

**Budget Background Information
2022-2023 Budget Proposal**

**Voluntown Board of Education
Voluntown, Connecticut
May 20, 2022**

Dear Members of the Board of Education and Voluntown Community,

The attached 2022-23 budget approved by the Board of Education on May 12, 2022, is \$6,850,333 and represents an increase of 0.96% or \$65,136 over the 2020-2021 approved budget of \$6,785,197. Over this past month there was a need to adjust allocations based primarily on tuition changes, the cost of energy, changes in health insurance enrollments, and establishing the final costs for health insurance.

The next review of the 22-23 budget proposal will be at the Town Meeting scheduled for Tuesday, May 24, 2022, at 7:00 p.m. in the VES Gymnasium.

A referendum to vote on the 2022-2023 budget proposals for the Board of Education has been scheduled for Tuesday, June 7, 2022, from 12:00 noon to 8:00 pm at the town hall.

This proposal includes:

- Negotiated salaries for teachers, non-certified, and classified faculty and staff
- The projected cost for the outplacement of Special Education students based on identified needs
- Projected cost of tuition based on the numbers attending eight designated high schools
- An increase of 10.5% in the cost of health insurance premium
- Increases in heating oil, diesel fuel, and electricity

Board of Education and Board of Selectmen Budget History

- 2017-2018 equaled \$8,403,537 with BOE at 80.75% and Town at 19.25%
- 2018-2019 equaled \$8,709,235 with BOE at 79.10% and Town at 20.90%
- 2019-2020 equaled \$8,749,273 with BOE at 77.55% and Town at 22.45%
- 2020-2021 equaled \$8,801,670 with BOE at 77.09% and Town at 22.91%
- 2021-2022 equaled \$8,989,321 with BOE at 75.50% and Town at 24.50%
- 2022-2023 equaled \$9,233,751 with BOE at 74.18% and Town at 25.81% (Proposal as of 5/10/22)

BOE budgets have been declining over these past years as a part of the total expenditures of the annual budgets of the Town. This has been the result of basically no increases in the school budget for these past five years.

Funds Deposited in the Town of Voluntown Fund Balance

The Board of Education has an expenditure only budget. We receive grants such as Special Education Excess, Magnet High School Transportation, Adult Education, etc. and money received are deposited in the town fund:

- 2017-2018 \$77,542.59
- 2018-2019 \$96,408.40
- 2019-2020 \$69,420.26
- 2020-2021 \$84,604.54
- 2021-2022 \$67,202.20 (as of May 10, 2022)

5-Year Approved Budget and Actual Expenditure Comparison

A 5-year Budget Comparison history of approved and actual expenditures summarizes our cost-saving efforts.

	<u>Approved Budget</u>	<u>\$ Incr./Decr. from prior year</u>	<u>Actual Expenditures</u>	<u>% of Incr./Decr. of Actual Expend.</u>
• 2017-2018	\$6,785,654	-\$11,403	\$6,785,533	0.05%
• 2018-2019	\$6,889,818	+104,165	\$6,888,816	1.52%
• 2019-2020	\$6,785,196	-\$104,622	\$6,782,936	-1.54%
• 2020-2021	\$6,785,196	\$0.00	\$6,766,686	-0.24%
• 2021-2022	\$6,785,196	\$0.00	TBD	TBD

As noted earlier, the proposal for 2022-2023 now shows a total of \$6,850,335. and represents an increase of \$65138. or 0.96% over the 2021-2022 approved total of \$6,785,197.

Consideration in the Development of the Annual Budget Proposal

This 2022-2023 budget seeks to use past strategies as the Board of Education supported five years of a 0.0% MIL or no property tax increase budgets while meeting the educational needs of our students. There was always the consideration to use the undesignated fund or town savings account to keep property tax increases to a minimal. BOE approval of adjustments in the budget or spending plan have also resulted in a no MIL or a no property tax increase. The BOE makes fiscal decisions to prepare for 22-23 and will again review expenditures that will help in the “possible” development of a no tax increase budget proposal.

The process of developing the budget requires an understanding of the history of the budget and the success of past cost-saving decisions. A careful review of the current budget expenditures, educational goals, and a projection of future expenses has successfully demonstrated fiscal responsibility while meeting the educational needs of the students in our Voluntown Public School system.

The budget process is a cooperative approach between the Town and Board of Education to allow for community input. The goal is to develop a budget proposal with a sincere understanding of the cost impact to local property taxes during these challenging economic times. Our goal is to meet the educational needs of students.

Special attention is given to monitor the expenditure of each dollar in our budget to follow our spending plan. These might include a new student requiring an expensive Special Education outplacement, an unanticipated expense for a mechanical issue in the building, unfunded mandates, and a wide variety of interesting and unanticipated financial challenges that seem to occur during any school year.

Academic Achievement of Voluntown Elementary School Students

The English/Language Arts and Mathematics performance of our grades 3-8 on the Standards-Based Achievement Consortium or SBAC administered in the spring of 2017, 2018, and 2019 were both #1 in our statewide 16 town reference group. Voluntown is in “DRG F” (District Reference Group) determined by median family income, parent education/occupation, single parent families, free/reduced-price meals, families speaking a language other than English at home, etc. The scores for ELA and Math were based on a state report listing the “Percent at Level 3 and 4 that Meet or Exceed the Achievement Level” for CT school systems. Other school systems have visited our school to observe classrooms as well as review our curriculum development, implementation, and evaluation of student performance processes and procedures.

Enrollment, Budget, and Per Pupil Cost

	PK-8	HS	TOTAL Students	Approved Budget	Per Pupil Cost	State ECS	Local Prop. Tax	Local Tax Per Student
18-19	256	123	379	6,889,818	18,179	2,292,236	4,597,582	12,131
19-20	251	131	382	6,785,196	17,762	2,117,243	4,667,953	12,220
20-21	240	130	370	6,785,196	18,338	2,117,243	4,667,953	12,616
21-22	242	130	372	6,785,196	18,239	2,117,243	4,667,953	12,548
22-23*	252*	132*	384*	6,850,333	18,239	2,117,243	4,667,953	12,156

*Projected as of 5.10.22

Summary:

- The per pupil cost funded by local property taxpayer dollars is significantly less than the annual calculations published by the state which include local, state and federal allocations.
- VES PK-8 (not including non-resident students) has remained the same over five years with HS enrollment remaining stable.
- Certified and Non-Certified positions have been eliminated over this five-year period through retirements or resignations (If replaced, it is generally at a lower salary).

Designated High Schools

High school tuition is for students attending our designated high schools: Griswold High School, Norwich Free Academy, Wheeler, Marine Science Magnet High School in Groton, Quinebaug Middle College in Danielson, and the Killingly Ag Program. Ellis Tech and Norwich Tech do not charge tuition.

During this time of COVID-19 high schools have had a wide variety of schedule adjustments that have required many changes in transportation to accommodate hybrid learning, remote learning, and full days in school. The recent increases to full-in school days caused some afternoon routes to take additional time for some high school students. Creative adjustments have been made to maintain reasonable times in the afternoon routes.

Projected Regular Education 2022-2023 High School Tuitions:

	<u>21-22</u>	<u>22-23</u>
• Norwich Free Academy	\$13,375	\$13,643
• Griswold High School	\$12,689	\$12,942
• North Stonington Wheeler HS	\$11,433	\$11,433
• Killingly Ag. Program	\$ 6,993	To be determined
• Marine Science Magnet HS	\$6,131	To be determined
• QMC (EASTCONN)	\$5,330	no students
• Norwich Tech	\$0.00	\$0.00
• Ellis Tech	\$0.00	\$0.00

Education Cost Sharing Grants

ECS funding will remain at \$2,117,243 for fiscal years 2022 and 2023. We are hopeful that the state legislators will support maintaining this level of ECS funding for Voluntown. While the overall ECS grant for the whole state has been increased, Eastern Connecticut communities are projected, to receive no increases. Hopefully, our state leaders will seek to protect the local taxpayer from potential loss of revenue they will continue to supply and maintain existing funds of state funding for ECS.

Special Education Excess Cost Grant

The revenues received by the Town are listed annually in a budget summary report. An Excess Cost grant covers a small part of the cost of Special Education in certain circumstances. The Board of Education has an expenditure only budget for all the projected annual Special Education costs. This revenue should be considered when determining the MIL rate and the fund balance of the town. Excess Costs grant funds from the State are deposited in the town account treasury. A summary is as follows:

- 2017-2018 was \$29,011 (Received \$12,334 on 2-23-18 and \$16,677 on 5-22-18)
- 2018-2019 was \$31,300 (Received \$17,503 on 2-25-19 and \$13,877 on 5-24-19)
- 2019-2020 was \$48,802 (Received \$30,035 on 2-20-20 and \$18,767 on 5-7-20)
- 2020-2021 was \$59,490 (Received \$46,345 on 2-21-22 and \$13,145 on 5-11-21)
- **2021-2022 was (\$45,302 as of 5-10-22)**

Three Years of Sp. Ed. Budget Information

The overall cost of Special Education for the Voluntown Public School System includes the following budget accounts: #1200 – Programs, #2000 – Administration, #2140 – Psychological Services, #2150 – Speech and Language, #2160 – OT/PT Services, and #2712 – Transportation. A three-year summary of budgets includes:

2020-2021	Sp. Ed. Actual was \$1,968,300 or 29.09% of the actual total budget of \$6,766,695
2021-2022	Sp. Ed. Approved was \$2,154,160 or 31.74% of the approved total budget of \$6,785,197 We just had a change in two Special Education placements, so the "actual" for 2021-2022 will be a little less than the approved Sp. Ed Budget.
2022-2023	Sp. Ed. Proposed is \$2,006,112. or 29.28% of a proposed \$6,850,333 total budget for the school year.

Voluntown budgets the full cost of Special Education tuitions and any EXCESS COST grant funds from the State of Connecticut are deposited directly into the Town Treasury. It is very difficult to predict what the state will allocate for EXCESS

Cost grant. As noted above, in 2020-2021 we received about \$59,490. Previous years are as follow: 2019-2020 was \$48,802, 2018-2019 was \$31,300, and 2017-2018 was \$29,011.

Projected 2021-2022 Tuitions in the Budget Proposal for Special Education Students

		<u>21-22</u>	<u>22-23</u>	
•	Norwich Public Schools Transition Academy	\$40,000	\$40,800	
•	Norwich Free Academy			
	Resource Room	\$19,688	\$20,082	
	ISLIP	\$43,137	\$40,000	
	ABLE	\$71,450	\$72,897	
•	Griswold High School			
	Resource Room	\$25,433	\$25,941	
	Alternative School	\$45,933	\$46,851	
	Transition Academy	\$25,433	\$25,941	
•	N. Stonington Wheeler HS	Resource Room	\$19,688	\$20,082
•	QVMCHS (EASTCONN)	Transition Services	\$49,920	no students
•	EASTCONN	NE Regional	\$64,480	\$64,480
•	EASTCONN	Autism Program	\$114,400	\$116,688
•	The Learning Clinic	Special Program	\$66,301	\$67,627

Heating Oil Tank Replacement Project

The heating oil tank replacement project has been completed. All “eligible” expenditures are now being reviewed at the State Department of Education. It is anticipated that the school system may receive a reimbursement of approximately \$130,000 and this will be deposited in the town's undesignated fund.

Transportation

We are one of a few school systems that maintains and operates our own Transportation Department and we own the vehicles, select drivers, maintain vehicles, and monitor all expenditures. The 2019-20 budget made the final payment of the cost of a five-year lease purchase of busses. We anticipate that our current busses, based on the detailed specifications listed in the bid process six years ago, will have an excellent “wear life” over the upcoming years. The average annual cost of transportation of the past 16 years is \$443,791. The 2021/22 approved transportation budget is \$459,810. The proposed 2022/23 transportation budget is \$485,087, as of 5-10-22.

During COVID we successfully transported our students by maintaining assigned seats for proper social distancing and contact tracing, when necessary. The Board of Education has purchased a new 10-passenger van for the 2021-2022 school year to replace a much older 2009 8-passenger van. All vehicles must comply with DMV safety inspections.

Capital Improvement Plan: \$0.00 Request from the School System to the Town for 2022/23

Capital Improvement maintenance expenditures are included in this budget proposal and will have no additional impact to the town's overall Capital Improvement Budget. Our approach seeks to support a healthy financial balance in the Undesignated Fund as well as no long-term debt.

COVID-19 required school systems, as per an Executive Order by the Governor, to close March 16 through June 30, 2020. K – Eighth Grades at VES reported back Monday, August 31, 2020. VES went remote for only a handful of days to strengthen our technology skills. Our faculty displayed the ability to effectively work together to implement strategies to maintain an education program for our students. Our K-8 school was one of just a few in the entire state that remained opened for in-person instruction during the 2020-2021 school year. Some students remained in remote learning for the whole year. Technology upgrades played a key role in helping all students maintain academic performance. There have also been federal grants processed through the State Department of Education that allowed us to upgrade our technology. We successfully remained open in 2021-2022.

• COVID Relief Fund (\$176,639 – Already Expended)

A federal Coronavirus Relief Funds (CRF) Grant was submitted and approved. The CSDE approved our request for reimbursement of eligible purchases between 3/1/2020 – 12/30/2020. All expenditures were documented by our district central office for the allowable expenditures of \$176,639. CRF paid for such things as PPE, ventilation upgrades, A/C upgrades, a remote learning teacher, a part-time custodian, bus monitors, a wide range of cleaning supplies during this time of COVID-19, and technology upgrades such as increased Wi Fi access, and additional

Chromebooks. The state also gave us 75 free Chromebooks and ten hotspots.

- **Elementary and Secondary Emergency Relief Funds or ESSER I (\$32,674 – Already Expended)**

In 2020, the Connecticut State Department of Education sent an ESSER I update from the U.S. Department of Education through the CARES Act. This *ESSER Fund* is a grant based on a percentage of each Title I grant to each school system. Voluntown received \$32,674 as a direct deposit into our school federal grant account and were used to increase our technology capabilities. ESSER I funds were used to upgrade our JHS Wi-Fi.

- **Elementary/Secondary Emergency Relief Funds or ESSER II (\$136,204 is being expended)**

An ESSER II Grant application requesting \$136,204 was submitted in 20-21 to the CSDE, was approved and the funds were deposited in the Voluntown Grants Management System account at the state. ESSER II was part of the next step in the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act, 202. ESSER II includes technology funds for 12 much needed Interactive Whiteboards, increased Wi-Fi capacity in the oldest sections of VES, improving remote fiscal access, and replacing air handlers.

- **American Rescue Plan or ARP-ESSER III (\$306,105 in the process of being expended)**

The ARP-ESSER III grant for \$306,105 submitted to the Connecticut State Department of Education or CSDE received full approval. The recent federal legislation will continue to allocate direct financial support to local communities. This grant also helps with our long-term planning as we seek to recover from the challenges of COVID-19. Funds were allocated for technology to replace older components, the construction of a pavilion in the playground area and installing A/C in the gymnasium.

- **Special Education Stipend Grant (\$20,000 Already Expended)**

At the end of August 2021, a Special Education Stipend Grant was released. There was a very quick due date for the application and the \$10,000 was required to be expended by September 30, 2021. We met all deadlines. Our Special Education classrooms were equipped with 65" Diagonal Class LED display - interactive - with built-in media player and touchscreen.

- **ESSER II Special Education Recovery Grant (\$30,000 – Application approved)**

The grant is intended to assist school districts with addressing delayed, interrupted, suspended or inaccessible IEP supports and services for students with IEPs in your school district.

- **ESSER II Bonus Special Populations Recovery Grant (\$25,000 – Application approved)**

The grant is intended to add bonus funding to the main grant and assist school districts with addressing delayed, interrupted, suspended or inaccessible IEP supports and services for students with IEPs in your school district. These funds can also be used to provide students with IEP supports and services to remediate skills and/or address lack of progress due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- **ESSER II Bonus Dyslexia Recovery Grant (\$3,250 – Application approved)**

The grant is intended to assist school districts with the instruction for student with dyslexia.

- **Homeless Grant (\$1,770 – Application Recently Submitted)**

This grant is not available to most municipalities because a requirement to work with other towns. Voluntown will join Griswold, Lisbon, and Preston to seek approval of these funds. Our funds will be used to lower the tuition and transportation costs of an identified homeless high school students.

- **USDA School Lunch Program Equipment Grant (\$25,000 application was submitted and approved)**

Funds helped purchase and install a new freezer in our kitchen. The USDA made the decision to allow all students to obtain a free breakfast and lunch. Therefore, we must increase our capacity to store more inventory. Grant funds will also be used to improve electrical access.

- **Comcast Local Grant to school systems (\$3,500 application is under review)**

There is a current effort to increase our connectivity to the public which includes setting up the BOE Meeting room to allow the public to view meetings. This grant, if approved, would be used to purchase a small portion of the equipment needed for such a communication system.

- **School Readiness Grant (\$207,900)**

For the past 15 years, we have applied for a School Readiness Grant and received funding for our Pre-School programs for children ages three and four. Our School Readiness Council meets on a regular basis and a grant application is being submitted for 2022-2023 to provide almost full funding for this program.

School Security and Safety

Our School Security and Safety Committee reviews our security systems. The committee has researched, reviewed, and developed upgrades in the proposed Board of Education budget. We also apply for available grants to secure funding from the State of Connecticut and other sources to further increase school security.

Budget Development is Part of an Ongoing Monitoring Process of all Monthly Expenditures

The Board of Education reviews all encumbrances, expenditures, and available funds at each regular monthly meeting. This is part of an ongoing budget review and development process that allows to make decisions about the current budget and aids in the creation of the proposal for the budget for 2022-2023.

Health Insurance

Our school system was one of the first in our state to take advantage of the CT Partnership Health Plan. The chart below documents the financial successes of joining this statewide partnership.

Year	Budgeted	Actual
2017-2018	\$543,380	\$522,752
2018-2019	\$576,677	\$576,438
2019-2020	\$601,657	\$652,376
2020-2021	\$643,678	\$633,670
2021-2022	\$643,396	\$630,970 (Estimated)
2022-2023*		

* The 2022-2023 budget proposal, as of 5-10-22, for health insurance is \$675,031 and this includes a slight increase in the number of participants for a projected 10.5% increase in the premium. Please note the actual overall budget increase for Health insurance is \$31,635 or 4.9% because of overall changes in coverage by participants due to retirement on resignations.

This budget supports a commitment to meet the education needs of our students. This includes programs for identified Special Education students from age 3 until age 22, maintenance, technology upgrades, and continuous improvements of instructional materials and supplies that are necessary for high academic standards.

The next review of the 22-23 budget proposal will be at the Town Meeting scheduled for Tuesday, May 24, 2022, at 7:00 p.m. in the VES Gymnasium.

A referendum to vote on the 2022-2023 budget proposals for the Board of Education has been scheduled for Tuesday, June 7, 2022, from 12:00 noon to 8:00 pm at the town hall.