



2009-2010 SUPERINTENDENT'S PROPOSED OPERATING BUDGET QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

On Thursday, January 15, 2009, Superintendent of Schools Dr. Joshua Starr presented his 2009-2010 proposed operating budget to the Board of Education. Below are frequently asked questions and answers to help parents and taxpayers understand the budget, next year's challenges, and the approval process.

1. What are the highlights of the Superintendent's proposed operating budget?

The budget request is \$228.6 million, which is a 4.57% increase over this year's spending plan. The base program (consisting of current staff and programs) normally increases from 4.5 – 5.5% annually. However, that figure has been reduced to 2.87%, by using reserves of \$1.4 million, reducing most discretionary spending categories by at least 10%, and making aggressive cuts to the following areas:

Athletics - 22% reduction (\$300,000)

Professional Development - 36% reduction (\$136,000)

Reductions in Homebound Tutoring – 30% reduction (\$90,000)

Clerical Overtime – 24% reduction (\$24,000)

2. What financial concerns are likely to impact next year's operating budget?

It is anticipated that there will be a 10% reduction in state and federal grants, which are directly tied to lower state and federal revenues. Additionally, increased funding is necessary for rising special education costs (particularly tuition), transportation related to the phasing in of the redistricting plan, custodial pension contributions due to reductions in asset values, and OPEB (Other Post Employment Benefits). Finally, a slight increase in enrollment (1.3%) is expected, given the likelihood that some private/parochial students will opt for public school.

3. Why does Stamford get a lower portion of state revenue sharing than most other municipalities?

Connecticut's Education Cost Sharing (ECS) formula is based on "Need Students", "Wealth Rank", and past funding practices of the state. Districts with the highest "Wealth Rank" receive the lowest amount of state support. When the state

determines "Wealth", property Grand List values and median household income are taken into account. Because Stamford has the second-highest Grand List value in the State, it receives significantly fewer funds than other districts with similar student demographics. When "Need Students" is factored into the ECS formula, Stamford's wealth rank drops (from 2 to 27 of 189 school districts), but not enough to significantly increase the ECS revenue to the district.

4. Is there anything new in this budget?

The budget includes \$846,000 (.4% of the budget) for program enhancements to literacy. This initiative is designed to increase student achievement levels that are unacceptably low. Other program improvements, such as to social studies, world language, art, and music, have been put on hold.

5. Why doesn't this spending plan cut any staff positions?

Cutting positions would impact class size and classroom instruction and every effort is being made to avoid that. Additionally, the gains the district has achieved in the last three and a half years are the result of the commitment, intelligence and hard work of staff. To put it simply, "People Are the System" in Stamford Public Schools.

6. Will class sizes increase under this proposal?

This budget would maintain the current average elementary class size of 20. Middle and high school class sizes also would remain consistent with current levels.

7. Will the length of my child's bus ride increase?

Although the budget calls for four fewer buses next year, bus ride times are expected to remain about the same as this year.

8. What is the cost of redistricting?

Originally, the budget called for 7 additional buses at a cost of \$586,000 to address transportation needs related to redistricting. That figure has been revised to 6 buses at a cost of approximately \$500,000.

9. Why does SPS pay for private school buses?

According to Connecticut General State Section 10-281, school districts are obligated to provide "the same kind of transportation services" to resident children enrolled in private schools that are located within the district.

10. Why does SPS partially fund two city charter schools, Trailblazers and Stamford Academy at an annual cost of \$1,658,756?

Trailblazers and Stamford Academy serve Stamford students who have not been successful in traditional school environments and who need a different learning environment to reach their full potential. They receive different programming and services than what SPS offers.

11. Why does SPS pay for some services provided by the City?

SPS shares services with the City for information technology, summer school crossing guards, health insurance for classified staff, pension, risk management insurance, and legal services. This sharing of services benefits the taxpayer due to economies of scale.

12. Where can I read more about the budget?

The 2009-2010 proposed budget and supporting documents are posted at <http://stamfordpublicschools.org/content/68/117/default.aspx>
Alternatively, go to www.stamfordpublicschools.org... Click Administration... then click Finance.

13. What is the Board of Education's review process for the Superintendent's proposed budget?

The Board of Education Fiscal Committee has scheduled several meetings to review the proposed budget. The schedule and meeting agendas are available at <http://stamfordpublicschools.org/content/68/107/443/default.aspx>

14. When can I comment on the budget?

The Board of Education has scheduled a public hearing on the proposed budget on Thursday, February 5, 2009 at 7:00 p.m. at Cloonan Middle School, 11 West North Street, Stamford. The Superintendent and Board of Education will present the proposed budget and then hear public comments. Childcare and interpreters will be available.

15. What happens after the public hearing?

The full Board of Education will vote on the budget on Thursday, February 12, 2009 at 7:00 p.m. in the Board of Education meeting room, 5th floor, Stamford Government Center, 888 Washington Boulevard. The budget is submitted to the Mayor, Board of Finance, and Board of Representatives prior to March 1, 2009. Those boards will hold a joint public hearing in March before voting in April. The school budget is finalized in May.

#