implications (2007–2021)



Year	Live Births
2007	35
2008	31
2009	39
2010	46
2011	45
2012	33
2013	47
2014	33
2015	32
2016	33
2017	25
2018	35
2019	27
2020	32
2021	30

Birth data from 2007 to 2021 within the Wynantskill UFSD reveals significant year-to-year variation, with annual births ranging from a low of twenty-five (25) in 2017 to a high of forty-seven (47) in 2013. The average over this 15-year period is approximately thirty-five (35) births per year. A peak occurred between 2010 and 2013, when several years exceeded forty-five (45) births, followed by a gradual decline from 2017 onward.

This trend is a key predictor of future enrollment, as children most typically enter kindergarten five years after birth. Accordingly, the district can anticipate smaller incoming kindergarten cohorts from 2022 through 2026, aligning with lower birth years from 2017 to 2021. This marks a shift from the larger classes that entered during 2012–2018, which corresponded to the higher birth rates from 2007–2013.

As smaller cohorts move through the system and larger cohorts exit after Grade 8, overall district enrollment is expected to decline further, potentially falling below 278 students. To plan responsibly, Wynantskill UFSD should use this birth data in conjunction with additional factors, such as local housing development, migration patterns, private school enrollment, and student

retention trends. Unless demographic shifts suggest population growth, the district should adopt a conservative approach to future staffing, facilities planning, and resource allocation.

Conclusions

Given the recent stabilization of birth counts around the low 30s, Wynantskill CSD should approach future planning with fiscal and operational caution. Unless offset by an influx of new families, the district should prepare for at best for modestly declining model or rapidly declining enrollment, which may influence decisions related to staffing, facilities, and program offerings. As enrollment declines, state and federal aid will also decline at a commensurate rate, impacting program, facilities and sustainability.

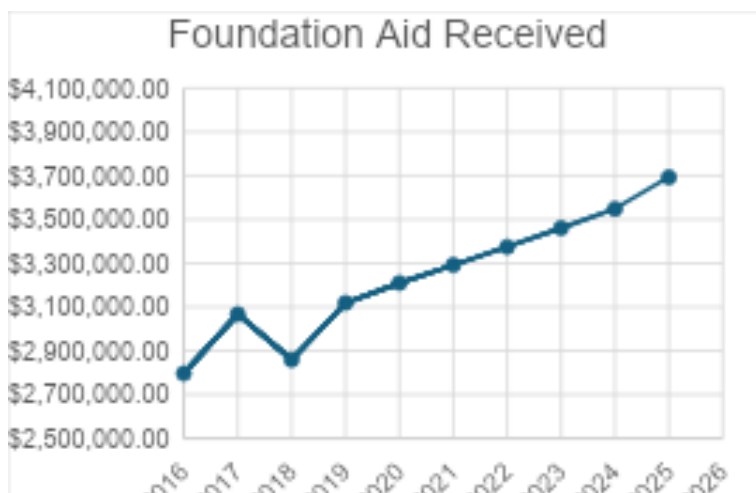
Recommendation

To accurately forecast long-term enrollment, this birth data should be considered alongside additional factors, including:

- ❖ Residential migration patterns (inward and outward),
- ❖ Local housing development activity,
- ❖ Private/parochial school attendance trends, and
- ❖ Student retention and attrition rates throughout PK–8 progression.

Data source: https://www.health.ny.gov/statistics/vital_statistics/2021/table54.htm

7.3 Foundation Aid Trends and Fiscal Outlook for Wynantskill UFSD (2016–2025)



Year	Foundation Aid
2016	\$2,796,535
2017	\$3,067,483
2018	\$2,859,406
2019	\$3,118,940
2020	\$3,210,092
2021	\$3,291,659
2022	\$ 3,375,299
2023	\$3,461,064
2024	\$3,549,009
2025	\$3,693,188

Between 2016 and 2025, Wynantskill Union Free School District's Foundation Aid rose from \$2.79 million to a projected \$3.69 million, an increase of just \$896,653 over ten years. While this upward trend may appear positive, the growth has been inconsistent and insufficient when weighed against the district's rising operational costs.

Dr. Rick Timbs' fiscal analysis, presented to the Board of Education in May 2025, highlights the urgent financial challenges facing the district. Even with a 5% annual tax levy increase, an approach many survey respondents indicated they could support, the district is still projected to encounter significant budget deficits within the next thirty-six (36) months. These projections do not account for inflation, rising transportation costs, new or unfunded mandates, necessary facility improvements, or high-cost student placements.

Core Fiscal Concerns:

- ❖ Aid vs. Costs: Foundation Aid increases are falling short of covering inflation, contractual salary growth, health insurance, special education requirements, and transportation expenses.
- ❖ Instability: Aid remains volatile, with past decreases (e.g., 2018) and only modest recent growth (\$127K in 2024, \$144K in 2025).
- ❖ Structural Disadvantage: As a small district, Wynantskill receives disproportionately less aid than larger counterparts, limiting its ability to sustain programming, retain staff, or remain competitive.
- ❖ Without a significant infusion of state or federal support or a fundamental overhaul of the Foundation Aid formula, the district's financial sustainability remains at serious risk.

Fiscal Reality:

Absent a significant increase in state aid, a revision of the Foundation Aid formula, or new federal investment, the district's existing programs and staffing levels will be at serious risk by the 2028–2029 school year. As Dr. Timbs noted, the inability to meet escalating operational costs will fundamentally influence class size, staffing, and the district's ability to function as it does today.

Recommendations:

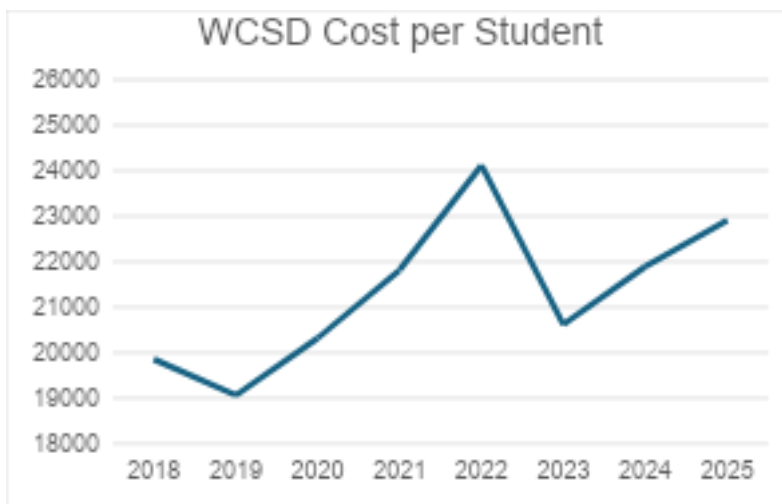
- ❖ Initiate Strategic Reorganization Planning: Begin exploring structural adjustments, such as program consolidation or inter-district partnerships, to protect core instructional services.
- ❖ Approve a full Feasibility Study to assess financial re-organization options.
- ❖ Intensify Legislative Advocacy: Work in coalition with similar districts to push for reform of the Foundation Aid formula and inflation-sensitive funding adjustments.
- ❖ Expand Community Engagement: Clearly communicate fiscal realities with residents, especially those without children in the district to build trust and transparency.

- ❖ **Pursue Shared Services and Efficiencies:** Actively identify and implement cost-sharing agreements in transportation, special education, and administrative functions.
- ❖ **Develop Multi-Year Financial Models:** Use conservative projections to map out sustainable spending scenarios aligned with declining enrollment and uncertain revenues.

Conclusion

Foundation Aid growth is failing to keep pace with actual needs. Without major policy changes or strategic restructuring, Wynantskill UFSD faces a narrowing path forward. Proactive leadership, transparent communication, and bold decision-making will be essential to safeguard the district's long-term viability and educational mission.

7.4 Wynantskill UFSD Cost per Pupil



Year	Cost per Student
2018	\$19,855
2019	\$19,063
2020	\$20,319
2021	\$21,820
2022	\$24,115
2023	\$20,619
2024	\$21,895
2025	\$22,911

Wynantskill UFSD's per-pupil cost of \$22,911 for the 2024–2025 school year reflects a fiscally responsible approach to providing educational programs, placing it among the lowest-spending districts in Rensselaer County. This efficiency demonstrates the district's commitment to maximizing limited resources while maintaining essential instructional and student support services. However, the data also underscores a growing concern: Wynantskill is nearing its financial capacity to sustain or expand offerings without a substantial influx of new revenue.

Compared to neighboring districts with significantly higher spending levels, the district faces mounting challenges in meeting staffing needs, maintaining competitive programs, and investing in necessary facility upgrades. As inflation, contractual obligations, and unfunded mandates continue to rise, the district's ability to absorb new costs without impacting core services will be severely limited.

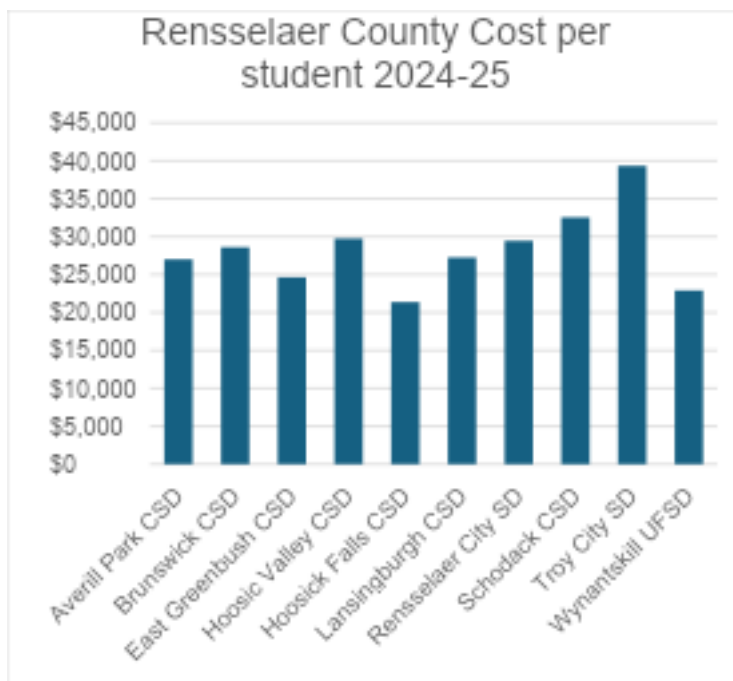
Recommendation: The district should

- ❖ Engage in a strategic review of programming, staffing, and facilities to prioritize high-impact investments.
- ❖ Identify areas for cost-sharing or expanded grant funding.
- ❖ Develop new partnerships with BOCES, neighboring districts, and community organizations to offset steadily increasing costs while maintaining service quality.

Conclusion

Wynantskill UFSD has demonstrated commendable fiscal discipline but sustaining that balance amid escalating costs will require difficult decisions and strategic foresight. Without increased state aid, federal support, or local revenue growth, the district's ability to maintain current programming, staffing levels, and facility standards will become increasingly constrained, potentially impacting student experience and long-term viability.

7.5 Cost per Student- County



District	Cost per student 2024-25
Averill Park CSD	\$ 27,009
Brunswick CSD	\$ 28,607
East Greenbush CSD	\$ 24,646
Hoosic Valley CSD	\$ 29,753
Hoosick Falls CSD	\$ 21,375
Lansingburgh CSD	\$ 27,255
Rensselaer City SD	\$ 29,446
Schodack CSD	\$ 32,566
Troy City SD	\$ 39,331
Wynantskill UFSD	\$ 22,911

For the 2024–2025 school year, Wynantskill UFSD reports a per-student cost of \$22,911, placing it on the lower end of the spending spectrum among school districts within Rensselaer County. Only Hoosick Falls CSD (\$21,375) spends less per pupil, while districts such as Troy City SD (\$39,331), Schodack CSD (\$32,566), and Brunswick CSD (\$28,607) invest significantly more.

This lower per-pupil index suggests that Wynantskill operates with strong fiscal efficiency, likely driven by its smaller scale, limited overhead, and focused budgeting practices. However, this also reflects a challenging fiscal reality: the district's capacity to increase expenditures in support

of instruction, staffing, and student services is inherently constrained by limited local and state revenue sources. Compared to higher-spending districts, Wynantskill may face increasing difficulty sustaining or expanding competitive academic and enrichment opportunities without new revenue streams.

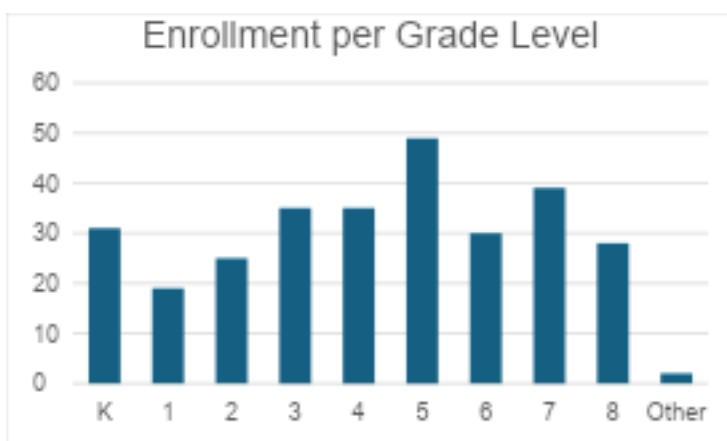
Recommendation: Wynantskill should

- ❖ Undertake a comprehensive programmatic and fiscal gap analysis to evaluate how current spending levels impact instructional quality, student support, and staff retention. Emphasis should be placed on comparing offerings with similarly sized but higher spending districts to determine whether constrained investment is beginning to limit student outcomes or long-term viability.
- ❖ Consider added partnerships (transportation, co-curricular, athletic, professional development) with neighboring, contiguous systems to mitigate cost factors.

Conclusion

Wynantskill UFSD is facing serious financial challenges that can no longer be ignored. Despite operating efficiently compared to other districts in Rensselaer County, its low per-pupil spending reflects a lack of financial capacity rather than an advantage. Costs are rising rapidly, and without immediate action, the district will not be able to sustain its core programs, retain staff, or maintain facilities. Corroborating data (Timbs Report, NYSED Aid projections, inflation, cost escalations) indicate action, must be initiated now. A thirty-six (36) month window of opportunity exists but any negative variable could accelerate and close this option. The district must aggressively pursue shared services, regional partnerships, and more efficient staffing models. It must also renegotiate tuition and transportation contracts before they expire to ease long-term budget pressures. Most importantly, the district must initiate a full Feasibility Study now to explore all structural and financial options. Delaying these decisions puts the future of Wynantskill UFSD and the quality of education it provides at serious risk.

7.6 Class Size Analysis, Staffing Stability, and Strategic Considerations



Enrollment data for grades K–8 reveals a longstanding pattern of maintaining two sections per grade (in most cases), resulting in historically low average class sizes, a feature widely supported by the community. For instance, 1st grade currently has nineteen (19) students divided across two sections, yielding a remarkably low nine to ten (9–10) students per class. In contrast, the highest enrollment is in 5th grade, with forty-nine (49) students and average section sizes of twenty-four to twenty-five (24–25). Most other grades range from thirty to thirty-nine (30–39) students, keeping class sizes at fifteen to twenty (15–20), still below regional norms. The configuration of the middle school program (grades 6–8) is perhaps an outlier because of variable certification requirements, accelerated placement (high school curriculum), scheduling constraints and mandated elective offerings for eligible students. This structure underscores the district’s commitment to personalized learning environments and strong student-teacher ratios.

However, this model creates tension when combined with ongoing staff reassignments and contractual obligations. Feedback indicates increasing stakeholder frustration around the frequency of teaching assignment changes, which not only impacts instructional continuity but diminishes staff expertise in specific grade-level content. Frequent reassignment weakens curriculum depth, disrupts team cohesion, and drives an ongoing need for intensive, grade-specific professional development. This requirement comes at a cost, both financial and operational, and strains the district’s budget alignment, particularly in a setting already facing fiscal limitations. It is important to note that frequent staff reassignments in districts with low total enrollment is common and contractually permissible, but over time, this practice can be a consequential impact for instruction, retention and recruitment of staff.

The district’s commitment to maintaining low class sizes must now be carefully balanced against rising financial pressures, including the growing costs of professional development, transportation, health insurance, contractual salary increases, and utility costs. While smaller class sizes in early primary grades, such as kindergarten through second grade, are consistently deemed beneficial, sustaining these reduced class sizes often leads to elevated class ratios in higher grades, such as fifth grade. This practice results in notable disparities in resource allocation. As a result, the district is approaching a point where its funding priorities are beginning to conflict. Additionally, frequent teacher reassignments continue to increase the cost of re-training and reduce opportunities for instructional specialization, further straining both instructional quality and the district’s financial stability.

Recommendations:

- ❖ Strategically Review Class Size Thresholds -Establish clear criteria for consolidating or expanding sections based on enrollment benchmarks, instructional quality, and financial impact. Consider combining extremely small classes (e.g., current 1st grade) to free resources for higher-need areas.
- ❖ Stabilize Grade Level Assignments- Reduce the frequency of teaching reassignments to build instructional depth and cohesion. This will decrease the recurring need for high-cost, individualized professional development.

- ❖ Reinvest in Targeted Priorities-Consider modest increases in class size in certain grades to reallocate staffing and financial resources toward electives, specialized programming, interventions for at-risk students, and instructional technology upgrades.
- ❖ Implement Long-Term Staffing Plan-Develop a multiyear staffing strategy that aligns projected enrollments with instructional priorities and staff specialization, ensuring both fiscal discipline and programmatic integrity.

Conclusion

Wynantskill UFSD's low class sizes are a point of pride and a hallmark of its identity. However, as financial pressures mount and staffing challenges persist, the district must confront difficult but necessary trade-offs. Preserving current class sizes at all costs may no longer be sustainable if it compromises program variety, instructional quality, or innovation. By re-evaluating class size standards, stabilizing teaching assignments, and redirecting resources toward strategic instructional priorities, Wynantskill can honor its core values while adapting to the evolving needs of its students and financial realities.

7.7 Instructional Compensation Analysis and Strategic Staffing Considerations

District	5th percentile	Median	95th percentile
Troy City SD	\$48,420	\$59,354	\$95,777
Schodack CSD	\$46,227	\$64,985	\$104,444
Rensselaer City SD	\$50,997	\$72,319	\$108,036
Averill Park CSD	\$50,606	\$90,354	\$108,757
Hoosic Valley CSD	\$46,667	\$59,346	\$91,127
Lansingburgh CSD	\$51,498	\$60,437	\$100,488
North Greenbush Common SD (Williams)	\$49,920	\$50,000	\$65,288
Wynantskill UFSD	\$55,701	\$80,959	\$105,754
Hoosick Falls CSD	\$48,408	\$71,312	\$95,924
Berlin CSD	\$50,000	\$69,959	\$97,465
East Greenbush CSD	\$50,588	\$84,352	\$108,743
Brunswick CSD	\$47,696	\$64,146	\$90,635

Instructional staff salaries represent one of the most significant budgetary commitments for any school district. In Wynantskill UFSD, this is particularly notable given that the district ranks among the highest paying in the region across nearly all levels of experience. According to available data:

- ❖ 5th percentile salary: \$55,701, the highest among all listed districts, indicating strong entry-level compensation.
- ❖ Median salary (50th percentile): \$80,959, trailing only Averill Park CSD (\$90,354) and East Greenbush CSD (\$84,352).
- ❖ 95th percentile salary: \$105,754, within the top tier, although slightly behind four neighboring districts.

This compensation structure has positioned Wynantskill competitively in terms of attracting early- and mid-career educators and reflects a district-wide commitment to valuing instructional staff.

Survey Feedback and Stakeholder Perception

Survey responses revealed concern among some stakeholders regarding staff recruitment and retention, with several suggesting that increasing salaries could serve as a solution to these challenges. While well-intentioned, these perceptions must be viewed cautiously considering Wynantskill's already favorable and historic commitment to instructional staff compensation.

Given the district's top-tier salary rankings, particularly at the entry and median levels, further increasing salaries beyond current contractual allowances would likely offer diminishing returns and introduce added significant fiscal risk. Elevating salaries further could divert limited resources away from other critical needs, such as class size goals, program expansion, technology upgrades, or targeted student interventions, ultimately doing more harm than good to the district's long-term educational mission and financial health.

Fiscal Considerations and Feasibility Study Alignment

Any consideration of re-organization must include a comprehensive contractual and benefit comparison with other districts. The Optimization Study is intended to provide a 30,000-foot perspective on mood, temperament and trends. Instructional compensation, including salary steps, health benefits, and retirement contributions, must be carefully examined in the context of a full Feasibility Study to evaluate long-term sustainability and equity. This type of detailed benefit and salary analysis would be a required component of a Feasibility Study if the Board of Education pursues further re-organization discussions.

Recommendations

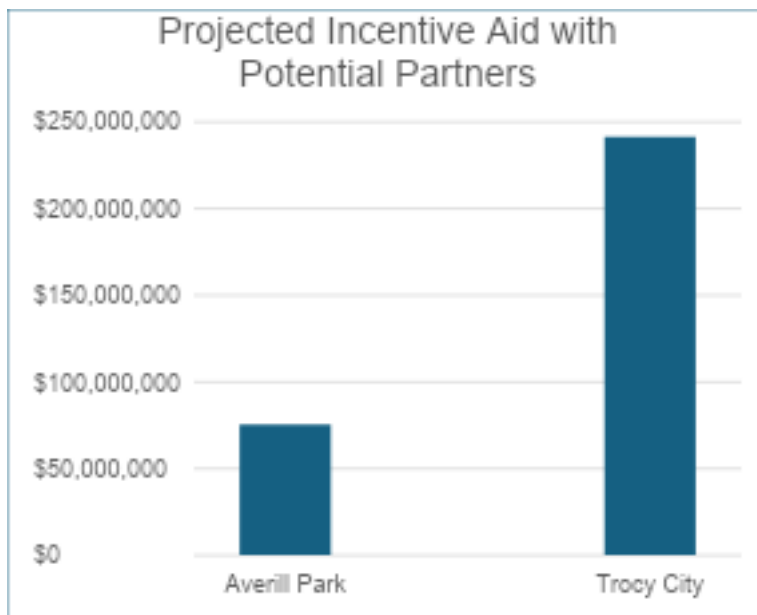
- ❖ Conduct Full Compensation Benchmarking- Expand salary comparisons to include total compensation packages (e.g., benefits, retirement, step schedules) for all stakeholders and employee groups to understand true competitiveness and identify financial pressures over time.
- ❖ Include Salary and Contractual Analysis in Future Feasibility Study- Should the district consider re-organization, ensure that salary and benefit structures and contractual obligations are thoroughly analyzed across prospective districts.

- ❖ **Focus Retention Strategies Beyond Salary-** Stabilize teaching assignments, improve professional development, and foster collaborative work environments as alternative strategies to attract and retain high-quality staff.
- ❖ **Protect Fiscal Sustainability-** Avoid salary increases beyond negotiated agreements that could compromise funding for student programs, technology, or essential services.

Conclusion

Wynantskill UFSD's current salary structure is both competitive and fiscally significant. While stakeholder feedback supporting higher pay for educators is understandable, existing compensation levels already rank at or near the top regionally. As such, the district may consider non-monetary retention strategies for long-term financial planning, rather than further increasing salaries at the expense of pressing district needs. Any future re-organization efforts should be supported by a rigorous Feasibility Study that fully examines contractual obligations and salary sustainability, ensuring the district can continue to deliver high-quality education while remaining fiscally responsible.

7.8 Future Reorganization Aid Projections



Potential Partners	Projected Incentive Aid	Duration (Years)
Averill Park	\$75,345,412	15
Troy City	\$241,339,387	15

In evaluating the financial incentives associated with potential reorganization, the Optimization Team has deliberately chosen to withhold the identification of specific, contiguous district partners. This decision is grounded in two primary considerations.

First, while financial viability is undeniably a critical factor, the Team affirms that it must not be perceived as the sole driver of future decisions. Reorganization must reflect a comprehensive evaluation of educational quality, community values, and long-term sustainability.

Second, stakeholder feedback has revealed compelling yet contrasting preferences regarding potential partners, each rooted in legitimate perspectives and community loyalties. To preserve objectivity and ensure that discussions remain focused on factual analysis rather than emotional bias, the Team has intentionally disaggregated this data.

A more detailed financial comparison, inclusive of named districts and associated impacts, would be an essential component of any future Feasibility Study should the Board choose to pursue reorganization more formally. In consultation with the New York State Education Department (NYSED) and the Optimization Team, only two (2) contiguous, eligible potential reorganization options exist, listed as A and B.

Financial Incentive Aid Projections by Contiguous Partner (organized by Projected Incentive Aid):

District	Projected Incentive Aid	Annual Distribution	Financial Benefit
Averill Park	\$75, 345,412	\$5.36 million per year	Low Benefit
Troy City	\$241,339, 387	\$17.14 million/year	Highest Benefit

Consensus Themes:

- ❖ Acknowledgment of Need for Change: Across surveys and interviews, there is widespread agreement that Wynantskill UFSD cannot maintain its current trajectory without exploring structural changes. Rising costs, enrollment decline, and fiscal instability have pushed stakeholders to recognize reorganization as a viable path forward.

Points of Apprehension:

- ❖ Uncertainty About Reorganization Partner: While most stakeholders concur that change is imminent, there is significant concern about which district Wynantskill might reorganize with. Preserving the district's identity, values, and program quality are critical should any action to reorganize be considered.
- ❖ Financial Advantage is Essential: Stakeholders repeatedly stressed that any reorganization must result in a clear and measurable financial benefit for Wynantskill UFSD community, improving fiscal stability without increasing the burden on taxpayers.
- ❖ Gardner-Dickinson Must Stay Open: There is a strong community consensus that the Gardner-Dickinson building must remain in use as a community instructional facility.
- ❖ Protect Programs and Staff: Respondents emphasized the need to maintain existing high-quality programs and retain current staff members, even if the district reorganizes with a larger system.

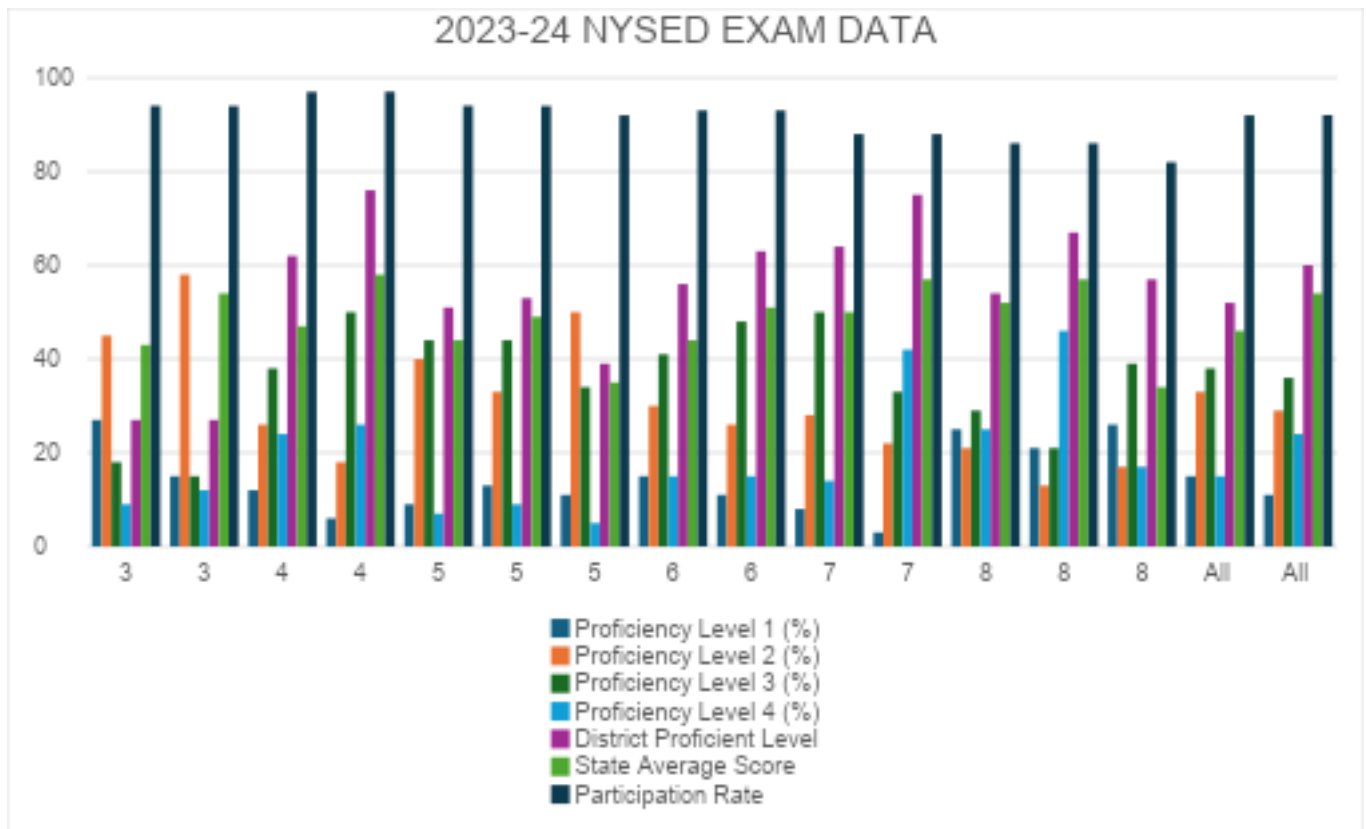
Conclusions and Strategic Recommendations

While financial incentive aid is a critical factor in evaluating potential reorganization, it must not be viewed in isolation. Stakeholders have made clear that any prospective partner must not only demonstrate alignment in educational mission, a willingness to incorporate existing facilities, and a commitment to preserving current programs and staff, but also enhance student opportunities, reflect community values, and serve as a destination that promotes educational excellence for Wynantskill students.

Each potential partner district presents a unique set of strengths and limitations, making any reorganization both potentially advantageous and inherently complex. Therefore, a deeper, multi-dimensional analysis is essential before any decisions can be made. Moreover, stakeholder concerns related to trust, community identity, and long-term viability must be proactively addressed through transparent dialogue and thoughtful assurance planning. Sustainable outcomes will only be achieved by carefully weighing financial benefits against the full impact of program changes and community implications.

7.9 Assessment and Achievement Data

NYS-3-8 Test Data (7.9.1)



NYS 3-8 Assessment Proficiency Data (7.9.2)

Grade	Subject	Proficiency Level 1 (%)	Proficiency Level 2 (%)	Proficiency Level 3 (%)	Proficiency Level 4 (%)	District Proficient Level	State Average Score	Participation Rate
3	ELA	27	45	18	9	27	43	94
3	Math	15	58	15	12	27	54	94
4	ELA	12	26	38	24	62	47	97
4	Math	6	18	50	26	76	58	97
5	ELA	9	40	44	7	51	44	94
5	Math	13	33	44	9	53	49	94
5	Science	11	50	34	5	39	35	92
6	ELA	15	30	41	15	56	44	93
6	Math	11	26	48	15	63	51	93
7	ELA	8	28	50	14	64	50	88
7	Math	3	22	33	42	75	57	88
8	ELA	25	21	29	25	54	52	86
8	Math	21	13	21	46	67	57	86
8	Science	26	17	39	17	57	34	82
All	ELA	15	33	38	15	52	46	92
All	Math	11	29	36	24	60	54	92

The district's performance on the NYSED Grades 3–8 assessments reveal several academic strengths, particularly in mathematics, while also highlighting areas that require strategic attention. In English Language Arts (ELA), fifty-two percent (52%) of students achieved proficiency (Levels 3 and 4), which is slightly above the statewide average of forty-six percent (46%). Performance was strongest in Grade 4, where sixty-two percent (62%) of students demonstrated proficiency, indicating strong instructional delivery at that level. However, Grade 3 showed the lowest ELA proficiency at just twenty-seven percent (27%), suggesting early literacy development may require additional support and targeted intervention strategies.

In mathematics, the district performed even more favorably, with sixty percent (60%) of students reaching proficiency, exceeding both ELA results and state norms. Again, Grade 4 was the highest performing cohort, with an impressive seventy-six percent (76%) of students proficient. Conversely, Grade 3 mirrored its ELA results, with twenty-seven percent (27%) of students meeting proficiency standards, highlighting a consistent pattern of early-grade challenges across core subjects that may stem from foundational skill gaps or developmental readiness. Further analysis of why this gap exists would be beneficial to drive instructional planning and pedagogical interventions.

Science results were mixed, with Grade 5 showing a proficiency rate of thirty-nine percent (39%) and Grade 8 achieving fifty-seven percent (57%), the latter significantly outperforming the state average of thirty-four percent (34%). Participation rates across all assessments were robust, averaging ninety-two percent (92%), with the highest in Grade 4 (97%) and the lowest in Grade 8 (82–86%). The drop in Grade 8 achievement compared to other Wynantskill cohorts could be connected to developmental achievement decreases associated with the onset of adolescence, student responses advising the need for more robust, hands-on content in science or a combination of factors. Further inquiry would be advantageous.

While these results underscore strong performance in math and upper-grade science, they also affirm the benefits of small class sizes, which allow for individualized instruction, close student-teacher connections, and timely academic support. However, financial pressures pose an existential threat to the conditions that have driven this success. Without careful planning, the district may face increased class sizes, staffing reductions, or program cuts that could negatively impact academic outcomes.

Recommendations for Financial and Academic Sustainability

- ❖ **Prioritize Small Class Sizes in Early Grades:** Focus resources on K–3, where foundational support is most critical; consider consolidating upper grades where appropriate.
- ❖ **Invest in Early Intervention:** Enhance literacy and math support in early grades through RTI, coaching, and small-group instruction.
- ❖ **Leverage Shared Services and Grants:** Collaborate with neighboring districts and pursue grant funding to reduce costs and support innovation.
- ❖ **Plan for Enrollment Shifts:** Monitor demographic trends to proactively adjust staffing and class sizes.

- ❖ Engage the Community: Communicate academic gains and the importance of small class sizes to maintain stakeholder support.

Conclusion

Stakeholder interviews and survey responses consistently affirm that the community views the district's academic program as a key strength. Supported by a highly respected teaching staff and administration, there is strong trust that students' academic needs are being met. Although concerns persist about the district's long-term financial stability, there is a broad consensus that the quality of instruction is both valued and validated by assessment results.

Chapter 8: Executive Summary

Executive Summary: Recommendation for a Full Feasibility Study

The Wynantskill Union Free School District (UFSD) Optimization Study, grounded in extensive stakeholder engagement and comprehensive data analysis, affirms a community deeply invested in preserving its close-knit, student-centered identity while facing growing fiscal and programmatic challenges. The study, which engaged 228 stakeholders yielding over 1,000 data points via interviews, forums, surveys and extended responses, has confirmed a unified sentiment: Wynantskill is proud of its academic legacy, but recognizes that meaningful, sustainable change is essential.

Key Findings

- ❖ **Academic Strengths:** Student achievement remains strong, especially in Grades 4 and 7 mathematics and ELA, with overall proficiency levels above the state average. The district's enviable class size ratios, dedicated staff, and strong primary elementary programming are recognized assets.
- ❖ **Middle School Priorities:** Stakeholders identified Grades 6–8 as a critical area of concern. They noted that limited course offerings, staffing/certification conflicts, and a lack of co-curricular opportunities are negatively impacting student preparation for high school. These deficiencies have created gaps in academic readiness and personal development, prompting the need for increased support and targeted intervention.
- ❖ **Enrollment and Demographics:** Declining birth rates and enrollment projections forecast a continued downward trend, with PK–8 enrollment expected to stabilize around 278 students by 2035.
- ❖ **Financial Instability:** Even with a 5% annual tax increase, projected deficits manifesting in 36 months or less, threaten the district's ability to maintain current programs, staffing, and facilities. Because Foundation Aid growth has not kept pace with inflation or operational costs, the economics of the district warrant action.
- ❖ **Instructional and Staff Pressures:** Staff face role overload, inconsistent assignments, and increased burnout, jeopardizing instructional quality and retention. While compensation is competitive, further increases are not fiscally sustainable.
- ❖ **Facility and Programmatic Constraints:** The district struggles to support athletics, arts, and enrichment due to space and staffing limitations. Students and families voiced concerns about aging facilities, lack of extracurricular options, and inadequate science and technology programming.

Community Readiness and Reorganization Considerations

While stakeholders express a deep affection for Gardner-Dickinson School and its traditions, they also acknowledge that maintaining the status quo is no longer viable. There is interest and value in exploring reorganization options, especially if this inquiry adheres to:

- ❖ Reflect community values and educational mission.

- ❖ Provide fiscal advantages supported by significant merger aid.
- ❖ Preserve and maintain the Gardner-Dickinson facility.
- ❖ Include stakeholders in the process and sustain program integrity.
- ❖ Expand opportunities for students, especially in Grades 6–8.

The community's message is clear: Reorganization is not resistance to tradition, but a readiness to preserve it through thoughtful, transparent, and strategic adaptation.

Conclusion and Recommendation:

Therefore, considering persistent financial constraints, declining enrollment, and the shared commitment of stakeholders to preserve high-quality educational opportunities, a feasibility study between Wynantskill UFSD and the Troy City School District is not only warranted, it is essential.

Stakeholders overwhelmingly voiced the importance of preserving the small, intimate, and connected environment of the Gardner-Dickinson School, while also expressing a strong desire for students to gain enhanced access to advanced coursework, co-curricular programs, and athletic opportunities.

Additionally, the need to mitigate transportation-related stressors, coupled with the ambitious desire to invest in modern, technology-enhanced classrooms and hands-on laboratory spaces, underscores the urgency of exploring a strategic partnership.

Among all potential partners, the Troy City School District presents the greatest opportunity for long-term Gardner-Dickinson sustainability, the opportunity for historic investment in the physical plant and classroom modernization efforts, geographic proximity to address transportation needs and most notably, the fiscal relief available with more than three times (3x) the NYS Incentive Aid to be encumbered to preserve the legacy of the Wynantskill UFSD.

It is the recommendation of the Optimization Team that the Board of Education of the Wynantskill Union Free School District pursue a feasibility study as soon as possible to validate both the perceptions and key findings of this study. Taking this step will ensure any future decision is grounded in facts, aligned with community values, and positioned to support a strong and sustainable future for Wynantskill students.

1. The district should move forward with a full Reorganization Feasibility Study. This study would:
 - ❖ Conduct an in-depth contractual, financial, and aid comparison with the Troy City School District as a reorganization partner.
 - ❖ Engage Wynantskill UFSD stakeholders through ongoing, transparent communication.
 - ❖ Review and advise the Board of Education on potential amendments for tuition and transportation agreements.

- ❖ Assess the long-term viability and cost implications of structural options associated with reorganization.
- ❖ Evaluate existing models for shared services, staffing, and facility use.
- ❖ Identify the intersection of the district's core values and financial profile to affirm a sustainable future.
- ❖ Review the NYSED timeline contained in School District Reorganization June 2025 guidance document (appendix)

2. Guiding Principles for Feasibility Study:

- ❖ Student-Centered Decision Making: All options must enhance academic and co-curricular opportunities.
- ❖ Transparency and Trust: Stakeholder engagement must remain inclusive, ongoing, and honest.
- ❖ Fiscal Responsibility: Every path forward must address long-term sustainability goals.
- ❖ Preservation of Identity: The Gardner-Dickinson experience must remain central to any reorganization.
- ❖ Commitment to the district's mission and philosophy.

Appendices:

Dr. Rick Timbs Presentation:

- ❖ PowerPoint Presentation:

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/13PJv_CdSvJdohZv7avHMvUIDjOHe95F/edit?slide=id.p1#slide=id.p1

- ❖ Data Metrics:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1b8GFVSRMmCKN9raui4OY-NEdxj8MNvaT/edit?gid=669887201#gid=669887201>

Optimization Study: Survey

- ❖ Survey Extended Responses and Questions [Extended Responses Wynantskill UFSD Optimization Study Data.xlsx](#)

Questar III BOCES Aid Presentation: December 2024

- ❖ https://drive.google.com/file/d/19LI-XC_N1CvfidKYY3WjRnBMybaA7Dk_n/view?usp=drive_link

Tuition Contracts:

- ❖ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1HS0SHGYFgzxzMDJbuuF6rmkTpdJ1Dr2v/view?usp=drive_link

Transportation Contracts:

- ❖ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1mEoPIWIIH7jBTLpkT4jDIXx2p6nVMyiX/view?usp=drive_link
- ❖ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1iJ9fQEj-A1s_oX-UQK4me5X2rr8ndwND/view?usp=drive_link

Wynantskill Budget Presentation:

- ❖ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1uKBPW4cRg5a6QSIDPVgmoUaPM72Uj3sx/view?usp=drive_link

Wynantskill Communications:

- ❖ Sports Letter: Spring 2025

https://docs.google.com/document/d/10wVqwwq3KBdkpXDzJVvqofRCnKSn5aOu73t8gMFyWa8/edit?usp=drive_link

- ❖ Elementary: Survey Template Fall 2024

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1r6ykXBzqTon1UEc8EGDgBgrxyvrOFJbJIJnxPh5FHY8/edit?ts=67bc8068>

- ❖ Middle School: Survey Template Fall 2024

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1yNL1OBpg_3v1H7zU2U-sJMCNP685r-XFZyMpyVVHtWA/edit?ts=67bc804f

- ❖ Compass Staff Survey Fall 2024

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/17Gc3QhmxXWiyAlf_QvvQaF00EtYsnQxRHoKd7yyw6uk/edit?ts=67bc7fe2

NYS Education Department

- ❖ Reorganization Primer [School-District-Reorganization-A-Primer-June-2025.pptx](#)