

North Stonington Public Schools

Board of Education Budget

2025-2026



Board of Education

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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 4.00% increase, or \$617,519, bringing the total to \$16,056,441, for the FY26 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.

Recent Initiatives and Accomplishments

North Stonington Public Schools (NSPS) exemplify excellence in education through a variety of innovative programs and achievements that foster student growth and community pride.

Innovative Instruction and STEAM Initiative: At the elementary level, NSPS emphasizes innovative instruction with a focus on Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM). This approach empowers students to explore and integrate knowledge across disciplines, preparing them for future academic pursuits.

Senior Capstone Project and Pathway Opportunities: The district offers Senior Capstone Projects and specialized pathways in Engineering, Business, and Education. These programs provide students with practical, real-world experiences that enhance their learning and inform their career aspirations.

Academic Excellence: NSPS students consistently achieve high standardized test scores, reflecting the district's commitment to academic excellence and rigorous educational standards.

Recognition Among Connecticut Middle Schools: The middle school has been recognized for its academic achievements, ranking among the top middle schools in Connecticut. This accolade highlights the school's dedication to student success and quality education.

Interdisciplinary Learning and Student-Led Conferences: The district promotes interdisciplinary learning and supports student-led conferences. These initiatives encourage students to take ownership of their education, develop critical thinking skills, and effectively communicate their learning progress.

Pioneering District Accreditation: NSPS is a candidate for district accreditation from the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), becoming the first district in Connecticut to pursue this distinction. This initiative underscores the district's commitment to continuous improvement and adherence to high educational standards.

Athletic Director

The creation of a full-time Athletic Director (AD) at North Stonington Public Schools has led to significant improvements in the athletic program and school community. The AD position allowed for the inclusion of Grade 6 students on middle school teams, broadening athletic opportunities and fostering early engagement in school sports. The AD provides mentorship and supervision to coaches, improving coaching strategies and professional development. A stronger social media presence has increased visibility of student-athlete achievements, building community pride. A leadership council, consisting of student representatives from each sport, enhances communication and team culture. The revitalized sports booster club supports fundraising and resource allocation. Additionally, the AD's grant writing efforts have secured funding for facilities and events, enriching the athletic experience and promoting personal growth. These initiatives have contributed to a thriving athletic culture, strengthened community engagement, and enriched student experiences at North Stonington Public Schools.

Director of Instruction and Learning

In the FY25 budget, a Director of Instruction and Learning position was created, allowing a teacher leader to step into this role by hiring a 0.6 FTE social studies teacher. This initiative has positively impacted the district in various ways, including organizing professional development, supporting instructional improvement, teaching instructional technology, aligning curriculum and assessment practices, facilitating the district data team, coordinating interdistrict partnerships, training new teachers, leading the district's NEASC accreditation, and teaching an Education 101 course to students in the education pathway.

Cub Club

Based on a survey of before and after school needs of parents in the community, Cub Club was created. Cub Club is a self-sustaining and flexible before and after school program. Each month parents can choose which sessions they would like their children to participate in and pay for those sessions. In March 62 kids participated. This program also connects with our Education Pathway giving those students valuable experience.

North Stonington Elementary School (PK-Grade 6)

The proposed budget for North Stonington Elementary School focuses on achieving the BOE's goals for the upcoming school year. The school is grateful for the BOE's support and aims to maintain its leadership in academic excellence. NSES continues to provide high-quality education and emotional support to help students reach their full potential. The school has outperformed its DRG and neighboring schools in state assessments, excelling in math and science across all grade levels, as well as in most grade levels for ELA (English Language Arts).

After implementing new ELA and Math programs in the past two years, the school is focused on improving the fidelity of these programs, alongside ongoing curriculum development and refining tiered support programs. The school believes it has the right programs in place and plans to continue refining and reinforcing the progress made in recent years.

Budget Highlights

- The kindergarten paraprofessionals have had a significant positive impact this year. In addition to supporting the youngest students, they provide consistent, skilled assistance during intervention time. The current model focuses on offering broad, intensive support to students early on, which helps reduce the number of students needing tiered support in later grades. This approach aligns with the improvements made to the Tiered Support process, which was updated this year.
- The school is currently piloting the Bridges Mathematics program, and based on its implementation so far, there are plans to present it for adoption by the Board of Education in the coming spring. If approved, funding will be required to cover the cost of materials for the current year, as well as consumables for the following year. However, it is expected that the cost to maintain the program in the future will be lower.
- There have been changes to the Grade 6 math program, as the current program, Desmos, has been purchased by Amplify, resulting in a higher cost than in previous years. Additionally, Amplify has added a larger writing component to the program, which requires the purchase of consumables, further contributing to the increased cost.
- In Science, the Grade 5 program is due for renewal, and there is a higher cost associated with this due to the need to cover 6 years of online service and one year of consumables. For the following years, only consumables will need to be purchased, which will reduce the ongoing costs.
- Year 3 of the Into Reading program will be implemented, and there has been a slight increase in cost. Additionally, the inability to use Right to Read funding, which was available last year, has contributed to the increase. As a result, you will notice an increase in the Reading Texts line of the budget.
- Amira, one of the state-approved reading proficiency screeners piloted this year, has proven to be valuable. It is not only effective for screening students but also provides additional data through its use in the classroom throughout the year.

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)

Middle School Initiatives

We remain dedicated to our middle school goals and are excited to continue this important initiative into the 2025-26 school year. Our teachers are hard at work reinstating the middle school model, which includes the introduction of student-led conferences and an enhanced focus on interdisciplinary units in grades 7 and 8. In addition, we are committed to maintaining the inclusion of 6th graders in our sports programs. While this has proven to be a valuable addition, it does have a significant impact on our budget due to the need for more teams, transportation, and coaching staff.

Understanding the importance of providing additional opportunities for middle school students, we will continue offering programs such as middle school clubs and the Homework Club.

High School Programming and Vision

Our high school programming remains aligned with Wheeler’s Vision of the Graduate, supporting multiple pathways for students whether they plan to attend college, join the military, or enter the workforce. As the landscape of post-secondary choices evolves, we are committed to providing practical, hands-on experiences that prepare students for life after high school. Opportunities like internships and work-study assignments not only equip students with real-world skills but also reinforce our commitment to keeping students in North Stonington, instead of seeking options outside the district.

Innovations in our program of studies are designed to ensure every student can succeed after graduation. These enhancements also make Wheeler an attractive option for students from our school-choice partner towns, Preston and Voluntown. We deeply appreciate the Board of Education’s support in fostering these initiatives and are grateful for the continued backing of the Town of North Stonington.

Budget Highlights

- **Middle School Model and Student-Led Conferences**

We continue to prioritize a true middle school model at Wheeler, creating distinct experiences for middle school students. Teachers are focusing on interdisciplinary learning and piloting a student-led conference model that enhances accountability and supports our Social/Civic expectations.

- **Expanded Athletic Opportunities (MS and HS)**

The addition of 6th-grade participation in middle school sports and continued growth in our athletic offerings has been a success but brings increased costs for transportation, coaching stipends, and team expenses like uniforms. Transportation costs, in particular, represent a significant portion of the increased budget. We continue to look at ways to provide opportunities for students while leveraging resources to keep costs down. For example, the addition of a high school track team in 2024-25 was a notable success, with over 30 participants. Thanks to our partnership with Griswold, we minimize costs by using their facilities, limiting expenses to coaching, transportation, and meet fees.

- **Wheeler School of Choice Program**

This program continues to thrive, with 9-10 students accepted into the incoming freshman class. This program, coupled with expanded athletic opportunities, attracts students from Preston and Voluntown while retaining North Stonington students.

Special Services

The Special Services Department remains steadfast in its commitment to making student-centered decisions that foster meaningful outcomes. By enhancing transition activities, expanding life skills instruction, and strengthening in-district supports, the department continues to create an inclusive, engaging, and well-rounded learning experience for all students.

Expanded Transition Activities

The district continues to strengthen its transition programming with a combination of new initiatives and the expansion of existing opportunities. These programs ensure that students gain the skills and experiences needed for success beyond high school.

- **Mystic Seaport Initiative (Expanded)** – Continuing to provide immersive hands-on learning experiences that connect students to local history, maritime skills, and career exploration.
- **The Giving Closet (Expanded)**-A community initiative in North Stonington where individuals can access free clothing and shoes. Students take on the responsibility of sorting, organizing, and laundering (some) donated items, reinforcing vocational, organizational, and life skills while giving back to the community.
- **Mack Snacks Partnership (New)** – A new collaboration with a local business offering real-world work experience through a structured transition program.
- **Bowling with Alley Katz in Westerly (Expanded)** – Expanding our partnership with Alley Katz as part of the **PE curriculum for the Alternative Education Program**, reinforcing physical activity, social engagement, and teamwork in an inclusive environment.
- **Goodspeed Opera House Opportunities (New)** – Introducing students to the arts through educational workshops, behind-the-scenes experiences, and career insights into the performing arts.
- **Local Work-Study Opportunities (Expanded)** – Strengthening community partnerships to provide students with practical, hands-on experiences that align with their interests and career goals.
- **Unified Opportunities with Surrounding Districts (Expanded)** – Increasing social and inclusive experiences by collaborating with neighboring districts. This year, we are excited to attend and support a **Unified Prom with Griswold**, fostering friendships and inclusion beyond our district.

By building on successful programs and introducing new opportunities, the district is committed to providing a well-rounded transition experience that supports students in college, career, and independent living.

Revamping and Expanding Life Skills Classes at Wheeler

To better prepare students for post-secondary success, the district is revamping and expanding **Life Skills Classes at Wheeler**, ensuring a more comprehensive and structured approach to **CORE transition skills**. The updated curriculum will focus on:

- **Functional Life Skills** – Enhancing instruction in essential daily living skills such as budgeting, meal preparation, transportation, and time management.

- **Social Skills Development** – Strengthening students’ ability to communicate effectively, build relationships, and navigate social situations with confidence.
- **College and Career Readiness** – Expanding opportunities for resume-building, interview practice, job exploration, and post-secondary planning to better equip students for life after high school.

By embedding these critical areas into the curriculum, students will gain confidence and independence as they transition beyond high school.

Continued Success of In-District BCBA and RBT Supports

The continued success of having a **Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) and Registered Behavior Technicians (RBTs) within the district** has been transformational. These professionals provide proactive, individualized behavioral support, significantly reducing the need for out-of-district placements. Their impact includes:

- **Reduction in Crisis Team Interventions** – Students receive timely support, decreasing behavioral incidents and improving overall classroom engagement.
- **Enhanced Paraeducator Training** – Encouraging paraeducators to obtain RBT credentials has strengthened the quality of direct student support.
- **Increased Student Success** – With tailored interventions and consistent in-district support, students are thriving in their home schools, fostering a sense of belonging and academic achievement.

Commitment to Student Success

By enhancing transition programs, expanding life skills instruction, and maintaining a strong in-district behavioral support system, the Special Services Department continues to foster an inclusive, student-focused learning environment. These initiatives build upon past successes and align with the district’s mission to prepare all students for independent and fulfilling futures.

The ongoing support of the Board of Education and the community remains critical in ensuring these valuable programs continue to thrive, empowering North Stonington students to reach their full potential.

Enrollment

Our projected enrollment indicates that our current Grade 8 will add 9 tuition students to Grade 9 in 2025-2026.

	PK	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Total
24-25	38	44	49	45	57	46	56	52	62	56	61	59	54	59	738
25-26	40	45	44	49	45	57	46	56	52	62	56	61	59	54	726

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, which includes the school-level and district level calculations. The state average was \$23,243 for that same year. Area school district's PPE for 2023-2024: Ledyard \$18,092, Griswold \$19,279, Groton \$20,055, Montville \$21,162, Voluntown \$23,596, Preston \$23,641, Stonington \$25,567, Norwich \$23,566.

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 and the labor market. We need to budget more for utilities, especially electricity. Repairs is an area in which we spent quite a bit more than we budgeted, however collaboration with the town has resulted in a decrease in our budget. In addition, our medical insurance is projected to increase by 9%. Yet another area of increase is transportation for which we have a new contract with M&J Bus after a request for proposal process.

	Amount	Increase/(Decrease)
Salaries Mostly Contractual Obligations	10,528,420	351,812
Benefits Health Insurance up 9%	2,663,728	119,358
Technology Implementation of Sustainable Technology Plan and Reorganization of Software	347,049	102,049
Maintenance	216,000	(43,000)
Transportation New contract and Sports Transportation	1,278,750	170,878
Utilities	407,500	103,000
Central Office	218,835	36,105
Other Expenses - Schools	494,771	89,810
Tuition	123,420	(90,461)
	Total Budget Increase	\$839,551

The total increase of \$839,551, adjusted for grants of \$222,032 is down to **\$617,519**.

FY26	FY25	Increase	Percent Increase
\$16,056,441	\$15,438,922	\$617,519	4.00%

Technology

In regards to technology staffing, we are planning on using LEARN to serve as IT Director. We have been piloting this change since the retirement of the IT Director and the service has been outstanding, and comes at a reduced cost. We recognize the need for additional IT technician support, which is included in the budget and can also be provided by LEARN at a low cost. The total support from LEARN (IT Director and IT technician) would be for 4 days per week, at an estimated cost of \$80,000.

A Technology Committee was charged with developing a sustainable replacement plan for hardware in the district. This group surveyed staff and looked at current technology inventories. What follows is a description of how this plan will be implemented using a combination of budget funds and non lapsing account funds.

1. **Laptop Replacement:** The district is using 46 laptops from 2016 and older. The budget contains 14 new laptops which is the sustainable level per year. This will begin to phase out desktops and provide each teacher one laptop. The BOE is planning on using the nonlapsing account for 32 additional laptops as a catch up.
2. **One-to-One Program:** Currently, high school students have Chromebooks. The budget contains the Chromebooks for the incoming 9th graders. We hope to extend this to students in grades 5-8, ensuring every student has a device for learning and state tests. However, the new Chromebooks for grade 5 will be purchased from the nonlapsing account rather than the budget.
3. **Interactive Boards:** Old projectors will be replaced with interactive boards, making lessons more engaging and improving instruction. 5 Smart Boards are in the budget and 5 will be purchased out of the nonlapsing account.
4. **IT infrastructure:** Our infrastructure needs to be upgraded and this budget will allow us to continue to replace aging switches, battery backups, our firewall, access points, and servers over a 5 year period of time at approximately \$20,000 - \$40,000 per year.
5. **Software Updates:** The district will adopt new tools like Desmos (for math), Stemscopes (for science), and IXL (for tracking student progress in reading and math). The STAR testing software will be eliminated to reduce costs and simplify tools.

Overall, the plan focuses on modernizing tech, improving access for all students, and making teaching tools more efficient and effective.

Grounds and Facilities

After much discussion among the BOE, BOS and BOF regarding the maintenance and upkeep of the school grounds and buildings, the Capital Committee has created a plan. As a result of this plan the BOE has reduced the General Building Services line and the BOS has added it to their budget. This agreement and plan has addressed a gap following the building and renovation project and will ensure that our schools are well cared for.

There is a need to replace 10 damaged security cameras and add 20 extra units to enhance visibility in and around certain areas of the buildings. All of these cameras will be purchased from the nonlapsing account, ensuring that they will not affect the budget.

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.

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. In 2024-2025, the ECS amount is \$2,660,307, with the 2025-2026 estimate expected to be updated in April 2025. Additionally, the town projects **\$510,814** 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
Contract Negotiations	\$40,000
Technology Infrastructure	\$20,200
Teacher Laptops (32)	\$38,400
Interactive Whiteboards (5)	\$20,000
Chromebooks (52)	\$23,400
Security Cameras (30)	\$13,000
Total	\$155,000

Staffing Chart

Positions	2024-2025	2025-2026
Regular Ed Teachers	69.1	68.6
Special Ed Teachers	11	11
School Guidance Counseling	2	2
School Social Work	2	2
School Psychology	2	2
Speech Pathology	2	2
Library Media	2	1.4
Occupational Therapist	1	1
School Nursing	2	2
Aides (nurse, cafeteria, office)	3	3
Paraeducator	19	20
BCBA	1	1
RBT - Registered Behavioral Technician (a paraprofessional with extra training and a stipend)	3	3
Facilities	9	9
Central Office	4	4
Information Technology	2	1
Administrators	4	4
Athletic Director	1	1
School Secretaries	4	4
Special Education Secretary	1	1
TOTALS	144.1	143.0

Budget History

The average budget increase over the last ten years, including this proposal, would be 2.34%. The average rate of inflation over the same period (2016-2025*) of time is 3.26%.

*projected inflation for 2025 is 3.0%

North Stonington Public Schools Budget Increases

Year	Percent Increase
2016-2017	0.91%
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%
10 year average	2.34%

CT School District Budgets

As of 4/15/2025, Connecticut Association of School Business Officials (CASBO)

This chart compares some school districts, for which data was available on 4/14/25, in the BOE budget increase for school year 2024-2025, and the BOF approved increases for school year 2025-2026. The last column totals these increases.

School District	Actual Increase 2024-2025	BOF Approved Increase 2025-2026	Total of Actual in '24-'25, and Requests in '25-'26
Hebron	6.78%	4.92%	11.70%
Somers	5.21%	5.68%	10.89%
Stonington	4.50%	4.94%	9.44%
Salem	5.60%	3.50%	9.10%
Waterford	3.98%	4.78%	8.76%
East Haddam	2.75%	5.64%	8.39%
North Stonington	1.79%	4.00%	5.79%

Summary

The budget proposal includes a 4.00% increase, necessary to cover rising costs while maintaining the high standard of education expected by both the local community and tuition-paying students. However, we did remove 1.1 FTE teacher positions and summer school in order to attain the 4.00% increase. Key cost drivers include significant increases in medical insurance, transportation, maintenance, and utility expenses. The town's partnership in funding and providing labor for building repairs is appreciated. Savings were achieved by reorganizing the IT department, and efforts to supplement the sustainable technology plan with grant funds are underway. In addition, the BOE committed to fund several technology items through the nonlapsing account to bring us up to date. While special education costs were reduced last year through program reorganization, they are subject to change, and any significant increases may require an additional appropriation from the town. The budget process removed non-essential expenses, reflecting a focus on efficiency and fiscal responsibility, with the goal of continuously improving the quality of the school system and contributing to the community's success.