

**ANNUAL REPORT  
SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS  
2008 - 2009**

The origin of the word sophomore hints at the wise fool; in the second year, a student has enough knowledge to appear wise, but not enough wisdom to prevent him or her from making some mistakes. As I help my own son attain the benchmarks of tenth grade, I am also working through my second year as Superintendent of the Bow schools; and I am keenly aware that the knowledge and wisdom that I have gained so far still needs to be verified by more experience in the Bow community.

A major undertaking this last year was the research for, and the production of, a district report card. The data from this project has informed a lot of our planning and has especially impacted the budgeting process. The full report card is available on the district's website under the SAU 67 tab. A shortened version of this report card will be presented at the Annual District Meeting, and I will highlight some findings from this project below:

Enrollment: District enrollment has been declining from an all time high of 1,820 students in 2002 to 1,655 for 2008. When looking more closely at this trend, there is a "bubble" class in our tenth grade that has been working through the system, and enrollment declines will become a larger issue as this class graduates. Also, our lower classes are smaller and the birth rate in Bow, like in all New Hampshire localities, is declining. Contraction of programs and reductions in staff will be needed to deal with this issue. The proposed budget has a reduction of 6.0 full time teaching positions, and in the proposed teacher contract, there is an important clarification and strengthening of the reduction in force language. The full effects of this decline in enrollment will be felt more in future years, but we as a district need to continue to address the issue.

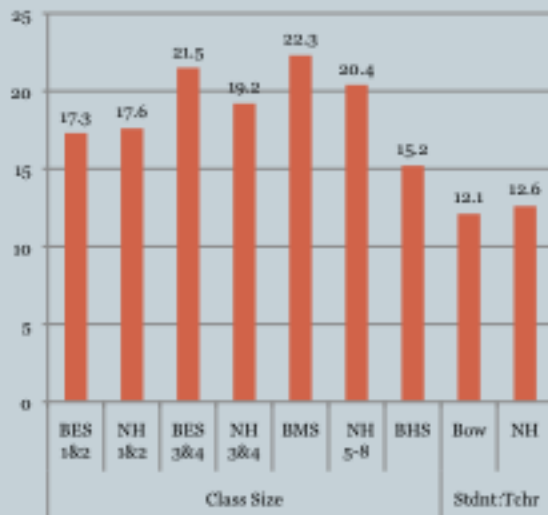
Demographics and End Results: Bow is not an at-risk district according to the measures traditionally used to assess that concept. Our total special education percentage is 12% compared to New Hampshire being 14%, and our free and reduced lunch percentage is below 4% while the state number is 19.5%. Our cumulative four year drop-out rate is 4.3% compared to New Hampshire's 12.2% and we have more students going to four-year colleges and less going directly to work as compared to the state of New Hampshire.

Teachers, Class Sizes and Costs: Bow has an educated and experienced staff. Compared to New Hampshire, there are fewer teachers with bachelor's degrees but more teachers with degrees beyond master's. Over two thirds of our teachers have 12 or more years of teaching experience. That experience and education, along with our salary scale puts our average teacher salary at \$53,512.00, which is \$5,000.00 above the state average and ranks 30 out of 164 localities.

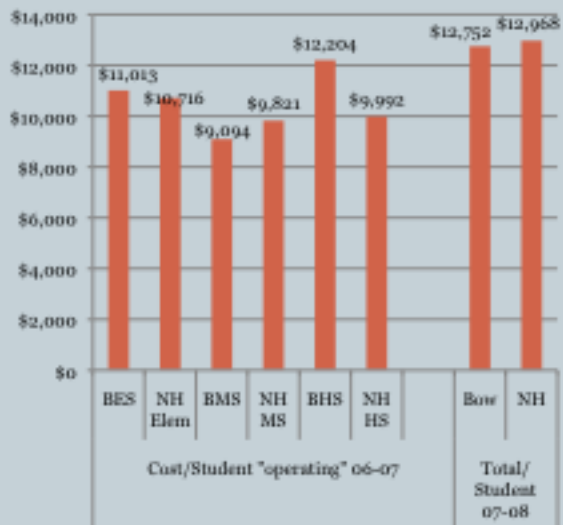
I have included the slide on Class Size and Student Costs from the report card below:

# Class Size and Student Costs

**Class size and Student :  
Teacher Ratio 07-08**



**Cost per Student**



This data shows class sizes and costs per student as defined by the state and captured from the Department of Education reports (please note that operating costs per student are different than total cost per student). This slide has been the most debated and explored data as the budget was developed; the School Board's reductions to the high school proposed budget had their genesis here. As administrators we can compare our numbers with the state of New Hampshire, but ultimately the decisions around this data are more of a judgment call of what optimal class size should be and what is an acceptable level of spending for the community of Bow for the schooling and services that Bow students receive.

**Achievement Data:** On all standardized tests used to measure achievement (SAT, NECAP, NWEA), Bow as a district does very well. Bow is a high performing district, but we also are conscious that we have to examine "value added" growth. As one person stated, just because you are on third base, it does not mean that you hit a triple. We are continuing to analyze our district test scores to make adjustments to programs. We are not content to be a high performing district, but keep asking questions to determine if individual students are improving and making the expected growth.

**Conclusions:** My interpretation of the state of the Bow School District for this annual report is that we have significant challenges and decisions to make in the coming years. The most important one can be capsulated as: "How can we maintain the high standards and achievement that the Bow School District has been known for, while reducing costs and becoming more efficient, especially in light of declining enrollment?"

One of the main drivers of cost increases over the last decade for public schools has been the increase in services for students as part of IDEA and No Child Left Behind. The spirit of these laws has been to provide extra services to make sure that all children, regardless of any learning issues or disabilities, make grade level progress. Schools have responded to these federal laws by increasing assessments of all students, and increasing programs for students not making acceptable progress, especially in the lower grades. In an era of increasing real estate prices (as was the case in that time period), the effect of those increases was not as shocking on the local property tax rate. However, in the present economy with falling real estate values, the reliance of funding schools via the local property tax has brought a very high level of scrutiny to the programs and budgets of public schools.

As a school leader I am keenly aware of the need to economize and be responsible in budgeting. I also recognize that the community needs to make collective decisions about levels of services and allowable costs. It is my hope that the data that has been provided in the district report card and in the budget process will allow the Bow community to have a reasoned debate on these issues

Goals for 08-09: In addition to the issues and concerns outlined above, the district is working on three major goals this year. First, we are conducting a review of the high school program by a citizen/school committee. The results of the review will be reported to the School Board by the start of the 09-10 school year. The Bow High School program is unique and exceptional and the review, after a decade of operation, is designed to see if there are areas that need to be looked at further for possible redesign.

The second goal recognizes a need to increase the two-way communication in the district. Using the community Alertnow system, providing an information center at the Baker Free Library and having the Board publish and mail newsletters are part of implementing this goal.

The last goal is to clearly identify a prekindergarten to 12<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum. Bow does not have a district Curriculum Director and relies on the collaboration of the administrative team and the teachers to get this work done. We are presently identifying a common format that will give structure for content area teams to do this work. We are also using professional development time and money to have teams of teachers work together to analyze test data and recommend program improvements or curriculum changes. I feel that we have a very good teaching staff and our curriculum is relevant and rigorous. We do need to do a better job of documenting our work and communicating the program scope and sequence in an easier to understand format.

So in closing, I am grateful for the hard work and support of the Bow community. We have weathered many storms this year, both figuratively and literally, and we still have some more difficult ground to cover. I am proud to be your Superintendent and really believe that I need to be an available and approachable servant of the public in leading our community schools.

If you have any questions, suggestions for improvements or comments please contact me.

Sincerely,

*Dean S. T. Cascadden*