



BUDGET IN BRIEF

A HIGH-LEVEL OVERVIEW OF THE 2024-25
NORWALK PUBLIC SCHOOLS BUDGET

Prepared by:

Finance Department
Norwalk Public Schools

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Mission Statement

Norwalk Public Schools provides an excellent and equitable education so ALL students graduate future ready as civically responsible, globally engaged and positive contributors to an ever-changing and diverse world.

Board of Education

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Table of Contents



From Our Superintendent	Page 04
From Our CFO	Page 05
Financial Transparency	Page 06
Budget Process	Page 07
Staffing and People	Page 08
2024-25 Budget & Staffing	Page 09
Enrollment Snapshot	Page 10
Student Highlights	Page 12
Capital Projects	Page 13
Budget Priorities	Page 14

From Our Superintendent

Realizing the goals set in our strategic priorities:
Norwalk Superintendent of Schools Dr. Alexandra Estrella



Norwalk Public Schools has reached the midway point of the Future Ready For All: 2021-26 Strategic Plan, and we are in the midst of evaluating the progress made so far to fully realize the strategic priorities we established for the district nearly three years ago.

With those priorities in mind, my team and I present the Superintendent's Recommended Operating Budget for FY 2024-25 with the intention that this request brings us closer to achieving our goals and taking the actions necessary to execute the strategic priorities.

This proposal is intended to maintain the same level of quality service and excellence currently expected by our students, staff and families. The continuation of necessary programs and retention of staff are of the utmost importance.

At the same time, we need to acknowledge the challenges beyond our control such as inflation, which impacts the costs associated with employee health insurance and out-of-district providers. We must also shift several items back under the local budget that were recently covered with federal COVID-19 relief funds, set to sunset later next year, and the one-time offset of \$2.5 million the mayor provided using the city's ARPA funds to balance the FY 2023-24 budget.

My team and I look forward to further developing the FY 2024-25 operating budget that will ensure we continue to provide an excellent and equitable education to the children of Norwalk. Together, we must make the commitment to invest in our schools to ensure our students receive an excellent and equitable education that will ensure they graduate future ready.

"The continuation of necessary programs and retention of staff are of the utmost importance."



From Our CFO

What is a Budget in Brief?:

Norwalk Public Schools Chief Financial Officer Lunda Asmani, CPFO



The Budget in Brief is a newly created guide which provides a high-level overview of the school budget with a specific focus on the development of the 2024-25 budget for Norwalk Public Schools.

This guide aims to explain how funding will be spent and the impact it will have on the Norwalk Public School students' learning and achievements. It provides a format that is easy to use and is intended to be used by a wide cross section of the community at large.

The goal is to create an understanding of the budget and provide transparency for community members so that they may come together to assist in building the budget with priorities that matter to both the community and students. This guide will enable people to take part in informed debate about the choices made by their local government. A public school system uses its budget to describe its program plans for the upcoming year.

It is a bird's-eye view of the school budget process and will answer high level questions. This guide will provide factual data, highlight accomplishments driven by past spending and review areas of need that the upcoming budget will address. Furthermore, this guide will explain the budget process and how student-based budgeting works.

The guide will also provide comparisons to other school districts and feature investments made to our school buildings by the City of Norwalk. Finally, this document will review the top priorities that drive the budget request for the 2024-25 school year. The objective of this Budget in Brief is to connect public finance to everyday living, striving to make our community a better place for all. For more information, visit the award-winning budget website at <https://bit.ly/476odtV>.

"This guide will provide factual data, highlight accomplishments driven by past spending and review areas of need that the upcoming budget will address."



Financial Transparency

NPS Receives ASBO Award for Excellence in Budget Presentation

Norwalk Public Schools believes in financial transparency as well as excellence in reporting and is proud to have received for the second year in a row, the Meritorious Budget Award (MBA), presented by The Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO).

In order to receive the budget award, the Norwalk Public School Budget document had to satisfy nationally recognized guidelines for effective budget presentation. The guidelines are designed to assess how well the budget serves as:

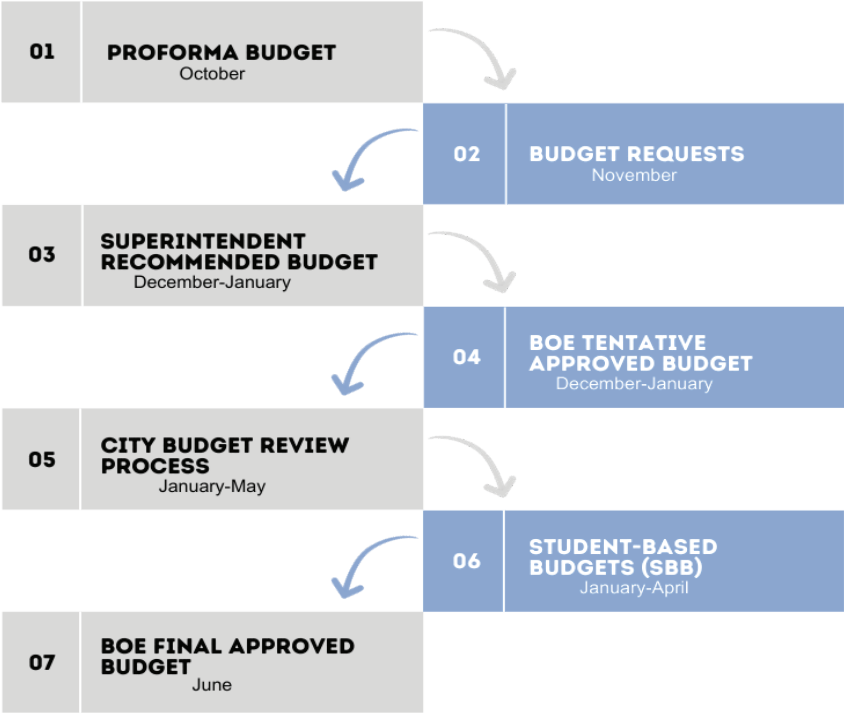
- a policy document
- a financial plan
- an operations guide
- a communication device



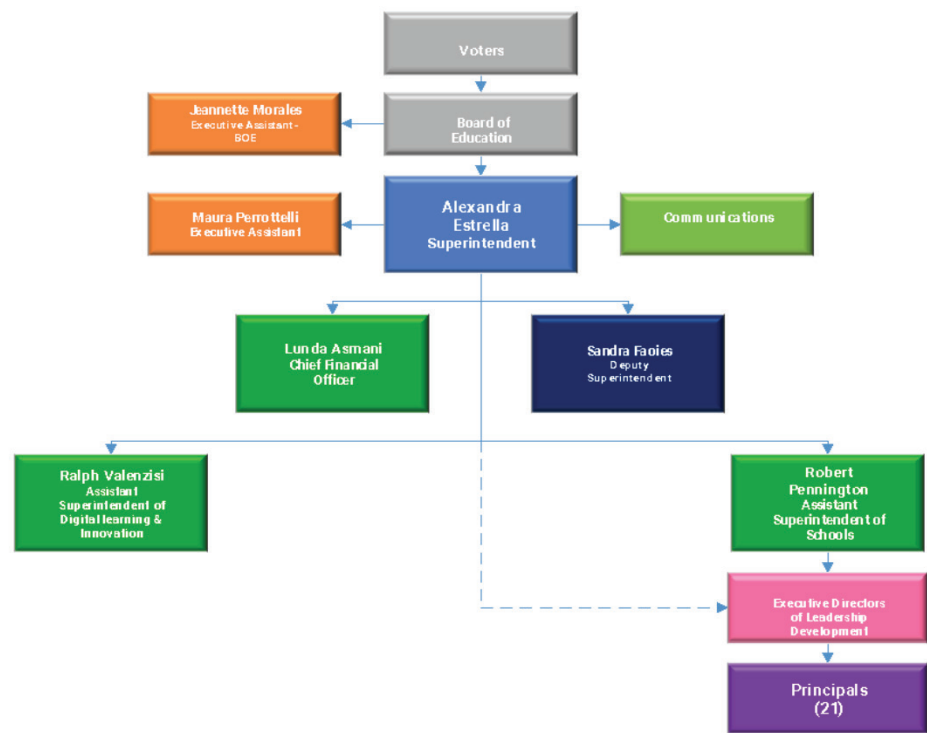
Budget Process

A quick look

The annual budget development process is a collaborative process of both internal and external stakeholders. It is a representation of the district's strategic plan combined with the needs and wishes of the community.



Staffing and People



The board's role is to set the mission, vision, and values for the district; hire an able and qualified Superintendent; create the policies to operate the school system; determine the financial needs and direct the funds necessary to run the schools, and employ the necessary personnel to operate an effective school district.

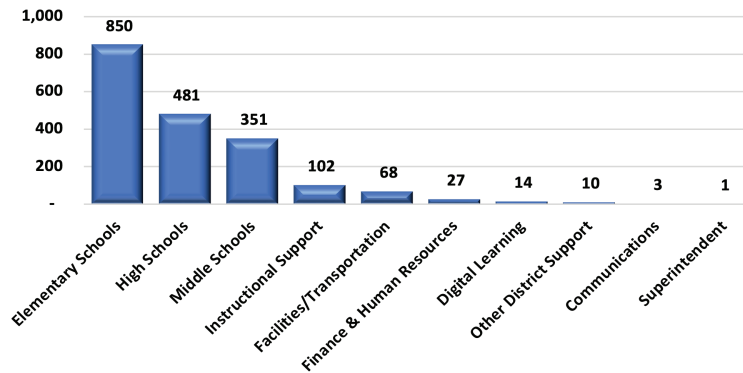
The Board of Education hires the Superintendent of Schools and rely on the Superintendent and staff to provide them with accurate budgetary and fiscal information upon which to make spending decisions.

Voters have the ultimate impact on the budget connected on both sides of the table of organization, beginning with voting for the BOE members and ending with participation in parent community groups. These local groups provide input on individual school budgets, which is a significant part of the overall district budget.



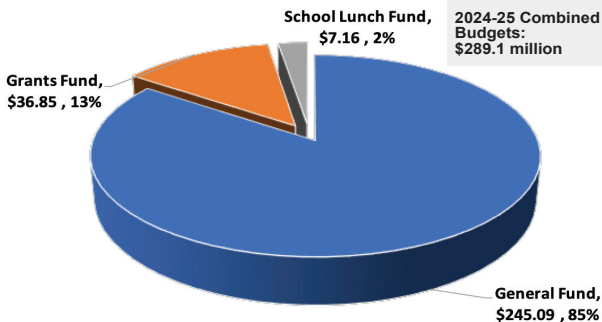
2024-25 Budget and Staffing Distribution

Staffing Distribution Local & Grant Funds FTEs
(1,907)



The 2024-25 Budget consisted of 1,907 Full Time Equivalents (FTEs). These FTEs are funded by various sources including total local funds and grant funds. 85% of the budget has been allocated to classroom services which includes student support, teachers, paraeducators, other instructional support and social & emotional roles such as social workers and counselors.

97% of the FTEs in the budget are directly located at the schools working with students. The General Fund, otherwise known as the local fund, comprises the general-purpose functions of the Board of Education (BOE). The Superintendent's Recommended General Fund Fund budget of \$245.09 million for 2024-25 which accounts for 85% of all BOE operating expenses and is funded through the City of Norwalk's General Fund.



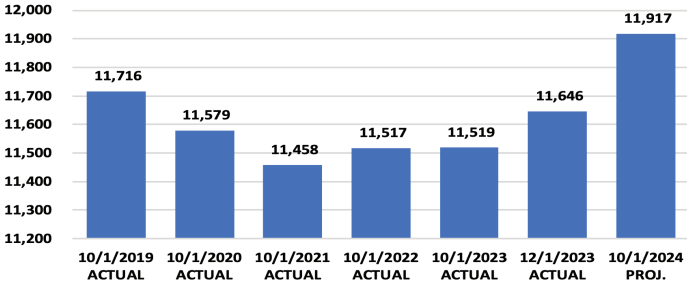
Grant Funds are reported in a separate fund, and are exclusive of local taxpayer funding. Grants include revenue from state, local and private sources and accounts for an estimated 13% of all BOE operating expenses or \$36.85 million for the 2024-25 school year. Grant funds assist in enhancing and creating programs that are not funded in the local budget.

The FY24-25 estimated Food Services Budget is \$7.16 million or 2% of all BOE operating expenses for the 2024-25 school year. The School Lunch Fund includes all revenues and operating expenses associated with providing high quality, nutritious, low cost meals. This fund also receives revenues through meal charges and state and federal subsidies that are determined annually.

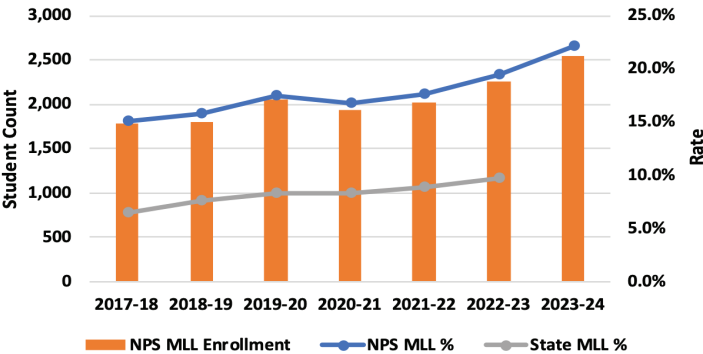
Enrollment Snapshot



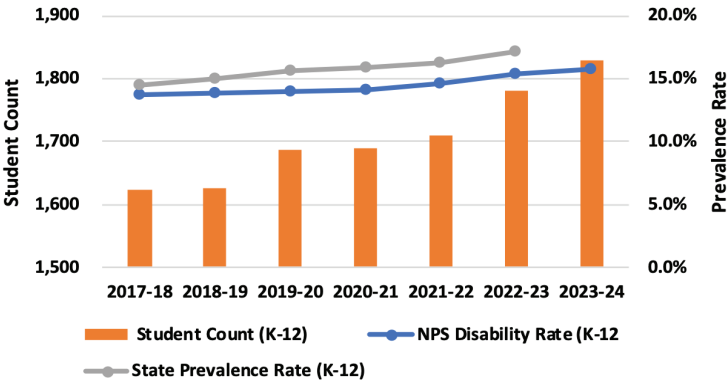
Enrollment History & Projections



MLL Rate & Count

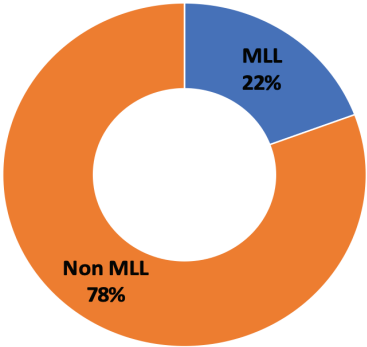


SPED Prevalence

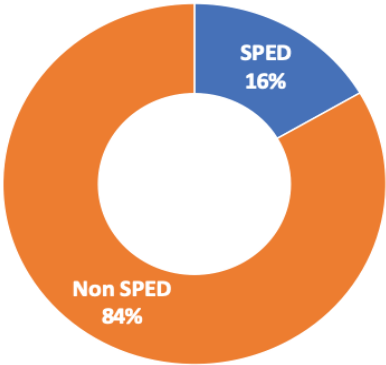


Enrollment Snapshot

MultiLingual Learners (MLL)



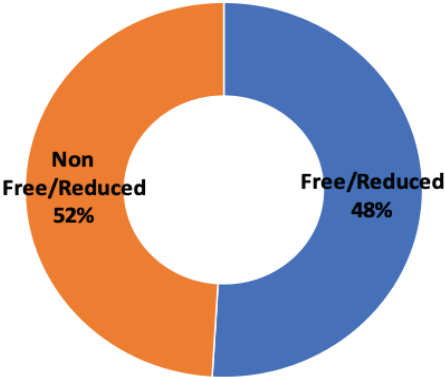
Specialized Education (SPED)



Total student enrollment drives the budget. But more importantly the mix and composition of students each year impacts the budget expenditures. The demographic makeup of students has a direct correlation to the student needs and therefore the cost required in the budget.

The population of Free and Reduced Lunch and Special Education students continues to grow year to year. The specialized learning population was recently impacted by changes in legislation requiring services to continue past the student's 22nd birthday until the end of the school year. The Multilingual Learner population has also seen a significant spike this year and over the last few years, which translates into higher enrollment projections and associated services needed. During Covid, a flat enrollment cycle occurred. In recent years, we see enrollment trends shifting back to pre-covid levels as projected by external demographers. Recent enrollment projections and actual student enrollment is now more consistent with long-term Norwalk enrollment patterns.

Free & Reduced Lunch



Student Highlights

English Language Arts DPI		
City	2022	2023
State	64.2	63.9
Norwalk	60.3	59.4
Stamford	60.4	58.5
Danbury	57.9	57.8
New Haven	51.3	50.8
Waterbury	64.2	50.7
Bridgeport	50.1	49.5
Hartford	48.3	47.4
New Britain	47.1	46.4

Math DPI		
City	2022	2023
State	58.6	59.7
Norwalk	54.9	55.4
Stamford	54.3	54.4
Danbury	51.6	52.9
Waterbury	42.3	43.8
New Haven	42.0	43.0
Bridgeport	42.1	41.8
Hartford	41.5	41.8
New Britain	37.6	39.9

Science DPI		
City	2022	2023
State	61.4	61.6
Norwalk	56.4	56.7
Stamford	57.3	56.0
Danbury	54.2	54.7
New Haven	46.7	46.6
Waterbury	47.1	46.6
Hartford	46.9	45.5
Bridgeport	45.5	45.4
New Britain	46.6	43.1

The District Performance Index (DPI) is used to track trends in achievement based on state test results. The DPI is calculated by content area for English Language Arts (ELA), Math, and Science.

Using Connecticut's largest cities as a comparison group, Norwalk's performance indices for English Language Arts (ELA), Math and Science rank #1.

Although Norwalk consistently has higher performance indices, compared to large cities, we are constantly striving to exceed the overall state levels.

English Language Arts PTA		
City	2022	2023
State	60.4%	57.2%
Norwalk	57.1%	55.3%
Danbury	59.3%	55.2%
Stamford	56.6%	52.6%
New Haven	58.7%	52.1%
New Britain	53.6%	51.2%
Hartford	51.9%	50.8%
Waterbury	58.6%	50.6%
Bridgeport	60.5%	49.5%

Math PTA		
City	2022	2023
State	65.2%	61.8%
Norwalk	62.6%	60.1%
Danbury	61.0%	57.2%
New Britain	55.0%	56.8%
Stamford	58.2%	56.4%
New Haven	59.7%	52.9%
Hartford	53.6%	52.1%
Waterbury	52.6%	51.9%
Bridgeport	56.6%	50.3%

The City of Norwalk continues to make progress towards its goal of improved facilities. Recently, three school projects have been completed including the expansion of the Ponus Middle School to add a 400-pupil lower campus building, a state-of-the-art renovated as new, Jefferson Elementary School and, most recently, the new Cranbury Elementary School (pictured below). Norwalk is also planning a new high school project, Norwalk High School/P-TECH Norwalk and a 680-pupil elementary school in South Norwalk, which is the first school in this historic neighborhood in over 50 years.



Budget Priorities

The 2024-25 budget priorities are tied to the district's strategic plan and goals. The priorities are a reflection of the community feedback and the students' needs. The priorities also include non-negotiable items, such as state mandates and providing the quality of services required under law. The district's intention is to provide students with an excellent and equitable education, while graduating future ready and addressing the diverse needs of the population.



Teacher Release Time

Nearly 85% of the budget every year goes directly into classroom and school services that benefit our students and provide support to our families. Schools are a people business and 97% of the budget is allocated to salaries and benefits, with the largest group being our teachers. This budget addresses the increase in planning time needed for teachers, particularly at the elementary school level, so they have the necessary time to develop and execute the best educational plans for their students.

Social & Emotional Learning

The most consistent feedback that we hear from our students and families is the need for more mental health supports in our schools. Norwalk Public Schools remains committed to providing social and emotional learning at every level and increasing the presence and efficacy of mental health personnel in our schools. Many of these positions were previously funded from the ESSER grant, which has since sunset. These positions are now accounted for in the local budget. The district is projecting an even further need in social services that what we have funded today.





School Lunch Fund

This fund encompasses all revenue and expenditures and is designed to be a self-sustaining fund. However, over the past several years the district was required to transfer funds to cover the deficit in Food Services. During the pandemic, federal funds were received allowing this fund to sustain itself. During this time period a decision was made to shift to the Community Eligibility Plan or CEP where all students eat for free. For the 2024-25 school year, the district is projecting a \$1.3 million deficit due to the lower reimbursement received from the state. The same deficit would have occurred if the district was not registered under CEP.

Special Education

The increase in our population of students needing specialized learning services, or the increase in the prevalence rate, has risen to over 15%. The population of students who are served under IDEA has grown in both number and share over the last few decades and continues to rise nationally. This increase combined with rising out of district tuition costs and additions of unfunded state mandates, has translated into a higher cost burden on the district. We continue to see increased rates from our out-of-district providers who we rely on to provide services to our students that are not available in Norwalk Public Schools. In addition, one new unfunded state mandate recently added to legislation, requires the district to educate students beyond their 22nd birthday until the end of the school year, which translates into additional unfunded student services. Norwalk Public Schools is legally required to provide these special education services to fulfill the needs of a student's individual education plan (IEP), whether that's in the district or by an outside provider.



Grants



Norwalk PS has an estimated \$36.85 million in ongoing grant funding for the 2024-25 school year. Grant funding represents 13% of the total financial resources to fund the operating budget and comes with very specific criteria that must be followed. Recent grant awards included a Marine Science Pathway in partnership with the Maritime Aquarium. The district was also fortunate enough to receive a new Magnet School Assistance Program (MSAP) grant worth a total of \$15 million over a 5 year period. This grant will be used to create an interdistrict magnet school which is a K-12 pathway in STEAM at P-TECH Norwalk, Ponus Ridge STEAM Academy, and Kendall College and Career Academy. An important point to note is that grants are meant to enhance existing programs within the district or to create new programs with specific goals outlined by the grant. Expenditures cannot be supplanted in the grant, meaning funds cannot be shifted from local expenditures to these newly awarded funds.



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