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## School Committee: School Committee offers Q and A's

By [Wayland School Committee](#)/ Guest Columnists  
Thursday, December 1, 2005

Editor's Note: The following was submitted by the Wayland School Committee - Jeff Dieffenbach (chairman), Robert Gordon (vice-chairman), Barbara Fletcher, Louis Jurist and Heather Pineault.

During the public comment periods of the last few School Committee meetings, residents have posed a number of questions. To inform the discussion that will take place over the next few months regarding the school budget, we present some of these questions below and provide answers.

**QUESTION:**Why is the School Committee discussing an 8 percent cut from the budget needed to maintain level services for the 2006-07 fiscal year?

**ANSWER:**In October, the Finance Committee projected the 2006-07 fiscal year (FY07) budget shortfall to be on the order of \$3.3 million. It then tasked all boards and committees with preparing two budgets - one that would provide level services in FY07, and a second that would cut the 8 percent required to avoid the need for an operating override. It is important to note that an 8 percent budget cut will not be the recommendation of the School Committee, but rather represents a response to the FinCom's request for information. The School Committee does not endorse cuts of this magnitude.

**QUESTION:**When is the Wayland School Committee planning to present a budget that it supports to the town?

**ANSWER:**The School Committee will work in December and January to develop a responsible budget that supports the needs of the town both educationally and fiscally. This budget will be recommended by the School Committee to the Finance Committee in early February.

**QUESTION:** Do the Wayland Public Schools charge fees for activities and athletics?

**ANSWER:** Yes, athletic fees date back to the 1989-90 school year. Furthermore, just last year, in response to financial constraints, the School Committee raised existing athletic fees to \$125 for each High School interscholastic sport per season (with a family cap of \$600) and to \$50 for each Middle School interscholastic sport per season. The School Committee also instituted new fees for extracurricular activities and clubs at the Middle School and High School of \$50 per year (allowing unlimited participation in all clubs/activities, with the exception of public service activities and elected positions for which no fees are charged), as well as a new student parking fee at the High School of \$90 per semester. We will continue to analyze the charging of fees, both at current and increased levels.

**QUESTION:**What if a family cannot afford these fees?

**ANSWER:**In the past, some assistance has been made available to help families who have difficulty affording school fees. The committee will explore this option going forward.

**QUESTION:**How do offsets work?

**ANSWER:**Offsets are revenues above and beyond the budget amount appropriated at the annual Town Meeting. For 2005-06, offsets include state and federal grants, fees for athletics, fees for before- and after-school programs, parking and building rental fees, sales of student lunches, and private gifts and grants. For example, the schools' operating budget for FY06 is \$27,881,368. This amount was reduced by offsets of \$501,625, resulting in a Town Meeting appropriation of \$27,379,743.

**QUESTION:** Over the last five years, the school budget has increased by 32 percent while the enrollment has climbed by only 1 percent during that same period. Why?

**ANSWER:**The FY06 school budget appropriation was \$27.4 million, up 32 percent from \$20.8 million in FY01. Enrollment in FY06 was 2,916, up 1 percent from 2,888 in FY01. There are several reasons why budget growth has exceeded enrollment growth.

First, each of those years saw a contractually negotiated compensation increase for teachers and other school employees. These increases were necessary for Wayland to maintain competitiveness in its recruitment and retention of the teachers who drive our

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academic program.

Second, as enrollments rose much faster than 1 percent in the Middle School and High School, new teachers were added. At the same time, enrollment drops at the elementary school were not sufficient to correspondingly reduce staff at the lower level.

Therefore, the combination of salary raises, pay increases for new steps (additional years of service) and lane changes (advanced degrees), and modest growth in the number of teaching positions resulted in teaching staff expenses increasing by 32 percent over this five-year period.

Third, non-personnel costs such as materials, utilities and transportation increased with (or in some cases at a faster rate than) inflation.

Last, legally mandated special education services increased by 42 percent from FY01 to FY06. Please note that a portion of this increase is also captured in the teaching staff expense increase.

**QUESTION:**What is the FY07 Ad Hoc Budget Advisory Committee?

**ANSWER:**Earlier in the year, the Board of Selectmen, Finance Committee and School Committee each appointed a representative to the FY07 Ad Hoc Budget Advisory Committee, charged by the selectmen with identifying revenue enhancements and cost savings that might reduce the projected \$3.3 million deficit without appreciably affecting the level of service that Wayland delivers. This committee expects to announce a deficit reduction dollar amount by the end of December 2005.

**QUESTION:**Will the School Committee consider outsourcing some of its services?

**ANSWER:**The FY07 Ad Hoc Budget Advisory Committee has discussed increasing fees for student lunches in order for this program to be fully self-funded. Therefore, outsourcing for this particular program is not currently being considered. However, as part of the overall budget process, the school administration does plan to evaluate outsourcing custodial work and technology support among other services provided throughout the school district.

**QUESTION:** Is the School Committee thinking about using volunteers in the schools?

**ANSWER:** There is already a strong volunteer presence in the schools. The committee will examine whether and how best to increase that presence. Wayland residents should understand that, in addition to the value that volunteers add, they also come with several unfunded obligations - the need to train them, the need to supervise them, and the need to fill in for them if they are expected but unable to show up for work on a given day. Furthermore, volunteers should not replace teacher instruction.

**QUESTION:**Are there more creative ways to reduce the budget by 8 percent?

**ANSWER:**As with businesses in the service industry, schools are largely dependent on people to provide the services they deliver. In fact, personnel accounts for more than 80 percent of the school budget. A sizable fraction of the remainder, such as utility and transportation costs, lies beyond the ability of the schools to control. Unlike private sector businesses, the schools cannot cut costs by serving fewer customers; every child who shows up in September is entitled to an education regardless of how much money the town has appropriated. When the School Committee is asked to reduce its budget by 8 percent, it must make a large portion of the cuts through personnel, thereby reducing the services it offers to the public through increased class sizes and eliminated extracurricular and athletic programs.

**QUESTION:** Are the students of Wayland receiving a private school education at the expense of the taxpayers?

**ANSWER:**No. While the quality of education and expectations of the schools have been quite high in Wayland, the program is by no means a private school education. There are two main differences between the Wayland public schools and private schools - class size and facilities. Both of these areas have a direct impact on the quality of education. Small class sizes allow teachers to offer more innovative teaching practices and more individualized instruction, truly knowing every child and working to meet their needs. The better school facilities have, among other qualities, fully updated technological capabilities, science laboratories and athletic facilities. Wayland can claim none of these, and, to the contrary, the High School's physical plant came under severe criticism for its inadequacy in its 2005 accreditation report. Not only is Wayland not delivering a private school education using public funds, the reverse is becoming increasingly true as student fees increase - the public education that Wayland is obligated to offer is being funded privately.

**QUESTION:**How can I learn more about this process and follow the discussion?

**ANSWER:**The School Committee usually meets every other Monday evening. However, during the budget cycle, the School Committee tends to meet more frequently, so it is

important to check the schedule. Our next meeting is on Monday, Dec. 5 at 7:30 p.m. in the Town Building. Our meeting schedule is posted at "www.wayland.k12.ma.us/admin/schoolcom.html" and is available at the Town Building's School Department.

For more information about the school budget and this process, visit "www.waylandschoolcommittee.org"

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