



# 2026 Annual Report



## Voting Day: Tuesday, March 3

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### Colchester High School • 7 am to 7 pm



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



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



**580**

parents and community members volunteered in our schools last year

Every day, our food service teams serve an average of



**1,037**

breakfasts



**1,436**

lunches

# From the Superintendent

Dear CSD Community Members,

Colchester's schools are strong because of the people who believe in and advocate for them. We strive to provide a welcoming environment where every family feels valued, and each year we graduate incredible students who have pursued their passions and overcome barriers to build a foundation for future success. It is with this commitment to our students and community that we share this year's Annual Report to the Community.

**"Colchester maintains its status as a comparatively low-spending district with steady enrollment and full classrooms."**

Across the district, we see encouraging growth in student performance after the challenges of recent years. We are focused on expanding opportunities and improving student outcomes, and our staff has worked tirelessly to support both academic and social-emotional needs. That dedication is making a tangible difference, as you'll see in more detail throughout this report.

I also want to continue to thank our community for supporting the facilities bond. It is exciting to see this contribution to our learning environments take shape, reflecting

a long-standing commitment that will serve students for decades to come. This much-needed investment will ultimately save the community money, both through immediate energy efficiencies and by replacing aging equipment before it fails.

As we pursue these goals, we uphold our role as disciplined stewards of public funds. Colchester maintains its status as a comparatively low-spending district with steady enrollment and full classrooms. This year, the district implemented cost-saving reductions and continues to seek efficiencies while maintaining high-quality programming.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the passage of Act 73 and the ongoing statewide conversations regarding the future of public education. While many aspects of this law will unfold over time, please know that I am fiercely advocating for Colchester. I am deeply engaged in discussions in Montpelier to ensure our district's needs, values, and long-term stability are clearly represented. Together, we will continue to navigate change thoughtfully and build a future we can all be proud of.



With appreciation,  
*Amy Minor*  
*Superintendent of Schools*



## Colchester School District's Enrollment is Projected to Grow!

Total student enrollment is strong and stable at 2,119 and projected to grow.

## CSD Average Core Class Sizes

- Grades K-5: **21**
- Grades 6-8: **22**
- Grades 9-12: **19**



# Community Connections



## Building Community Through Books

For over 25 years, Union Memorial School's Community Reading Program has paired our youngest learners with volunteers to grow a love of literacy and boost confidence. Students meet three times a week with family members and community partners from the Burnham Library, Colchester Police, and the Foster Grandparent Program. This literacy program is more than a local tradition; it is a nationally recognized model for educational best practices. By bridging the gap between the classroom and the Colchester community, we ensure our youngest learners have the resources and encouragement they need to succeed.



## Championship Brings Glory

Colchester High School celebrated a historic milestone this fall as the varsity football team won the 2025 Vermont Division II State Championship. The Lakers secured their first state title since 2009 in a thrilling 27–20 victory over Fair Haven. This achievement was the result of years of persistence, particularly by the current senior class, which transformed a 2023 championship loss into fuel for a relentless 2025 campaign. The district is incredibly proud of the players and coaches for their unwavering "next play" mentality and the teamwork that brought this trophy back to Colchester.



## Pups Bring Paws for Support

Colchester Schools are proud to incorporate Animal Assisted Therapy to support student well-being. These certified therapy dogs are brought in by community volunteers at no cost to taxpayers, reflecting a shared commitment to our children. Whether helping students process trauma, building confidence in emerging readers, or relieving stress for anyone seeking a quiet moment, these dogs provide vital emotional safety. We are grateful for the volunteers who share their canine companions to ensure every student feels supported and ready to learn.



## Lakers Hall of Fame Honors Our Legacy

This fall, Colchester High School proudly launched the Laker Hall of Fame, a new annual tradition dedicated to honoring alumni and staff who exemplify excellence. The inaugural class, comprised of five distinguished graduates and one legendary faculty member, was celebrated during a joyous Homecoming weekend featuring a ribbon-cutting and formal induction ceremony.

By enshrining those who have achieved significant professional success or made lasting contributions to our schools, the Laker Hall of Fame serves as a source of community pride and inspiration for current students. We are honored to celebrate this first class of inductees for their remarkable impact on our district and beyond. To learn more about the accomplishments of our 2025 inductees or to nominate a future candidate for the Class of 2026, please visit [csdvt.org/HOF](http://csdvt.org/HOF).

# Our Past – Our Future

## ALUMNI HIGHLIGHT

### Nick Spengler, Class of 2005

English Literature Professor, Autonomous University of Barcelona

I arrived in Colchester in 1997 as a 5th-grader. It's ancient history now, but that was a momentous school year: my father, Jeff, married my wonderful stepmother, Kristy, that December, and then in January the great ice storm knocked out our power for

over a week. My siblings (Sarah and Reid) and I returned to MBS after that adventure to swap ice storm stories with our friends and teachers. I've always loved hearing and telling stories, and my teachers at MBS, CMS, and CHS fostered that passion. They recognized that our communities, from the local to the global, are built on stories. It's how we connect ourselves to those who have come before us, and it's what we'll leave behind for those who come after us.

The teachers I had in Colchester made me want to become a



**"I've always loved hearing and telling stories, and my teachers at MBS, CMS, and CHS fostered that passion."**

teacher myself, as well as a lifelong reader of stories. And so, after graduating from CHS, I studied English Literature at Middlebury College, and then I went to Edinburgh in Scotland for my master's. I returned to Vermont and worked for two years as the assistant to one of New England's great storytellers, John Irving, down in Dorset. And then I went back to Edinburgh for my PhD, focusing on the writing of Herman Melville, who wrote that whale of a story, Moby-Dick. And because life, like the greatest stories, is full of twists, I found a job teaching literature in Barcelona, Spain, where my partner is from. (No ice storms here.) Long story short, I'm now a long way from home, but I still keep in touch with friends and teachers from Colchester, and I'll take our stories with me wherever I go.

## STUDENT HIGHLIGHT

### Sawyer Cyphers, Class of 2026

In the past few years, I have become increasingly interested in the tech world because of massive innovation. The summer going into senior year, I began to put my passion into practice. The capabilities of AI allowed me to build apps and systems in days or weeks, which would have taken months to years for traditional software developers. One of the systems I built was an AI-powered receptionist named Thomas who can answer calls and take booking requests for companies 24/7.

A local Essex electrician took interest in the idea, and we spent months meeting to figure out the most practical way to integrate the system with his business. This has been a great experience, and I have learned many valuable things about the business world.

This summer, I sat down with Mr. Hall, who is my guidance counselor at CHS, to discuss my plans for the upcoming school year. I told him about my recent project and he wanted to help me expand it to the CHS community. With the help of Mr. Hall, Ms. Leclair, and Mr. Mott,

**"In our club, we teach students how to bring ideas to life using AI tools and build apps that have a positive impact on our community."**

we created the CHS AI Coding Club. In our club, we teach students how to bring ideas to life using AI



tools and build apps that have a positive impact on our community.

We are currently working on [chslakernation.com](http://chslakernation.com), which shows the schedules for all active sports teams. We also allow users to sign up for gameday reminders via email for sports of their choosing. I am grateful that CHS took the time and effort to help bring my personal passion to our school, and more projects will be coming from our club.

# Academic Update



## CSD Students Show Steady Growth in Academic Achievement

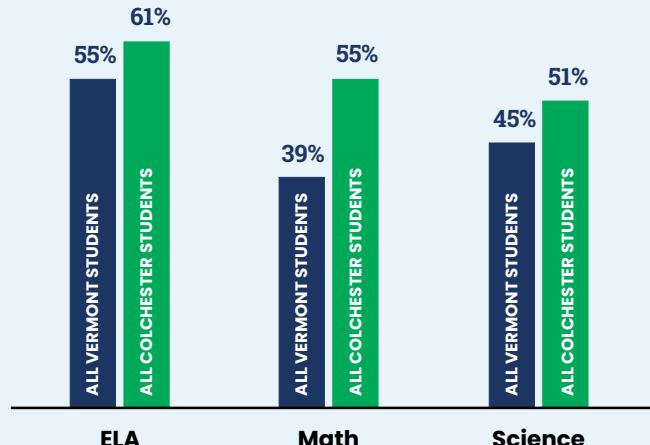
Colchester has made significant strides in academic achievement as measured by our recent statewide assessments. Each spring, students participate in the Vermont Comprehensive Assessment Program (VTCAP) to evaluate proficiency in English language arts (ELA), math, and science. In 2025, our district performed well above the state average in all three categories, specifically by 6 points in ELA and science, and by 13 points in mathematics.

A review of scores from 2022 to 2025 shows a steady increase in academic performance across ELA, math, and science, signaling an essential recovery from pandemic-era challenges. With a combined growth of 25 percentage points across these content areas, continuous improvement is clearly in action. This

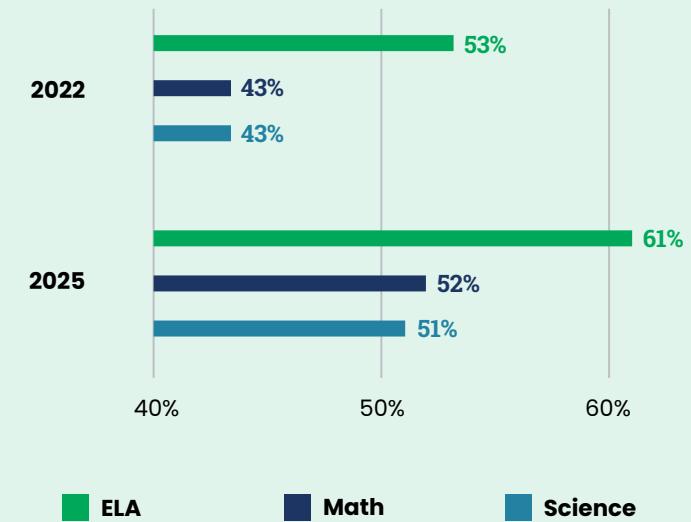
progress is the direct result of strategic district investments in professional learning, instructional coaching, and dedicated literacy and math interventionists.

Across all grade levels and content areas, our primary aim is to deepen learning and increase overall achievement. Current school-based goals are focused on comprehension, argumentation, and modeling, allowing students to apply skills in authentic ways. While our scores far exceed state averages, our work continues. We remain committed to raising overall academic performance while narrowing the gaps for historically disadvantaged groups by five points; progress we look forward to seeing in our 2026 results.

### VTCAP Assessment: CSD vs Vermont



### Performance Over a Multi-Year Period



## College Acceptances for the Class of '25

### Strengthening the Foundation in Literacy and Mathematics

Colchester is dedicated to creating annual plans that ensure our instructional materials reflect current evidence-based practices. A recent review of early literacy data showed a need for more consistent foundational instruction across grades K–4, so the district implemented From Phonics to Reading and Benchmark Education Phonics. Foundational reading skills are just what they imply, the skills that students need to become strong readers, such as phonemic awareness, fluency, and vocabulary.

The impact was immediate; after the first year of implementation, the district saw significant growth on STAR assessments, with **an 11-point increase in early literacy and a 6-point increase in reading.**

Building on this success, we're applying the same rigorous approach to our math curriculum. In grades 6–8, the new Open Up Math program has already yielded **a 7-point increase in STAR**

**Math scores.** This spring, the district will complete the selection process for a new K–5 math program, which will be implemented in

the upcoming school year. By aligning our instructional materials across all grades, we are ensuring a cohesive and successful academic experience for each student.



### Expanding Horizons: The Early College Program

The Early College program provides a rigorous academic pathway that allows students to complete their first year of higher education concurrently with their final year of high school. This initiative offers a significant “jumpstart” on post-secondary education at no tuition cost to families, all while allowing students to remain fully engaged in the Colchester High School community through athletics, clubs, and traditional senior milestones.

Further enhancing this opportunity is the McClure Promise, which enables students through the Class of 2028 to earn an Associate’s Degree just one year after high school graduation, entirely debt-free. Whether students enter the workforce

**“The opportunity to knock out classic first-year credits for no debt sets me up to be debt-free sooner in life. I love knowing that I’m a step in front of some of my peers in that aspect, and I’ll be able to save more money sooner!” — Kate Bradford, '25**

immediately as career-ready employees or transfer to a four-year institution, the program provides an invaluable financial and professional advantage. This personalized approach to learning allows students to balance high-level academics with their extracurricular commitments.

- Alfred State University
- American University
- Amherst College
- Appalachian State University
- Arizona State University
- Auburn University
- Aveda Institute Chapel Hill
- Babson College
- Baldwin Wallace University
- Barnard College
- Bates College
- Bay Path University
- Belmont University
- Beloit College
- Bennington College
- Bentley University
- Boise State University
- Boston College
- Boston University
- Bristol Community College
- Brown University
- Bryant University
- California Institute of Tech.
- Capital University
- Case Western Reserve Univ.
- Champlain College
- Clarkson University
- Colby-Sawyer College
- College of Charleston
- Columbia College
- Columbia University, NYC
- Community College of VT
- Connecticut College
- Drew University
- East Carolina University
- Emmanuel College
- Farmingdale State College
- Fitchburg State University
- Florida SouthWestern State College
- Gettysburg College
- Husson University
- Johnson & Wales University
- Keene State College
- Maine College of Art & Design
- New England College
- New England Institute of Technology
- Norwich University
- Oklahoma State University
- Pace University
- Quinnipiac University
- Saint Michael’s College
- The University of Alabama
- University of Akron
- University of Arizona
- University of Bridgeport
- University of Colorado
- University of Connecticut
- University of Dallas
- University of Massachusetts
- University of Vermont



# Our Town, Our Schools, Our Future

## Building Our Future

Following the passage of the \$115 million school facilities bond in November 2024, we are excited to announce that construction began at Porters Point School in October 2025. Our schools, some with systems over 60 years old, are finally receiving the modern infrastructure they deserve. This large-scale facilities project tackles three vital areas:

- **Infrastructure:** Replacing plumbing, electrical, and HVAC systems that have reached the end of their useful life.
- **Safety & Accessibility:** Installing modern and secure entryways, automated sprinklers, and ADA-compliant accessibility.
- **Learning Environments:** Eliminating “hallway instruction” by adding two-story expansions at PPS and UMS, so every student has a dedicated, functional classroom.

By renovating aging facilities and relocating preschool services with their age-alike peers, we are creating a safer and more effective learning environment for the future.



Construction began at Porters Point School in October 2025. This rendering shows how the school exterior will look when it's completed.

BLACK  
RIVER  
DESIGN  
ARCHITECTS

### Fall '25 – Summer '26

#### PORTERS POINT SCHOOL

**Phase 1:** Construction of a new two-story addition.

#### UNION MEMORIAL SCHOOL

**Planning:** Architectural and design development and approval.



Teachers and staff serve on school-based design committees.

### Summer '26 – Summer '27

#### PORTERS POINT SCHOOL

**Phase 2:** Demolition of the oldest wing and renovation of the remaining wing. Parking lot redesign and paving. **Expected completion date:** August 2027

#### UNION MEMORIAL SCHOOL

**Phase 1:** Construction of a new two-story addition.

#### COLCHESTER MIDDLE SCHOOL

**Planning:** Architectural and design development and approval.

### Summer '28 – Summer '30

#### UNION MEMORIAL SCHOOL

**Phase 2:** Demolition of the oldest wing and renovation of the remaining wing. Parking lot redesign and paving. **Expected completion date:** August 2028

#### COLCHESTER MIDDLE SCHOOL

**Phase 1:** Work at CMS is scheduled to begin in the Spring of 2028.

### Summer '27 – Summer '28

As we get closer to starting the remaining projects, we'll expand the timeline to include detailed milestones. These will include essential infrastructure updates at Malletts Bay School and Colchester High School.



Nearly all subcontractors on the PPS project are local; several are based right here in Colchester.

## Bond Repayment & Budget Impact

The \$115 million bond is being issued in three phases (\$30M, \$30M, and \$55M) to align with construction at PPS, UMS, and CMS. To date, the district has utilized \$3,062,243 of the initial \$30M borrowed in March 2025.

It is important to note that although this is a separate voter-approved facilities project, state accounting requires that these debt payments be included in our overall annual operating budget. Consequently, these capital costs are factored into our per-pupil spending calculations. This means our annual "cost per student" or "spending per pupil" calculation will appear higher because, in addition to our day-to-day classroom operating expenses, it now also includes these long-term infrastructure investment costs.

For FY'27, the estimated principal and interest payment is approximately \$4 million. This will increase as we complete our borrowing, peaking at approximately \$9.3 million in FY'29 before beginning a steady, predictable decline over the life of the bond.

Fiscal Year	Bond Status	Estimated Payment
FY'27	Payment Cycle Begins	~ \$4.0 Million
FY'28	Continued Borrowing	~ \$6.9 Million
FY'29	Peak Payment Year	~ \$9.3 Million



## Construction Progress at Porters Point School

Since the October groundbreaking, PC Construction has made significant progress during this initial phase of construction. Crews are focused on the exterior addition, starting with setting wall forms, pouring foundations, and placing the steel framework. Because work is concentrated on the new wing, all classes and school routines in the existing building will continue as usual through the end of the school year.

## New Playground Unveiled

To accommodate the location of the new two-story addition, the outdated Porters Point playground was relocated and replaced last summer. Designed with student and staff input, the new space trades challenging, age-inappropriate equipment for an inclusive, fully accessible environment. This ensures all students, regardless of ability, have a safe and engaging place to play.



# 2025-26 Operational Budget Information

On January 20, the Colchester School Board approved a \$70,167,602 budget for FY'27. With strong student enrollment, this proposed budget balances rising, unavoidable costs with strategic reductions to protect student learning. Despite external pressures, including significant statewide healthcare hikes and a 15% increase in transportation costs over the past three years, the operational portion of the budget was held to a 4.51% increase. The remaining 3.62% is dedicated to the voter-approved facilities bond. In total, this proposal reflects a 8.13% increase over the previous fiscal year.



## How Have We Worked to Contain Costs?

To contain rising year-over-year costs and balance the next payment towards the voter-approved facilities bond, the School Board and administrator identified \$1,077,007 in strategic reductions. These adjustments allow the district to continue providing high-quality education and services to students while remaining fiscally responsible:

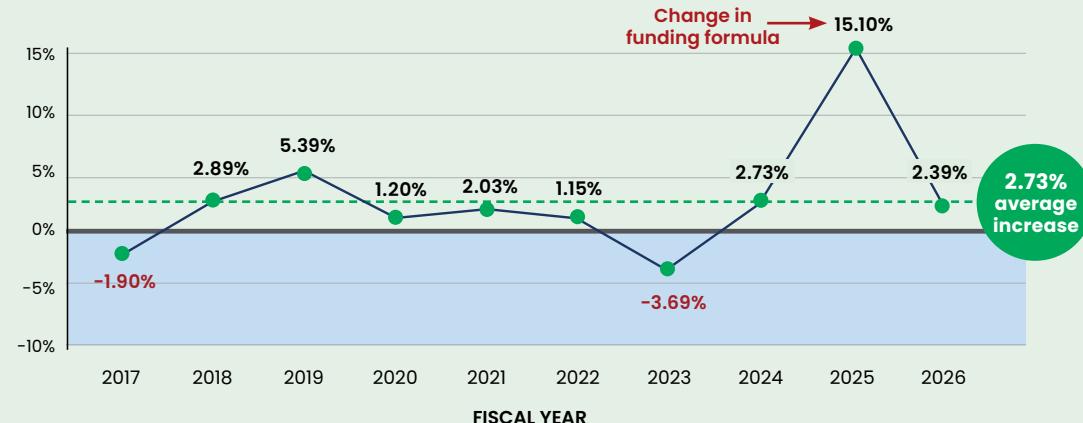
- Capital Management (\$500,000):** Shifts maintenance costs to the Capital Reserve Fund.
- Staffing, Teaching and Stipends (\$427,007):** Eliminates five vacant support staff positions, reduces 1.0 FTE teaching position (salary & benefits) and decreases professional stipends.
- External Services (\$150,000):** Reduces professional education services from outside vendors that are no longer needed due to student transitions and academic progress.



**Total Reductions: \$1,077,007**

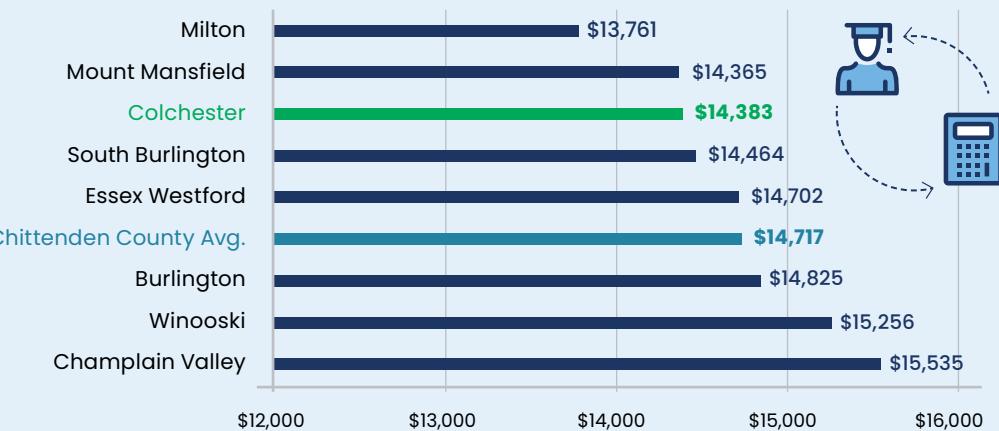
## A Tradition of Low Spending

Over the past decade, Colchester taxpayers have averaged an educational tax increase of just 2.73%.



## FY'26 Comparison of Spending Per Pupil

Across Vermont, the spending per pupil for the current school year ranged from \$10,846 to \$19,089. Colchester School District continues to be below the Chittenden County Average.



**Please note:** This information is accurate as of February 2, 2026. Any changes made by legislators that impact the estimated tax rate will be posted online at [csdvt.org/budget](http://csdvt.org/budget).

# Understanding Colchester's Property Reappraisal & Your Taxes

Education funding in Vermont is a complex process, and a key factor in determining your local tax rate is the Common Level of Appraisal (CLA). Because Colchester recently completed its first townwide property reappraisal since 2012, this year's budget reflects a significant shift in how those taxes are calculated. To help clarify the impact on taxpayers, here are the essential points regarding the reappraisal and the FY'27 budget:

- Addressing Outdated Values:** Since 2012, the market value of homes in Colchester has risen substantially beyond their listed appraised values. The state previously lowered our CLA to compensate for this gap, ensuring the education fund was adequately supported.
- Resetting the Scales:** The recent townwide reassessment is bringing property values back in line with current market realities. Consequently, the Vermont Department of Taxes has recommended raising the CLA components in our district's FY'27 education tax calculation.
- Rate vs. Value:** Similar to the 2012 reappraisal, this update will result in a significant decline in the education tax rate. However, it is important to understand that a lower rate does not necessarily mean a tax reduction. While the tax rate is decreasing, the assessed value of your home is now higher.
- Budget Neutrality:** This shift is a mathematical adjustment of the variables in the State's funding formula used to calculate property taxes. The goal of the reappraisal is to ensure the tax burden is distributed fairly and accurately based on current property worth across the entire community.



## Understanding the Ballot When You Vote

SCHOOL ARTICLE	
ARTICLE 15	
"Shall the voters of the school district approve the school board to expend seventy million one hundred sixty seven thousand six hundred two dollars (\$70,167,602), which is the amount the school board has determined to be necessary for the ensuing fiscal year? The Colchester School District estimates that this proposed budget, if approved, will result in <u>per pupil</u> education spending of \$15,747, which is <u>9.49%</u> higher than per pupil education spending for the current year."	
<input type="radio"/> YES	
<input type="radio"/> NO	

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

This is not the tax increase or the budget increase. This number is strictly a comparison in per pupil spending, which includes the facilities bond repayment in addition to our annual operating budget.

## How Would This Proposed Budget Affect You?

As a result of the townwide property reappraisal, the education tax rate is estimated to drop 44%, from \$1.8634 to \$1.0495. This adjustment by the Department of Taxes serves as a rebalancing to make sure that as property values go up to reflect the current housing market, the tax rate is lowered so the State does not collect more than voters authorized.

Typically, the budget section of this report includes two charts to show how the proposed budget affects taxpayers: one based on assessed property values and another based on household income. However, because Colchester homeowners have not yet received their updated individual assessments from the townwide reappraisal, those annual charts would not provide accurate or helpful information this year.

	Current (FY'26)	Proposed (FY'27)
Assessed Property Value	\$300,000	Reappraisal TBD (likely higher)
Education Tax Rate	\$1.8634	\$1.0495 (Estimated)
Education Tax Bill Calculation	$(\$300,000/100) \times \$1.8634$	$(\text{New Value}/100) \times \$1.0495$
Total	\$5,590.20*	TBD*

## \*Property Tax Credit

Approximately 70% of Vermont households receive a property tax credit based on their income. If your household made less than \$115,400 last year, you may qualify for a property tax credit and would not pay the full amount of taxes listed in the example. The credit is determined by your income level and is subject to state caps. To learn more visit: [tax.vermont.gov/property/property-tax-credit](http://tax.vermont.gov/property/property-tax-credit).





## Your Future Starts Here

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



**39%** of CSD employees  
live in Colchester



**86%** of licensed positions have a  
master's degree or higher  
(teachers, nurses, counselors)



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



Colchester School District partnered with USPS to  
deliver these reports for only 14¢ a household.



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