

Frequently Asked Questions Concerning the Budget and the School Program

1. What is the budget voters are asked to approve?

The spending plan for 2010-2011 is \$5,200,000. Each household/taxpayer will receive a budget card which lists the budget by category. The 2010-2011 budget represents a 2.45% (approximately \$125,000) increase in spending and a 4.45% increase in the tax levy. The increase in the tax rate, based on current assessments is .575 cents per one thousand dollars of assessed value. Currently, our tax rate is \$12.061 per one thousand. Based upon the current assessments the tax rate for the 2010-2011 school year would be \$12.575 per one thousand. An ESTIMATED Change in Property Tax Bill chart is attached.

2. What is the impact of non-resident students on the budget?

Westport Central School accepts non-resident students when the enrollment will have no additional financial impact on the school. We will not accept students when classes or programs are full. In the past, our State Foundation Aid has increased because non-resident applications to the school have risen. Based on this additional enrollment, the District has realized an increase in state aid. The new Foundation Aid model is a “share” or “foundational” approach, wherein each student does indeed generate an allocation. This approach is a result of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity lawsuit which yielded the decision that the state must provide fiscal support for each student. This can be calculated by dividing Westport’s total Foundation Aid by the number of students enrolled. This will give an approximate amount of aid per student including the non-resident students. When the Foundation Aid System is operating correctly, there will be an increase of additional state aid generated by our rising enrollment. The 2010-2011 foundation aid will be calculated using the 2008-2009 data. Non-resident students have generated significant aid in the past. Enrollment has remained constant over the past several years, while acceptance is based on classroom availability and size.

3. Where have the reductions occurred in this year’s proposed budget?

We have made reductions in all areas of the budget with the exception of BOCES services, health insurance, and retirement contributions. The District has reduced the position of Superintendent of Schools to one-half time. A retirement will reduce professional salaries. Supplies and materials and plant operations have been reduced as well.

4. What costs have increased, year over year?

Our costs for BOCES services, mostly in special education, have increased dramatically. Our contributions to health insurance and state retirement funds have also increased.

5. What are unfunded mandates?

We currently have more than 145 unfunded or underfunded requirements for schools. A listing of unfunded or underfunded mandates is available. Graduation requirements have increased over the years and not all requirements are funded. Students are required

to complete 22 credits of high school classes. There are new testing requirements that have been phased in. Graduation requirements change with each cohort of students.

6. Why have no positions been eliminated?

We have reduced the Superintendent's position to half-time. We have not cut any teaching positions, since doing so will have a direct impact on program. The Board of Education has made the decision to keep the program intact and to reduce areas of expenditure to ensure that the education of the student body is not compromised. This year and next, the school was awarded approximately \$107,000 in ARRA (federal stimulus) money. This money was used to keep our current instructional staff in place.

7. What is the retirement incentive?

The BOE passed a one-time incentive for teachers to retire. This incentive was limited to those eligible to retire under TRS (teacher retirement system) rules this year. There were five faculty members who qualified for this offer – one responded. There is an additional program offered by the State for members of NYSUT with 25 years of experience and who are 55 years of age. The window for this incentive starts in June. All faculty members eligible for this program have been informed.

8. What is a contingency budget?

A contingency budget is prepared and adopted by the school board when the voters reject the board's proposed budget. The contingency budget funds only teachers' salaries and those items the board determines to be ordinary contingent expenses. Examples of ordinary contingent expenses include legal obligations, expenditures, specifically authorized by statute and other items necessary to the maintenance of a school district's educational program, the preservation of school property, and ensuring the health and safety of students and staff. The Westport Central School District contingency budget would be \$5,078,356. This is \$3750 higher than last year's budget.

9. Is a contingency budget automatic after voters reject a proposed spending plan?

No. Should the voters defeat the budget, the District has the option of offering a revised budget to voters for a revote, or immediately adopting a contingency budget. Districts are only allowed one budget revote to be held on the third Tuesday in June. If the budget fails a second time, then the Board of Education must adopt a contingency budget before July 1st. In the case of a contingency budget, districts are constrained in two ways – determination of ordinary contingency budget appropriations and the statutory caps. Ordinary contingency expenses are defined as the expenditures absolutely necessary to operate and maintain schools (except for those items over which the statutes themselves either provide mandates for or give discretion to the board).

10. If we go to a contingency budget, what will that mean?

We will need to cut program by about \$121,000. The BOE will need to consider all aspects of the program at that point.

Additional Contingency Budget Information

A. What legal obligations are considered ordinary contingent expenses?

- Debt service (both principal and interest payments).
- Judgments from courts and orders of the commissioner of education and other administrative bodies or officers.
- Social Security and retirement obligations as well as other payroll taxes and assessments.
- Pre-existing contractual obligations, including collective bargaining agreements under the Taylor Law.
- Payments made to a former superintendent in settlement of claims arising from a contract.

B. What ordinary contingent expenditures are specifically authorized by statute?

- Teachers' salaries.
- Interscholar athletics, field trips and other extracurricular activities.
- Transportation within the state-mandated mileage limitations.
- Transportation to and from school under the mileage limitations last approved by the voters if more generous than the minimum mileage limitations required under state law.
- Transportation related to interschool athletics, field trips, and extracurricular activities.
- The cost of providing transportation in a child safety zone.
- Expenses for cafeteria or restaurant services.
- Textbooks.
- Expenses in connection with membership in the New York State School Boards Association, Inc.
- Convention and conference expenses.
- Admission of nonresident pupils upon payment of tuition in accordance with Part 174 of the commissioner's regulations.
- Under limited circumstances: youth bureaus, recreation and youth service projects, and other youth programs.
- The district's share of BOCES services.
- Health and welfare services.
- Grants in aid received from either the state or federal government, other gifts, and insurance proceeds not involving the expenditure of local money.
- Kindergarten, nursery, and night schools.
- Pre-kindergarten, if the board chooses to offer a pre-kindergarten program.
- Accident insurance for students.
- In-service training for teachers.
- Eye safety devices.
- Library books and other instructional materials associated with a library.
- Energy performance contracts entered into by either a school district or a BOCES.

C. What are some examples of necessary items deemed to constitute ordinary contingent expenses?

- Necessary travel expenses of board members and employees on official business.
- Amounts needed to pay for necessary legal services.
- "Teacher supplies" but not "student supplies".
- Employment of security guards to ensure "safety of students and staff".

- Salaries for necessary non-teaching employees.
- Utilities, including fuel, water, light, power, and telephone.
- Use of school buildings for teachers' meetings and parent-teacher association meetings with school-connected purposes. However, this does not include programs of entertainment or of a social nature.
- Emergency repairs of school plant.
- Maintenance of necessary, sanitary facilities.
- Necessary expenditures for complying with the commissioner's regulation pertaining to such items as fire alarm systems and fire escapes.
- Rental of temporary classroom facilities with approval of the commissioner, in the case of an unforeseeable emergency.
- Required civil defense equipment.
- Certain expenses, such as for emergency repairs, or to equip a classroom or classrooms where it is essential to house additional students. This does not include equipment.
- Materials used in classes by students where uniformity is essential to the program or to preserve health and safety.
- Newspapers and periodical subscriptions for libraries and classroom use where essential for instruction or to preserve continuity of sets.
- Expenditures necessary to advise district voters concerning school matters.
- Preliminary plans and specifications needed to submit propositions to voters.
- Options on land where the price of land is nominal.

D. What are some examples of expenditures that do not constitute ordinary contingent expenses?

- New equipment.
- Public use of school buildings and grounds, except where there is no cost to the district but a district may charge a fee that meets or exceeds its actual costs.
- Nonessential maintenance.
- Capital expenditures, except in an emergency.
- Consultant services to review district operations and make recommendations necessary for the creation of the budget.

ESTIMATED

Change in Property Tax Bill

| Assessment (before exemptions) | Current Tax Bill \$12.061 / \$1,000 Assessed Value | Projected Tax Bill \$12.575 / \$1,000 Assessed Value | Estimated Change (based on current assessed value) |
|---|---|---|---|
| \$ 50,000 | \$ 603.05 | \$ 628.76 | \$ 25.71 |
| \$100, 000 | \$1206.09 | \$1257.52 | \$ 51.43 |
| \$150, 000 | \$1809.14 | \$1886.28 | \$ 77.15 |
| \$200, 000 | \$2412.18 | \$2515.05 | \$102.86 |
| \$250, 000 | \$3015.23 | \$3143.81 | \$128.58 |
| \$300, 000 | \$3618.27 | \$3772.56 | \$154.29 |

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