

Dear Faculty, Staff, Parents, and Community Members,

The Board of Education on 5/13/21 approved the budget proposal for 2021-2022 is \$6,785,196 and represents an increase of \$0 or 0% over the 2020-21 town approved total of \$6,785,196. This proposal may need to be reviewed and adjusted over these next month as we prepare for the annual town meeting as well as consider the financial needs of the community as well as the state final ECS or Educational Cost Sharing grant for 2021-2022.

This initial 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 2.68% in the cost of health insurance.
- Projected energy costs for heating fuel, propane, electricity, and diesel/gasoline.
- A 0.60 FTE Foreign Language teacher is included in this budget proposal.

The process of developing the annual Board of Education budget requires an understanding of the history of the school budget, a review of the current budget, and the projection of future expenses to successfully meet the educational needs of the students in the 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 ultimate goal is to meet the educational needs of students.

The Board of Education, on May 14, 2020, approved our current 2020-2021 budget of \$6,785,196, which also represented a \$0.00 or 0.0 % change from the 2019-2020 town approved total of \$6,785,196. The Board, in an effort to prevent a MIL increase for the town during these challenging economic times, authorized the Superintendent to make adjustments so that there would be a 0% change to the 2020-21 school budget.

The Board of Selectmen have scheduled the Annual Town Meeting for Tuesday May 25, 2021 at 7:00 p.m. in the VES gymnasium.

The goal is to make every effort to develop a budget proposal with a sincere understanding of the cost impact to local property taxes and meeting the educational needs of all students. The following pages give additional information about the budget process.

Sincerely,



Adam S. Burrows

Superintendent of Schools

860-376-9167 or aburrows@voluntownct.org

Voluntown Board of Education 2021-2022 Budget Proposal Information (page 2)

This 2021-2022 budget seeks to continue to use a past strategy such as the approved 2020-2021 combined budgets when the Board of Education supported a 0.0% MIL or no property tax increase budget by suggesting the use of funds from the undesignated or town savings account as well as the approval of adjustments in the 2019-2020 budget to develop a no MIL or a no property tax increase 2020-2021 budget proposal which was, as noted above, approved on May 14, 2020 and resulted in the following:

- Board of Selectmen approved increase\$ 52,399
 - Board of Education approved increase\$ 0.00
 - Reductions in state grants (ECS, etc.)..... \$117,031
- Total \$169,430 (Covered by the town Undesignated Fund)**

A summary of school budgets documents the cost savings efforts of the Board of Education.

- 2017-2018 budget was a decrease of \$11,403
- 2018-2019 budget was an increase of \$104,165
- 2019-2020 budget was a decrease of \$104,622
- 2020-2021 budget was \$0.00 or 0% and the 2021-2022 proposal is another 0% increase

The total increase of \$104,165 with subtracting decreases of \$116,025 equaled a decrease of \$11,860 for these five years. The school budget has actually decreased by an average of \$2,372 per year over five years.

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%

The above summary documents a trend that the approved BOE budgets have been declining over these past four years as a part of the total expenditures of the annual budgets for the Town of Voluntown. This has been the result of basically no increases in the school budget for these past four years.

Enrollment, Budget, and Per Pupil Cost

	PK-8	HS	TOTAL Students	Town Approved Budget	Per Pupil Cost	State ECS	Local Prop. Tax	Local Tax Per Student
17-18	271	128	399	6,785,653	17,007	2,174,841	4,610,812	11,556
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*	235	129	364	6,785,196	18,641	2,117,243	4,667,953	12,824

*projected as of 4/5/2021

Summary:

- The per pupil cost funded by local property taxpayer dollars is significantly less than the annual calculations published by the state which include state and federal grants.
- VES PK-8 (not including non-resident students) has had an average decline of 7.3 students per year over five years with HS enrollment remaining stable.
- The Voluntown Board of Education budget is projected to have a decrease of \$11,800 over five years which is an average decrease of \$2,372 per year
- Two homeroom classes and the position of full time Assistant Principal have been eliminated.
- Please note there have been some retirements and/or replacements which, if replaced, are generally at a lower salary.

Education Cost Sharing Grants

The ECS grant for Voluntown was previously \$2,029,248 and \$1,941,252. But Governor Lamont's Budget Proposal changed this to \$2,117,243 for FY 2020 and \$2,117,243 for FY2021. This means, if approved, Voluntown will not receive the previously scheduled overall ECS cut of \$87,995 and \$175,991 for a total of \$263,986. If approved, ECS funding will remain at \$2,117,243 for fiscal years 2021, 2022, and 2023. We are hopeful that the state legislators will support this proposal. The overall ECS grant has been increased but eastern Connecticut communities were projected to receive cuts in ECS, and we need to protect the local taxpayer from potential loss of state revenue.

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.

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 that all of the 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 is \$46,345 as of 4-5-21

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

• Norwich Public Schools	Transition Academy	\$40,000
• Norwich Free Academy or NFA	Resource Room	\$19,688
	ISLIP	\$43,137
• Griswold High School or GHA	Resource Room	\$25,433
	Alternative School	\$45,933
	Transition Academy	\$25,433
• North Stonington or Wheeler High School	Resource Room	\$19,688
• QVMCHS (EASTCONN)	Transition Services	\$49,920
• EASTCONN	NE Regional	\$64,480
• EASTCONN	Autism Program	\$114,400
• The Learning Clinic	Special Program	\$71,165 (includes Summer)

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. This allows our school system to 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 five years ago, will have an excellent “wear life” over the upcoming years. The average annual cost of transportation of the past 15 years is \$443,166. The current 2020/21 approved transportation budget is \$431,811. The proposed 2021/22 transportation budget is currently \$459,810.

During the time of COVID-19 we have been successfully transporting our students by maintaining assigned seats for proper social distancing and contact tracing, when necessary. Mask wearing is a requirement for safety purposes.

The Board of Education has purchased a new 10-passenger van for the 2021-2022 school year to replace a 2009 8-passenger van.

Capital Improvement Plan: \$0.00 Request from the School System to the Town for 2021-2022

Capital Improvement expenditures are included in this 0% budget proposal and will have no additional impact to the town's overall Capital Improvement Budget. This fiscally conservative approach seeks to maintain a healthy financial balance in the Undesignated Fund as well as no long term debt.

COVID-19

COVID-19 required school Systems in Connecticut, 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 and went remote for only a handful of days to strengthen our technology skills. Our faculty has definitely displayed the ability to effectively work together to implement a number of strategies to maintain an education program for our students. A special thank you to our faculty, staff, parents, parents, community and above all, the students for their efforts to work together to maintain social distancing, washing of hands, and wearing a mask. K – Eighth Graders continue to have this full-in opportunity.

Coronavirus Relief Fund

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 totaling \$176,639. CRF has therefore already paid for such things as PPE, ventilation upgrades, A/C upgrades, a remote learning teacher, a part-time custodian, bus monitors, and a wide range of cleaning supplies during this time of COVID-19.

Elementary and Secondary Emergency Relief Funds or ESSER I

In 2020, the Connecticut State Department of Education sent an ESSER I update from the U.S. Department of Education provided for 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 these funds have been used to increase our technology capabilities.

Elementary and Secondary Emergency Relief Funds or ESSER II

The State Department of Education announced a federal ESSER II grant application is now available. Voluntown is listed to receive \$136,204 as part of the next step in the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act, 2021. Funds will be used to help with summer learning, PPE, ventilation upgrades, and technology upgrades.

American Rescue Plan

The recent federal legislation approved by the federal government will continue to allocate direct financial support to local communities and information will be soon be available to help with long-term planning as we seek to recover from the challenges of COVID-19.

School Readiness Grant

For the past 14 years, we have applied for a School Readiness Grant and received funding for almost all of our Pre-School programs for children ages three and four. It is important to note that our School Readiness Council meets on a regular basis and a grant application is being submitted for the 2021-2022 school year to again provide funds for this important program.

School Security and Safety

Our School Security and Safety Committee spent time reviewing the current status of our security systems and the need for any upgrades. The committee has researched, reviewed, and developed a priority list along with costs for consideration by the Board of Education and the Board of Selectmen as part of a coordinated school/community initiative. Every effort is being made to include any necessary upgrades within the existing and 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.

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 2021-2022 High School Tuitions:

• Norwich Free Academy or NFA	\$13,375
• Griswold High School or GHA	\$12,689
• North Stonington or Wheeler High School	\$11,433
• Killingly Ag. Program	\$6,993
• Marine Science Magnet High School or MSMHS	\$6,131
• Three Rivers Middle College	\$6,131 (transportation not provided)
• QVMCHS (EASTCONN)	\$5,330
• Norwich Tech and Ellis Tech	\$ 0.00 (fully state funded)

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

The Board of Education reviews in detail all encumbrances, expenditures, and available funds at each regular monthly meeting throughout the school year. This detailed information is part of an ongoing budget review and development process that allows the Board of Education to make decisions about the current budget and aids in the creation of the proposal for the budget for 2021-2022.

Funds Deposited in the Town of Voluntown Fund Balance

The Board of Education has an expenditure only budget. We receive funds from such sources as Special Education Excess grant (explained below), a Magnet High School Transportation Grant, Adult Education Grant, insurance rebate for safety performance and others. Funds received are deposited in the town fund:

- 2017-2018 \$77,542.59
- 2018-2019 \$96,408.40
- 2019-2020 \$69,420.26
- 2020-2021 \$62,650.54 as of 5-11-21

This budget supports a commitment of our community to maintain a school system that meets the education needs of our students and be in compliance with State of Connecticut statutes. This includes a mandate to maintain and fund programs for identified Special Education students from age 3 until age 22, as per a recent court decision. This budget includes funding for maintenance and repair of our Pre-Kindergarten through Eighth Grade Voluntown Elementary School, technology upgrades with proper repairs as well as a replacement strategy, and continuous improvements of instructional materials and supplies that are necessary for high academic standards.

It is important to note that the bottom line of this current proposal may slightly change based on the upcoming work of the Board of Education in the budget development process, as well as receipt of the actual amount of state and federal grants for education.

A copy of this 2021-2022 budget proposal is available on the school website, at the VES school office's front window upon request, the office of the Superintendent located in the white portable building behind VES, and the Town Hall. The Selectmen have set the Annual Town Meeting for 5-25-21 at 7 p.m. in the VES gymnasium.

(ASB & RLR on 5-17-21)