

## The Two Percent Budgets

After the public hearings last week, the Amherst and the Souhegan School Boards voted their proposed FY10 budgets. These budgets reflect the times—responsible, lean and ready to address the essentials of the future. As our new president declared, this is the era of responsibility, when each of us must understand the impact we have on one another, making room for change, realizing that we can't do everything we might want to do right away, but we won't lose sight of our goals.

The 1.99% budget increase in Amherst and the 2.09% increase for Souhegan will fund our obligations and many fixed costs while allowing us to keep advancing our long-term strategic goal of improving all students' learning in all subject areas. The Literacy Initiative, begun three years ago, remains the focus of much of our academic funding as we work to assure that ALL students will be able to access learning in all subject areas through the written word.

Almost 20 existing positions were cut from these budgets, eliminated due to declining enrollments. Class size and programming were maintained. A decline in enrollment does not result in a directly proportional decline in dollars, but it offsets somewhat the projected 5 percent increase in electricity, 8 percent increase in health care benefits, and 20% increase in NH retirement contributions.

The Boards acted responsibly when they delayed new programs. If we do this indefinitely, we would stagnate educationally. Fortunately, we are in the midst of some exciting work with assessment and differentiation – educational “buzzwords” for a great deal of new learning that has begun and will carry us for several more years. What remains now, is for you as citizens, to review the details of these budgets at the upcoming District Meetings to be held on February 5th for Amherst and on February 3<sup>rd</sup> for Souhegan. While these budgets move forward, the third SAU39 District, Mont Vernon, will be developing their budget readying it for presentation at its March 13<sup>th</sup> Town Meeting.

Please take time to educate yourself about these budgets. Your educational systems and your towns need your thoughtful attention and civic responsibility at this time. Keep the hope for the future alive.