

North Stonington Public Schools

Board of Education Budget

2026-2027



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Introduction

The North Stonington Board of Education (BOE) is committed to delivering quality education while maintaining fiscal responsibility. In the face of rising costs, particularly in salaries, benefits, transportation, and utilities, the district has developed a budget that balances these challenges with the educational needs of our students. The BOE budget is a 2.5% increase, or \$401,373, bringing the total to \$16,457,814, for the FY27 budget.

Rising Costs: The economic climate has led to increased expenses across various sectors. These increases mirror the financial pressures many families and communities are experiencing.

Impact on Education: Despite these financial challenges, the BOE remains dedicated to preserving the quality of education. The budget prioritizes funding for essential teaching staff, educational programs, and student services, ensuring that students continue to receive a comprehensive and enriching educational experience.

Community Collaboration: Addressing these financial challenges requires a united effort. The BOE actively engages with town officials, school personnel, and community members to explore sustainable solutions. This collaborative approach ensures that decisions reflect the community's values and priorities, fostering a shared responsibility for our children's education.

This budget reflects our commitment to fiscal prudence and educational excellence. By acknowledging rising costs, focusing on educational quality, and working together as a community, we can navigate these challenges effectively.

Vision

Preparing all students to take their place as culturally and globally competent citizens.

Mission

As a Learning Center of Excellence, North Stonington Public Schools is committed to preparing literate, collaborative, critical thinkers and problem-solvers, empowered to embrace and successfully pursue their passions and talents.

BOE Goals

Goal #1 - Safe, valued, and sense of belonging - Embed practices and procedures throughout the schools and curriculum experiences that ensure all students, staff, and families feel safe, valued and have a sense of belonging.

Goal #2 - Innovative Instruction - Design, document and implement innovative instructional opportunities that empower each learner.

Goal #3 - Transparent and Efficient - Develop and follow efficient and transparent processes to ensure smooth flow of operations and enable increased focus on learning.

North Stonington Elementary School (PK-Grade 6)

The proposed budget for North Stonington Elementary School reflects how we plan to meet the BOE adopted goals for the upcoming school year with an included focus on our NEASC goals. We are also cognizant of our increased health care costs as well as contractual obligations so we strive to create a budget that will not burden the residents of North Stonington unnecessarily. We are always appreciative of the BOE support for our school as we look to continue to lead the area in academic excellence. NSES consistently strives to provide our students with the best educational experiences and emotional support that they need in order to reach their highest potential. Our school continues to excel in state assessments outperforming our DRG and neighboring schools in SBA performance in many areas, including math in grades 3, 5, 6 and ELA in grade 3.

As we did last year, NSES is looking to not add more programming but continue to improve the implementation of both our core ELA and Math curricula, with an emphasis on tiered support. We have zeroed in on what we feel are the best tools for benchmark testing and are working continuously to better understand the data it provides and how we can best use that data to teach our students with a focus on growth. We also are looking to increase our STEAM programming and find new ways to bring these exciting programs to our students in a more consistent manner.

Budget Highlights

- Our discretionary budget is lower than in the previous year. We have worked to ensure that our expenses remain as reasonable as possible given the projected increase in insurance costs.
- You will note a marked decrease in Bridges expenses. As we enter our 2nd year of implementation, we have purchased the major items we need to teach the curriculum effectively, leaving our annual purchases to mostly consumable materials.
- With the new state mandated climate work, we are in need of purchasing a survey program as per state regulations
- As we have made the switch to standards based report cards, we have seen an increased need to better track student progress based on those standards. This year we piloted a new data warehouse program called Forefront in grade 5. We have found that this is a very effective program to keep track of student progress in both ELA and Math and will help us to more accurately inform families on student progress based on the standards. This program also is able to house and help evaluate our DIBELS 8 data which is another of our screeners we use three times annually. We have added this program to our budget for the upcoming school year.
- We are in some very early stages of discussion around reimagining our library and computer roles. We feel there could be a wonderful opportunity to have these positions work together to bring more STEAM activities to our students. This could end up impacting our budget in the future.
- With the implementation of our district technology plan last year, we feel more secure knowing that our 5th and 6th grade students can maintain one-to-one status and that our lower grades will have continual access to technology. The new smartboards that have been installed have increased student engagement and teachers continue to find innovative ways to use them.

We look forward to more of our teachers having access to them as the plan enters its second year.

- As we continue to work towards NEASC accreditation, we will need to complete some components of our goals, which include curriculum writing. Having some monies set aside to pay teachers to do this work will greatly assist in the timely completion of this task.

In summary, this budget reflects our dedication to providing an outstanding educational environment, fostering innovation, and prioritizing the well-being of our students. We appreciate your ongoing support in achieving these goals.

Wheeler (Grades 7 - 12)

Library Media ReDesign

The Library Media Design Initiative is a collaborative effort to reimagine our existing library space as a central, modern hub that brings Wheeler Middle and High School students together in an accessible and inspiring environment. This redesigned space will shift the focus from passive screen time to hands-on maker space activities that foster creativity, career exploration, and post-graduate aspirations, while better supporting collaboration, innovation, and productivity. The current library media area is smaller than the existing library across the street and is outfitted with outdated furniture, limiting its potential; this initiative addresses those challenges through a thoughtful redesign over the next few years that better maximizes the functionality and flexibility of the space. By creatively leveraging a library media aide to support daily operations, we can manage costs while still expanding opportunities for students, teachers, and even community members to engage in unique programming, workshops, and collaborative projects. Reinstating the Library Media position to 0.6 FTE is a critical component of this initiative, ensuring we can deliver up-to-date, meaningful programming that aligns with our NEASC Vision of the Graduate and transforms the library media space into a vibrant, future-focused learning center for all. This past year it was at 0.4 FTE with the resignation of our former Library Media Specialist allowing us some significant cost savings while we explored new programming for the space.

MS/HS Athletics

Wheeler Middle School and High School Athletics continue to evolve to better meet the needs of our students while remaining fiscally responsible. We also continue to support our new indoor and outdoor track programming and have added an assistant coach stipend and some other expenses for meets that our teams have currently fundraised for in our first two seasons. Under the leadership of our new Athletic Director, we continue to expand on our collaborative offerings which although a lot less than funding a team ourselves, does include some expenses, the largest being transportation to other schools when necessary. We are also closely examining athletic programming, particularly at the middle school level, where Wheeler currently participates in the QVJC league, to ensure offerings are the best fit for our students. Exploring potential league or program adjustments for next year may

allow greater middle school student participation while also helping to keep competition closer to home, an important consideration as transportation costs continue to rise. At the same time, we remain committed to maintaining our new uniform rotation, though these costs have increased considerably and must be carefully planned for as part of our overall athletics budget. This year we begin that same type of rotation at the middle school level which we have held off on while we continue to explore leagues that best fit our needs.

Other Budget Highlights

- **Naviance to SchoolLinks**

While our experience with Naviance has been very positive, our contract is expiring and we have identified an alternative platform that better meets the evolving needs of our students. SchoolLinks will allow us to include our transition students, enabling all learners to develop post-secondary plans in one centralized location. The platform supports multiple pathways, including college, career, military, and technical options, and provides engaging career exploration tools that connect students' interests and skills to real-world opportunities. In addition, SchoolLinks offers robust data dashboards and educator tools that allow staff to monitor progress, personalize guidance, and ensure equitable access to post-secondary planning supports. The system also enables us to house Student Success Plans (SSPs) digitally beginning at the elementary level, creating a cohesive, longitudinal planning experience that grows with students throughout their academic journey and aligns to our district accreditation.

- **Continued support of Middle School Model**

We continue to work at the middle level to increase collaboration, communication and more importantly resilience among our students. Since 2020 we are still seeing a very different generation of learners and are shifting how we instruct them to encourage opportunities for communication, collaboration and self-reflection. You will see some additional expenses to support interdisciplinary activities as well as other initiatives including our student led conferences. We are also looking at different math programs for grades 6-8. Our Director of Instruction and Learning is leading our team in doing a program assessment comparing our current program (DESMOS) to others and we continue to align with NSES in this endeavor as much as possible.

- **Consumable increases HS level**

Our Science and Tech Ed (including our new manufacturing space) consumable costs have increased due to the increase in materials needed in these courses and current shipping and cost increases to such materials. Our pathways, specifically our engineering one has highlighted a real interest for our students wishing to pursue engineering and manufacturing careers. These changes and offerings allow us to keep more students at Wheeler and give them the programming that they were once leaving us to pursue elsewhere. This request also reflects current national initiatives and our local economy by strengthening CTE programming in manufacturing. New manufacturing courses were added to prepare students for high-wage careers after graduation by partnering with local businesses, including Electric Boat, and expanding access to the workplace while still enrolled in high school.

- **New Climate Survey Program (State mandated)**

Following the recent legislative requirements to our Climate Policy, we are looking into purchasing a program to do our annual Climate Surveys that is researched-based and statistically reliable. We currently use Survey Monkey as the platform to give these surveys and make them ourselves which no longer will be an option for school districts.

Special Services Budget

The FY27 Special Services budget is intended to continue the work already in place across the district while meeting our responsibilities under state and federal special education regulations. This proposal maintains current programs, staffing, and service delivery models, with a focus on ensuring students receive the support and services outlined in their IEPs and 504 plans.

As in prior years, the budget supports staffing, contracted related services, nursing services, transportation, tuition, and Extended School Year (ESY) programming. These resources reflect the day-to-day work of supporting students with a wide range of learning, social-emotional, and medical needs, as well as the evaluations, progress monitoring, and planning required to provide appropriate and meaningful programming. Instructional, testing, and operational supplies remain consistent with previous years and are directly tied to supporting instruction, assessment, and student engagement across educational settings.

The budget also continues to support early childhood programming and Child Find responsibilities, including preschool instructional materials, screenings, and evaluations aligned with Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards. In addition, funding is included to maintain required professional learning, licensure, and memberships so staff can remain current with regulatory expectations and best practices in the field.

While the FY27 proposal does not represent a significant expansion of services, the department remains attentive to opportunities that enhance student experiences within existing resources. Unified opportunities, including Unified Physical Education, were very well received this year and supported positive student engagement. Building on that success, Special Services will continue to look for thoughtful ways to support inclusive practices when they align with student needs and fit within the established budget.

Throughout the year, Special Services will continue to monitor student needs, service delivery, and programming to ensure resources are being used effectively and responsively. Families are an important part of this work, and the department remains committed to open communication and collaboration as we support students across programs and grade levels. The department remains focused on keeping students at the center of decision-making while using district resources thoughtfully and responsibly.

Enrollment

Current enrollment as of January 21, 2026, and projected enrollment for 2026-2027.

	PK	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Total
25-26	43	50	46	51	50	59	49	56	54	62	52	58	58	51	739
26-27	40	55	50	46	51	50	59	49	56	54	62	52	58	58	740

Magnet, Vocational Agriculture (VoAg), Vocational Technical Schools

When students choose to attend these schools, we are obligated to support them. We must provide transportation only to Technical Schools and pay tuition for magnet and VoAg schools. The cost for VoAg in 2023-2024 was \$6,823. The tuition for magnet schools depends on the particular magnet school. The range in 2023-2024 was \$3,319 to \$6,378. In 2024-2025, the rates for VoAg and Magnet School stayed the same, however the state paid 42% of the tuition. It is reported that the rates will remain the same and the state will pay the same portion in 2025-2026. We are projecting 26 students attending Technical High Schools, 4 students attending VoAg High School, and 9 attending Magnet High Schools.

Per-Pupil Expenditure (PPE)

The per-pupil expenditure can be a confusing concept because it is calculated several different ways. Generally it is the total expenditures (sum of budget, grant, in-kind) divided by the number of students. However, the expenditures may be just school-level, or combined school-level and district-level. The state calculates it for us each year, but the most recent report is from 2023-2024. The total PPE for North Stonington Public Schools was \$20,659, Montville \$21,162, Voluntown \$23,596, Preston \$23,641, Stonington \$25,567, Norwich \$23,566. The state average was \$23,243 for that same year. Area school districts PPE for 2023-2024: Ledyard \$18,092, Griswold \$19,279, Groton
Source: [Edsight](#)

Budget Challenges and Increases

There are several areas of the budget that have increased significantly. The cost of labor has gone up as indicated in our employee contracts. In addition, our medical insurance is increasing by 15%.

	\$ Increase (Decrease)	Comments
Salaries	222,621	Contractual
Benefits	158,132	15% Medical Insurance Increase
Central Office	(9,485)	Decrease in contract negotiations and NEASC expenses
Other Expenses, Schools	95,104	SPED Contracted Services \$76k; Athletics
Maintenance Services	(39,080)	General Building Services
Utilities	45,788	Natural Gas - Elementary School, new lines for water and trash
Transportation	(13,836)	Regular \$36k,, Special Ed \$14k,Sports \$9k
Tuition	8,178	Magnet School enrollment higher
Technology	(66,049)	EDR Cyber Security SW \$33k, Verkada Door \$9k, School Links to replace Naviance \$6k
Total Increase	401,373	

Technology

In regards to technology staffing, we are planning to continue our partnership with LEARN to serve as IT Director. This arrangement has proven to be highly successful in up-grading our technology infrastructure while also dealing with a significant cyber security incident. The service has been outstanding, including different specialists to meet our needs, and comes at a reduced cost. This budget includes a full-time technology coordinator employed by the district and personnel from LEARN including a technician for 2 days per week and an IT Director for 2 days per week.

Due to our cyber security incident we had to increase the pace of technology infrastructure upgrades, for which The BOE used some funds from their nonlapsing account. The BOE is also committed to finishing upgrading the remaining older infrastructure using the non-lapsing account, decreasing the need for infrastructure in the FY27 operating budget, and in the next several years.

Software

The district's software budget is designed to support student instruction while ensuring that district systems are secure, stable, and reliable. Following the recent cyber incident, the district reviewed its digital tools and identified the need for stronger cybersecurity measures alongside continued access to essential instructional platforms. Instructional tools include Desmos, which supports mathematics learning and is expanding to include student workbooks in grades 6 and 8. STEMscopes is also the core program for science grades 6-8, primarily used in print but requiring digital subscriptions and teacher access for lesson planning, assessments, and instructional resources. The budget also includes critical operational systems such as PowerSchool, Curb Smart, and district internet services. The addition of EDR cybersecurity software and Verkada licensing directly addresses previously identified vulnerabilities. Tyler Technologies and CABE systems that support finance, human resources, and governance functions. The associated cost increase reflects enhanced security requirements, updated licensing, and compliance measures necessary to protect data, reduce risk, and ensure continuity of instruction and operations across the district.

Hardware

The district's hardware budget supports secure, reliable technology essential for instruction and operations. The recent cyber incident accelerated elements of the Sustainable Technology Plan and highlighted the risks associated with aging devices. Older hardware—including student devices, classroom display technology, and network infrastructure—contributed to increased vulnerability, reinforcing the need for consistent replacement cycles and additional investment. The district is continuing work on infrastructure improvements such as security cameras, switches, and servers, and is also addressing the loss of outdated classroom printers by exploring additional copiers and centralized printing solutions that reduce risk while supporting staff needs.

Student Chromebooks remain a critical instructional tool in a 1:1 model for grades 5 and 9, with students retaining devices for a four-year cycle to ensure consistency, security, and instructional continuity. While the district continues to examine intentional technology use and appropriate screen time, Chromebooks are essential for accessing curriculum, assessments, and instructional resources.

Classroom instruction is also supported through ViewSonic interactive boards, which provide a more reliable, longer-lasting instructional solution as aging Epson projectors reach the end of their usable life. Together, these investments ensure technology remains secure, sustainable, and aligned with instructional needs.

Grounds and Facilities

A few years ago our facilities department absorbed the maintenance of the grounds without adding additional staff. Around that time, we negotiated in the maintenance/custodian contract that anyone can perform any task with the proper training, increasing the efficiency of the required cleaning, maintenance, and grounds work. In addition, we made the facilities director much more hands on while still expecting the completion of all the administrative tasks. The department is stretched further with the multiple school and community events that take place in the school buildings. In order to create a sustainable situation, earlier versions of this budget included another custodian. In this current version of the budget, the additional custodial position has been removed due to financial constraints.

Tuition to Attend Wheeler High School

North Stonington offers a high quality, individualized educational program at a very reasonable fee. These tuition figures will keep Wheeler competitive while bringing in important revenue that will benefit the Town of North Stonington. In addition, this plan of tuition may be helpful to sending districts in their budget planning. Please note that the 2026-2027 school year is the last year in the current tuition plan and the BOE is considering options for increasing the rates in the future.

Four year plan to increase tuition (Approved by the North Stonington BOE on January 11, 2023)

Year	Regular Tuition	Special Education*	Alternative School*
2023-2024	12,187	20,985	37,357
2024-2025	12,674	21,825	38,851
2025-2026	13,054	22,480	40,016
2026-2027	13,446	23,154	41,217

*May be adjusted higher based on services to meet student needs, following rates set by LEARN.

Revenue to the Town

The Town of North Stonington receives funding from two main sources for its schools: Educational Cost Sharing (ECS) and school of choice tuition. The ECS amount is **\$2,660,307**. Additionally, the town projects **\$527,505**, in school of choice tuition revenue, with expectations for growth as more families recognize the value of the education and extracurricular opportunities at Wheeler.

Items to be acquired using the Nonlapsing Account

Item	Cost
Technology Infrastructure (Access Points, Switches)	\$42,000
Interactive Whiteboards (7)	\$28,000
Centralized Printers	\$4,000
Chromebooks	\$69,000
Technology Replacements	\$20,000
Total	\$163,000

Staffing Chart

Positions	2024-2025	2025-2026	2025-2026
Regular Ed Teachers	69.1	68.6	66.6
Special Ed Teachers	11	11	11
School Guidance Counseling	2	2	2
School Social Work	2	2	2
School Psychology	2	2	2
Speech Pathology	2	2	2
Library Media	2	1.4	1.6
Occupational Therapist	1	1	1
School Nursing	2	2	2
Aides (nurse, cafeteria, office)	3	3	3
Paraeducator	19	20	20
BCBA	1	1	1
RBT - Registered Behavioral Technician	3	3	3
Facilities	9	9	9

Central Office	4	4	4
Information Technology	2	1	1
Administrators	4	4	4
Athletic Director	1	1	1
School Secretaries	4	4	3.5
Special Education Secretary	1	1	1
TOTALS	144.1	143.0	140.7

Budget History

The average budget increase over the last ten years, including this proposal, would be 2.50%. The average rate of inflation over the same period (2017-2026*) of time is 3.29%.

*assumed inflation for 2026 is 2.7%

North Stonington Public Schools Budget Increases

Year	Percent Increase
2017-2018	0.00%
2018-2019	4.97%
2019-2020	1.93%
2020-2021	2.50%
2021-2022	1.13%
2022-2023	1.74%
2023-2024	4.41%
2024-2025	1.79%
2025-2026	4.00%
2026-2027	2.50%
10 year average	2.50%

Summary

The budget proposal includes a **2.50%** increase, which is down from the original BOE budget of 5.47%. The budget does contain the funding necessary to cover rising costs while maintaining the high standard of education expected by both the local community and tuition-paying students. Key cost drivers include significant increases in salaries, medical insurance, and special education. The town's partnership in funding and providing labor for building repairs and service contracts is appreciated. Without that partnership, the BOE budget would be at 3.75%, instead of 2.50%. Our reorganized IT department continues to result in significant savings and efficiencies, including the successful handling of our cybersecurity incident. The BOE committed to finish upgrading our technology infrastructure, as well as fund technology devices, utilizing the nonlapsing account. Also, in order to get the budget down to just 2.50%, 4.5 positions (2 teaching, 1 custodial, 1 paraeducator, and 0.5 secretary) were removed from the original BOE budget.