

# Journal Inquirer.com

NORTH-CENTRAL CONNECTICUT'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER

Towns > Bolton

## Bolton superintendent seeks 3.75% increase for schools

Print Page

By Kym Soper  
Journal Inquirer

Published: Friday, January 21, 2011 12:21 PM EST

BOLTON — School Superintendent Paul K. Smith says his proposed \$12.52 million budget for fiscal year 2011-12 — a 3.75 percent increase in spending over the current year — will mean larger class sizes, fewer supplies, and less frequent updates to curriculum or textbooks.

"We've used the word 'maintenance' to describe our budgets over the last couple of years," Smith said, noting last year's 1.59 percent increase and the 0.76 percent increase in 2009-10.

Prior to the economic downturn, increases were in around 3 to 4 percent.

After two successive years of lean budgets, "we're now digging into the heart and soul of instruction, equipment, and curriculum," Smith said. "We're making wise decisions, but it's getting more and more difficult.

"It's a sign of the times — we're all trying to do what we can with limited funding," he added.

Smith on Thursday outlined several scenarios for the Board of Education with increases ranging from 3.75 percent to zero.

In his preferred proposal, with a 3.75 percent increase, Bolton Center School would still lose one teacher and a part-time speech pathologist position. There would also be no upgrades to the computer lab, but that can be absorbed when the new high school comes online in late fall or early winter, Smith said.

There would also be nearly \$20,000 in cuts to textbooks and supplies, "pay-to-play" will continue for athletics, and the planned summer literacy program will be put on hold.

Those accounts would be slashed further to reduce the overall increase to 3.5 percent, said Smith, who would also eliminate \$5,558 in stipends for clubs such as the high school debate team and the art club.

A 3 percent increase would eliminate two part-time special education instruction assistants, one at the high school and the other at Bolton Center School, as well as one part-time teacher in the lower grades.

Another full-time teacher would be lost to reach a 2.5 percent increase, and both a full-time library instructional assistant at Bolton Center School and a full-time computer lab monitor at the high school would be reduced to part-time positions. The Advance Placement test fee account also would be cut in half.

Another full-time teacher would be cut, and one school bus eliminated to reach a 2 percent increase; technology upgrades, software, maintenance and custodial funds, and athletic accounts would be further reduced for a 1.5 percent increase; and an additional two teaching positions would be cut to keep spending at the same level.

The town schools have 900 students this year, up from 879 the previous year. The town is in the fourth year of a program that accepts students from Columbia; Those out-of-town students number 69 now, and 80 percent of their tuition goes to the high school building project, with the remaining 20 percent going into the town's general fund to offset taxes.

The \$26.15 million high school renovation project, which includes a scaled-down 33,975-square-foot addition, was approved by voters in April 2009 and will receive 54 percent

reimbursement from the state.

Education Cost Sharing funds are not as certain, however, Smith said.

"We planned as if it were level funding," he said of the state's largest grant to schools.

Last year, Bolton received some \$3 million in ECS funds.

The schools will lose \$430,000, or 14 percent of ECS dollars, in additional federal stimulus money that it received in the current year.

Those federal funds won't be there this year, and if the state doesn't fill the gap, the shortfall will be "pretty devastating" for all municipalities, he said.

"That's the most serious educational concern in Bolton, for a number of years now, and it's a similar problem in every town," Smith said. "These weren't new dollars for new programs — they maintained existing programs. Without them, we'll be losing dollars we were able to rely on for years.

"Even if ECS stays level it appears as a cut because utilities, fuel, and other costs keep going up," he added.

Salaries and wages, common drivers of school budgets, increased by 1.6 percent in the proposed budget while benefits went up by 4.12 percent.

Teachers negotiated a two-year contract for 2010-11, 2011-12 that calls for no pay raise and no step increases in this first year and a 2 percent raise with step increments only in the second half of the second year.

"I really have to applaud our teachers because when we went into negotiations, they were conscious of the economy and responded," Smith said.

Smith says he also has \$176,000 tucked away in stimulus funds that has yet to be spent. He said he might need to use that money to prevent laying-off existing staff.

He remains hopeful it won't come to that, however.

"Our town has shown its commitment to education through the renovation to the high school, and when they were called on as a community to develop the 20/20 vision," Smith said. "And I hope they understand that supporting the budget and ECS funding is also an important commitment to education."

The money was designed to promote job growth. Smith says he has identified jobs he'd like to add but will wait to see what happens with ECS funding or what the school board or town requires before deciding.

Copyright © 2011 - Journal Inquirer

[x] Close Window