

NJ Says Stockton Compares Favorably, Cost-Wise, to Area Schools

Last month, the New Jersey Department of Education (DOE) released its annual Comparative Spending Guide for 2009. The Comparative Spending Guide (CSG) gives the public an opportunity to review and compare various components of a school district's annual budget to similar districts in the state through a series of "indicators" that present costs on a per-pupil basis. The March 2009 report is based on school budgets for the 2008-09 school year and on school enrollment as of October 15, 2008.

The report divides school districts into groups based on operating type. Stockton fares extremely well when compared to other K-6 school districts. According to the DOE report, the school's 2008-09 comparative cost per pupil is \$12,727. This ranks the school 31st among the state's 62 K-6 school districts.

Given that each of the state's school districts have an obligation to educate all

children who reside in the district, it is important to note that Stockton has the lowest comparative cost per pupil of the four K-6 districts in Hunterdon County. At a comparative cost per pupil of \$13,267, West Amwell ranks 37th in the state, followed by Lambertville (\$17,339, 54th) and Lebanon (\$22,228, 62nd).

Another neighboring school, Delaware Township, is classified with the other K-8 school districts in New Jersey that have a population of between 401 and 750 students. According to the DOE, Delaware Township's comparative cost per pupil of \$14,306 ranks 55th among these 64 K-8 school districts. Other local schools in this category include East Amwell (\$12,846, 35th) and Kingwood (\$13,059, 51st).

"Stockton has always done well in the Department of Education's comparison of school costs," commented Rick McDaniel, president of the Stockton

Board of Education. "We're very pleased, and feel that it reflects our commitment to providing a high-quality education without over-burdening the taxpayers of our community."

McDaniel noted that the state uses a complex formula to develop its annual Comparative Spending Guide. "It is not just a matter of taking the total cost to operate the district and dividing it by the number of enrolled students. It's my understanding that the state does not include certain expenses and revenues, particularly those that are somewhat unique to specific districts, in their calculations. That may help us in some areas, but hurt us in others. For example, revenue from our tuition program is not reflected in this number—even though the program brings in tens of thousands of dollars each year that helps to lower the tax rate for Stockton residents."

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Stockton School News

Spring 2009

Stockton Borough School—Serving the Community Since 1832

Stockton Residents to Vote Tuesday, April 21

Stockton residents will have an opportunity to vote on the school's budget, as well as for two candidates to the Board of Education, at the annual election. This year, the polls will open at 3 P.M. on Tuesday, April 21. Voting will take place at the Stockton Firehouse on Mill Street until 9 P.M.

After a public hearing on March 30, Stockton School's Board of Education approved a 2009-10 operating budget of \$675,864. Local taxes will pay \$617,954 of the operating expenses for the school years.

The overall increase of the tax levy for 2009-10 is under the 4 percent state cap. That represents a \$79 increase for the owner of a home assessed at the town's

average value of \$322,466. With payments on the debt incurred by Stockton's recent renovation program (see "Grant Will Help Pay Renovation Expense," page 2), the total increase in the average home's property tax bill will be \$123.

Stockton will draw on funds ordinarily meant for emergency problems, such as educational or maintenance expenses that were not anticipated and thus included in the annual budget. (For example, when the school's boiler broke down a few winters ago and had to be replaced.) The 2009-10 budget uses \$19,706 from this fund balance to reduce the tax rate.

In developing the budget for the upcoming year, the school was faced with significant cost increases in such areas as

special education and health care. These increases were partially offset by utilizing anticipated revenues from tuition, grants, and the tireless efforts of fund-raising by the PTO.

The PTO will continue to sponsor educational programs, such as school field trips and assemblies. Stockton also receives grants from the Lambertville Area Educational Foundation and the Municipal Alliance for educational programs and materials.

Although some school districts did receive an increase in financial aid from the state of New Jersey, Stockton's aid remained flat. For 2009-10, the state has promised \$14,244, the same amount

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Stockton kids braved the cold to hunt for candy-filled eggs at the annual Egg Hunt on Saturday, April 4. Many thanks to Tami Hettman and the volunteers who helped make the event a success.

Citizens to Support the Stockton School
c/o Stockton Borough School
19 S. Main Street
Stockton NJ 08559

Cost Ranking

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The introduction to the DOE's 2009 report explains, "When determining the costs to be included in the per pupil calculations, the Department gave careful consideration to what per pupil calculations would be meaningful to the reader as well as what costs could bias the comparison among districts. Only those costs that were considered to be similar among districts were included in the per pupil calculations. Costs that are somewhat unique to certain districts or differ based on circumstance were excluded. Examples of excluded costs are those expenditures funded by restricted grants, Teachers' Pension and Annuity Fund (TPAF), tuition payments to other districts and private schools, debt service expenditures and the principal and interest payments for the lease purchase of land and buildings."

The complete 2009 Comparative Spending Guide can be found online, in PDF format, at <http://www.nj.gov/education/guide/2009>. If anyone without access to a computer would to see the report, contact school board member Jim Gallagher at (609) 397-4005 to request a printout.

Budget

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pledged to the school in 2008. This represents about 2 percent of Stockton School's annual budget.

In addition, Stockton's pre-kindergarten program for four-year-olds will enter a second year in 2009-10. This program is paid for through private tuition funds. All tuition monies are used to help reduce the school's operating costs and thus ease the burden on local taxpayers.

On Tuesday, Stockton voters will also choose representatives to fill a pair of three-year terms on the Board of Education. Two candidates have filed for

Tuition Registration Open

Stockton Borough School offers a private tuition program for students in grades PreK through six. If someone you know lives outside of the Borough and is interested in enrolling a child in our unique school, please tell them to visit our webpage at www.stocktonschool.us for more information or call the CSA Suzanne Ivans at 609 397-2012 to arrange for a personal tour of the school.

the two seats. Atiera Abatemarco Ransavage is a longtime resident of the Stockton area whose daughter attends the school. She is currently employed as a middle school teacher. Incumbent board member Jim Gallagher is also seeking re-election to the Board.

Grant Will Help Pay Renovation Expense

In 2009-10, Stockton residents will begin paying for costs incurred during the school's recently completed renovation program. In September 2006, the community voted to authorize the program, which was intended to shore up the 132-year-old school's frame and foundation. Now, with the project complete, the school will issue and sell bonds to cover the expense. This spreads the cost of the long-term improvements over a number of years.

Fortunately, Stockton taxpayers will be receiving substantial help in paying this bill. In March, the New Jersey Historic Trust recommended that Stockton School receive a Capital Projects grant of \$219,769. If the grant is approved by the governor, the funds will be used to reduce the amount of the school's bond issue.

In addition, Stockton will receive funds from a state program that reimburses school districts when they borrow money for school construction. The program pays 40 percent of the debt each year. Stockton received \$7,723 from this program in 2008-09. The school's 2009-10 budget anticipates \$8,458 in state debt service aid for the upcoming school year.

The local share of the debt adds \$44 per year to the tax bill of the average home in Stockton (assessed at the borough average of \$322,466). The project accomplished much-needed repairs and renovation to our landmark school. In 2006 and 2008, the Stockton School received smaller grants from the New Jersey Historic Trust which were used to help pay "soft costs" such as architect fees and other expenses involved in planning the renovation project.

Students Participate in Water Monitoring Program

On October 16, fifth and sixth grade students from Stockton joined other middle and high school students and science teachers at the Prallsville Mill Complex to take part in World Water Monitoring Day.

The students participated in hands-on water-testing demonstrations, working with representatives of the Department of Environmental Protection, the U.S. Geological Survey, the Delaware River Basin Commission, the New Jersey Water Supply Authority, the Delaware Greenway Partnership, and members of the New Jersey AmeriCorps.

"These are not scientific demonstrations," a DEP official explained. "The students are taking part in real environmental measurements and will submit the results of their tests to the Water Monitoring database."

Throughout the day, groups of students rotated between eight interactive stations that focused on groundwater monitoring, stream flow monitoring, freshwater chemical monitoring, lake and fish sampling, and freshwater biological monitoring. Students had opportunities to analyze water from the nearby Wickecheoke Creek, use microscopes to examine aquatic insects, analyze water-body maps and models, sample a ground water well, conduct experiments, examine equipment, and observe and identify local fish, while interacting with experts and meeting other students.



Stockton Students work with a hydrogeologic engineer to determine how contaminants flow in unconsolidated sediments using a groundwater flow model.

Stockton School students readily understood the concepts involved, thanks in large part to the Environmental Program started last year in Mr. Hudak's class with the cooperation of State Park Naturalist Stephanie Fox and Stockton parents Bill Lowry and Gregg Rackin.

This year, the theme for the

Environmental "Community Science" unit is the forest, and the students have been studying forest ecosystems and have "adopted" the Anderson Forest tract behind the school. The most recent project has been the Fox Forest Survey, which the students are conducting to poll citizens regarding usage of the preserved tract.

Art and Spaghetti Dinner Set May 17 at Stockton Firehouse

Are you looking for a great painting, print or photograph to spruce up your walls? Or maybe you are thinking of something else, like a concert, movie, or wine tasting party for 10 at a local vineyard, or something else entirely? Maybe passes to a ball game for the kids, guitar lessons, or a dinner at a local restaurant? Then make your reservations NOW for the Stockton School PTO Art & Spaghetti Dinner and Silent Auction at the Stockton Firehouse on Sunday May 17th. These and many other items will be up for bid at the silent auction.

This year's dinner will once again feature the talents of chefs Kristen Meil of Meil's in Stockton, and Melissa Hamilton, chef and former co-owner of the

Hamilton Grill. Dinner will consist of an antipasto salad, a main course of pasta with a choice of homemade vegetarian or meat sauce, coffee, tea, and deserts. Diners should feel free to bring their own wine.

Prices for this year's dinner have been reduced from \$15 for adults to \$12 for the 6 P.M. seating. The price for children over five is \$6; children under five eat for free.

New this year is an Early Bird Special dinner seating at 4 P.M., with the price only \$10 for adults and \$5 for children under five. Children under 5 also eat for free at the Early Bird Special. This is a great price for a three-course, all-you-can-eat dinner!

This affordable, family-friendly event sells out quickly, so be sure to make your reservations now for the Family Art Event of the Season. A reservation form appears on page 2 of this newsletter.

In addition, the PTO is still accepting art donations for the auction. Please contact PTO President Joanne Nestor at 609 397-0379 if you would like to make a donation.

If you have news about a Stockton School graduate, send your story and/or photos to sbs@stockton-school.us. We'll try to include an update in our next newsletter!

Pasta and Art Reservation Form

Name: _____
Phone: _____ Email (optional): _____

SEATING

EARLY BIRD SPECIAL (4:00 P.M.)

REGULAR SEATING (7:15 P.M.)

____ Adults x \$10 = _____
____ Children (age 5-12) X \$5 = _____
____ Children under 5 (FREE)

____ Adults x \$12 = _____
____ Children (age 5-12) X \$6 = _____
____ Children under 5 (FREE)

Total Enclosed _____ Total Enclosed _____

Please detach and return to:
Stockton School PTO
19 S. Main St.
Stockton, NJ 08559

Enclose your check made payable to Stockton School PTO

Seats are limited and are on a first paid/first served basis. Payment must be included with your form to guarantee your seats. For reservation information, please call Kathleen Vandegrift at 609 397-7376 or contact her via email at kathleenvandegrift@yahoo.com