

# Voluntown Public Schools



*In-Person Instruction  
and  
Continuity of Services Plan  
2022-2023  
Voluntown Elementary School  
195 Main St.  
Voluntown, CT 06384*

Based on the Connecticut State Department of Education Guidelines

Date of Submission:	6/23/21, Revised 8/11/21, Revised 9/7/22
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*(Drafted 6/23/21, Revised 8/11/21, and Updated by the REOPEN Committee on 9-7-22)*



## **Voluntown Board of Education**

**195 Main St.**

**PO BOX 129**

**Voluntown, Connecticut 06384**

**Tel: (860) 376-9167 Fax: (860) 376-3385**

September 6, 2022

Our school system is committed to supporting the children of our town. The past few years have proven to be a challenging time as we all navigated the complexities of learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. In our Voluntown PreK through 8<sup>th</sup> Grade school, we provided a full in-person learning model for the 2021-2022 school year and have continued this success into the 2022-2023 school year as well. Various mitigation strategies were used to support our efforts to maintain an in-person learning model. Cohorting allowed us to minimize the impact when a COVID case touched the school community. Although now optional, we believe that mask wearing, and social distancing were key factors in helping to minimize the spread within our schools.

We have planned strategies for this school year. Voluntown will not be offering a fully remote learning option in 2022-23. We continue various mitigation strategies as mandated by the SDE and DPH. Our goal is for children, families, and staff to remain as safe as possible while engaging in educational opportunities. The following documents shall be considered a live and ever-evolving plan that will be adjusted according to developing research and guidance from the State Department of Education.

This In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services plan is a requirement for Voluntown's application for the ARP (American Rescue Plan)/ESSER (Emergency and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund) grant.

Please note that our school system does not have a high school. Therefore, our Eighth graders have a choice of 8 different schools: Norwich Free Academy, Griswold, Wheeler, Ellis Tech, Norwich Tech, Killingly Ag, Marine Science Magnet High School, and Quinebaug Middle College. Each school is also required to publish a Continuity of Services Plan


We appreciate the commitment and flexibility of our faculty and staff, children and families as we continue to navigate learning during this historical time in our lives.

Your feedback is always welcomed. Please feel free to share your thoughts at [aburrows@voluntownct.org](mailto:aburrows@voluntownct.org). and [asuffoletto@voluntownct.org](mailto:asuffoletto@voluntownct.org)

Sincerely,

Adam S. Burrows  
Superintendent of Schools

Amy L. Suffoletto  
Principal of VES



In planning for this year’s in-person learning in the Voluntown school system, it has been essential to envision the safest environment and the highest quality instruction for the school community. Based on guidelines provided to school districts from the Connecticut State Department of Education and the State of Connecticut, **Voluntown Elementary School is currently planning to continue with a full In-Person Learning Model that was successfully implemented in 2020-2021 and 2021-2022.**

The plan is intended to be a fluid document that will evolve based on the public health data and research available to mitigate the spread of the virus. As we proceed, we will continue to receive input from our educational partners, students, and families and will continue to work toward providing the best opportunities for our greatest resource—the students in the State of Connecticut.

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An “In-Person Learning Model” refers to the desire to have all students and all staff for a full-length traditional day of school with necessary modifications given the pandemic.

Adherence to expectations and guidelines from the State of Connecticut, the CDC, local health officials (UNCAS Health District), and other sources will be in place to ensure that the school’s environment supports learning during this time of COVID-19.

We believe that the children are connected to teachers, interventionists, service providers, coaches, and mentors. The plan is to follow all aspects of school life in the safest and most appropriate manner and continue with our suite of mitigating strategies to protect students and staff.





We value the contributions and suggestions of parents, caregivers, families, and students in the decision-making process. The VES faculty will continue to play an active role in building trust and credibility for the plans that are to be implemented. Parents and community members are invited to give regular feedback and suggestions concerning this plan and all aspects of school life.

List of Stakeholders: Voluntown Public Schools students, faculty, and staff; families and guardians; Members of the REOPEN Committee, the Board of Education, and the Board of Selectmen.

## **VES Priorities**

Our school system, as guided by the REOPEN Committee has identified priority areas that must be in place to reopen, which include:

- (1) the safety of the students and staff;
- (2) the development of appropriate educational opportunities;
- (3) the awareness of social and emotional well-being of students, families, and staff;
- (4) the expectation that all children will achieve at the expected grade levels.

	<b>Safety of Students and Staff</b> Our school will be prepared to reinforce healthy practices among our staff and students, take preventative actions to prevent the spread of all respiratory illnesses, and prepare for any potential cases or increased transmission of COVID-19.
	<b>Development of Appropriate Educational Opportunities</b> Our school will be open with a full in-person learning model. As new information relating to COVID transmission becomes available we will be flexible to ensure the health and safety of our students and staff.
	<b>Awareness of Social and Emotional Well-Being</b> Our school will be open knowing that the COVID-19 pandemic has created different types of experiences and levels of stress for our staff, students, and families. The pandemic has shown the importance of social/emotional well-being for all. In addition, there is a growing body of research proving that social/emotional learning (SEL) is fundamental to academic success.
	<b>Achievement at Expected Grade Level</b> Our school will consider and solidify a systematic cycle of assessments, including initial screenings and formative and summative assessments in order to inform instruction and gauge student learning. We will work to analyze individual student data to identify shifts and changes in instruction to meet students' needs and implement intervention strategies.

In addition to our own priorities, our school system is expected to follow the guidelines of the State Department of Education. Such publications are posted on [www.ct.gov/sde](http://www.ct.gov/sde). These guidelines are subject to change.



## LAUNCHING INTO HEALTHY LEARNING

### Operational Strategies - Fall 2022

The Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH), State Department of Education (CSDE), and Office of Early Childhood (OEC) are excited to announce the ***Launching into Healthy Learning*** initiative for the start of the 2022- 2023 school year! This initiative is designed to get Connecticut's kids back to school, child care, and camp at the scheduled start of the school year, to keep them there in-person as much as possible throughout the year, and to keep them healthy and learning all year long. In addition to updated DPH guidance for K-12 school administrators, child care, and youth camp program operators (*Respiratory Disease Prevention Strategies for Schools, Child Care, and Camps: Fall 2022*), DPH, CSDE, and OEC will work closely with school districts, child care, and youth camp facilities in the coming weeks to provide the following resources to Connecticut's children and their families.

**COVID-19 VACCINATION CLINICS** will be organized for all 36 of Connecticut's Alliance School Districts that are open to school, child care, and youth camp staff, students, and families in those communities. DPH, CSDE, and OEC will coordinate with Alliance District administrators, child care operators, and youth camps to deliver on-site state-sponsored mobile vaccination clinics ("yellow vans") to offer COVID-19 primary or booster vaccine doses to anyone 6 months of age or older. Administrators, child care operators, and youth camps in non-Alliance Districts can also request free mobile vaccination clinics for their communities by contacting [SDE.COVID19@ct.gov](mailto:SDE.COVID19@ct.gov) at CSDE (for school district administrators) or [HealthEquityTeam@ct.gov](mailto:HealthEquityTeam@ct.gov).

**SELF-TEST KITS** will be available free of charge to all Connecticut schools, child care programs, and youth camps to distribute to their students, staff, and service providers (e.g., bus drivers, specialized instruction providers, etc.). The State of Connecticut has ordered approximately 2.5 million self-test kits (5 million individual tests) for distribution to school districts and early childhood education programs. The State plans to order additional self-test kits for distribution to licensed child care programs and operating youth camps throughout Connecticut as well. For more information on test kit distribution, school administrators should work within their Districts to coordinate COVID-19 supply requests or contact [SDE.COVID19@ct.gov](mailto:SDE.COVID19@ct.gov) for more information. School districts, licensed child care centers, and operating youth camps will receive additional information in the coming days directly from CSDE and OEC.

**TEST-MASK-GO** is an optional strategy designed to increase the number of days of in-person learning and care available to children, both to improve the social/emotional/physical wellbeing of students, staff, and their families and to enhance learning recovery. The fall and spring allergy seasons combined with New England winters present a challenge for schools, child care, and youth camp facilities that were advised in previous years to exclude individuals from in-person attendance if they had any of a long list of symptoms associated with COVID-19. Schools, child care programs, and camp operators choosing to utilize a *Test-Mask-Go* strategy can give children and staff with mild respiratory disease symptoms (e.g., infrequent cough, congestion, runny nose, sore throat, etc.) the option to continue participating in-person provided:

- they are fever-free (< 100°F) and feel well enough to participate,
- they do not live with anyone who has had COVID-19 in the past 2 weeks,
- they can wear a mask consistently and correctly (if facility operators require them to do so), and
- they test negative for COVID-19 prior to reporting in-person on every day they have symptoms, as well as one final test on the morning their symptoms have completely resolved.

Individuals who have any respiratory disease symptoms **should not** use the *Test-Mask-Go* strategy if:

- they have a fever ( $\geq 100^\circ\text{F}$ ) or feel feverish (they should not report in-person until their fever has resolved for at least 24 hours without the use of medication)
- they live with a person who recently tested positive for COVID-19 (within the past 2 weeks)

Instead, these individuals should stay home until their symptoms resolve and test for COVID-19. Anyone testing positive for COVID-19 should complete isolation according to the [CDC Q/I Calculator](https://www.cdc.gov/qc/calc/). School, child care, or youth camp administrators or health staff who have questions regarding *Test-Mask-Go* should contact [DPH.EPI@ct.gov](mailto:DPH.EPI@ct.gov).

## AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN (ARP) & EMERGENCY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL EMERGENCY RELIEF FUND (ESSER) GRANT

- Makes available federal funds for a multi-year implementation
- Spans the 2021-2022, 2022-2023, and 2023-2024 school years through September 2024
- Supports priorities that must be addressed in the grant application
- Focuses on transforming school, education renewal, learning recovery/acceleration and enrichment for all students
- Requests district to establish In-person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan
- Must be submitted to the State of Connecticut for review, approval, and continuous monitoring
- Requires districts to write grant applications by addressing priorities to particular needs
- Expects districts to monitor grant use and measure progress, especially in terms of student performance on standardized measures

### ARP/ESSER GRANT PRIORITIES

- **Learning Acceleration, Academic Renewal, and Student Enrichment:** Advancing equity and access in education for students in Connecticut remain top priorities. Resources must focus on academic supports and recovery to accelerate learning for our students, particularly those disproportionately affected by the pandemic.
- **Family and Community Connections:** The complex issues brought about by the pandemic have made it clear that the success of schools, families, and communities are interdependent, and all have a stake in students' well-being. Investing in mutually beneficial school-family-community partnerships will not only support students to achieve their full potential, but it will also strengthen families and stabilize communities.
- **Social, Emotional, and Mental Health of the Students and of our School Staff:** The school community experience during the pandemic has been one of collective challenge and trauma. We must be prepared to use strategic, wraparound social, emotional, and mental health supports to restore and successfully re-engage our school communities.
- **Strategic Use of Technology, Staff Development, and the Digital Divide:** Applying what we have learned during the pandemic requires careful consideration of the importance of student access to in-person learning and enrichment balanced with the strategic use of technology to engage and expand learning opportunities. Resources should be allocated to maintain or upgrade access to technology and connectivity for the long term and to ensure that technology training and support is provided to students, school staff, and families to maximize student outcomes.
- **Building Safe and Healthy Schools:** Ensuring our school buildings are safe and healthy environments that enable all of our students to excel remains an important aspect of recovering from COVID-19. Resources may be used consistent with federal relief funding allowable uses as a means to continue facility repairs and improvements, such as improving ventilation and providing more space for distancing. Resources should continue to be allocated to support the physical health and safety of our students and staff (e.g., to ensure adequate personal protective equipment.)

## **ARP/ESSER ACCOMPLISHMENTS and DEVELOPMENTS**

### **Federal and State Grants**

- COVID Relief Fund (\$176,639 – Expended)
- Elementary/Secondary Emergency Relief Funds or ESSER I (\$32,674 – Expended)
- Elementary/Secondary Emergency Relief Funds or ESSER II (\$136,204 being expended)
- American Rescue Plan or ARP-ESSER III (\$306,105 being expended)
- Special Education Stipend Grant (\$20,000 Expended)
- ESSER II Special Education Recovery Grant (\$30,000 – Approved)
- ESSER II Bonus Special Populations Recovery Grant (\$25,000 – Approved)
- ESSER II Bonus Dyslexia Recovery Grant (\$3,250 - Approved)
- USDA School Lunch Program Equipment Grant (\$25,000 Expended)
- Sp. Ed. Grants (\$10,000 for Certified and \$5,000 for Non-certified – being expended)

The above grants are additional allocations for a wide variety of COVID and other related priorities especially related to improving air quality in schools throughout the nation, addressing learning loss, supporting technology connectivity, additional PPE of Personal Protective Equipment, etc. These funds were not used to replace the day-to-day and year-to-year school expenditures for our local school budget. These federal grants have become available to maintain a “Continuity of Services” during this time of maintaining health and safety protocols and addressing learning loss during the time of COVID.

### **FULL IN-PERSON INSTRUCTION**

Voluntown has operated with full in-person learning for the 2021-2022 school year and continues to do so for 2022-2023. The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) has clarified that remote learning days cannot be used for snow or inclement weather days. If public health developments and/or the State of Connecticut require Voluntown to offer a remote option, then the district will revisit the implementation of this learning model.



There are five areas that school districts must consider when developing the Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan:

- 1. Health and Safety Strategies**
- 2. Continuity of Services**
- 3. Public Comment**
- 4. Periodic Review Process**
- 5. Understandable and Uniform Format**

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### **1. Health and Safety Strategies**

Below are descriptions of our school districts approach to provide a suite of mitigation strategies to keep students and staff safe.

- **Optional Mask Wearing:** Mask wearing became optional for Voluntown Elementary School on February 28, 2022.
- **Physical distancing (e.g., including use of cohorts):** The district will comply with CDC guidelines. Students will be grouped by the same class and associated with appropriate teachers.
- **Hand washing and respiratory etiquette:** Hand washing procedures will be displayed in all public and student restrooms and will be continued as a standard protocol throughout the day. Signs for proper respiratory etiquette will be displayed in classrooms and hallways and reviewed with staff and students on a regular basis. Students and adults are encouraged to wash/sanitize hands frequently while school is in session. Respiratory etiquette, emphasizing covering the mouth and nose when sneezing or coughing, using and immediately disposing of tissues, and washing hands, will be encouraged.
- **Cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities, including improving ventilation:** The district will continue its current cleaning and sanitizing protocols. Bathrooms, lunch areas, and high touch surfaces will be cleaned and disinfected regularly.
- **Isolation and Quarantine:** Voluntown Public Schools follows all guidelines for students, families, faculty, and staff regarding isolation and quarantine as directed by the Uncas Health District, CDC, and the CT Department of Public Health.
- **COVID-19 Self-Test Kits:** Kits are available, upon request, to families, students, faculty and staff from the school office or school nurse. Voluntown Elementary School also works with the Town of Voluntown and UNCAS Health District on self-test kits resource sharing.
- **Efforts to provide vaccinations to educators, other staff, and students, if eligible:** The district will continue to partner with the UNCAS Health District and other health providers to provide vaccination clinics to staff and students as needed. The district will continue to share vaccination literature with the Voluntown community.



- **Appropriate accommodations for children with disabilities with respect to the health and safety policies:** Voluntown remains committed to providing high quality programs and will continue to accommodate students with special health care needs or disabilities whose learning (direct instruction) or other needs (e.g., assisting with toileting, feeding, or ambulation) may require closer proximity and/or direct contact or other accommodations. We comply with all federal and state mandates and statutes and adjust plans as necessary to accommodate appropriately.

## 2. Continuity of Services

The district will utilize existing staff and additional staff hired through the ESSER II and ARPA/ESSERIII grants to ensure continuity of services to address the academic, social, emotional, mental and physical needs of students. The district will have full in-person learning in place. A remote learning option is not available in the 2022-2023 school year. The district will utilize local and grant funding to provide interventions for students.

- **Academics:** Voluntown will deliver high quality instruction based on the needs of individual students and address any learning gaps based on grade-level targets and prioritized standards. Voluntown offers summer learning and after-school programs to further support students' learning growth with targeted interventions and enrichment activities. We use standardized and non-standardized student performance data, screenings and anecdotal records to identify and expand upon strengths to accelerate learning. Faculty and staff are supported and trained with professional development opportunities.
- **Social and Emotional Well-Being:** Voluntown Elementary School focuses on the importance of addressing social and emotional well-being by cultivating a psychologically safe environment to learn, work and grow. Positive relationships are promoted and support is offered through our school counselor. Several after school activities are given that also support the social and emotional well-being of VES students. Our school also collaborates with EASTCONN and implements SEL initiatives.

## 3. Public Comment

Public comment is welcome and a key element of stakeholder engagement. The public can provide feedback by calling or emailing one of the following school administrators:

Adam S. Burrows  
Superintendent of Schools  
860-376-9167  
[asburrows@voluntownct.org](mailto:asburrows@voluntownct.org)

Amy Suffoletto  
Principal/Compliance Liaison  
860-376-2325  
[asuffoletto@voluntownct.org](mailto:asuffoletto@voluntownct.org)

## 4. Periodic Review Process

We are required to periodically review and, as appropriate, revise their Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan at least every six months through September 30, 2023. Each review must include seeking public comment on the plan and developing the plan after taking into account the public comment.

This plan will be dynamic, and changes may be necessary based upon circumstances. Should any changes occur, the REOPEN Committee and the Voluntown Board of Education will be notified and a revision request/approval will be sought out.

The first version of this plan was submitted on June 23, 2021 and revised on August 11, 2021. This updated version was reviewed and approved by the REOPEN Committee on September 7, 2022 and approved by the Board of Education on September 8, 2022. Our school is operating on the information made available to us at this time. A schedule of future periodic reviews by the REOPEN Committee and Board of Education will be as follows.

Below are the dates that we must submit a refreshed or updated plan to CSDE via eGMS.

Review/revisit Dates:

- June 22, 2021
- December 22, 2021
- June 22, 2022, and approved by the REOPEN Committee on 9-7-22
- December 22, 2022
- January 22, 2023
- June 22, 2023

## **5. Understandable and Uniform Format**

Federal regulations require that this plan be in an understandable and uniform format, to the extent practicable; is written in a language that parents can understand or, if not practicable, orally translated; and upon request by a parent who is an individual with a disability, provided in an alternative format accessible to that parent. Our Voluntown Public School system has utilized the Connecticut State Department of Education's template to ensure that the information is a uniform format. We will provide a, upon request, copy of this document in requested languages or in an oral format as requested or any other format to ensure accessibility.

## **History of the REOPEN Committee**

School Systems throughout Connecticut were closed on March 16, 2020, until the end of that school year by an Executive Order of the Governor. A REOPEN Committee was established by the Superintendent of Schools and approved by the Board of Education to guide the process for the eventual REOPEN Voluntown Elementary School. The REOPEN Committee met extensively during the 2020-2021 school year and during the first three quarters of 2021-2022. It was during this time that the Board of Education approved motions to support appropriate actions to maintain a healthy, safe, and secure school system.

The Board of Education received monthly reports. Voluntown Elementary School was one of several schools in the state that remained fully in-person the 2020-2021 school year. This was based on the decisions and support the Board of Education gave to recommendations by the REOPEN Committee. Two days were scheduled for the school to fully develop and improve our remote learning access to prepare for the possibility of another long-term closing of schools. A small percentage of families did take the option of remote learning during the time of COVID.

The transition to 2021-2022 allowed for a significant increase in the number of students coming to VES for full in-person learning, especially because of the efforts by the Board of Education to approve ARP ESSER and other applications to improve the school, utilize grants to pay for additional programs that addressed learning loss, and maintain student academic progress. Critical decisions were made to support learning loss during the time of COVID. Our small school system had the ability to make timely adjustments. Parents and community members were supportive during this time. Our students were required to follow strict guidelines for social distancing, hand washing, and mask wearing.

In March of 2022, the Board of Education approved the decision for the “option” of wearing a mask. This was also a time when we were able to increase the number of program activities. Immediate and appropriate actions were taken with any COVID issues to maintain a safe environment. VES had great success with increasing in-person attendance at school. Our eight (8) designated high schools had some increased challenges in 2021-2022 and some schools utilized alternating days for hybrid and remote learning.

The 2022-2023 school year has started with a significant increase to normalcy in the day-to-day school program. The REOPEN Committee will meet on an as-needed-basis to follow-through and review documents and/or directives from CTSDE, DPH, UNCAS as well as comply with maintaining an updated Continuity of Services plan. The committee will also take appropriate steps based on any direct observations of the needs of students. This meet-as-needed approach is a significant change from the weekly REOPEN Committee meetings that were held during the height of COVID.

The REOPEN Committee and Board of Education receives updated reports about the process of completing projects to improve air quality and facilities improvements and well as the implementation and use of federal ARP ESSER grant funds to address learning loss and other needs of students.

The Board of Education approved this Continuity of Services plan on September 9, 2022.

## **Voluntown Public School System REOPEN Committee Members**

<p><b><u>Educational Programming</u></b></p> <p><b>Amy Suffoletto</b> Principal/Compliance Liaison</p> <p><b>Dr. Lloyd Johnson</b> Director of Student Services</p>	<p><b><u>Health &amp; Wellness</u></b></p> <p><b>Terry Quintas</b> School Nurse</p> <p><b>Patrick McCormack</b> Uncas Health Director</p>	<p><b><u>Facilities &amp; Operations</u></b></p> <p><b>Brian Kallio</b> Director of Maintenance</p> <p><b>Tom O'Connor</b> Director of Food Service</p>
<p><b><u>Technology</u></b></p> <p><b>Jim Ward</b> Technology Consultant</p>	<p><b><u>Transportation</u></b></p> <p><b>Anne Michaud</b> Director Of Transportation</p>	<p><b><u>Social Emotional Well-Being</u></b></p> <p><b>Rachel Sahoo</b> School Counselor</p>
<p><b>Adam S. Burrows</b> Superintendent of Schools</p> <p><b>Darlena Loranger</b> Executive Assistant to the Superintendent</p>	<p><b>Andrea Kelly</b> Voluntown Education Association</p> <p><b>Toula Wyland</b> Preschool Teacher</p> <p><b>Angela Gardella</b> Connecticut State Employees Association</p>	<p><b>Kate Beauparlant</b> BOE Chairperson/Parent</p> <p><b>Tracey Hanson</b> First Selectman/Parent</p> <p><b>Amanda Page</b> <b>Rachel Ricard</b> Parents</p>

**Please note that all plans and items included in this document are subject to change  
based on requirements and/or advice from  
the U.S. Department of Education, Governor of Connecticut,  
the Connecticut State Department of Education,  
and the Uncas Health District.**

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