



Board Report
March 8, 2024



BOARD UPDATE

From the desk of Dr. Alexandra Estrella, Superintendent

March 8, 2024

EXCELLENCE, EQUITY & INCLUSION

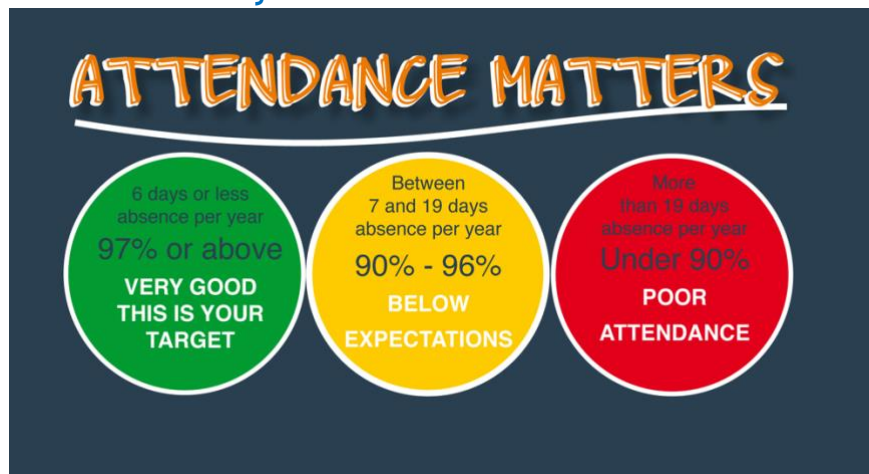
Testing & Accountability

On March 7 training sessions, required for State NGSS testing, were held for high school Building Test Coordinators and high school science leaders. Major topics were security and the use of approved supports that make the test accessible to all students. By mid-March, the Testing Office will upload designated supports to TIDE, the test delivery engine. CT-SEDS updates TIDE with accommodations from finalized IEPs. At the training, a school level process to review supports/accommodations was reviewed. Each proctor is required to simulate a testing session with students, using the online practice test. Office hours will be held as a follow-up to these sessions. Live high school NGSS testing is scheduled for April 8 and April 9.



The impact of the Future Ready Program on graduation rates was measured using Norwalk's 2022 4-year graduation cohort and preliminary results for the 2023 cohort. The assumption was that if students did not participate in the Future Ready Program, they would not have graduated on time. 2022 graduation rates would have been two to three percentage points lower. Using preliminary 2023 cohort records, the graduation rate would be three to four percentage points lower.

Research & Analytics



Norwalk Public Schools regularly send families notices that update them on the number of days their students(s) are absent and includes a comparison to the average number of absences for a student in the same grade. Last week an attendance update was sent to all parents/guardians via ParentSquare.

Work has commenced to plan for the Senior Exit Survey in collaboration with the CT RISE Network. This 10 to 15-minute-long survey, which will launch in April, will capture students' final postsecondary plans and help us to learn from their experiences so we can continue to deepen our support of future classes. Information that will be captured includes:

- The student's postsecondary plan and where the student plans to enroll/enlist/work
- The milestones the student completed for enrollment and financial aid
- The support students found most helpful in navigating the postsecondary process

Communications

Quick Links

- [BMHS Students Win 9 Awards at HOSA State Conference](#)
- [CGS Saber Lex Francois Earns Gold at State Fencing Championship](#)
- [5 NPS Students Qualify for CT History Day Competition](#)
- [Ponus Ridge STEAM Academy Selected as CT State Winner for Samsung Solve for Tomorrow Competition](#)
- [Curricula Corner: February 2024](#)

Reading Opens the World



Here we go again! Reading Opens the World, a First Book initiative, returns on Saturday, May 18 from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Brien McMahon High School. Expand your home library by choosing from over **50,000 FREE books** and enjoy lots of other activities and food trucks.

And if you haven't seen it already (and if you haven't, are you living under a rock?), [watch the launch video](#) featuring Dr. Estrella and Mr. Rob Pennington to learn a little more about this year's event. Be sure to watch to the very end!

Black Heritage & History Festival



Thank you to everyone who joined us (and volunteered!) at the 2nd annual Black Heritage & History Festival, celebrating African Americans and the Arts. We had over 1,200 people in attendance to support our students who gave incredible performances and showcased impressive presentations. We hope you all enjoyed the delicious food and danced the night away.

A special thank you goes out to our guest speakers including Norwalk Board of Education Vice Chair Sheri McCready-Pritchett, Norwalk Connecticut Branch NAACP President Brenda Penn-Williams, Rev. Roosevelt Ewell of Canaan Institutional Baptist Church, and Norwalk Mayor Harry Rilling.

Shout out to Jeannette Morales and the BHHF Committee on making this event another incredible success! Thank you to Superintendent Dr. Estrella and Deputy Superintendent Sandra Faioes for your inspiring vision and dedicated leadership that allows us to bring together our community for these wonderful celebrations.

[Click here to watch all the performances from the festival!](#)

Read Across America



We had another successful Read Across America Day earlier this week with many, many elected officials, school faculty and staff, and other community leaders taking time out of their busy schedules to read to our students across the district. We can't thank them enough!

Shout out to Stacey Bergin and the Curriculum Team for organizing another amazing day of reading! [Click here to see some highlights from the event.](#)

Graduation & Promotion Dates

Things will look a little different this year for the Norwalk High School/P-TECH graduation due to the new school construction. [Click here to see all the dates, times and locations](#) as we celebrate our graduating seniors and rising freshmen!

In Case You Missed It

Celebrating Women's History Month

Throughout the month of March, we'll be celebrating Women's History Month by highlighting the female leaders and educators who are making an impact on our students, our schools and the Norwalk community. Check it out on our Facebook and Instagram channels.

NPS Celebrates Black History Month (VIDEO)



The BMHS NAACP Club organized a panel to educate their peers on the experiences of Black educators and staff in the community. The conversations highlighted the challenges the panelists had to overcome in their lives and careers and focused on the change they're making in the BMHS community.

P-TECH recognized Black History Month with a school-wide celebration that included art projects, music performances, a movie screening, a fashion show and trivia games. [Click here to watch the highlights \(including a cameo from Ralph and Old School 203!\)](#)



We shared reflections from My Sister's Keeper members about their viewing of the 2023 film "The Color Purple." See them all on our Facebook and Instagram channels.

Superintendent's Book Club - "I Am Enough" (VIDEO)

Executive Directors of Leadership Development Mary-Anne Sheppard and Alison Breedy-Johnson closed out the Superintendent Book Club's celebration of Black History Month with the book "I Am Enough" by Grace Byers with pictures by Keturah A. Bobo.

NPS Winter Recap (VIDEO)

Schools across the district spent their winter volunteering in the community, welcoming our educational partners for fun experiences, and preparing for spring musicals.

Important Dates

Thursday, March 14 - K-5 Conferences (90-Minute Early Release)

Thursday, March 21 - K-5 Conferences (90-Minute Early Release)

Monday, March 25 - Staff Professional Development (2-Hour Early Dismissal)

Friday, March 29 - Good Friday (No School; Central Office Closed)

Upcoming Events

Misatengo

Saturday, March 9 at 7:30 p.m.

Norwalk Concert Hall, 125 East Ave. in Norwalk

The Fairfield County Chorale has invited the Norwalk High School Chamber Singers to join them again, this time to perform "Misatengo" or "Mass a Buenos Aires" by Argentinian composer Martin Palmeri. The piece is a fascinating combination of a classic Latin mass and Nuevo Tango rhythms and syncopation. It has been described as a work both sultry and sacred.

Fairfield County Chorale and the NHS Chamber Singers will present the tranquility of contemporary composer, Ola Gjeilo, and a world premiere by Evan Fein, composed specially for this concert. The performance will also feature Shinjoo Cho on the traditional bandoneón.

[Click here to purchase tickets](#) or buy them at the door.

Family Workshop - Wooden Animal Decor/Painting

Thursday, March 15 from 6 to 7 p.m.

NPS Family Center, 1 Park St. in Norwalk

Families are invited to this fun and interactive workshop to create their own wooden animal, a unique and custom piece of artwork. Use your creativity to create a one-of-a-kind piece!

[Click here to register.](#)

"The Colors of Frida/Los Colores de Frida"

Friday, March 15 at 6 p.m.

Jefferson Marine Science Elementary School, 75 Van Buren Ave. in Norwalk

NPS Family Center invites families to see "The Colors of Frida/Los Colores de Frida" presented by Teatro Sea on Friday, March 15. Admission is FREE!

"The Colors of Frida/Los Colores de Frida" is a bilingual show about the great Mexican painter Frida Kahlo. It combines storytelling, music, visual arts and puppets.

[Click here to reserve a seat.](#)

Ponus Ridge STEAM Academy Presents "Moana Jr."
Friday, March 15 at 7 p.m. and Saturday, March 16 at 3 p.m.
Ponus Ridge STEAM Academy, 21 Hunters Lane in Norwalk

The Ponus Ridge STEAM Academy Drama Club invite the community to its production of Disney's "Moana Jr." Based on the 2016 Walt Disney Animation film, this musical features all the beloved songs from the movie by Lin-Manuel Miranda, Opetaia Foa'i and Mark Mancina, including "How Far I'll Go," "Shiny," and "You're Welcome."

This thrilling and heartwarming coming-of-age story follows the strong-willed Moana as she sets sail across the Pacific to save her village and discover the truth about her heritage. Moana and the legendary demigod Maui embark on an epic journey of self-discovery and camaraderie as both learn to harness the power that lies within. With empowering messages of bravery and selflessness, Moana JR. is sure to bring out the hero within each of us.

Tickets are \$8 for students and \$10 for adults. Tickets can be reserved by emailing ponusmusic@gmail.com

Roton Middle School Presents "Once On This Island Jr."
Friday, March 15 and Saturday, March 16 at 7 p.m.; Sunday, March 17 at 2 p.m.
Roton Middle School, 201 Highland Ave. in Norwalk

The Roton Middle School Drama Club invite the community to its production of "Once on This Island Jr." The musical is adapted from the 1990 Broadway production which was based on the 1985 novel "My Love, My Love; or The Peasant Girl" by Rosa Guy, a Caribbean-set retelling of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale "The Little Mermaid."

Through almost non-stop song and dance, this full-hearted musical tells the story of Ti Moune, a peasant girl who rescues and falls in love with Daniel, a wealthy boy from the other side of her island. When Daniel is returned to his people, the fantastical gods who rule the island, guide Ti Moune on a quest that will test the strength of her love against the powerful forces of prejudice, hatred and even death.

Tickets are \$8 for students and NPS staff, and \$12 for adults. Tickets will be sold at the door, cash only.

BMHS Presents "Footloose: The Musical"
Friday, March 22 at 7 p.m. and Saturday, March 23 at 2 p.m. & 7 p.m.
Brien McMahon High School, 300 Highland Ave. in Norwalk

Let's hear it for Brien McMahon High School, which will present their spring musical production of "Footloose: The Musical" in March. They're holding out for an audience jam-packed with their friends, family and community. It's sure to be a night that's almost paradise.

The musical is directed and choreographed by Christina Zangaglia. She was assisted by musical director Laszlo Balazs, producer Holly Robert, and assistant directors Alba Alcantara and Samantha Pullia.

Tickets are \$10 for students and NPS staff; \$12 for senior citizens; and \$15 for adults. Cabaret seats are available for \$25 each. [Click here to purchase tickets.](#)

WRMS Presents “Beauty and the Beast Jr.”

Friday, March 22 at 7 p.m. and Saturday, March 23 at 2 p.m. & 7 p.m.

West Rocks Middle School, 81 West Rocks Road in Norwalk

West Rocks Drama Club asks you to “be our guest” for their production of “Beauty and the Beast Jr.” More than 50 students in grades 6-8 are part of this year’s production from the cast to the backstage crew.

The musical follows the plot of the classic Disney film and Broadway production - a reminder that true beauty lies within.

Tickets are \$10. [Click here to purchase tickets.](#)

CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION & SPECIALIZED LEARNING

Humanities

The Humanities department continues to support the Science of Reading through district wide professional development in grades K-5. As part of the Right to Read legislation, schools are engaging in coaching sessions with our partners at The Hill. Middle School curriculum work in ELA was completed around the genre of Argumentative Writing. We are excited to see how our students lean into the topics of Increasing Recess Time, the Impact of social media, and the Risks of Contact Sports. Essentials teachers in the high school have completed 2 new units of study.

To support the work of the Executive Leadership Team, professional development in the areas of scaffolding and the QFT were offered as choice stations at the monthly meeting. We continued to develop school leaders on using standards as the driving force of lesson planning.

Mathematics/STEM

The STEM department continues to prepare for professional learning for the middle and high schools for their March sessions. Additionally, professional learning will be offered to elementary physical education teachers to collaborate on the new curriculum for next year.

We supported the principals and assistant principals professional learning session in March by presenting an engagement session on the instructional routine Collect and Display. Leaders were supported with the purpose, multiple examples of implementation to support implementation in different subject areas, and extensions to additional best practices.

Math coaches engaged in professional learning around Collect and Display, leveraging of the PDSA cycle and supporting teacher teams and individual teachers with reflective questioning, as presented by a math coach implementing at their school, and we brainstormed curricula enhancements for the upcoming year.

Multilingual Learners

The Multilingual Learner department engaged administrators and coaches in a professional learning session on supporting newcomers in the classroom during the March leadership meetings. The session provided multiple resources on how to create a welcoming environment for newcomers and their families and many instructional strategies on how to support newcomers in the classroom.

The Family Center is excited for the Wooden Animal/Painting workshop for families scheduled for March 14th from 6-7 pm. Scholars along with their families will create their own wooden animal, unique and custom artwork and use their creativity to create their one-of-a-kind piece!

Workforce Development

The work continues on the Career Z Challenge Grant as we attend their community of practice and topic-related discussion sessions. This week will focus on Program Marketing and Scholar Engagement. The CT Apprenticeship Series was offered to Junior and Senior scholars interested in learning more about Asphalt Lab Technician. Families and scholars who are 16+ can apply for a job in the field of Culinary Arts and Lifeguarding which will include training and mentorship. The Dual Credit Expansion Committee is now turning its attention to the teacher credentialing portion of the grant. The team is meeting with the Indoor Comfort Training Center to see if a partnership with NPS is possible. The NPS Interns are in their selected placements, while more scholars continue to interview. The Perkins Grant was submitted, and we received our approvals from the state of CT. The team has partnered with the Red Fashion School in Norwalk, and the Spring High School cohort began their weekly class. The Today's Students/Tomorrow's Teachers work is beginning with BMHS.

Counseling/Support Services

EduSolve was on site to do an SEL walk-through with five of our cohort schools. The following day we had on-site training for all 10 cohort schools and one for our district SEL team. The MLL transcript reviews continue at the Family Center for the Class of 2025. This allows staff to better adjust and/or prepare scholar schedules with a lens on graduation, based on earned credits. School Counselors have started working with their scholars for course selection and continue to meet with them as needed. The work continues on the SHAPE Assessment in partnership with the Child Health and Development Institute.

Specialized Instruction

Members of the specialized learning team including Special Education Administrators and BCBAs attended the first part of a three-part series on Restraint and Seclusion offered by Connecticut Parent Advocacy Council (CPAC) and the State Department of Education (CSDE). This workshop is open to educators and community members. This and other events sponsored by CPAC can be found here: <https://cpacinc.org/events.aspx>

On March 7 and 8, members of the Specialized Learning leadership team will attend the Connecticut Council of Administrators of Special Education (ConnCASE) March Legal Issues Conference. We look forward to returning with valuable information regarding the year's most impactful cases. We look forward to keynote speakers including Attorney Deanna Arivett and Nate Levinson from New Solutions K12. The latter is the author of a recently published book being read by members of the department: *Six Shifts to Improve Special Education and Other Interventions: A Common Sense Approach for school leaders.*

Throughout the District, teams are preparing for transitioning students to the next developmental level of school: PreK to Kindergarten; elementary to middle school; middle school to high school; high school to post-secondary plans or transition programming. Simultaneously, we are also preparing summer plans for Extended School Year Services.

SRBI

We have been implementing the High Dosage Tutoring Grant for middle school mathematics. We have started rolling this out on a small scale with after school tutoring and supporting intervention during the school day. We are continuing to support during the leadership meetings and reviewed mid-year goals with the board. School teams have been busy with calibration of walk-throughs internally. These walk-throughs have been math and literacy based. This also includes intervention meetings to support what grade levels are focusing on and make sure that the meeting has an outcome of a next step.

We have been working with the state also to support the roll-out of the Multi-Tiered Systems Support pilot. The state is adding intervention worksheets and importing benchmark assessments to have all teams be able to see more information on the whole child.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

March Instructional Leadership Meetings

On March 5 and 6, we hosted our principals, assistant principals and instructional coaches for their monthly professional learning session. In response to our middle of the year NWEA data, we used the time to review the upcoming ELA unit plans. During this time, school leaders and literacy coaches dove into the standards for the unit, reviewed available resources and worked to develop an action plan to launch the unit with their teachers and students. As the unit launches, members of the team will be visiting classrooms to identify promising practices and areas for future support.

Cycles of Improvement

We continue to partner with schools to conduct short cycles of improvement. This week, Brookside led their end cycle visit which focused on improving outcomes for our MLL students in ELA and Math. During this end cycle visit, the Brookside team shared the strategies and systems they have implemented, student data and work samples to demonstrate the progress made by students, and we visited classrooms. As you can see below, the Brookside team demonstrated substantial improvement!

Improvement in Teacher Practices

ELA	Math
By the end of the cycle, evidence of standards-based planning increased by 33% and evidence of student engagement increased by 26%.	By the end of the cycle, evidence of student engagement increased by 25% and evidence of active monitoring increased by 83%.

Improvement in Student Outcomes

ELA	Math
The percentage of MLL students in the focus group scoring a Level 3 or 4 (out of 4) on a written response increased by 43%.	The percentage of MLL students in the focus group scoring a Level 3 (out of 3) increased by 28%.

BUSINESS & OPERATIONS

Food Service

NORWALK FOOD SERVICE DEPARTMENT IS COLLECTING DONATIONS

JEANS FOR A CAUSE

Norwalk Food Service Department is working with Open Door Shelter to provide meals for our community in need.

When you donate to help our cause you get to wear Jeans on Friday.

It's easy you donate and we make the food and drop it off at the shelter.

Our next two dates are **March 9th and April 6th**

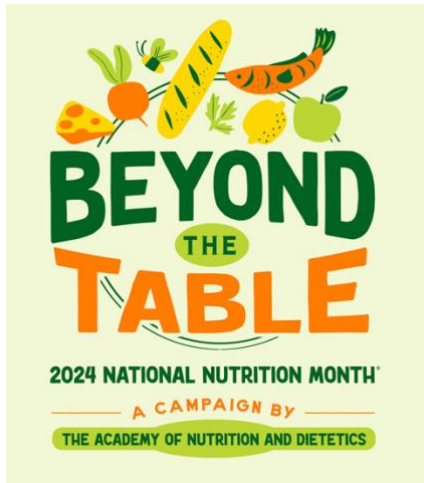
STOP HUNGER

Jill Kress
@JillKress

Join Jeans for a Cause and help us feed our community. Since January, the Food Service Department has teamed up with The Open Door Shelter in Norwalk to provide meals for our community in need.

Once a month the Food Service department collects donations from our team members and those who donate get to wear Jeans to work on Fridays.

This week **March 4-8** was [National School Breakfast Week](#) our students celebrated with new menu items like the Breakfast Banana Split and fun activity sheets which were handed out at breakfast.



Also, this month we are Celebrating [National Nutrition Month](#) this is a nutrition education and information campaign created by the Academy of Nutrition and Diet and Dietetics that focuses on the importance of making informed food choices and sound eating and physical activity habits.

	<p>Health Benefits:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Antioxidants – overall health and fight against cancer2. Fiber – digestion and heart health3. Copper - red blood cell formation, bone health, immune function
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Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Grant recipient schools are enjoying some delicious [blue and purple](#) fruits and vegetables this month. This week our FFVP schools are serving [eggplant](#) and [plums](#), next week we will feature purple cabbage and black grapes. Our Wednesday, March 6 pop-up event will feature raspberries and on Wednesday, March 13 there will be a pop-up event featuring purple grapes. As always here are Mrs. Kelly's learning and tasting videos:

[Learning & Tasting: Eggplant](#)

[Learning & Tasting: Plums](#)

[Eat a Rainbow: Blue/Purple](#)

Facilities

South Norwalk Elementary School:

In February, Newfield Construction mobilized on site and began the permitting process for demolition and construction. Work is planned to begin in early March.

Norwalk High School:

Gilbane's project team is currently on-site planning and coordinating their work. They have begun the permitting process with the city, beginning with the demolition and foundation only permits. Work is planned to begin in mid/late March pending permit approvals.



2024 Spring Tryout Dates & Information

Here is a copy of the [Athletics Communication](#) that was shared with families regarding Spring Sports due to the fields being offline.

School Safety

Members of the NPS Executive Safety Committee partnered with the Norwalk Police Department and The Norwalk Maritime Aquarium to hold an Active Shooter Training for aquarium staff and volunteers. This is the fifth part of an ongoing series to consult and provide support to the Aquarium in developing their Active Shooter Protocols.



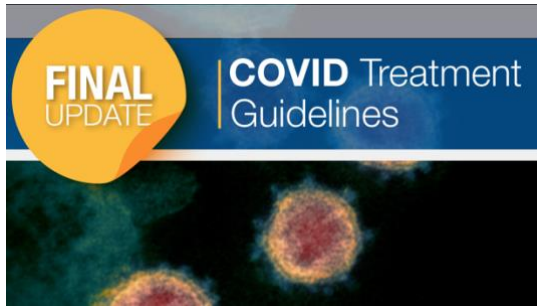
Transportation

The Transportation Office provided shuttle bussing for the Black History Month Celebration on February 29 at BMHS. Pickups were provided in the areas around town to assist families with attendance.

The Transportation Office in collaboration with NPS Wellness Committee will partner with the City of Norwalk Bike/Walk Commission and CT DOT Safe Routes to School Division to host a City-Wide Event at the beginning of May. An 'Open Streets' Festival is being planned. This event will provide resources and education to families to support biking and walking (and rolling) to school and around town. More detailed information will be provided in the coming weeks.

Driver shortage update: We welcomed another new driver to the team, Raymond Jeune, who recently passed DMV testing and will begin training on a route next week! Welcome Raymond!

Health Services



NPS has aligned its Covid guidelines with the recommendations announced by the CDC on February 29. Students who test positive for Covid may return to school once they are 24-hours fever-free without the use of medication, in addition to improved overall symptoms; precautions are then recommended for 5 days.



School Health Services continues to collaborate with The Norwalk Partnership and has scheduled a refresher Narcan (Nalaxone) training with Positive Directions on March 25. Every nurse will receive an additional box of Narcan for emergency use in their school. Medication training was provided to some staff at the Next Steps 18-21 transition program on February 28 to ensure a safe plan for a new student.

Grants

Norwalk Public Schools held their triannual Alliance and Priority School District Grant Monitoring Meeting on Monday, March 4 with a representative from The Connecticut State Department of Education. In this meeting, we presented district priorities relative to the funding we received from the State. Celebrations include our decrease in Out of School Suspensions and gains in our mid-year testing. We continue to focus on increasing and maintaining student consistent student attendance. We will hold our final Alliance Monitoring Meeting with the State in July where we will present data from our end-of-year testing.

DIGITAL LEARNING & TECHNOLOGY

Enterprise Software/Data Application

Training sessions for central office were held last month and were a great success. Staff learned new processes in Excel, SharePoint and more. Staff created efficient, quicker results on many of their repetitive workday tasks. We will continue to hold training sessions and look forward to working with every department!

Infrastructure/Operations

We are finalizing bid evaluations for E-rate projects. The projects include replacement APs and Wi-Fi sensors. Once approved our cost for those projects will be reduced by 80%. Initial implementation of our VDI system (Virtual Desktop Infrastructure) starts next week. Hopefully testing with students by mid-April.

Digital Learning

Digital Learning Coaches are currently working on developing some of our first opportunities to use AI as an instructional tool for teachers. Our first PD sessions will focus on how to use prompts in tools such as ChatGPT and CoPilot to create lesson plans.

We are excited to officially begin our work with Digital Promise. Some of our next steps in the process of preparing our schools for next year include:

- Teachers receiving their Chromebook and onboarding in May
- Building admin will join other school leaders in May for a national onboarding event in Kansas City MO
- Student device deployment to occur sometime in August.

FINANCE

Payroll

The bi-weekly payroll for this week has been successfully completed. The City and Board are collaborating on the implementation project for UKG (Human Resources, Payroll, & workforce management Solutions). Our payroll team is also working on building the necessary codes on our Munis platform to ensure accurate record keeping and reporting once the transition from NOVAtime to UKG is complete.

Budget

The budget team met to discuss the next steps of the budget process, including the student-based budgeting process. We have started creating and updating the School Based Budget files this week. We are also meeting with individual departments and schools to review their current year's spending and provide them with updated general ledger summaries. We have finalized the holdback methodology and have begun adding budget transfers for holdback amounts.

Grants

Our grant teams have been working on reconciling the Priority School District Extended School Hours grant, Title I, and Title I carryover. We have sent an email to each school explaining the funding usage and remaining funds. We have also had individual meetings with schools to strategize spending for the rest of the school year. This week, we distributed an updated general ledger summary of all main grant accounts to the Chief Financial Officer, grant teams, and Deputy Superintendent. This report shows year-to-date spending and grant availability. We are preparing for the upcoming School-based Budget meetings in April and are excited to assist schools with School-based budgeting.

Purchasing/Accounts Payable

We are continuing to work on the district's Food Service Management Company Request for Proposal. We have been meeting weekly with the Connecticut State Department of Education to discuss their updated requirements and the new proposal submission platform. We are also starting to train and test the district's Student Activity Fund move to Munis, with beta testing at Brien McMahon starting this week. The implementation and configuration of Tyler Technologies/MUNIS eProcurement module is scheduled for next Wednesday and Thursday. Once completed, users will be able to connect their requisitions and purchase orders directly to vendors with this capability, enabling real-time transactions to be recorded within MUNIS.

Capital

This week, we received a payment for the Jefferson Elementary school construction grant fund request. The Capital Construction team met to prepare for the South Norwalk New School and Norwalk High School fund request.