



## **A Message from Janine Randolph and Norwalk BOE**

### **NPS Family Center is the Heart of Norwalk Community**

For families new to the district, we want to make sure they receive a warm welcome to Norwalk and receive any help they need to make sure their child gets off on the right foot. In our creation of the NPS Family Center, we are helping to engage families in a more direct manner, providing them with equitable access and opportunity to be a part of our community.

The main objective of the NPS Family Center was to create a one-stop shop for both current families and those new to the city that provided easy access to family-facing school services. Prior to the Family Center, families would have to find their neighborhood school, travel to that school to register their child and then be redirected to City Hall to complete assessments for services such as special education or multilingual learning.

At the Family Center, a family can accomplish all of that and more without ever having to leave the building at 1 Park St. Our representatives walk families through the registration process, introduce them to our lottery and choice programs, have them meet with a social worker if they need special education services or our Multilingual Learning Department if they need a language assessment.

Our health services team helps direct families to community health centers where they can get their child a physical or immunizations. Our food services department helps families who may need nutrition services outside of school, and families can learn what bus will pick up their child and take them to school. All of this occurs with one visit to the Family Center.

Over the first year, the Family Center has surveyed the needs of families in the Norwalk community. This has allowed them to implement programs and events that improve the quality of their experience as Norwalk community members. Since July 2022, over 1,900 families have benefited from the support afforded at the Family Center.

Workshops are tailored to meet both district and community goals. Educational opportunities help to inform families how to navigate the school system and support their children's education through home-school partnership activities. Between September 2022 and December 2022, more than 1,090 families attended the workshops and events. In surveys to families, the Family Center's services and care for their needs was rated at an "exceptional" level.

The staff working inside the Family Center are not new to the district, and their positions have been part of the local budget. Many of them were previously housed at City Hall or in other district buildings. The Family Center simply put them under one roof that was convenient for families to access them all at one time.

The start up of the Family Center was funded by grants. Norwalk Public Schools is paying \$250,000 to lease the space at 1 Park St. We were previously leasing space in that building for \$55,000 to house the Project SEARCH program. That cost is now embedded in our total lease. The net incremental cost of operating the Family Center is approximately \$195,000 or \$16,250 monthly incremental.

School districts across the country from New York to Wisconsin to New Mexico have established family centers to [give families a greater sense of ownership in their schools](#) and to make them feel like insiders. A successful family center permits school staff members and families to establish relationships, programs, and activities to help children succeed academically, emotionally, and socially.

The Family Center has become the heart of the Norwalk community and continues to develop strong community ties that bridge families with schools, city agencies and other community organizations providing much-needed resources and services that enhance student and community success.