

HUUSD Survey on Redistricting

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Rob Dabrowski, Bobbi Rood, Steve Rosenberg, Cindy Senning, Shannon Wisdom

Executive Summary

The Harwood Unified Union School District asked the residents of its six towns for their thoughts on Act 73 and school district consolidation. The poll ran from October 12 to October 31, 2025.

Perhaps the most significant finding was the extremely high public interest in consolidation: out of approximately 11,500 residents over age 16 in the district, 720 responses were submitted, equaling over 6% of the population.

The second key takeaway is that our residents are deeply skeptical that consolidation will result in either improved education or significant cost savings. Even in Question 5, which asked for the advantages of consolidation, almost half the respondents saw little to no advantage to consolidation. Major criticisms include increased transportation time, skepticism about savings, and loss of local control.

A few issues were raised repeatedly, regardless of whether the respondent was pro- or anti-consolidation. These include a) unsustainable increases in property taxes, b) lack of state funding for construction/maintenance costs, c) increased transportation times, d) loss of community, e) loss of local control.

A final disturbing trend was the 7% of respondents who (without prompting) were skeptical that the legislative process will be done in good faith and/or would produce meaningful improvements. A smaller but noticeable percentage reported similar skepticism about the HUUSD School Board. This skepticism seemed to focus less on the goals of consolidation and more on the process and implementation of consolidation, indicating a need for better communication.

Question by Question Analysis

The survey is [here](#).

There were 720 responses to the survey.

Q1: Breakdown of respondents

- Parents/caregivers: 58%
- Community member: 24%
- Teachers: 5.1%
- Students: 4.7%
- Support staff: 2%
- Other: about 16%

Out of 13,968 residents in 2020, 5.1% answered the survey. There are around 11,500 residents over 16, so a more reasonable response percentage is $720/11,500 = 6.3\%$.

The 11/24 survey on the FY25 school budget had 212 respondents, so the number of respondents answering the current survey is almost $3 \frac{1}{3}$ times the number of respondents to the previous survey. This confirms the extremely strong interest of Act 73 redistricting for our residents.

Q2: In which town do you live?

Responses are roughly proportional to town populations.

- Moretown: 1,893, 13.6% of district population, 18% of responses
 - Fayston: 1,412, 10.1% of district population, 10.5% of responses
 - Warren: 1,701, 12.2% of district population, 10.7% of responses
 - Waitsfield: 1,854, 13.3% of district population, 12.1% of responses
 - Duxbury: 1,396, 10.0% of district population, 10.5% of responses
 - Waterbury: 5,712, 40.9% of population, 32.8% of responses
 - Other: about 2%
- Total: 13,968 (based on 2020 census)

Source: DeepSeek

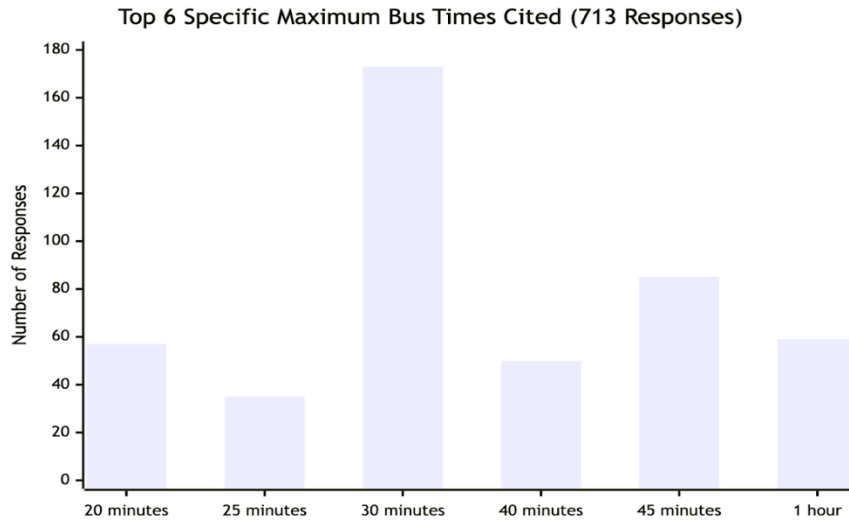
Q3: How familiar are you with Act 73/H.454 and the work of the Vermont School District Redistricting Task Force?

63.8% somewhat familiar, 17.8% very familiar, 18.4% not familiar. So 80.6% are somewhat or very familiar, again demonstrating the strong interest of Act 73 redistricting for our residents.

Q4: What is the maximum time you think an elementary, middle school or high school student should spend on a one-way bus ride to school?

A clear majority believes:

- 20–30 minutes is appropriate for younger students
- 30–45 minutes is acceptable for older students
- Very few think rides longer than 45–60 minutes are reasonable under any circumstances



(173 out of 720 respondents chose 30 minutes.)

Q5: What *opportunities* might exist for students, staff, or communities if HUUSD became part of a larger district or was reconfigured? (For example, more advanced classes, more clubs, more sports opportunities, cost savings, etc.)

Summary: Advantages are seen more at the middle/HS level with more course choices (particularly more AP and SPED support), more sports choices and more clubs, language/arts/music activities, tech courses, more diversity, more unified curriculum development. Some respondents see cost savings, e.g., on maintenance, bulk purchases, fewer administrative positions leading to lower taxes. Other advantages include a full time nurse, more support for students, expanded social circles, more help for special ed students, larger selection of teachers. There are concerns that added opportunities come with added travel time and added competition for e.g., varsity spots.

A surprising number of respondents said they saw little or no advantage to consolidation and/or no supporting evidence for cost savings.

Advantages to Consolidation	Number of Responses	Percentage (Approx.)
Little or no advantage/no supporting evidence for cost savings. <i>This shows deep skepticism about consolidation.</i>	327	49
Cost savings/smaller administration as a plus	236	35
More advanced courses (AP, etc.)	120	18
More clubs and extracurriculars	110	16
More sports opportunities	95	14
Social/community benefits (e.g., "more diverse peer groups," "larger friend group")	45	7
	933	NA

*665 people responded to this question, many listing multiple advantages, for a total of 933 responses.

Sample quotes:

Positive comments:

- "More advanced class options, a robust language program and more club options."
- "Consolidation of resources which may allow for spending on more opportunities for students; more opportunities for collaboration among staff... more consistent presence in schools of music, art, nurses, and library teachers in the valley; more opportunities for elementary students with larger class sizes."
- "More clubs, more advanced classes, more equitable offerings and class sizes, streamlined administration, streamlined and consistent teacher contracts... and hence saving time and resources and ensuring that high quality teachers are equally available to all students across the state."
- "Cost savings, more clubs and other after school opportunities for our children, a unified PTO."

Negative comments:

- "There will be no cost savings."
- "The only 'opportunities' seem to be saving on building maintenance at our children's expense."
- "I can't think of many."
- "It's hard to look at anything positive when your children's education is in jeopardy."

Q6: What risks or concerns do you see if HUUSD became part of a larger district or was reconfigured? (For example, less local control, longer bus rides, upfront construction costs, less parental input, etc.)

Summary: Most frequently mentioned risks/concerns include longer transportation times and snow days issues, larger class size, loss of local control and parental input, less individual attention for students. Other risks/concerns include bullying, transportation issues for extracurriculars, loss of community, construction costs, lack of cost savings, more competition for teams, teachers losing jobs.

Many responses of “all of the above” for the prompted risks. For specific responses, fewer mentions of construction costs than the other prompts.

Several respondents say that the School Board has not done a good job, so they have no problem with consolidation. Several respondents said that larger class sizes would be a benefit. Several responses pointed out that there are huge construction costs regardless of consolidation.

Several say there is no downside to consolidation of districts.

Concern	Number of Responses	Percentage (Approx.)
Longer bus rides and other transportation issues	386	56%
Loss of local control	288	41%
Larger class sizes/less individual attention	229	33%
Loss of community/sense of community	226	33%
Less parental/community involvement	193	28%
Upfront construction costs	121	17%
No risks/concerns or minimal risks/concerns	40	6%
Total Responses	695	N/A

*The number of “opposite” answers to Q6 is much lower than the number of “opposite” answers to Q5.

Sample quotes:

- "Longer bus rides (my kids already have a 45+ minute ride home, 30min in the morning) which is developmentally inappropriate for elementary kids and interferes with work and extracurricular activities for older kids (and unpleasant!)"
- "Less local control, less control by trained educators, more one size fits all approach (which does not work for education.)"
- "Almost every problem a student could have school could be addressed by better and more abundant relationships with well trained adults. Larger class sizes and less staff per student means that any issues already present will be exacerbated. One of Harwood's real strengths is its limited class sizes. Teachers are able to co-plan, and adjust on the fly for particular student's needs, and each student gets the space to be known and understood. Any larger of a school and students would begin to fall through the cracks."
- "Loss of community, increased travel time, towns being split up into multiple schools... less parental engagement, no town identity..."
- "...with schools further away there will be less parental involvement, decreased ability for parents to be involved, more difficult to attend afterschool performances, etc."
- "The upfront construction costs are the elephant in the room for any school closures. Modeling in our district shows cost savings for any school consolidation to taking place over 30 years. This is not a solution to a current day funding crisis."

- “A larger district will only add benefits.”

Q7: What resources, supports, or policy changes would you want to see in place if redistricting moves forward? (For example, state funding towards construction costs, additional state or federal funding for special ed students, changes in education property taxes, etc.)

Summary: Overall there is concern about property taxes’ affordability or lack thereof. Subthemes included revision of the tax formula and equity of expenditures across districts. Noted are the need for further elaboration on sources of revenue for the school district, why schools funding is based on property and not income tax, how redistricting would affect local communities to make more locally based decisions, and a concern for the well-being of students in the district based on sound budgeting practices that take quality of education into account. Generally speaking, respondents don’t want to “dumb down” the education our students are receiving in order to lower costs. They want assurance that quality is part of the formula.

Response Category/Theme	Number of Responses	Percentage (Approx.)
Funding & Taxes — State / Federal Support	244	40.50%
School Facilities & Construction	78	12.90%
Special Education — Funding & Services	55	9.10%
Program Changes / Curriculum & Purpose Clarity	41	6.80%
Staffing & Classroom Support	29	4.80%
Student Experience & Class Size	41	6.80%
Property / Tax Increase Concerns	39	6.50%
Funding Mechanisms, Fairness & Distribution	37	6.10%
Desire for Lower Taxes / Cost Savings & Efficiency	30	5.00%
Clarifications, Examples & Miscellaneous Questions	8	1.30%
	602	99.80%

*The number of responses was considerably lower on this question than on previous open ended questions.

Sample quotes:

- “We need more state or federal funding — don’t just shift costs to local property taxes.”
- “Please be clear about total project costs and how that will affect our bills.”
- “I support updated facilities if they’re needed for safety and learning.”
- “Renovate what's necessary before committing to big new construction.”
- “Special education costs shouldn’t be paid for by raising local property taxes.”
- “Renovate what's necessary before committing to big new construction.”
- “Show us how any program changes improve outcomes, not just costs.”

- “Keep teacher-to-student ratios reasonable; hire aides for classrooms that need help.”
- “Raise or level teacher salaries so we can keep good staff.”
- “Smaller class sizes would help students — that should be a priority.”
- “We need an estimate of how much taxes will change so families can plan.”
- “How will the money be split between schools — please explain the formula.”
- “If costs can be cut or phased in, do that instead of a big tax hit.”
- “List the exact items the funds would be spent on, with numbers.”

A more detailed AI summary is in the Appendix.

Q8: What additional questions, thoughts, or comments would you like the HUUSD Board to consider as it prepares input for the Task Force?

Summary: Participants expressed a range of opinions about redistricting, with mixed feelings about proposed consolidation or unification. The overwhelming majority express concerns about loss of community identity, increased taxes and diminished educational quality if local schools consolidate, while a minority support selective restructuring or efficiency measures. Overall, sentiment across all responses leaned strongly negative, reflecting frustration or skepticism about how redistricting is implemented rather than disagreement with the idea itself. Themes centered on fairness, transparency, community identity, and trust in decision-makers.

In short, the comments reveal that while people understand redistricting’s purpose, many worry about *how* it is carried out and *who benefits* — suggesting that clear communication and fairness in the process are key to improving public confidence.

Stance	Count	Percentage (Approx.)
Against redistricting	Majority of mentions	60–70%
For redistricting	Smaller share	10–15%
Neutral/concerned	Smaller share	10–15%
Neutral/unclear	Small remainder	

Thematic Interpretation

A. Against redistricting (dominant theme)

Respondents used negative or emotionally charged language such as “horrible,” “terrible,” “unfair,” or “a bad idea.” These often focused on concerns about community disruption, unequal impact, and loss of school identity.

Representative quotes:

- “This redistricting plan is horrible for our kids and divides neighborhoods.”
- “Redistricting is unfair and doesn’t solve the real issues in education.”
- “Terrible idea — it punishes families who worked hard to get into good schools.”

B. For redistricting (minority but supportive)

A smaller group expressed approval, describing redistricting as necessary or beneficial for

balancing enrollment and equity. These responses included words like “support,” “agree,” “good idea,” “necessary,” or “important change.”

Representative quotes:

- “I support this plan — we need more balanced schools.”
- “Redistricting is a necessary step to improve overcrowding.”
- “Good idea, if it helps reduce class sizes and improve equity.”

C. Neutral or concerned (middle ground)

This group raised questions or acknowledged complexity without clear approval or opposition. They often used phrases like “concerned,” “depends,” or “unsure.”

Representative quotes:

- “I’m concerned about how redistricting will affect special education students.”
- “Not sure how this will be implemented — depends on the details.”

D. Neutral/unclear

Responses mentioning redistricting tangentially or ambiguously, without clear sentiment.

Example: “Redistricting will happen, I just hope it’s done fairly.”

5. No mention of redistricting

Most respondents focused on **funding, staffing, special education, or property taxes** — showing that redistricting, while visible, isn’t the only major issue on their minds.

Q9: Is there anything else you would like to share about your hopes, concerns, or vision for the future of education in our six towns?

Summary: Responses reveal deep emotional investment in local schools and mixed feelings about proposed consolidation or unification. While a minority support selective restructuring or efficiency measures, the overwhelming majority express concerns about loss of community identity, increased taxes, and diminished educational quality if local schools consolidate.

Response Theme/Category	Percentage (Approx.)
Preserve Community Identity & Small-School Culture	35%
Educational Quality, Programs, and Student Well-Being	20%
Taxes & Cost Management	20%
Fairness Across Schools and Towns	10%
Long-Term Vision and Sustainability	8%
Skepticism, Transparency & Distrust in Decision-Making	7%
	100%

Thematic Interpretation

A. Preserve Community Identity & Small-School Culture (≈35%)

Many respondents emphasize:

- Protecting the character of individual towns
- Schools as the heart of their towns, essential to the community cohesion and family life
- Avoiding the feel of “mega districts”
- Keeping schools community-centered and locally connected
- Fear consolidation will increase travel times & disconnect families from schools

B. Educational Quality, Programs, and Student Well-Being (≈20%)

People raise worries about:

- Students becoming “numbers” in larger systems
- Overburdened teachers and loss of enrichment programs
- Loss of personal attention and belonging
- Emotional and social impacts of consolidation

C. Taxes & Cost Management (≈20%)

Strong threads include:

- Frustration with rising property taxes and education cost growth
- Concerns about financial inefficiency and caution against sacrificing quality or equity
- Calls for smarter consolidation or restructuring (e.g., grade-level campuses)
- The dominant concern is that consolidation, if done hastily or for purely economic reasons, could damage the social and educational fabric of the six towns

D. Fairness Across Schools and Towns (≈10%)

Respondents mention:

- Perception that some schools receive more investment than others
- Desire for equitable opportunities & resources regardless of town size or influence
- Avoiding favoritism or political decision-making
- Calls for balanced representation and transparency in district decisions

E. Long-Term Vision and Sustainability (≈8%)

Several comments focus on:

- Demographic realities (shrinking enrollments, aging populations)
- School viability over time
- Balancing fiscal responsibility with educational quality

6. Skepticism, Transparency & Distrust in Decision-Making (≈7%)

Recurring concerns include:

- Doubt that leadership will listen
- Fear that community input isn’t genuinely considered
- Cynicism about motives (jobs, politics, optics)
- Respondents emphasize thoughtful, transparent, and inclusive planning, calling for reevaluation of unification efforts and more community input

Q10: If you want to receive follow-up information about this process, please give your name and email address.

212 asked to be on a mailing list for these issues.

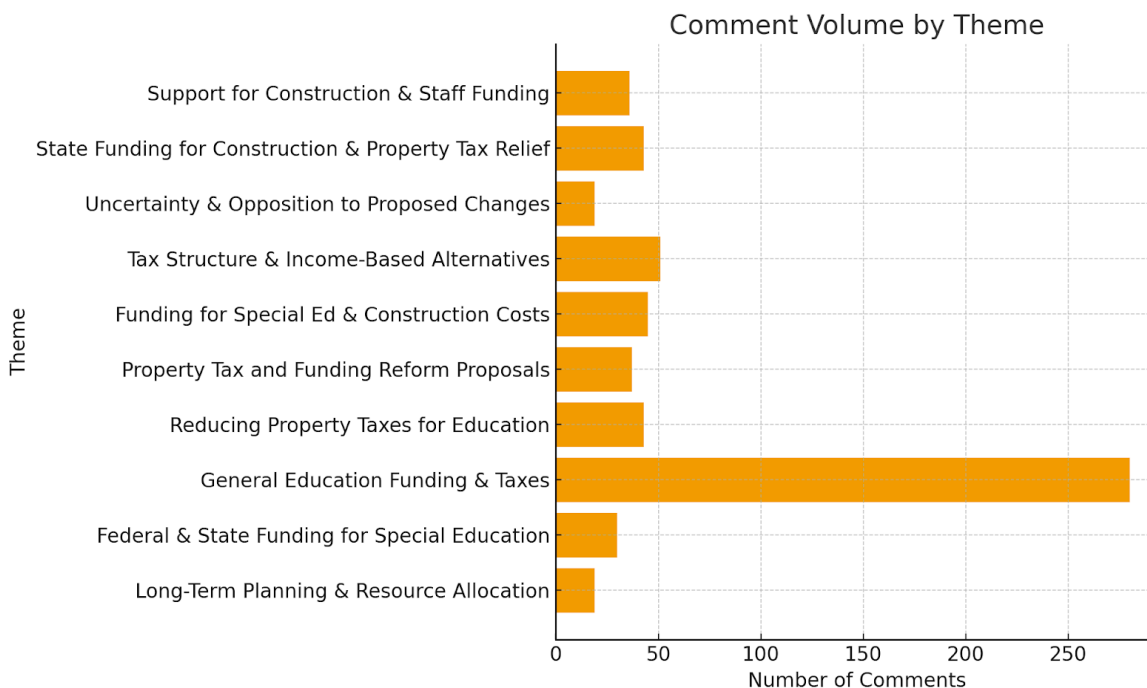
Discussion of Methodology

All answers were looked over by a human to identify main themes in the open ended response questions. To obtain statistics, the survey was uploaded by report authors to DeepSeek, ChatGPT, and Gemini. We then asked the bots for numbers and percentages of main themes. This is subject to both human and machine error, since some responses are vague or don't fit neatly into a theme. SR checked one response by hand (the social/community benefit in Q5), and found that DeepSeek's numbers matched well with his count, up to a reasonable error. The styles of the questions differ, depending on which bot was used.

There are issues with the framing of the survey questions. The HUUSD School Board felt there should be some suggested answers to Q5-7, which of course influenced respondents' answers. Similarly, Q4 on maximum transportation time presumably led to an increased emphasis on transportation in responses to Q5 on disadvantages of consolidation.

Appendix

Extra AI generated material for Q7



1) Funding & Taxes — State / Federal Support

Share: 244 responses (40.5% of answers — the largest single theme)

Sentiment: ~10.2% positive, 86.9% neutral, 2.9% negative (directional lexicon estimate)

Subthemes

- Calls for increased state or federal funding for schools
- Concern about property taxes and who will bear the cost
- Requests for clarity about how funds will be used and cost calculations
- Requests to protect special education funding from local tax increases

Representative paraphrased quotes

- “We need more state or federal funding — don’t just shift costs to local property taxes.”
- “Please be clear about total project costs and how that will affect our bills.”
- “Protect special education funding — it shouldn’t be cut or pushed onto homeowners.”
- “If the state steps up funding, that would reduce pressure on local taxpayers.”

2) *School Facilities & Construction*

Share: 78 responses (12.9%)

Sentiment: ~14.1% positive, 83.3% neutral, 2.6% negative

Subthemes

- Support or questions about building new facilities vs. renovating existing ones
- Concern about construction cost estimates and long-term maintenance
- Interest in prioritizing essential repairs and health/safety upgrades

Representative paraphrased quotes

- “If we’re building, show detailed cost estimates and long-term maintenance plans.”
- “I support updated facilities if they’re needed for safety and learning.”
- “Renovate what’s necessary before committing to big new construction.”
- “We need assurances maintenance funds will be included so buildings won’t deteriorate again.”

3) *Special Education — Funding & Services*

Share: 55 responses (9.1%)

Sentiment: ~1.8% positive, 94.5% neutral, 3.6% negative

Subthemes

- Requests for targeted funding for special education programs
- Concerns about staffing and resources for special needs students
- Desire for state/federal support rather than local tax burden

Representative paraphrased quotes

- “Prioritize federal funding to keep special ed programs fully staffed and supported.”
- “Don’t reduce services for students with special needs — they need consistent budgets.”
- “Special education costs shouldn’t be paid for by raising local property taxes.”

4) *Program Changes / Curriculum & Purpose Clarity*

Share: 41 responses (6.8%)

Sentiment: ~7.3% positive, 87.8% neutral, 4.9% negative

Subthemes

- Questions about what the proposed changes would mean for curriculum and programs
- Requests for clear examples of how students’ day-to-day learning would change
- Desire to know whether changes align with district priorities

Representative paraphrased quotes

- “Explain how these changes will help students — give concrete examples.”
- “Will the curriculum or class offerings change? I want to know what students will experience.”
- “Show us how any program changes improve outcomes, not just costs.”

5) Staffing & Classroom Support

Share: 29 responses (4.8%)

Sentiment: ~31.0% positive, 69.0% neutral, 0% negative

Subthemes

- Requests for more teachers, aides, and support staff
- Focus on teacher salaries, classroom ratios, and student supports
- Interest in using funds to retain staff and reduce class size

Representative paraphrased quotes

- “Funding should go to hiring more teachers and support staff — that affects learning directly.”
- “Keep teacher-to-student ratios reasonable; hire aides for classrooms that need help.”
- “Raise or level teacher salaries so we can keep good staff.”

6) Student Experience & Class Size

Share: 41 responses (6.8%)

Sentiment: ~4.9% positive, 85.4% neutral, 9.8% negative

Subthemes

- Concerns about class size and how it affects instruction quality
- Interest in additional student services (mental health, extended programming)
- Worries about changes that might lengthen the school day or alter schedules

Representative paraphrased quotes

- “Smaller class sizes would help students — that should be a priority.”
- “We need more support for students’ mental health and extra help where needed.”
- “Don’t make the day longer or cram in more unless it clearly helps students.”

7) Property / Tax Increase Concerns

Share: 39 responses (6.5%)

Sentiment: ~2.6% positive, 97.4% neutral, 0% negative

Subthemes

- Anxiety about property tax increases affecting homeowners
- Requests for limits/guarantees on how much taxes might rise
- Concern about the impact on seniors and fixed-income residents

Representative paraphrased quotes

- “I’m worried about increased property taxes and how that will hit homeowners.”
- “Please include protections for seniors and people on fixed incomes if taxes go up.”
- “We need an estimate of how much taxes will change so families can plan.”

8) *Funding Mechanisms, Fairness & Distribution*

Share: 37 responses (6.1%)

Sentiment: ~0% positive, 100% neutral, 0% negative

Subthemes

- Questions about how funding will be distributed across schools/districts
- Concerns about fairness — some schools getting more than others
- Requests for transparency in formulas (levies, bonds, state allocations)

Representative paraphrased quotes

- “How will the money be split between schools — please explain the formula.”
- “We want an equitable distribution so all students benefit.”
- “Show line items so the community can see what each school will receive.”

9) *Desire for Lower Taxes / Cost Savings & Efficiency*

Share: 30 responses (5.0%)

Sentiment: ~3.3% positive, 96.7% neutral, 0% negative

Subthemes

- Requests to find efficiencies rather than raise taxes
- Interest in cost-saving measures and better fiscal oversight
- Calls for prioritizing essential needs before additional spending

Representative paraphrased quotes

- “Look for waste and efficiencies before asking taxpayers for more.”
- “If costs can be cut or phased in, do that instead of a big tax hit.”
- “We need fiscal transparency and accountability for how money is spent.”

10) *Clarifications, Examples & Miscellaneous Questions*

Share: 8 responses (1.3%)

Sentiment: ~0% positive, 100% neutral, 0% negative

Subthemes

- Requests for concrete examples and math on proposed changes
- Questions about specific scenarios (e.g., how a family would be affected)
- Small set of miscellaneous comments that asked for more info

Representative paraphrased quotes

- “Give examples: what would my tax bill look like next year versus now?”
- “Provide specific scenarios so people can understand the impact on families.”
- “List the exact items the funds would be spent on, with numbers.”