



2023-24 (FY24) Operating Budget Frequently Asked Questions

Where does Stamford Public Schools get its funding?

Stamford Public Schools is funded by the City of Stamford and federal, state, and private grants.

The operating budget comes from the City of Stamford and funds day-to-day operations. Grants are typically earmarked for specific purposes.

Who approves the Stamford Public Schools Budget?

Approval of the SPS operating budget is a multi-step process involving the Board of Education (BOE), the Board of Finance (BOF), and the Board of Representatives (BOR).

1. The BOE reviews the Superintendent's proposed operating budget and may increase, decrease, or approve the Superintendent's proposed budget as submitted.
2. The BOE's proposed budget is then presented to the BOF, which can decrease the budget or approve it as submitted.
3. If necessary, the BOE reallocates funds based on the BOF's actions.
4. The BOE presents a final proposed budget to the BOR. The BOR has final approval over the SPS operating budget and may decrease or approve the BOE budget as submitted.

Please note, the BOE cannot override budget cuts made by either the BOF or the BOR.

City of Stamford governing boards historically cut the requested operating budget increase by almost half. During the last eight years, the BOE's average **proposed** operating budget **increase was 4.37%**, while the average **approved** budget **increase was only 2.46%**.

What's the difference between the operating, capital, and grants budgets?

The operating budget funds day-to-day operations of Stamford Public Schools.

The capital budget, which is allocated separately, is used to build new schools and renovate existing schools. Projects in the Long-Term Facilities Plan are part of the capital budget.

The grants budget consists of funds from State, Federal and Private sources that are typically earmarked for specific purposes.

How much is the Stamford Public Schools operating budget?

For FY23 (year ending June 30, 2023), the SPS Operating Budget is \$301,843,542.

For FY24 (year ending June 30, 2024), the proposed SPS Operating Budget is \$313,871,939.

Why is the SPS operating budget so big?

Stamford is the second-largest city in Connecticut and Stamford Public Schools is the 5th largest school district in the state. Including students and staff, Stamford Public Schools comprises more than 18,500 people. SPS operates and maintains 23 program sites consisting of more than 3 million square feet of building space on 300+ acres.

Enrollment 2021-22	
Bridgeport*	18,972
Hartford	18,690
Waterbury	18,355
New Haven	17,495
Stamford*	16,034
Norwalk*	11,881
New Britain	11,201

*Fairfield County

How Much does Stamford Spend Per Student?

In FY22 (year ending June 30, 2022), Stamford Public Schools spent an average of \$20,679 per student. Stamford ranked 14th in per pupil spending among the 20 public school districts in Fairfield County for which data are available. (Statewide average spending per pupil was \$20,021.)

District	Enrollment	Spending Per Student
1. Redding	1,215	\$26,621
2. Greenwich	8,378	\$26,311
3. Weston	2,208	\$24,262
4. Sherman	387	\$24,170
5. Westport	5,278	\$24,149
6. Darien	4,708	\$23,180
7. Wilton	3,715	\$22,980
8. Ridgefield	4,564	\$22,394
9. New Canaan	4,154	\$22,164
10. Easton	1,303	\$21,953
11. Fairfield	9,359	\$21,581
12. Norwalk	11,881	\$21,396
13. New Fairfield	2,081	\$21,314
14. Stamford	16,034	\$20,679
15. Newtown	4,073	\$20,035
16. Bridgeport	18,972	\$18,748
17. Stratford	7,068	\$18,721
18. Monroe	3,377	\$17,837
19. Trumbull	6,772	\$17,628
20. Bethel	3,126	\$17,507

How many Stamford Public Schools employees are working directly with students?

Of the 2,465 full-time employees in Stamford Public Schools, 84 percent work directly with students. This includes classroom teachers, paraeducators, social workers, psychologists, speech and language pathologists, BCBAs, etc.

Is Stamford Public Schools enrollment increasing or decreasing?

Although public school enrollment in Connecticut has declined 4.7% since FY17, enrollment in Stamford Public Schools has remained largely stable, experiencing only a 0.13% decline over the same period.

	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	decline
Connecticut	538,899	535,025	530,612	527,829	513,079	513,615	-4.70%
SPS	16,100	15,931	16,053	16,600	16,273	16,079	-0.13%

https://public-edsight.ct.gov/Students/Enrollment-Dashboard/Enrollment-Report-Legacy?language=en_US

Why are Stamford Public Schools labor costs so high?

Labor costs are the largest expenditure in many organizations. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, salaries and benefits comprise approximately 80 percent of public-school expenditures in the United States. Stamford is slightly under the national average at 75.7 percent.

Stamford Public Schools is the 5th largest district in the state. SPS employs 2,465 staff – including 1,495 teachers – to serve a district with more than 16,200 students at 23 sites.

Why does Stamford Public Schools spend so much on special education?

Students with disabilities – defined as those with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) – accounted for 16% of all Stamford Public Schools students in 2021-22. Statewide, students with disabilities accounted for 17% of students.

Students with disabilities usually require additional legally mandated school-based services. These services may include, but are not limited to, speech and language services, audiology services, psychological and counseling services, physical and occupational therapy, recreation services, medical services for diagnostic or evaluation purposes, school health services, and social work services.

https://public-edsight.ct.gov/Students/Enrollment-Dashboard/Enrollment-Report-Legacy?language=en_US

State of CT	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Special Education Status						
No	461,871	455,769	448,854	443,431	429,456	428,088
Yes	77,028	79,256	81,758	84,398	83,623	85,527
Total	538,899	535,025	530,612	527,829	513,079	513,615

SPS	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Special Education Status						
No	14,074	13,864	13,840	14,195	13,853	13,568
Yes	2,026	2,067	2,213	2,405	2,420	2,511
Total	16,100	15,931	16,053	16,600	16,273	16,079

What is the average cost per student for special education vs. general education?

In 2021-22, the average cost per student for general education was \$19,122 and \$34,135 for special education students who remained in-district. The average cost for special education students who required out-of-district placement was \$78,251.

How much of the SPS budget is used for instruction?

Stamford Public Schools spends 66% of its budget on instruction, compared to the state-wide average of 63%.

Spending Compared to State Average			
Scaled to SPS 2021-22 Budget			
	SPS	State Average	Variance
Instruction	\$192,435,956	\$184,126,493	\$8,309,463
Support Services	\$53,294,953	\$54,823,218	-\$1,528,265
Central Office	\$4,537,575	\$10,086,295	-\$5,548,720

Why does the Stamford Public Schools Budget always increase?

Each year, Stamford Public Schools presents a proposed operating budget intended to maintain or increase the programs and services offered to students. In most years, this requires increased funding. Over the last eight years, the average proposed increase to the SPS budget has been 4.37%, and the average approved increase has been 2.64%. Inflation has increased an average of 2.8% annually over the same period.

Is there funding in the budget to expand the Restorative Practices Program to all schools?

The Restorative Practices Program is rolling out across the District. Currently, the middle and high schools are using the program. The District is providing funding, resources and professional development opportunities to schools as they adopt the Restorative Practices Program.

What can Stamford Public Schools do to bring transportation costs under control?

School transportation costs have more than doubled over the last 50 years after adjusting for inflation. From 2008 to 2018, the average cost per student for school transportation rose 27% in the U.S.¹³

Stamford Public Schools currently contracts with First Student to provide student transportation. The 3-year contract with First Student expires in June 2024.

Labor shortages, fuel prices, and higher equipment costs are causing transportation providers to charge more. SPS anticipates that its next transportation contract will be more expensive.

Why Doesn't Stamford Public Schools Apply for Additional Grants?

Stamford Public Schools applies for grants for which it is eligible and that complement the Strategic Plan. For the 2023-24 school year, Stamford Public Schools will receive more than \$50 million in grants funding.

Most recently we received a competitive grant from the State of Connecticut to enhance after-school programming. We work with community agencies and universities to collaborate on grants

I've heard that other districts get more State money for their schools. How can Stamford Public Schools get more support from the State of Connecticut?

State Funding is based on the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) formula. The ECS formula considers a number of factors, including the number of high needs students (low-income, English learners, etc.) in a district, as well as the town's or city's median income, and the amount of taxable property. Click [here](#) for more information about the State of Connecticut ECS formula.

Why doesn't SPS redistrict so fewer students would require bus transportation?

Per Board of Education policy, enrollment at each Stamford Public School must fall within +/- 10 percentage points of the district average enrollment of educationally disadvantaged students. To meet this standard, districts are drawn in such a way that most students qualify for bus transportation. Simply assigning students to the schools nearest their residence would result in unbalanced schools.

What is SPS doing now to prepare for the impending FY25 "fiscal cliff" so the burden doesn't fall on taxpayers?

The "fiscal cliff" was created in spring 2020 when, out of uncertainty due to the COVID-19 pandemic, City boards cut \$12.5 million from the Stamford Public Schools FY21 budget. To balance the budget and absorb this reduction, the district planned to eliminate more than 100 positions and reduce spending in other areas.

Fortunately, Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Funds enabled SPS to temporarily retain 120 full-time positions that otherwise would have been eliminated. Roles currently funded through ESSER include parent facilitators, technology integration support specialists, kindergarten paraeducators, crisis social workers, security workers, and more.

ESSER funds run out at the end of FY24. Returning these 120 positions to the operating budget will require an increase of more than \$8 million dollars. When combined with projected increases in other categories, it is estimated that the FY25 operating budget will increase 6 to 8 percent.

Currently, the District is working on a master staffing plan to evaluate what each building needs and to reallocate personnel where they are most needed, and we are exploring alternate funding options for the 120 positions and other ESSER funded programs.

The District recognizes that no one wants to pay more in taxes. Unfortunately, costs increase most years, requiring us to increase the budget to simply maintain existing programs and services.

I don't have children in Stamford Public Schools. Why should I support more spending for education?

Quality public schools benefit everyone in the community. Public schools ensure all students have access to education, which contributes to a healthy society. Strong public schools can make communities more attractive to home buyers and may positively impact property values.

I've heard that Stamford Public Schools aren't as good as those in neighboring communities. Why should I support more spending for sub-par schools?

Stamford Public Schools meets students where they are to provide an education that cultivates positive habits of mind, body, and heart. Our district serves a greater percentage of high needs students than our neighbors, and these students often require more support to achieve their highest academic potential.

Stamford Public Schools follows an honors for all model, and offers more advanced coursework opportunities than most other districts in the state.

Here is just some of what SPS offers:

- More Advanced Placement (AP) courses than any other district in the state
- 22 International Baccalaureate courses (2nd in the State) across 3 International Baccalaureate Programs (Stamford High School, Rogers, Strawberry Hill).
- 7 magnet schools (Hart, Toquam, Westover, Rogers, Strawberry Hill, Scofield, AITE)
- 25 UConn Early College Experience Courses

To learn more about Stamford Public Schools, visit our website or download the [2021-22 Annual Report](#).

How can parents get involved in the budgeting process?

Parents interested in the budgeting process should participate in the information sessions that take place each January. Those meetings are an opportunity for families to make suggestions. In addition, families and staff are encouraged to attend the BOE Budget Hearing to voice their support for the Superintendent's proposed operating budget.

What can parents do to advocate for the Stamford Public Schools budget?

Parents and others who care about public education in Stamford need to advocate for the Superintendent's proposed operating budget to be fully supported by the Boards of Education, Finance, and Representatives. It's important for parents to attend committee and board meetings and to contact their elected officials to express support for the budget.

Here's how you can help:

- Attend the BOE Budget Hearing on February 2 to voice your support. Click [here](#) to register.
- Share the Fact Sheet ([LINK](#)) + Presentation ([LINK](#)) with Other Parents.
- Contact [Board of Finance Members](#) to express your support.
- Call or Email your [Board of Representatives Members](#) to express your support. Download the phone and email list [here](#).