

**SCHOOL UNION #122**  
(New Sweden, Stockholm, Westmanland, and Woodland)

**What Do We Offer to the Students and Community?**

Many of you have heard and read about proposed plans by the Governor, Commissioner of Education, and our State Legislature that would "regionalize" the entire educational public education system of Maine. Many claims have been made that the costs of public education can be reduced by lumping administrative services together. As your Superintendent, I have often made statements about the high costs of our educational system. I believe that you would agree that these costs continue to rise every year and the subsequent costs to you as taxpayers can be a burden. However, there is much information in state and local newspapers and in TV and radio broadcasts that is misleading. If you had good teachers when you were young, you may have been told not to believe everything you read, see, and hear in the media. That was good advice. Please allow me to share some facts, not just my unfounded opinions or personal bias,

1. In just the past few years, costs for health insurance premiums for individuals and families have increased an average of almost 10% per year. An Anthem Full Family Standard Plan will cost over \$18,000 for the year of July 1, 2007 to June 30, 2008. For most families, this is more than a house payment or rent, a car payment, and fuel and electricity combined. Union #122 offers as a fringe benefit some health insurance premium coverage for all employees, but nowhere near what it costs for anyone needing above a single coverage. Administration has no control over annual insurance premium increases. The increases are determined by the insurance company.

2. Just recently all of us got our monthly electrical bill. Many homeowners, at peak seasonal use time, received a 25-30% increase in their monthly bill. I have been told of some cases of reported 40% increases. The last time I checked, we all use electricity. Administration has no control over electricity rate increases. Our school buildings are charged the "commercial rate", which is even higher than the home consumer rate.

3. Energy costs that include diesel fuel and heating oil for Union #122 are at least one dollar per gallon higher than they were less than two years ago. Unless any of you have a better crystal ball than I do, energy costs are almost impossible to predict anymore.

4. All employees in Union #122 receive an annual pay increase of some kind. That increase varies but has commonly been in the 3% range for several years. I do not see that as unreasonable and it is in line with national consumer price index figures. Administration certainly does have something to say about wage increases, but like most employers, we try to honor employees work with a modest wage increase.

5. As your Superintendent, I perform 12 other functions besides the prescribed duties of Superintendent of Schools. Some of these other 12 functions include Chemical Hygiene Officer, Affirmative Action Officer, Attendance Officer, and Federal Programs Coordinator. In these four positions, and in the other eight, I perform mandated and/or required functions that are required either by the federal or state Departments of Education. In each of these 12 positions I must complete the required reporting (paperwork) for the federal and state departments. I'm not complaining; I'm simply stating facts about my administrative duties. In a larger school system, many Superintendents will have delegated these duties to other personnel. In small school systems, administrators, and many other employees, commonly wear several hats in their full-time employment.

6. Our Governor, Commissioner of Education and many legislators, are actively trying to convince you that the high cost of education can best be curtailed by making drastic cuts in local school administration. Furthermore, their message this winter is that you, as local citizens, are not capable of providing a cost effective education for your children. Again, this is not my opinion. The facts show that every bill, not just some of the bills, contain provisions to create regional school boards that will eliminate the current school boards in each of our Union communities. Right now, each of you are represented by very capable school

committee members. Under the "new" plans, there might be just one or two current school committee members involved in school policy and school budget making decisions.

7. In the on-going debate of these issues, there is a remarkable absence of quality education commentary, as defined by student performance. Once again, using facts, not opinion, last year your Grade 3-8 Union #122 students, on the state of Maine Educational Assessment and the 11th Grade SAT, significantly outperformed other Maine students. That does not mean that all of our students performed above state average. As educators we are acutely aware that we have much work ahead of us to see that all of our students get the best education possible and are able to demonstrate positive annual growth. We continue to be committed to do that. Often I hear statements about how well our students do academically at the elementary and secondary level. I am hesitant to make those claims too often lest we take the attitude that we are superior and better than others. That is not my purpose. Simply put, by state and national standards, many of our students do very well. That should be an on-going expectation from parents, grandparents, community members, and certainly all of the Union #122 staff.

8. For the third year in a row, I am working on school budgets in all four Union Communities that do not contain an increase in the tax commitment from local citizens, to support education. In some cases, if you review your Town Reports and other public financial information provided at Town Meetings, you will have noted a decrease in your town's tax commitment for education. In simple terms, if you study the facts, you will find that your cost as local taxpayers for education, has been very reasonable. Through the diligent study of your school committees, town budget committees, boards of Selectmen, and yes, even the Superintendent, reasonable school budgets are presented to you, for your final approval annually. This to me represents the best of participatory, responsible democracy. Local people making decisions about their children's education has served you well for over 50 years. Be certain that you understand that all bills currently at the committee level in the legislature will eventually take away your local control and your ability to determine what YOU pay for education. A review of those bills will show my previous statement to be fact as well.

9. We have just recently added Middle School Wrestling to our extra-curricular program. Students at the New Sweden and Woodland Schools now can participate in their choice of eight sports. We have cross-country running and soccer in the fall, basketball, skiing and wrestling in the winter, and baseball, softball and track and field in the spring. This is comparable to even the largest district offerings in northern Maine and exceeds what most smaller districts offer at the middle school level. Students in Union sports are eligible to play from 5th Grade through the 8th Grade. In most larger schools, students are only eligible to play on school teams starting in the 7th Grade, with some schools allowing a 6th Grade start-up. We have a full-blown PreK-8 Music program that includes classroom instruction, individual and small-group instrumental lessons, a Union Chorus, a Union Band and a Union Show Choir as well. There is a school district not far from you that has absolutely no music program whatsoever and many others that offer only a part of what we offer. I could go on but let me finish by saying that we strive to offer a "full-service" program academically and in extracurricular and enrichment. Our teachers and ed techs are fully qualified and committed to provide quality education. I know that individual parents might disagree at times and I insist that staff be courteous and respectful in their communication with parents. We are far from perfect but acutely aware of shortcomings and will continue to work to improve.

10. As a summation, be aware that legislative action, soon to take place, may change the conditions and ingredients in items #1 to item #9. You as parents and community members have a responsibility to stay involved in how your children are educated, who educates them, and how much that service costs. Do not accept proposals as inevitable or necessary just because the powers that be say we must. Change can be good, when it is well thought out and is driven by good reasons. I truly believe that none of the legislative proposals currently proposed will be better for Union #122. If you need information on how to contact your local legislators, school committee members, or others, please phone me at the office, and help will be provided.

Thank you for listening.

Sincerely,

John Hedman  
Union #122 Superintendent