

Education 2020-2021 School Year

OVERVIEW

Stamford Public Schools (SPS) comprises more than 16,000 students, 1,500 professionals and 21 schools. SPS has 13 elementary, five middle and three high schools. Our mission is to provide an education that cultivates productive habits of mind, body and heart in every student. Stamford is the second largest and fastest growing city in the state. We are among the most ethnically diverse in America – more than 73 different languages are spoken in students' homes, 14% of students are English Learners and 59% are eligible for free- or reduced-priced meals.

The 2020-2021 Stamford Public Schools (SPS) school year was another unique one for our district. SPS reopened in a Hybrid Model, providing in-person instruction for 75% of students, with half of them attending in-person, every other day. Additionally, in order to meet state requirements, SPS also offered a 100% Distance Teaching and Learning Academy (DTLA) model for families who did not want to send their students back to school in-person. In March 2021, SPS returned to 5-days per week of in-person learning for elementary and middle school families. In April, our high school students returned to 5-days per week of in-person learning.

In mid-2020, the district established a CORE Committee and formed outcome-focused subcommittees, each of which were responsible for addressing key areas for planning a safe return to school:

In June and July 2020, SPS collected data through surveys for staff, families and students. This data became our baseline for our COVID-19 Response Strategy. Key concerns that required immediate attention, included:

- Only 50% of students had access to technology
- Serious concerns existed regarding consistent / quality access to WiFi for both students and staff
- The comfort level with the use of Technology varied greatly (PowerSchool, Website, Google Classroom), with socio-economic status as a contributor
- Food insecurity was a major concern among a large population of the community

The research, combined with the CORE Committee efforts and the family survey data, identified categories to address in the SPS CORE COVID-19 response: Health and Safety, Childcare,

Nutrition, Technology, Transportation, Facilities, Teaching & Learning, Family Engagement and Social-Emotional Learning and Support.

COMMUNICATIONS

Many of the effective communications strategies established at the start of the pandemic were continued through the 2020-2021 school year, including Superintendent's Weekly Message to staff and families; Shout Outs, featuring positive stories across the district; Board of Education recognition of Student and Staff achievements during the monthly BOE meeting; Peachjar electronic flyer distribution; and regular frequent website updates. Additionally the district established new communications tactics. For example, in early August, the Public Affairs Officer (PAO) along with the Office of Family & Community Engagement (OFCE) co-hosted a series of parent focused "Pop Up" Q&A webinars in English and Spanish with various community groups. PAO also established a webpage dedicated to COVID-19 related information, such as the launch of a COVID-19 Dashboard that is updated weekly with numbers of school-related positive cases and quarantines. In March 2021, we conducted "listening sessions" with staff, students and families in English and Spanish to ensure that we continue to address concerns and are effectively providing the necessary information. For a complete summary of Communications strategies and tactics, please see [Stamford Public Schools 3 Rs Response to COVID-19: Rapid, Resolved, Resolute](#).

TEACHING & LEARNING

In the 2020-21 school year, Teaching and Learning was focused on supporting the two instructional models, Hybrid and the Distance Teaching & Learning Academy, as well as on developing the technology skills of our staff. We rolled out our 1:1 technology initiative and all students in Pre-K through 12th grade were issued a device to support learning in both educational models. Many new online programs were purchased to support the teaching and learning at all levels and across content areas. A Request for Proposal (RFP) was developed and a company was selected to conduct a thorough audit of our curriculum, instruction and assessment practices. The work began in September 2021.

SCHOOL, STUDENT AND STAFF ACHIEVEMENTS

Stamford Public Schools celebrates the accomplishments of select schools, students and staff members. Here are some highlights from the 2020-2021 School Year:

- Associate Superintendent for School Development, Olympia A. Della Flora, was selected to participate in the 2020-2021 cohort of the AASA/Howard University Urban Superintendents Academy.

- Stamford High School (SHS) Social Studies Teacher and Debate Coach Jeremy White was named a 2020 Yale Educator Award Winner.
- Academy of Information Technology and Engineering (AITE) Juniors Kevin Fleischer and Anna Lichtenberg and Stamford High School Senior Prisha Kulkarni were selected to participate in the Student Enhancement in Earth and Space Science (SEES) summer internship, hosted by The University of Texas at Austin's Center for Space Research.
- Two Westhill High School (WHS) teams of six students from the Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) chapter placed in the top 10 of the FBLA Awards of Excellence Program at the FBLA National Leadership Conference.
- Cloonan Middle School Seventh Grader Lila Gow was one of only 10 students statewide to earn recognition by Lt. Governor Susan Bysiewicz in the COVID-19 Computing Challenge, which was a statewide competition for students in grades three through 12.
- The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) awarded Stamford High School (SHS) Senior Matthew Tromba a certificate of Superior Writing in the 2020 NCTE Achievement Award in Writing Program.
- The National Merit Scholarship Corporation named Stamford High School (SHS) Seniors Samuel P. Lai, Rachana Somaskandan and Edward D. Yudolevich and Westhill High School (WHS) Seniors Gaurov Bansal and Jacob C. Sherman as National Merit® Scholarship Semifinalists and 19 additional SPS students as Commended in the 66th annual National Merit Scholarship Program.
- The College Board selected Academy of Information Technology & Engineering (AITE) Senior Carlee Reid and Westhill High School (WHS) Seniors Morgan McDonald and Jackson Williams as 2020-2021 National African American Scholars. The organization also named Westhill High School (WHS) Seniors Priscilla Tehrani and Brandon Perez as 2020-2021 National Hispanic Scholars.
- AITE Senior Carlee Reid authored and illustrated "Oscar Wears Pink Clothes," a children's book about learning to appreciate your uniqueness and accepting who you are. This is her second children's book.
- Four SPS students earned perfect ACT scores: Westhill High School (WHS) Juniors Jacob Sherman and Gaurov Bansal and Stamford High School (SHS) Juniors Allie Findeisen and Panos Ketonis.

- Academy of Information Technology and Engineering (AITE) Senior Claire Paolini earned the highest possible composite score of 1600 on the SAT standardized test used for college admissions.
- The Boys and Girls Club of Stamford selected Westover Social Worker Mitch West as a winner of the 2020 Champion of Youth Award.
- The Boys & Girls Club of Stamford honored Academy of Information Technology & Engineering (AITE) Junior Jayda Dupree as its 2021 Youth of the Year.
- The Connecticut Technology Council and Connecticut Center for Advanced Technology named Stamford High School (SHS) Teacher Susan Dougherty one of the 2020 Women of Innovation®.
- Northeast Elementary School Fourth Graders Gino D'Orta, Hayden Fazzino and Cayla Katz won first prize in the Junior Achievement of Greater Fairfield County, Inc. "Celebrating Entrepreneurship 2020," Contest.
- Stamford Public Schools' High School Mock Trial team qualified to compete in the State Championships.
- Davenport Elementary School Fifth Grader Reya Kotha was a winner in the Aquarion Black History Month Quiz and Essay Contest in February.
- Thirty-five Stamford Public Schools (SPS) students, more than any other Connecticut school district, qualified and participated in the Connecticut Debate Association (CDA) State Finals in late March.
- The National Merit® Scholarship Corporation (NMSC) named Westhill High School (WHS) Senior Gaurov Bansal a National Merit® \$2,500 Scholarship awardee and Stamford High School (SHS) Seniors Samuel Lai and Rachana Somaskandan as college-sponsored NMSC winners, in the 2021 National Merit® Scholarship Program.
- The 2021 U.S Presidential Scholars Program named Westhill High School (WHS) Senior Gaurav Bansal one of its 625 semifinalists. Semifinalists are selected from nearly 6,500 candidates expected to graduate from U.S high schools in 2021.
- AITE Sophomores Laurel Fuda, Stacey Pierre and Marco Ratermann took second place in the Securities Industry and Financial Markets Association (SIFMA) Foundation's 18th annual Capitol Hill Challenge™ (CHC), presented by the Charles Schwab Foundation.

- Cloonan Middle School students Nicole Bierzowiec, Ashley Cando Velasco, Aya Homs and Michael Interlandi each earned first place in the Connecticut Council of Language Teachers (COLT) 2021 Virtual Poetry Contest.

SUPPORT SERVICES & SPECIAL PROGRAMS

Family and Community Engagement

I. Family and Community Engagement (FCE) CORE Advisory Committee

The FCE Advisory met weekly throughout this pandemic. These meetings brought voice from different stakeholders, generated ideas on how to best meet the needs of our students, families and teachers and fostered action in support for our most marginalized families. We serve as a critical friend and advisory to the Superintendent and other school officials on matters that affect our children, youth and families.

This work is leading to changes we need to make to effectively engage with our families and community. Now, as we transition to a “new normal” for our schools and community, we have pivoted and adjusted our work accordingly. FCE Advisory will continue to meet once per month to help foster a full, equal, and equitable partnership among families, educators and community partners to promote children’s learning and development from birth through college and career.

Some key achievements:

- Helped support the distribution of WiFi Hotspots and over 3000 Chromebooks to families.
- Established a Bilingual/EL Technology support solution for families who are struggling with the digital divide.
- Collaborated with community organizations and parents to produce instructional videos, Pop Up Webinars and website improvements for families in English and Spanish. For a complete summary of resources and supports, please see the Parent University section of the district website.
- Food distribution sites were expanded to include community based organizations. From March 2020-March 2021, Stamford Public Schools provided 1,213,219 FREE meals to our students. Meals are available to ALL students, to cover needs 7 days per week. Breakfast and Lunch meals have been provided uninterrupted. At the height of the need, meals were being distributed via 28 separate locations across the district.
- Extended contract with Remind to expand scope and reach for 2 way communication with families.

- Launched the PTHV MODEL (<https://www.pthvp.org/>). Parent Teacher Home Visits establishes a connection between the expertise of the family on their child with the classroom expertise of the teachers.
- Implemented outreach efforts to increase participation from multiple parent groups on family surveys.

We are currently meeting as a full committee every 4th Thursday and will continue to alternate meeting times. The times will be 9:00 a.m., 12:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m.

Two working sub-committees were formed to work around two areas of focus:

1. Sub-Committee on Interpretation and Translation

Essential Question: How do we engage our English Learner families in public meetings?

- Developed general guidelines for interpretation and translations for schools and central office
- Identified a virtual platform for facilitating interpretations at meetings
- Selected a vendor to deliver services for our district and Board of Education (BOE) meetings

2. Sub-Committee on School Climate Surveys and Focus Groups

Essential Question: How do we improve communication between parents, teachers and students?

- Developed and conducted a *Return to School Survey*
- This survey had the highest engagement rates and was the most represented for any SPS parent survey
- Improved participation was the result of volunteers going out into the community to engage directly with families

II. Partnerships Programs

1. Connecticut Family School Partnership (CFSP) provided high-impact family engagement trainings and networking opportunities to SPS. (Friday Café, SERC Trainings, NAFSCE, NNPS)
2. Stamford Cradle 2 Career, CFSP and families conducted surveys in the spring, summer, and the fall of 2020 for students, families and teachers on the impact of our distance and hybrid learning models. Conclusions included:

- SPS Families are experiencing significant stress.
- There is a need for increased communication and support for home learning, as well as a need for increased access to technology There is an opportunity to address disconnect through increased family engagement.
- Increased focus is required for vulnerable students and families
- Consideration should be given for additional professional development for staff.

The key learnings from these activities included:

- Most parents are working and helping their children with schoolwork at home. Teachers may not see the ways that parents are supporting their children at home.
- Teachers have increased their family engagement, strengthened relationships with families, and want additional resources for family engagement. Families appreciate their teachers' support, and want more communication and support for home learning and more opportunities for teacher-parent communication. Most families reported receiving the most helpful information from their child's teacher(s).
- We know that our teachers and families are feeling the challenge of maintaining strong relationships to support our students' success during these difficult times.
- We know that strong school, family and community partnerships have never been more important than today.

3. **VITA COVID-19 High Risk Community Outreach Task Force**

Accomplishments include:

- Launched COVID-19 Testing effort with community partners.
- Established **No Barriers** vaccination effort.
- Hosted the **Stamford's Community Mental Health and Wellness Summit**.
- Established **Here 2 Help** to work collaboratively with community partners serving disconnected and disengaged families and their children whose learning was disrupted as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic .
- Provided additional bilingual Mental Health Support to schools (Northeast, Stillmeadow, Turn of River, and Westhill) through partnerships with Family Centers and Community Health Centers.

4. **LGBTQ+ Collaborative**

- A policy on transgender and non-gender conforming students was adopted by the BOE.

- LGBTQ+ curriculum resources were shared with teaching and learning.
- A student led webinar was held about issues affecting LGBTQ + students around mental health.
- Launched LBTQ+ gallery <https://spslgbtqgallery.wixsite.com/spsgallery>

SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES

The district currently continues to work to train para educators to become Registered Behavior Technicians. Currently, there are 20 Registered Behavior Technicians working within the Stamford Public Schools and with the continued use of online training using ReThink, this number will continue to grow. This training offers continued development for staff members and cost savings for special education students.

The district filled one additional BCBA position to support students who require behavioral support and monitoring. This is the BCBA the district hired to be a staff member at a building with specialized programs and Registered Behavior Technicians that need ongoing supervision of their work with students. Current Stamford BCBA's work at Northeast and Roxbury schools.

In September of 2020, the special education department increased the amount of specialized programs in the district from 35 classrooms servicing up to 280 students to 40 classrooms, servicing up to 320 students. New CORE classrooms servicing students with intellectual disabilities were added at Hart and Strawberry Hill, new ASD programs at Westover and Springdale, and a new REACH classroom at Stamford High School serving students with significant social and emotional needs.

- Specialized reading expanded at the elementary level from four elementary schools to eight elementary schools. Programming focuses on supporting students with dyslexia and other phonics based reading disabilities. In the middle and high schools, 175 students were supported with highly trained special education teachers. In elementary schools, 200 students are using the iSPIRE program. iSPIRE is an intensive, multi-sensory reading intervention that we are using as part of our Specialized Reading Instruction. iSPIRE is a digital delivery system of the iSPIRE curriculum which provides teacher-led direct, systematic and sequential instruction in phonological awareness, phonics and decoding, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, spelling, and written language. In the 21-22 School year, specialized reading will be implemented at all elementary schools.

The Special Education Dept. is continuing to invest in our digital capacity to evaluate our students in an increasingly cost effective, collaborative and efficient manner. Utilizing tablet computing, Special Education and related service providers access the most up to date and valid test administration ensuring accurate assessment of our students through the Pearson Digital Assessment Library (DALs) and Q interactive. Q interactive assessment tools are used with two IPADS via Bluetooth. Q-Global uses web based scoring and reporting from paper and

pencil assessments. This crucial upgrades cost is based on enrollment resulting in a \$65,000 cost savings along with time efficiency allowing teachers more time to see students.

Over the past year, the SPED Dept. has expanded the way we service families throughout Stamford. Recognizing that many of our SPS families were and are struggling with basic needs, the SPED Dept. began collecting food, clothing and hygiene products. These families were not only registered Special Ed students with the Out of District Team but also registered with Cloonan, Ripp, Westover, Anchor, Stamford HS, Westhill, Hart, Roxbury, Stillmeadow and Toquam, New Arrivals. In total we have serviced and supported over 100 families.

Per the new AR ruling in July of 2020, the Stamford Public Schools is now required to provide specialized instruction in the areas of independent living, employment and post-secondary education readiness up until the day before their 22nd birthday for eligible students. During the 2020-2021 school year, there were 53 students eligible for transition services, 24 of which were being supported outside of the district. In an effort to provide a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE) which is their home school district/community, the transition team has worked diligently to expand service offerings. During the 2020-2021 school year, 3 students receiving transition services previously outside of the district returned to Stamford Public Schools for services, for a total savings of approximately \$400,000. The transition team anticipates returning an additional four students during the 2021-2022 school year for a savings of approximately \$296,000.

With the return of students, SPS has worked with Mayor Martin to bring all transition opportunities under one roof at the Government Center. This has allowed the team to streamline services, better access the greater community and practice the skills necessary to access community locations (as opposed to reporting to school). Public travel-training, coordinated internships in the community, collaboration with local agencies, linkages to state agencies, supported college-experiences and professional trainings have all improved due to the program relocation.

Some of our achievements:

- Medicaid revenue \$689,230.00 for 2020-2021.
- Five meetings were held with the Power Parent group to review Special education procedures and to update sections of our website into Spanish. Much of the website can now be translated automatically into more than 60 languages. In addition, the following documents are now available in Spanish:
 - Parent guide to Special Education
 - The IEE criteria

- The IEP document
- Due to COVID, the Special education department developed the use of Seamless Docs, which allowed parents to sign confidential forms digitally.
- 22 Building Administrators with Special Education responsibilities participated in training from the State Department of Education, focusing on the Special Education process; including, Child Find, Least Restrictive Environment, Comprehensive Evaluations, Service Delivery, and Goal and Objective Development.
- 2,713 Children received special education services as of June 30, 2019.

Mental Health Planning and Oversight

- Implemented CBITS/Bounce Back (evidence based group trauma focused therapy group) groups in 29 groups in 16 schools and in two programs.
- Continued to partner with the Department of Children and Families (DCF) in the learning collaborative to train five social workers intensely in the CBITS model.
- Collaborated with DCF around ways of enhancing mental health support in the district.
- Trained 30 additional mental health staff in CBITS and Bounce Back.
- Continued the Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT)/Health Skill Classroom at AITE and piloted the class at Westhill.
- Created trauma informed team to support school teams in implementing evidence based trauma informed practices.
- Trauma Specialist additionally providing structural support and professional development in trauma informed practices to mental health staff as well as educators.

Student Demographics and Achievement Data

- Student enrollment, as of October 1, 2020, PreK-12, was 16,335 students, compared to 16,652 a decrease of 317 students over October 1, 2019.
- Diversity of race and socioeconomic status is one of SPS's strengths. As of October 1, 2020, SPS students were:
 - 7.0% Asian
 - 14.1% Black or African American
 - 45.7% Hispanic/Latino of Any Race

- o 0.11% American Indian/Alaska Native
 - o 0.1% Native American or Other Pacific Islander
 - o 29.4% White
 - o 3.6% Two or More Races
- The percentage of students that were eligible for free and reduced priced meals during the 2020-2021 school year was 58% which is up 2% from the 2019-2020 school year. All students had access to free meals during the 20-21 school year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - The percentage of students identified with disabilities was 14.5% during the 2020-2021 school year which is up 0.7% from the 2019-2020 school year.
 - The percentage of students identified as English Learners during the 2020-2021 school year was 14.4% which is up 1.6% from the 2019-2020 school year.
 - The percentage of students that were identified as chronically absent during the 2020-2021 school year was 19% which is up 5% from the 2019-2020 school year. For the 2020-21 school year, chronic absenteeism calculations were based only on school days for attendance both in-person and remote.
 - Strawberry Hill, an extension of Rogers International School continues to add one grade each year. In 2020-2021, the school had 607 students in grades K-5. The school will have students in grades K-6 in the 2021-2022 school year.
 - The Next Generation Accountability Report for the 2019-2020 School Year, which measures progress in achievement, attainment, growth, attendance, college and career readiness, graduation and physical fitness, was not provided as Smarter Balanced, Next Generation Science Standards Assessments and Physical Fitness Assessments were cancelled by the CSDE as a result of the school closures due to COVID-19.
 - 86 students from the Class of 2021 graduated with a Seal of Biliteracy, which recognizes students who demonstrate a high level of proficiency in English and another language in the areas of listening, speaking, reading and writing. This year SPS students achieved this recognition in 12 different languages.

FACILITIES

Construction of the new Strawberry Hill Elementary School was substantially completed in October 2020 with turnover of the completely renovated original building and 1950 gymnasium addition. Stamford Public Schools currently operates throughout the 144,000 square feet building which includes a playground and basketball court. The Starr Barn located on property is under construction with an expected completion date of October 2021.

Westover Magnet Elementary School underwent an approximate \$25 million dollar renovation in 2019-2020 and was substantially completed in September 2020 for occupancy by Stamford Public Schools. In the summer of 2021, a Dedicated Outdoor Air System (DOAS) mechanical system was installed throughout the classroom wings of the building. The renovated building includes new mechanical equipment, ceiling, wall, and floor finishes, roofing, and playgrounds, as well as numerous water mitigation systems.

Other major upgrades to the buildings conducted in 2020-2021 include installation of high efficiency HVAC equipment at the following schools:

- Davenport Elementary School (Replacement of Existing Roof Top Units)
- Julia Stark Elementary School (Replacement of Existing Roof Top Units and New Installation of Gymnasium Unit)
- Northeast Elementary School (Replacement of Existing Boilers and Hot Water Tanks)
- Rippowam Middle School (Replacement of Existing Boilers and Hot Water Tanks)
- Springdale Elementary School (Replacement of Existing Hot Water Tanks)
- Stamford High School (Replacement of Existing Boilers and Hot Water Tanks)
- Stillmeadow Elementary School (Replacement of Existing Hot Water Tanks and New Installation of Gymnasium Unit)

FINANCE

- 2020-21 Operating Budget surplus of \$5,187,486 (1.82%) on a budget of \$285,555,203
- Development and approval of 2021-22 Operating Budget of \$293,586,146 (2.81%) and Grants Budget of \$44,203,889 to accommodate an anticipated 1.87% student enrollment increase
- Position control efficiencies in managing 2,283 total positions (teachers, administrators, custodians, paraprofessionals, clerical, security)
- Continued to develop dashboard report to assist with the monthly monitoring of Special Education cost
- Issued 4,503 Purchase Orders for goods and services, 58 done via Bid Waiver
- Upgraded contract database to assist with data tracking and Student Data Privacy requirements
- Expansion of in-district Special Education Therapeutic programs to reduce student out-placements
- Continued to promote longer term contracts to hold down cost, provide continuity of service and reduce administrative burden
- Issued 35 Requests for Proposal in the following areas:
 - 7 Special Education and Related Services

- 18 Facility Maintenance
- 6 Curriculum & Instruction
- 4 Other

**OFFICE OF INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS
(formerly called Grants and Funded Programs)**

- The Board of Education was awarded \$44,203,889 in state, federal and private funding in the 2020-2021 school year. Competitive grant awards include the Mary Fitch Trust Foundation Grant, 21st Century Community Learning Center Grants, State Afterschool Grants, and the Upward Bound Grant.
- Schools provided before and after school academic and enrichment programs virtually and in person to over 1,700 students through the state funded Extended School Hours Grant.
- Westhill High School was the recipient of the Rise Innovation Grant to support the RISE by five network wide strategies to increase on-track achievement.

HUMAN RESOURCES

For the 2020-2021 School Year:

- Hired 98 new teachers, 3 administrators, 18 paraeducators, and 4 security workers
- Processed retirements of 3 administrators, 45 teachers , and 27 paraeducators
- Processed resignations of 1 administrator, 63 teachers and 27 paraeducators
- Continued working with the Minority Teacher Recruiting Planning Consortium with our partners at Cooperative Educational Services
- Partnered with the Capitol Region Education Council to establish the Teacher Residency Program in Stamford Public Schools and hired three residents for the 2021/2022 school year
- Implemented improvements in the recruiting, onboarding, and orientation for substitute staff
- Established building substitutes at each school
- Completed contract negotiations with the teachers' union
- Negotiated agreements with the teacher, paraeducator, and security unions regarding the District's pandemic response

TRANSPORTATION

Provided bus service to students based on hybrid schedules and rerouted buses throughout the year to accommodate changing needs. We worked closely with First Student to set up and monitor daily cleaning and disinfecting schedules on buses. We set protocols for mask wearing

for drivers and students and equipped buses with extra masks to hand out to riders who didn't have one. We also set expectations for behavior regarding loading and unloading buses to minimize close contact with other students. Lastly, we supported contact tracing with the use of videos from buses.