



## **A Message from Dr. Alexandra Estrella, Superintendent of Norwalk Public Schools and the Norwalk Board of Education**

### **Norwalk Board of Education Reconciles \$226.5 Million FY2023-24 Operating Budget**

Norwalk, Conn. (June 13, 2023) – The Norwalk Board of Education approved the FY2023-24 Operating Budget Reconciliation on Tuesday at its June business board meeting. The reconciled budget for Norwalk Public Schools totals \$226.5 million, representing a 4% increase from the previous fiscal year.

Norwalk Public Schools entered the final phase of the 2023-24 budget season fully prepared to make challenging decisions. In collaboration with Human Resources, the Finance Department worked closely with school leadership and other departments in Central Office to preserve vital programming in the schools while minimizing the impact on the district's dedicated workforce.

"I am immensely proud of their commitment and resolve in navigating the challenges of this year," Superintendent Dr. Alexandra Estrella said of the BOE Finance Department. "Their decisions exemplify our dedication to making sure that our scholars receive nothing but the absolute best learning experience in Norwalk."

In January, the Board of Education approved a tentative operating budget for nearly \$245.5 million, representing a hefty but necessary 12.7% increase over the previous fiscal year's budget. The reconciled budget fell nearly \$19 million short of the BOE's original request.

In order to bridge that funding gap, the Finance Department worked diligently to identify and implement numerous solutions to achieve the necessary reduction. Thanks to a one-time allocation of \$2.5 million from the city's American Rescue Plan funds, an additional \$1.6 million in state grants, and the district's carryover of \$3 million from the previous fiscal year, we were able to find some relief.

Moreover, Norwalk Public Schools will utilize over \$34 million in grant funds to support our operations. It's important to note that these funds can only be used for the expressed purpose stated in the grant language and cannot supplant the need for funds elsewhere in the budget.

"I'm grateful to the Finance Department for their outstanding work in closing a significant funding gap. Their efforts have been remarkable, as they managed to find effective solutions without significantly impacting the learning experience of our students or causing excessive hardship to our dedicated workforce," said Sheri McCready-Pritchett, Secretary of the Norwalk Board of



Education. “I also want to acknowledge the hard work by this administration and others around the district to secure grant funding and to foster relationships with our philanthropic partners that are instrumental in providing much-needed support to our schools and relieving the burden on our taxpayers.”

The district made every conceivable effort to maintain the programs and services that our scholars and families have come to rely upon. Programs traditionally targeted in previous budget cycles, such as middle school athletics, arts, and music programs, were safeguarded. These programs play an integral role in providing scholars with a well-rounded education while nurturing their physical, social and emotional well-being.

“I am extremely impressed by the efficiency and speed demonstrated by our Finance Department in reconciling the budget. I cannot emphasize enough the commendable job they have done in utilizing our available resources effectively including grant funds and taxpayer dollars. Their efforts have allowed us to maintain our dedicated workforce, which is crucial for the success of our students, our district and our community,” said Godfrey Azima, Vice Chair of the Norwalk Board of Education.

“As a Board member, and more importantly, as a father of four children in the district, I can’t fathom what my children’s academic experience would be like next year if not for the dedication and competence of this administration and our school leadership.”

In addition, all specialized learning programs and services were preserved within the schools. To achieve this, the specialized learning budget was reduced at the district level. The reduction resulted in little extra funding, and the district is prepared to seek a special appropriation from the city in the event we see another influx of students requiring specialized services.

The commitments made in this year’s budget reflect the priorities outlined in the Future Ready For All 2021-2026 Strategic Plan, particularly in terms of providing high-quality instruction and support for our scholars, as well as building instructional capacity for our esteemed staff.

Professional development and growth is critical in a field that is ever evolving with new research and innovations on how to best effectively serve our scholars. To this point, the district found it critical to maintain our math and literacy coaches because they are instrumental in providing our school staff with professional development and support that is applied and infused into the day-to-day learning experiences of our scholars.

The primary goal throughout the budget reconciliation process was to minimize the impact on our scholars, staff, and families. In many areas, we succeeded in achieving this objective.



However, it is important to acknowledge that the consequences of budget cuts will be felt in various ways across the district.

Norwalk Public Schools eliminated 104 positions through retirements and attrition for the 2023-24 school year to help alleviate the financial burden of next year's budget. Yet, the district only had to lay off six employees.

"It is crucial to understand that collaboration does not equate to agreement. When managing multiple unions with diverse needs and desires, it is not feasible to fulfill all demands. However, our unwavering commitment remains focused on the care and well-being of our dedicated staff, while consistently prioritizing the best interests of children and families," Estrella said.

To maintain programming options for all our scholars, some staff members will be shared across schools. As a result, there may be a slight reduction in the frequency of certain courses available. Additionally, cuts at the district level may impact the efficiency of specific departments. For instance, considerable improvements have been made to school facilities in response to concerns raised by families. Unfortunately, plans for future repairs will inevitably face delays due to budget constraints.

"I want to thank Dr. Estrella and her team, especially district CFO Lunda Asmani, for their exceptional efforts in navigating this difficult budget season. Their dedication and hard work ensure that our students continue to receive a high-quality education and our valued employees remain to do their important work," said Diana Carpio, Chair of the Norwalk Board of Education.

"While we acknowledge this incredible achievement by our Finance Department, I don't want to continuously find ourselves in this position where we must fight every year for the necessary funding that our schools deserve," Carpio said. "It is essential that we all recognize the inherent value of a quality education and the impact it has on our community's future."

Norwalk Public Schools remains resolute in its commitment to providing an excellent and equitable education to all our scholars. We are determined to ensure that all our scholars graduate fully prepared for their futures as responsible citizens, engaged global participants, and positive contributors to our ever-changing and diverse world.