

Plainville Citizen Op-Ed, December, 2014

**Financing Public Education in Connecticut and
Developing the Plainville BOE Budget**

Among the 50 states in America, Connecticut has a somewhat unique structure when it comes to funding public education. Connecticut ranks 49th (only Illinois is worse) when it comes to the percentage of funding for education that must come from local taxpayer dollars. Our state government helps most towns offset the cost of operating schools by contributing about 42% of the funding required, and the federal government adds about 5% toward that cost. The state's Education Cost Sharing (ECS) formula is part of legislation that is designed to balance the scale and equalize the ability of towns to pay for public education. Unfortunately, the ECS grant has never been fully funded by the state government, so each town only receives a percentage of the promised dollars.

Once Connecticut towns and cities set a total budgeted amount for spending on public schools in their community, our state statutes give complete authority over how that money is expended to the local board of education (CT Statute 10-222). It is the responsibility of the approximately 166 school boards in Connecticut to work collaboratively with their superintendents to develop and sustain the highest possible quality in educational programming for their schools, while staying within the community's allocation for education spending. A review of the efforts by Plainville's Board and administration over the last five years clearly shows how seriously we take this charge. The cost of providing public education in Connecticut and across our country has continuously risen over this time at an average of nearly 4% each year. However, here in Plainville over that same period of time, the administration and board of education have continuously improved our schools, while working with budget increases well

below that national trend. Plainville’s budget for educational spending has increased by less than 1% in all but one of the last five years. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) is a calculation that demonstrates the percentage increases in the cost of certain goods and services in America, in this case the costs associated with providing public education. The chart below provides a five-year comparison of the increases to the national CPI for education cost and the Plainville education budget increases:

| | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 5-Year Average |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| % Increase in CPI for Education | 3.8% | 5.2% | 3.7% | 3.7% | 2.9% | 3.8% |
| % Increase to Plainville BOE Budget | 0.75% | 0.00% | 1.15% | 0.99% | 0.67% | 0.71% |

I am extremely proud of what we have accomplished in our schools over the last five years and the results in student achievement our work has produced. Our students have benefitted from numerous initiatives, program upgrades and curriculum improvements. But it is important to understand that within the board of education budget, approximately 93% of our spending is attributed to just five areas: 1) salaries; 2) employee health benefits; 3) student transportation; 4) out-of-district special education tuition; and 5) utilities. All things we have little or no control over, but none of the progress we have made would have been possible without the attention and effort placed on containing costs in these areas. We have worked hard to negotiate fair contracts with our employee unions, while also reducing our expenses for health insurance. Our energy consumption has been reduced by over 25% in the last three years, saving nearly \$250,000. The Food Service Department serves over 250,000

breakfasts and lunches to students each year and is completely self-supported, not requiring a single dollar of funding in our budget.

In the coming months I will be working with our Board to develop a budget for next year. We will once again look at all aspects of our budget to Reprioritize, Reallocate and Reinvest, (the 3-Rs). We have established a transparent process for developing our budget and monitoring our expenditures. Our board of education has a commitment to sustaining the progress we have made by reinvesting the funding we save in other areas in our high-priority initiative. Working together, the administration and board of education will focus on developing a budget that will SUSTAIN the quality our students and parents deserve, and in doing so, maintain the value our schools bring to the entire community. I encourage everyone to follow our budget process closely. I am confident that if you do, you will see the quality and value I am so proud of.