



George F. Apel
Mayor

TOWN OF VERNON

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COMMENTS ON THE PROPOSED FY2013-2014 BUDGET FROM MAYOR GEORGE F. APEL

I would like to thank each resident who attended the Public Hearing/Annual Town meeting last Tuesday night. Regardless of where you stand on the budget, you have offered your time and input. There is no doubt that this process is difficult.

I feel it important to address citizen's concerns and to accurately inform you of the Board of Education's portion of the overall town budget. I firmly believe the budget, well managed, can meet the Board of Education's needs, and be fiscally responsible to every tax payer of this great town. This belief is based in large part on my knowledge of the Board's budgets during my tenure as Chairmen of the Board Finance Committee, as well as their contractual obligations.

Alliance District Status

One of the points to which all agreed was that the labeling of the School System as being part of a lesser grouping, i.e. an Alliance District, did the Town a disservice. The fact that we have been designated as one of the "Alliance Schools" does not mean we are not educating our students. This is a district that routinely sends students to matriculate at schools such as MIT, Worcester Poly Tech and West Point. Not all students failed the state assigned criteria. I know that the Board, the Superintendent and staff, as well as this Town will not leave any child left behind. They understand that it is our responsibility to teach each student, and not to solely address the needs of a small group of students that need extra care. Rather, they will find creative, responsible ways to meet the challenge and remove the Alliance designation. As proven throughout this state, this challenge cannot be met, or answered solely by money, nor our resolution judged merely by the quantity of dollars spent.

Magnet Schools

Another point upon which all attendees at the Town Meeting would agree, Magnet Schools also challenge our Public Schools. Whether by design or accident of creation, the presence of and recruitment by Magnet schools results in a competition for the allegiance of parents and students. This competition is not felt by Vernon alone. Our neighbors also fund students to attend magnet schools as shown in the table below.



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<i>District</i>	<i>Student Enrollment</i>	<i>No. of Students Attending Magnet Schools</i>	<i>% of Student Population Attending Magnet Schools</i>
Tolland	2991	64	2.1%
Glastonbury	6625	200	3.1%
Ellington	2717	87	3.2%
Vernon	3450	146	4.2%
South Windsor	4291	190	4.4%
Enfield	5425	401	7.4%
Manchester	7032	843	12.0%

Vernon has supported and funded a magnet school of its own for many years, namely the Rockville High School VoAg Program. Magnet schools focus their resources on specific areas of studies such as the Arts, the Environment or Technology. We continue to look for ways to bring our students all of these things through course study and enhancements in technology. This budget calls for over \$800,000 to be spent on Technology in the schools, linking every school into the fiber network. This is using technology for education sake and not for entertainment. In Vernon our goal is to provide a well rounded education for all our students.

In our proper concern about having a district deemed lower performing, it would nonetheless be improper to overlook the many positive academic achievements occurring in our schools.

- Approximately 700 middle school and high school students or 40% achieved honor or high honor roll status each quarter.
- Each year, a group of Rockville High School students compete in a writing contest on both a state and national level. This past year, the group was presented with approximately ninety (90) awards, which is, by far, the most awards of any school in the state competition.
- Last year alone, 48 students enrolled in a total of nine (9) Advanced Placement Courses last year, earning college credit.

In Vernon, we are fortunate to host classrooms which are richly diverse and represent a healthy cross-section of our community. Appreciating academic diversity and ability is a virtue which prepares our students for later in life.



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Budget

Here are several important facts which I believe support the validity of the proposed \$50,169,787 budget, as it stands, which directly and specifically benefit our school system.

1. A base budget of \$50,169,787, which is a \$1,988,790 increase in funding from the Town over the current year. This occurs in a year when Vernon is anticipating a loss of approximately one million dollars in revenue from the State of Connecticut.
2. In addition, this current fiscal year (2012-2013), the Board of Education received \$670,000 from the state to address Alliance issues and in the upcoming fiscal year 2013-2014, the Board of Education will receive approximately \$1.4 million to also use for Alliance District purposes. These funds are in addition to the Board of Education budget and the Alliance District program is controlled by the State of Connecticut.

The Vernon Public Schools also presently (2012-2013) receives approximately \$546,387 in additional funding charged to the Town of Vernon general government for services such as trash collection, grounds keeping, Crossing Guards, Resource Officer, and snow plowing. In addition, the general government side funds debt service for Board of Education construction projects in the amount of \$2.5 million for principal and interest payments.

It is important to note that the Board of Education will have a total of \$54,616,174 from the Town's budget and the State Alliance funding to support their initiatives for the upcoming year.

These are only a few key reasons I believe the FY 2013-2014 proposed budget is sufficient to address the Board of Education's ambitious goals, as well as being fiscally responsible and financially fair to all our citizens.

In closing, do we have a lot of work to do? Yes, but we have the courage to take on the task at hand and the will to complete it. Vernon is "*On the Move.*"

cc: Press

Mary P. Conway, Superintendent

Michael Purcaro, Business Manager

Town Council

James Luddecke, Finance Officer