

Woodstock Board of Education
Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Budget Items

Below we have summarized responses to some of the community's frequently recurring questions about the Education budget. You can receive more detail on these questions as well as any others you may have by calling the Superintendent, Dr. Baran, at 928-7453. Many State reports for expenditures in various forms are available online at: <http://www.state.ct.us/sde/dgm/report1/cpse2005/contents.htm> .

Q *Does Woodstock require a full-time superintendent?*

A The Board does not believe Woodstock would be well served by a part-time superintendent given the scope of responsibilities and demands of the position. There are only ten towns in Connecticut with a part-time superintendent. Of those towns, the student population ranges from 76 in Union to 628 in Lisbon. Woodstock currently has 982 students in the district. Each of those districts has only one school building. Five are PK-8 systems, three are K-8, and two are PK-6.

Q *Does the district need four staff positions in the superintendent's office?*

A The district office consists of a payroll/financial position, .75 Accounts Payable (.25 Transportation) position, an administrative assistant, and an executive assistant. Often districts of our size have a separate business office. Major responsibilities of this staff include in-house payroll, human resources, state and federal testing and reporting requirements, grants management, accounts payable, inventory, budgeting, business management, and school activity accounts. The executive assistant's hours often stretch into the evening. State reporting requirements and CMTs take up a significant amount of time. The Board feels that the district office is minimally staffed to achieve efficient business management and mandated reporting requirements. Woodstock's spending per pupil on General Administration of \$387 is 24% below the state average and 21% below that of ERG C.

Q *How does our teacher compensation compare to other districts?*

A The Board looked closely at comparative salary schedules during our teacher negotiations last fall. Our compensation scales are fair and generally tend to be near averages for both Windham County and ERG C. Our negotiated contractual increase over the next three years will be 3% per year. Including step increments, the increases will be 4.74%, 4.75% and 4.57% for 2006-07, '07-'08, and '08-'09, respectively. This is comparable to statewide teacher settlement averages of 4.73%, 4.64%, and 4.61%. Our recent teacher settlement increases the length of teachers' working year by two days. In general, our teachers are committed, hardworking and effective, and many spend far more hours than are contractually required. The teachers have agreed to meet collaboratively with the Board in a Teacher Knowledge and Skills Based Compensation committee to evaluate potential alternative compensation structures.

Q *Wouldn't it be less expensive to contract out for school bus transportation?*

A Transportation for students is a mandated service. Transportation comprises 5.09% of our overall budget. Periodically, the Board reviews the cost of maintaining our own fleet versus outsourcing transportation. To date, each time we have researched this alternative, we have determined that we save money by managing our own fleet. Our average per pupil transportation costs of \$422 is 20% lower than that of the State average, and yet, geographically, we are the second largest district.

Q *Can we manage healthcare insurance more effectively?*

A The cost of health insurance comprises 7.54% of our overall budget. The Board has actively sought quotes for many years from numerous insurance companies for both self-insured and fully-insured plans. We have also attempted to combine the group at the Town Hall, and at Woodstock Academy. The results have been that the current self-insured plan is the most cost effective for the district.

Our new teachers' contract increases the premium cost- share from its current 10% to 15% over its term, and requires greater member copays for most services, in a step toward greater personal responsibility for healthcare expenditures.

Q *Can more money through grants be raised?*

A. The district applies for and manages grants from the federal and state governments and from private foundations. This year we received \$431,029 from federal entitlement grants and a \$107,000 grant for school readiness from the state. A state technology grant for \$99,385 is in process (this was received last year). Smaller competitive grants are applied for annually by the district and individual teachers. In addition to school readiness and technology infrastructure, grant proceeds have been designated for special education program needs, our social worker and psychologist, reading intervention assistance, professional development and workshops for teachers, and student safety, character and drug education programs. The district actively seeks grant monies for relevant programs and needs for Woodstock, balancing potential funds available with the resources required to apply to and monitor the grant program.

Q *How many teachers' aides are employed by the district?*

A In 2003 the WPS eliminated those teachers' aides not required for special education needs, reading intervention or those funded through grants. Currently the district employs 32 special education TAs (eight funded through grants) and seven regular education TAs. Of these seven, six are funded through grants: two are shared by six sections of kindergarten, four work in reading intervention at WES, and the district pays for one TA for reading intervention at WMS.

Q *What is the student teacher ratio in the Woodstock Public Schools and how does this compare to other districts?*

A In the 2004-2005 Strategic School Profile, the State defines the number of students per teacher as the student enrollment divided by the full-time equivalent count of certified professionals classified as teachers. The average number of students per teacher in the district (K-8) is 15.5. This compares to an average of 13.8 in the state, 13.4 in ERG C, and 15.8 at Woodstock Academy. This information and that of other towns, is available at the State website for Strategic School Profiles:

<http://www.csde.state.ct.us/public/cedar/profiles/index.htm#go>

Average classroom sizes at WPS, and the potential impact on class sizes of classroom teacher reductions, are presented in your budget package handouts.

Q *How does the district try to better manage costs in the budget?*

A The district is diligent in seeking cost efficiencies in purchased goods and services and in contractual negotiations. Approximately 40% of our budget is associated with high school costs, over which we have little control. Another 50% is spent on salaries and benefits. We negotiate contractual salaries and benefits seeking to balance fair market compensation and fiscal responsibility. Another 4% of our budget pays for utilities and fuel, which we purchase under the most cost effective programs available to us. We spend 1% of the budget on repairs and maintenance of buildings and grounds, leaving the remaining 5% for all other categories including textbooks and other books, supplies, technology, equipment, legal, insurance, professional development, etc. There is little discretionary spending in the budget. Reductions in the budget will necessarily quickly result in reductions in programs and teaching positions.

Your Woodstock Public Schools are both effective and efficient. Woodstock ranks 164th out of 169 towns in CT in spending per pupil. Your tax dollars are responsibly and prudently invested in a quality education at a bargain price.

