



# Brookfield Public Schools

*"Create Your Tomorrow"*



Dear Mr. Dunn,

January 30, 2024

The adopted Board of Education budget for 2024-2025 represents the Brookfield Board of Education's commitment to maintain the high level of quality programs offered to Brookfield's students, to enhance educational opportunities, and to continue to move the Brookfield School District forward with excellence.

## **BACKGROUND**

In finalizing this budget, the Board and administration have invested an extraordinary amount of time and effort to evaluate spending and program requirements, beginning in early October. The Superintendent presented his budget recommendation on December 6th to the Board of Education, and the Board has since convened on multiple occasions throughout December and January (both in its Finance Subcommittee and as a full Board) to perform detailed reviews and evaluation. Our annual process continues to be transparent, including both a representative of the Board of Finance and the Town Controller in the deliberations. The Board has held two public hearings (December 20th & January 3rd) on the budget and sought the public's input. The enclosed budget is the result of those efforts.

## **CONTEXT**

We are planning for the 2024-2025 school year with great expectations. We have initial results from our learning recovery efforts and our strategic plan work indicating notable improvements in student learning. With our healthy school start times initiative well underway and having moved to Candlewood Lake Elementary School, our planning remains focused on student achievement, curriculum & program development, recruiting & retaining the best faculty and staff, and enhancing the physical environments of both Brookfield High School and Whisconier Middle School.

**Before delving into an explanation of next year's 2024-2025 budget drivers, it is imperative that I provide you with an overview of the real challenges and costs we are facing in the current year 2023-2024 budget.** These details have been shared on an ongoing basis publicly with the Board of Finance since September.

Our focus on learning recovery during the 2022-2023 school year yielded significant growth in our students' performance, including closing the achievement gap between high need students and non high need students. Brookfield's spring 2023 scores demonstrate gains from the previous year that are at the top of comparable districts in Connecticut. While this is very good news and a reflection of our students, faculty, and administration's skill and focus, we still have a great deal of work ahead of us in addressing student mental health issues and continuing to grow their achievement.



# Brookfield Public Schools

"Create Your Tomorrow"



There are areas where we are experiencing extraordinary unbudgeted costs this year, which are carried forward in the 2024-2025 adopted budget. These areas include special education, teacher turnover, substitutes, athletics transportation, and electricity at the new Candlewood Lake Elementary School. As yet, it is not clear if these are anomalies that will self-correct with time, or if these are part of a new normal to which this and future budgets will have to adjust.

### 2023-2024 Budget Anomalies Carried Forward

Teacher Turnover	225,000	0.45%	<i>Town/School Budgeting Approach</i>
SPED Transportation & Tuition	412,742	0.82%	<i>Impact of 6 New Outplaced Students</i>
Excess Cost Grant	(198,829)	-0.39%	<i>Additional grant funding due to increase in SPED costs</i>
Substitutes	145,000	0.29%	<i>Budget alignment to actual need</i>
Electricity	130,000	0.26%	<i>Budgeted based on engineer's estimate provided Aug. '22</i>
Athletic Transportation	31,158	0.06%	<i>Bus driver shortage</i>
<b>2024-2025 Adjusted Status Quo</b>	<b>745,071</b>	<b>1.49%</b>	

### BUDGET OVERVIEW

The 2024-2025 budget request is \$53,624,635, a year-to-year increase of \$3,240,328, or 6.43%.

The status quo budget increase is the largest of this budget with a 3.96% increase due to anticipated health insurance costs, along with increases to collectively bargained contracts, and inflationary contractual increases.

### As outlined above, the challenges we are facing this year carry over into next year's budget.

Beyond the status quo budget increase, the remaining 2.47% increase is due to the incorporation of items previously funded by the town; these include teacher turnover and special education, along with town ARPA grants (security monitors), the final phase of the ARPESER grant initiatives and more state mandates, all of which are detailed below.

### Status Quo

<i>2023-2024 Budget</i>	<i>50,384,287</i>		
Health Insurance	473,203	0.94%	<i>Estimated 7% increase in premiums</i>
Contractual / Inflationary	1,689,787	3.35%	<i>All other contractual increases including salaries, energy, transportation</i>
Reductions	(165,847)	-0.33%	<i>HR Reorg. / Reduce 1.0FTE School Counselor (CLES) / AIS Tuition / ParentSquare</i>
<b>Status Quo Budget Request</b>	<b>52,381,430</b>	<b>3.96%</b>	



# Brookfield Public Schools

"Create Your Tomorrow"



## 2023-2024 Budget Anomalies Carried Forward

Teacher Turnover	225,000	0.45%	Town/School Budgeting Approach
SPED Transportation & Tuition	412,742	0.82%	Town/School Budgeting Approach / Impact of 6 New Outplaced Students
Excess Cost Grant	(198,829)	-0.39%	Additional grant funding due to increase in SPED costs
Substitutes	145,000	0.29%	Budget alignment to actual need
Electricity	130,000	0.26%	Budgeted based on engineer's estimate provided in August 2022
Athletic Transportation	31,158	0.06%	Bus driver shortage
<b>2024-2025 Adjusted Status Quo</b>	<b>745,071</b>	<b>1.49%</b>	

## New State Mandates

SPED Transportation & Tuition	102,704	0.20%	New: Transitional Services
.4 Bilingual Teacher	30,000	0.06%	To support a cohort of 20 Portuguese speaking students @ CLES
K-3 Literacy Program	87,500	0.17%	Total Cost: ~\$174K / Right to Read Grant Funded: \$85K
<b>Total Mandates</b>	<b>220,204</b>	<b>0.43%</b>	

## Investments

ARP ESSR Phase-in	115,261	0.23%	Summer School, .5 Tech Coach Salary, Part-Time COTA
ARPA Phase-In	31,644	0.06%	Security Monitors - Town Grant
IM Math Program	22,475	0.05%	Program Improvement - New Curricular Tool
College Algebra Course	11,000	0.02%	Program Improvement - Cost of New Textbooks (pending CAPE & BOE approval)
Maintenance (BHS / WMS)	82,550	0.16%	Roll-In of Building Conditions Study (Non-CIP)
Enrollment Study	15,000	0.03%	Strategic Investment (last comprehensive study completed in 2019)
<b>Total Investments</b>	<b>277,930</b>	<b>0.55%</b>	

<b>Total BOE Adopted Budget</b>	<b>53,624,635</b>	<b>6.43%</b>
---------------------------------	-------------------	--------------

## STATUS QUO

- Year-to-year cost increases are primarily in the areas of salaries and benefits (relatively normal rate of increase 3.37% or \$1,697,838) and a significant percentage of the overall budget is in health benefits costs (rate increase 7% or \$473,203).
- The district administration is creatively working to reorganize the Human Resources Department, along with establishing several key efficiencies in staffing and operations to find budget savings (decrease .33% of \$165,847).

## ANOMALIES

- Special education tuition and transportation continues to be an area where the district experiences budget volatility. Six new students needing programming to support their



# Brookfield Public Schools

"Create Your Tomorrow"



profound needs has caused a major expenditure in the current year which is carried forward in next year's budget (.82% or \$412,742). This is partially offset by an anticipated increase in Excess Cost Grant Revenue of \$198,829, or .39%.

- The long time teacher turnover Towns and Board of Education approach of budgeting \$200,000 less than what is actually needed to fund current faculty salaries was not met for the second straight year. Not only did we not hit the \$200,000 savings target, it was exceeded by \$25,000. This expenditure of (.45% or \$225,000) is accounted for in the 24-25 adopted budget.
- Next year's adopted budget also includes a "truing up" of the historical actual costs of substitutes for both teachers and paraeducators (.29% or \$145,000).
- While our regular bus transportation is within the status quo budget and serving the students well, we are experiencing a dearth of bus drivers similar to the state and national bus driver shortage. For Brookfield, after-school middle and high school athletics transportation is a concern, which demands a healthy increase (.06% or \$31,158).
- Finally, we are experiencing a significantly larger cost for electricity at Candlewood Lake Elementary School. While the administration budgeted precisely what the engineers recommended when we were preparing the current year's transition to CLES, it is well short. There is a large increase for electricity for this school in the budget (.26% or \$130,000).

## STATE MANDATES

- Once again, we are planning for several unfunded state mandates. Legislation changes July 2024 and mandates that all school districts address an additional year of transitional services for particular students with special needs up to their 23rd birthday (.20% or \$102,704).
- The K-3 Science of Reading legislation impacts next year's budget in that we will be purchasing materials and arranging professional learning to implement a brand new K-3 reading program in alignment with this mandate (net .17% or \$87,500). This cost was significantly reduced as the administration applied for and secured the competitive *Right to Read* Grant of \$85,000
- Finally, with the consolidation of CES, HHES and Grade 5 from WMS, Candlewood Lake has reached a state threshold of 20 students enrolled who speak Portuguese as their first language. Per statute, when any school in CT has 20 students speaking one language as their primary language, it is required that the school provide bilingual services. As such, we have included a part time faculty member in the budget, who requires specific Portuguese language acumen and a certification as a bilingual teacher (.06% or \$30,000). As a reminder, two years ago we added a full time position for Spanish bilingual services due to the nearly 40 students speaking Spanish as their primary language at the elementary school level.



# Brookfield Public Schools

*"Create Your Tomorrow"*



## STRATEGIC INVESTMENTS

Systemic change takes a minimum of 5-7 years to take hold. As we prepare to enter the third year of our strategic investments using ARPESSEER grant funds and have set forth on our new Board adopted Strategic Plan, it is paramount that we stay the course with our laser focus on student achievement and wellness at the forefront of all that we do. This includes continuous improvement efforts in programming PreK-12 and facility enhancements at both WMS and BHS.

- The 24-25 school year budget includes the final phase-in of the ARPESSEER investments in instructional coaches and summer school (.23% or \$115,261). In 2021, during the height of the pandemic, federal funds were available to all public schools. Strategically, Brookfield Public Schools invested in social workers to address rising mental health concerns, summer school, tutors and instructional coaches to address learning loss. We also advance our faculty's skill and system capacity in technology. From the beginning, the needs and subsequent initiatives were publicly discussed, approved and organized as a three year plan to transition from the federal grant program into the district's operational budget. We have phased these costs in over the past two years and look forward to the final year in 24-25. The faculty investments made have contributed to further building of a district and community culture of continuous improvement and learning, entirely focused on student needs.
- Additionally, we are in the heart of a multi year process, implementing a new math program at CLES and WMS, (.04% or \$22,475) and as stated above will be in year one of implementing our program to comply with the new state mandated Science of Reading.
- We also have a new College Algebra course planned for Brookfield High School (.02% or \$11,000).
- We have utilized federal ARPA funds to enhance security at all of our schools. In preparation for the ending of this grant program, we have budgeted (.14% or \$69,510) in the next year's spending plan to account for the final phase-in of two security monitors.
- With the students moved into our brand new, state of the art Candlewood Lake Elementary School, it is time to more proactively invest in maintaining and enhancing both Whisconier Middle School and Brookfield High School. While the 2024-205 Capital Improvement Plan addresses both schools' major facility projects, it is necessary to increase maintenance accounts for the coming year in the operational budget in order to keep up with week to week maintenance issues (.16% or \$82,550).
- Finally, it has been almost five years since the district invested in a comprehensive enrollment study. Given the unprecedented worldwide disruption beginning in 2020, it is important to obtain an accurate evaluation of school aged demographics as we develop plans for the next 10 years (.03% or \$15,000).



# Brookfield Public Schools

*"Create Your Tomorrow"*



## CONCLUSION

The Board of Education is entrusted to adopt a responsible budget that is reflective of the needs of the students, in alignment with the Board's March 2023 adopted Strategic Plan and the values of the community, and is free of excess. The Brookfield Board of Education believes this budget recommendation accomplishes these aims. While some of the needs of our students identified in prior years remain, we are also working to prepare our students for an ever-changing future and culture with experiences that create a world class education. Regardless, the challenge to meet organizational and mandated responsibilities continues to grow. Support from you, from the Board of Selectmen, and from the Board of Finance is integral and necessary to ensure we maintain the outstanding school system that Brookfield enjoys.

Thank you so much for your ongoing support of our schools and your support of this budget.

Sincerely,  
Dr. Wendy Youngblood  
Chairman, Brookfield Board of Education