



CITY OF NORWALK

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***Mayor Rilling, Lt. Gov. Bysiewicz, Sen. Duff, Deputy  
Commissioner Hewes, Dr. Estrella and Community Leaders  
Complete the Groundbreaking of the First South Norwalk  
Neighborhood School in Over 40 Years***

(Norwalk, Conn.) Today, April 8, 2024, Mayor Rilling and Dr. Estrella, Superintendent of Norwalk Public Schools were joined by Lieutenant Governor Susan Bysiewicz, State Senator Bob Duff, Deputy Commissioner Charles Hewes of the CT State Department of Education, Darlene Young, President of Norwalk Common Council, Rev. Roosevelt Ewell, Senior Pastor of Canaan Institutional Baptist Church of Norwalk and other state, local and community leaders to break ground on the new South Norwalk School. This school will be the South Norwalk community's first neighborhood school in over 40 years.

The ceremony took place at 1 Meadow St. Ext., where the new neighborhood school is being constructed. It is the City's first new school construction project under the new state reimbursement rate of 60%.

"The young students in South Norwalk have not had a neighborhood school in over 40 years, and not having a neighborhood school has been a tremendous hindrance to them," **said Mayor Harry Rilling**. "They have to wake up in the morning, get on a bus and drive all the way across town to go to school, and their neighbor may go to a different school than them. But that is all about to change. When this school is finally completed in August 2025, up to 680 students from the community, ages PreK to 5<sup>th</sup> grade, will be able to attend. This school will be the City's first new construction project under our

new state reimbursement rate of 60%, saving Norwalk taxpayers millions of dollars. I want to thank our State Delegation and State leaders for their commitment to education and partnership in making that reimbursement rate possible. The new 60% reimbursement rate from the State was made possible in large part thanks to the incredible leadership of Senator Duff."

"Today's groundbreaking and the construction of a new neighborhood school for South Norwalk students – it's first in 40 years – will ensure our state's most precious resources, our students, can learn and grow right in their own neighborhood," **said Lt. Governor Susan Bysiewicz.** "This project will remove obstacles that parents and students were forced to face by having to enroll in various schools outside of their neighborhood and throughout the city. When we invest in the wellbeing of our students, teachers, and schools, the returns on our investment will be seen for generations to come."

"As we break ground on the first new South Norwalk neighborhood school in over 40 years, we mark a significant milestone in Norwalk's educational landscape," **said Senator Bob Duff.** "This school, a cornerstone of our 25-year plan for Norwalk schools, signifies a renewed commitment to providing quality education to our community. With the support of a 60% reimbursement rate from the state of Connecticut, we are also able to build this school at a significant savings for local taxpayers. I extend my deepest gratitude to the passionate members of our local community who tirelessly advocated for the realization of this school. Your dedication and partnership with officials have been instrumental in making this vision a reality. I am thrilled South Norwalk will have a neighborhood school to locally access an exceptional education and a bright future."

"The opening of the new South Norwalk School represents a wonderful opportunity for Norwalk's children and families. It's not just about bricks and mortar; it's about creating a nurturing environment where every child can thrive and reach their full potential," **Connecticut State Department of Education Deputy Commissioner Charles Hewes said.** "We all know the importance of education in shaping the future. By investing in this new school, Norwalk is investing in the success and well-being of generations to come. It's a decision that speaks volumes about this city's commitment to excellence and progress."

In the late 1970s, South Norwalk lost its neighborhood school when the district closed Nathaniel Ely School on Ingalls Avenue to desegregate schools. Ever since, South Norwalk children have enrolled in various schools throughout the City outside of South Norwalk and have had to endure long bus rides to and from school. South Norwalk children have missed out on the benefits afforded to students that are generally provided by a neighborhood school and many South Norwalk parents have also been subject to limitations as a result of this condition. Based on the current minority student population in the City of Norwalk, children in South Norwalk are no longer required by law to attend schools outside of their community. This new neighborhood school will allow Norwalk Public Schools to provide all South Norwalk children, ages PreK to 5<sup>th</sup> grade, with the option to attend a brand new, first-class neighborhood school once the project is complete. The building's design will incorporate the community's feedback, fostering an inclusive and welcoming environment for students and their families and the building will have safe, effective and flexible learning spaces for students.

"In many cases, many of our families don't have private transportation to be able to visit their school sites and engage in the community in ways that others have been able to do throughout Norwalk," **said Dr. Alexandra Estrella, Superintendent of Norwalk Public Schools.** "So I want that to sit in a little bit for people here, because what's happening around us right now is going to be transformational for the families and children of Norwalk, to have a place that they can come to engage, celebrate, during the

school day, but also after school see this as a place of community convening and coming together, which is critical in any community."

"Growing up in South Norwalk, I understand the challenges of not having a neighborhood school," **said Diana Carpio, Board of Education Chair**. "I am thankful for all the hard work that Norwalk Public Schools, the City of Norwalk, and the South Norwalk community has done to make this school a reality. It's been more than 40 years, a very long time, and I'm proud to be a part of this project and seeing us all dedicate ourselves to provide the best education possible for our children."

"We all know schools and neighborhoods create community and that's what you need," **said Darlene Young, President of the Norwalk Common Council**. "We were missing that for a very, very long time — decades."

"I think Norwalk needs to understand how much this means to the minority community, to see the commitment of a city that cares about the people of the city, that they would invest into a school in the community that our students can be able to have less time traveling and more time being educated," **said the Rev. Roosevelt Ewell, Senior Pastor of Canaan Institutional Baptist Church of Norwalk**. "This project, this movement, have come about from the hard labor of so many in the minority community."

"If there was a school in my neighborhood, I could have walked home from school," **said Lincoln Almonte Martinez, 5th grader at Marvin Elementary School and South Norwalk resident**. "Instead, I have spent 40 minutes each day for six years straight riding the bus, and while I like riding the bus because it gives me time to talk to my friends, it sometimes gets me in trouble. Kids growing up in South Norwalk will soon have a brand-new school in their neighborhood and they will attend with the lucky kids who live near them. They are the lucky ones."

The anticipated completion of the new school is scheduled for late summer 2025 and will be ready to welcome students for the 2025-26 school year. You can learn more about the South Norwalk construction project [here](#).

During Mayor Rilling's administration, the City has prioritized the first major school construction projects in decades. In 2023, the City of Norwalk welcomed students to a brand-new, state-of-the-art Cranbury Elementary School, the City's first new school in over 50 years. Last week, the City and NPS broke ground on the new Norwalk High School and the Norwalk P-TECH building. In 2022, the City and NPS welcomed students to the completely renovated Jefferson Marine Science Elementary School. In 2020, they welcomed students to a newly renovated Ponus Ridge School campus, which included renovating an existing middle school and the construction of an elementary school.

You can find the video recording from today's groundbreaking ceremony [here](#).

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