

Taking the mystery out of writing

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

techniques of Ardith Davis Cole in "Better Answers: Written Performance That Looks Good and Sounds Smart."

The book offers an easy-to-follow example of an "answer sandwich" that helps students strengthen their writing skills. Consider Cole's analogy:

The top and bottom bun of a sandwich serve the similar purpose of holding the sandwich together, while the middle is the "meat" and can be comprised of multiple layers of fillings. So, too, is an essay. Students are instructed to come up with the "gist" of their writing assignment – the purpose or "so-what" of what they are trying to say – and use that to begin their essays as the "top bun." Layer two – the sandwich filling – fills in the details, specific examples and/or supporting arguments, while the

bottom bun brings it all back together as a conclusion.

"This approach is so structured, so easy," said Mrs. Wilcox. "The program really works."

Students' writing skills are improving tremendously with the sandwich method, both she and Mr. O'Connor agree, as they move from the more simplistic approach of a five-paragraph essay to the more sophisticated thinking and writing skills needed for in-depth assignments.

Last year's fourth-graders started using the sandwich method mid-year, Mrs. Wilcox said, and almost all of them scored in the highest possible category when they took the state's standardized English-language arts test just a few months later. Similarly, these same students scored very high on the state's Grade 5 Social Studies test earlier this school year. "I don't believe we'd be

where we are at this point with the students' scores on the state exams if it weren't for this approach really boosting the quality of their writings," Mrs. Wilcox said.

Parents are equally pleased with their children's progress, she said, noting that her students each had authored 20-25 essays in the weeks between the start of school in September and parent-teacher conferences in November.

This structured approach helps students get over their fears of not knowing where to begin, Mr. O'Connor said, and as they gain confidence they are able to move away from focusing on the mechanics of writing to higher-order thinking and more complex sentence and paragraph structures.

"Just knowing where to begin is a real confidence builder for young writers," Mrs. Wilcox agrees. "And that's the most important step they can take."

Nurturing a Community of Learners

Wells Central School

PO Box 300
Wells, NY 12190

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Wells, NY 12190
Permit No. 1

BOARD OF EDUCATION

Avis Warner, *President*

Julie Lacey, *Vice President*

Kenneth Hoffman

Pam Palmer

Dorman Reese

Produced in cooperation with the
Hamilton-Fulton-Montgomery
BOCES Communications Service.

Nurturing a Community of Learners

WELLS

CENTRAL SCHOOL

Spring 2005

Proposed Wells budget calls for 6% increase in spending

Residents vote May 17 on school budget

Wells Central School District residents will go to the polls on May 17 to vote on a proposed \$4,260,628 school budget for the 2005-06 year.

The budget calls for a 6% spending increase – and a projected 4.5% increase in the tax levy. The actual tax increase will not be calculated until summer when town assessors submit assessment rolls to the district.

School officials were pleased with the increase in state aid that Wells Central School will receive under the new state budget. Wells received \$709,407 in state aid for 2004-05 while for the coming school year, the district is slated to receive \$882,512 – an increase of almost 25 percent.

And because the state budget was adopted on time this spring – the first time in 21 years – school officials were able to develop a revenue picture to match projected expenditures. In previous years, school districts were forced to use estimates of how much state aid would be forthcoming.

Under the district's proposed budget, Wells will allocate \$20,000 towards mandatory professional development. Teachers are required by the state to complete a minimum of 175 hours of continuing education in five years. This funding will allow the district to make staff development a priority in the coming year.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Fourth-graders Jake Earley and James Hoffman work on final drafts of a classroom writing assignment.

Both students say they are becoming more confident as writers thanks to the "Answer Sandwich" approach used by their teacher, Gail Wilcox.



Taking the mystery out of the writing process

Sometimes, all kids need to become better writers is a sandwich.

Not a literal sandwich, teachers agree, but a metaphorical one that paints a picture in the student's mind of how to begin planning and organizing a writing assignment.

"The approach we are using now at Wells is nothing really new," says fourth-grade teacher Gail Wilcox, "but yet it is. The systematic structure

of the 'answer sandwich' helps students get a focus in their minds so they can write their introduction – which is key to pulling it all together – and then they can break down their thoughts into specific examples and details."

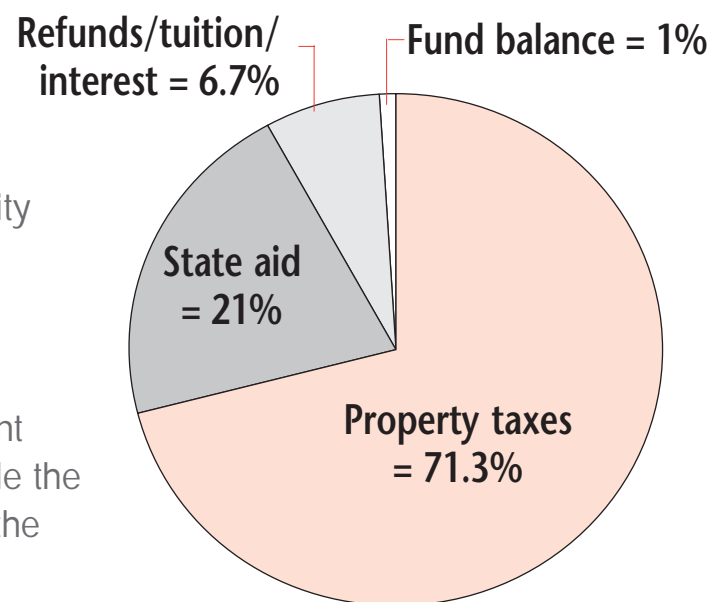
Fifth-grade teacher Steve O'Connor first introduced his students two years ago to the writing

PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 4



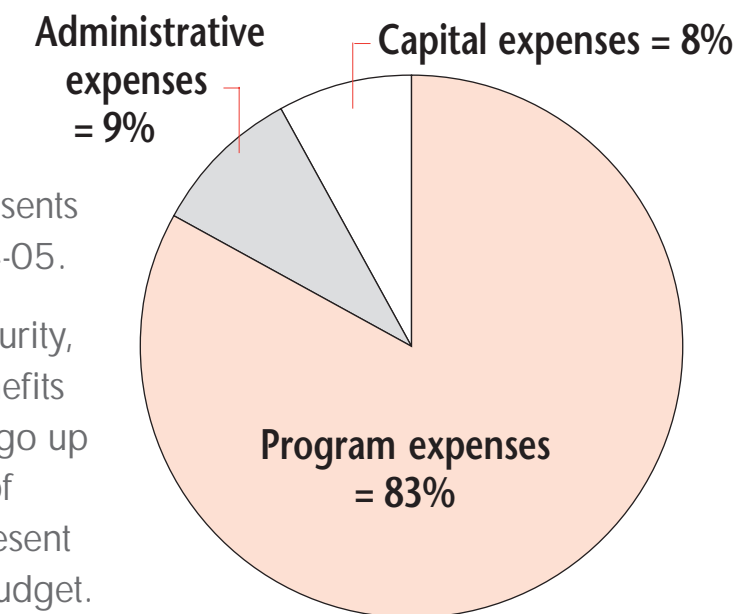
WHERE THE MONEY COMES FROM

- School district funds come from a variety of sources, with the majority coming from local property taxes, along with state aid.
- Other sources include investment earnings, BOCES aid, non-resident tuition for students who live outside the district, and appropriations from the existing fund balance.



...AND WHERE IT GOES

- Instructional expenses account for more than 83 percent of the budget, for a total of \$3,536,321. This represents an increase of \$312,843 from 2004-05.
- Hospital, medical, dental, Social Security, worker compensation, retirement benefits and insurance costs are expected to go up an additional \$186,522 for a total of \$755,784. These benefits costs represent 17.7 percent of the total proposed budget.



2

PROJECTED REVENUES

CATEGORY	TOTAL
Property taxes	\$3,042,676
State aid*	882,512
Refunds/tuition/interest	285,440
Fund balance	50,000
TOTAL	\$4,260,628

* State aid revenues can be accurately projected for the 2005-06 school year because the state has adopted its budget for the coming fiscal year. This marks the first on-time state budget in 21 years.

2005-06 proposed budget calls for 6% spending increase

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

In most areas of Well's proposed 2005-06 school budget, spending is flat. No new academic programs have been proposed and no new teaching positions would be created.

There are several key areas where spending increases are proposed. They include:

- **\$53,000 to purchase a new 30-passenger, handicapped-accessible school bus.** This proposed expense is part of the district's planned bus purchase program that allows for scheduled replacement of high-mileage vehicles. Approximately 12 percent of the purchase cost for the new school bus will be reimbursed to the school district through state aid.

- **An additional \$15,385 for mandatory Social Security and Medicare payments for employees.** Like all employers, Wells is required to pay towards employees' Social Security and Medicare programs. Those costs are projected to rise by 9.95 percent.
- **An additional \$13,200 for substitute teachers' salaries.** School officials budgeted for a 44 percent increase in costs for substitute teachers, in anticipation of three long-term absences during the 2005-06 school year.
- **An additional \$32,870 for mandatory contributions to state retirement plans for employees and teachers, and an additional \$37,700 for employee benefits.** Schools across New York State are facing rapidly rising costs for both pension funds and health insurance.

3

Budget timeline: Key dates to remember

- **April 26:** This was the deadline for filing nominating petitions for a five-year seat on the Board of Education currently held by Julie Lacey.
- **May 10:** Last day to mail a request for mailed absentee ballot.
- **May 10:** Public hearing on proposed 2005-06 budget, 7 p.m., at Wells Central School
- **May 16:** Last day to pickup absentee ballot.
- **May 17:** Budget vote/board elections/annual meeting. Polls are open 12:30-8 p.m. in the school cafeteria. Absentee ballots are due by 5 p.m.

What happens if a majority of voters don't approve the budget?

The school district can hold another vote and offer residents either a revised budget or the same spending plan – or it can adopt a contingency budget, which puts a cap on some spending.

If a budget is twice defeated, the district MUST adopt a contingency budget, and there can be no more votes to restore the funding eliminated for the 2005-06 school year.

Wells' contingency budget would be very similar to the proposed budget, said Superintendent Paul Williamsen, with few additional cuts needed to meet required contingency levels.

PROJECTED EXPENSES

CATEGORY	TOTAL
Instruction	\$2,371,580
Benefits	755,784
Operations/maintenance	218,150
Pupil transportation	315,269
Debt service	79,025
BOCES & other services	520,820
TOTAL	\$4,260,628