



**Board Report**  
**September 20, 2024**



# BOARD UPDATE

From the desk of Dr. Alexandra Estrella, Superintendent  
*September 20, 2024*

## EXCELLENCE, EQUITY & INCLUSION

### Communications



**Hispanic Heritage Festival**  
Thursday, Oct. 24 from 5:45 to 8 p.m.  
Brien McMahon High School

Norwalk Public Schools wishes to invite you to our third annual Hispanic Heritage Festival on Thursday, Oct. 24 from 5:45 to 8 p.m. at Brien McMahon High School.

Inspired by the national theme, “Pioneers of Change: Shaping the Future Together,” experience captivating performances that bring to life the stories of Hispanic pioneers who shaped America’s future. Enjoy student performances showcasing dance, music, visual art, theater, and spoken word, all highlighting the vibrant spirit of Hispanic heritage and culture.

There will also be student presentations, a live DJ and traditional cuisine.  
[Access the event invitation here.](#)

### Quick Links

- [City of Norwalk Announces \\$20,000 Youth Mental Health Gap Analysis](#)
- [NHS AP Biology Creates Lantern Fly Traps](#)
- [NPS Celebrates Hispanic Heritage Month](#)
- [NPS Celebrates National Arts in Education Week](#)
- [4 High School Seniors Named National Merit Scholarship Semifinalists](#)

## FY 2025-26 Budget Public Hearing

The City of Norwalk is hosting a hybrid Budget Public Hearing ahead of the development of the Fiscal Year 2025-2026 Operating and Capital Budgets on Monday, Sept. 23 at 6 p.m. in the Common Council Chambers at Norwalk City Hall and virtually via Zoom.

ZOOM LINK: <https://norwalkct-org.zoom.us/j/85458234294>

Representatives from Norwalk Public Schools will be participating on the panel to hear ideas and comments from members of the public about next year's budget. The panel will also include city officials who play a role in the development of the city's Operating and Capital Budgets.

[Click here for more information.](#)

## NPS Teacher of the Year



Last week, we celebrated our 2024 Teacher of the Year Nicole Jean with a school visit surprise and a lovely recognition at the Board of Education meeting. Jean is the band director at West Rocks Middle School and represented the middle school as its 2024 Excellence in Education recipient.

[Click here to watch Dr. Estrella's surprise visit.](#)  
[Read more about this year's Teacher of the Year honoree.](#)

## Vision Zero Recognition



The City of Norwalk was recently recognized for its commitment to Vision Zero practices in collaboration with Norwalk Public Schools to plan, develop and implement projects and activities that will improve safety, reduce traffic, and positively impact fuel consumption and air pollution around schools.

Shout out to Johanna Zanvettor and Jill Kress with NPS Wellness Committee, has collaborated with the City of Norwalk's TMP Department on a few projects to keep everyone safe on and near roads.

- Working with TMP and the CT DOT Safe Routes to School Office to conduct walk audits at several elementary schools which help the responsible agencies facilitate planning for improvements to ensure students are able to travel to school (walking, riding or rolling) using accessible pedestrian walkways with proper safety mechanisms in place.
- Working with these organizations and the city's Bike/Walk Commission to plan the Open Streets Festival at Calf Pasture. The first festival was held in May and along with supporting Safe Routes to School initiatives, NPS representatives volunteered to assist with bicycle and pedestrian safety, a helmet giveaway and free fittings.
- Encouraging schools to participate in the national Walk, Bike & Ride to school event in October.

[Click here to learn more.](#)

### Estrella Panelist at DC Conference



Earlier this week, Dr. Estrella participated in a panel discussion about the Ecologies of Learning at the 2024 IES Research and Development Centers Conference on Improving Instruction, Assessment, and Policies for Secondary English Learners across the Content Areas in Washington D.C.

Hosted by Dr. Aída Walqui and Dr. David Francis, the conference invited educators from across the nation to seek out research-based findings, tools, processes, and practices working to deliver quality opportunities for English Learners to succeed and realize their potential.

### In Case You Missed It



[Cavalcade of Sound \(VIDEO\)](#) - Check out the first video produced by the new NPS Communications intern Matthew Damian.

[NPS Shorts \(VIDEOS\)](#) - Be sure to watch more of our NPS Shorts (VIDEOS). You'll never miss one if you follow us on Instagram @norwalkschoolsct

- [Surprise! WRMS's Nicole Jean is the 2024 NPS Teacher of the Year](#)

### Important Dates

**Monday, Sept. 23** - Staff Professional Development (2-Hour Early Release)

**Thursday, Oct. 3** - Rosh Hashanah (No School; Central Office Closed)

**Monday, Oct. 14** - Indigenous Peoples/Italian Heritage Day (No School; Central Office Closed)

**Tuesday, Oct. 15** - Staff Professional Development (No School)

### Upcoming Events

#### **Norwalk Fire, Public Works & Police Touch-a-Truck & Open House**

**Saturday, Sept. 28 from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.**

**Norwalk Public Works Center, 15 South Smith St. in Norwalk**

The Norwalk Fire, Police and Public Works departments (and more) will host its annual Touch-a-Truck & Open House event at the Public Works Center. This is a great opportunity for attendees of all ages to learn about city services (including emergency preparedness).

The event will include hands-on activities and demonstrations, opportunities to meet firefighters, police officers, public works employees and other city staff, and collect some great giveaways. Visitors can also take a tour of the wastewater treatment plant.

Please bring non-perishable food items to donate to the Open Door Shelter in Norwalk.

For more information, call 203-854-3200 or email [customerservice@norwalkct.gov](mailto:customerservice@norwalkct.gov)

#### **Middle School Showcase**

**Wednesday, Oct. 9 from 6 to 8 p.m.**

**Ponus Ridge STEAM Academy, 21 Hunters Lane in Norwalk**

The third annual Middle School Showcase will be held on Wednesday, Oct. 9 from 6 to 8 p.m. at Ponus Ridge STEAM Academy.

Each of our five middle schools will have booths set up in the gymnasium to share their amazing programs, and representatives from each school will be available to speak with our current fifth graders and their families. Other NPS departments and community partners will also have booths set up to speak about their services.

### **Testing & Accountability**

Annual NWEA platform updates are complete and the fall NWEA testing window opened on Tuesday, September 17. Students in grades 1-10 will take math and students in grades 3-10 will take reading. In addition to NWEA portal, a set of district and school level reports will be prepared for major subgroups. The growth of students with matched scores, fall 2023 and fall 2024, will be measured.

# PSAT:

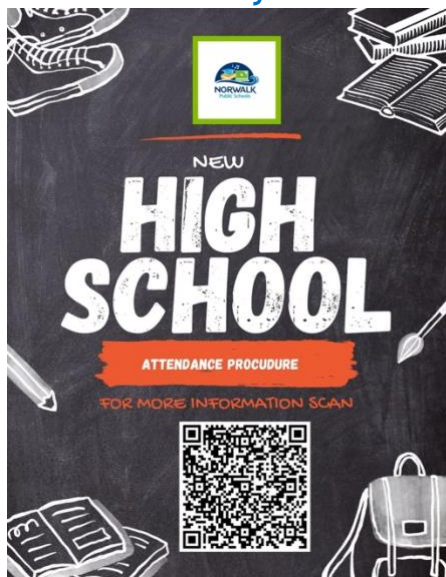


Middle and High school Test Coordinators are being supported in preparation for fall PSAT which will be administrated on October 1 to students in grades 8 and 9 and on October 2 to students in grades 10 and 11. This is the second year that College Board PSAT testing is digital.

## School Quality Review (SQR)

Nine of the 13 schools receiving a School Quality Review this year will attend the School Quality Review Training Institute. This all-day training will provide a refresher course for these school teams because their last SQR was in 2022-2023. The school teams include principals, assistant principals, coaches, teachers, and an NFT Union Steward. Members of the Curriculum and Instruction team have been trained to facilitate the school team tables. The first SQR will be at West Rocks Middle School in October 2024.

## Research & Analytics



The district's efforts to reduce chronic absenteeism across schools and grades have been a focus. In addition to presenting the work of the District Attendance team to the Board, a [new attendance procedure](#) has been put into place where high school students who are chronically absent may receive an Incomplete for Attendance (IA), instead of a passing course grade. Families have been informed of the new procedure through ParentSquare.



**LEAP**  
Learner Engagement & Attendance Program

**CSDE welcomes 12 new districts to the LEAP home visit program!**

- ★ ACES
- ★ Bristol
- ★ CTECS
- ★ Enfield
- ★ Hamden
- ★ Middletown
- ★ Naugatuck
- ★ Norwalk
- ★ Norwich Free Academy
- ★ Stratford
- ★ Wallingford
- ★ West Haven

[ct.gov/LEAP](http://ct.gov/LEAP)

The Learner Engagement and Attendance Program (LEAP) has also been launched. Through a grant from Connecticut, Norwalk has hired three LEAP representatives who will be focused on reducing chronic absenteeism at Brien McMahon, Norwalk High and South Norwalk Neighborhood school.

## CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION & SPECIALIZED LEARNING

### Humanities

For the week of September 9th, members of the Curriculum & Instruction team visited schools in partnership with members of the MLL team. These visits offer support to schools in the curriculum area. Schools have begun to ask for instructional support for selected members of the school community.

For the week of September 16th, the Humanities Department provided 3 days of inquiry training for the middle school social studies teachers. SS teachers engaged in an inquiry that was packed with turnkey instructional strategies. Members also support the Director of School Quality during the SQR training as table facilitators.



### Mathematics/STEM

The last two weeks have been very busy for the department. We are preparing professional learning for October 15 and trying to arrange learning for math, science, physical education, and health teachers throughout the district for elementary through high school. Additionally, we have been holding beginning of the year meetings with math and STEM coaches to identify areas of cohesion and analyze areas for highest leverage professional learning and opportunities for growth. We have been working to ensure alignment with school improvement plans and planning for the first coaches meeting of the year.

## Multilingual Learners

The MLL Department has met with 18 schools (three pending for 9/27 & 9/30) to review available MLL Support and Data to schools. The Family Center will be offering beginner Spanish classes for adults starting in October and will meet weekly until December. The Dual Language PLCs will start in October and will be held bi-weekly at the Family Center on the first and third Tuesday of the month.

## Specialized Learning

We held our first New Special Education Staff Academy on 9/17. Staff were introduced to CT SEDS and the policies and procedures manual for NPS Specialized Learning. We held 2 half day sessions to accommodate staff and school schedules. The Department will be holding an event for parents/guardians at the Family Center on Thursday, September 26, 2024, from 5:00 pm-6:00 pm. We will review the PPT and referral process.



## LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

### Building Leadership Capacity

On September 24th and 25th, we will kick off our monthly professional learning series for principals, assistant principals and coaches. Leaders will deepen their learning around critical thinking which directly aligns to the NPS Portrait of a Graduate. Our partner, Paul Forbes, will continue the “Hearts and Mind” work that began during the summer leadership retreat with our leaders to support them with leading the equity initiatives in their schools.

### Educator Goal Setting Meetings

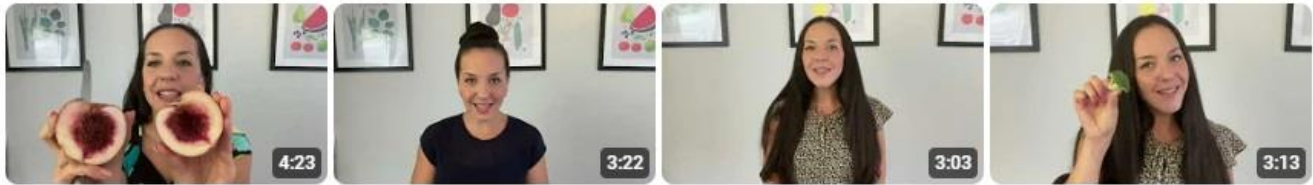
Now that principals have completed their own goal setting process, they will begin conducting goal setting meetings with their staff. All goal setting meetings will be completed by October 15th.



## BUSINESS & OPERATIONS

### Food Services

#### Videos



Learning & Tasting: Peaches    Learning & Tasting: Cherry Tomatoes    Learning & Tasting: Pears    Learning & Tasting: Broccoli

Our Fresh Fruit and Vegetable program is off to a great start. Basket Delivery to the classrooms has gone well. [A shared drive](#) was created for all ten school principals to share with their classroom teachers to make it easy for a brief learning and tasting for our students.

Wellness meetings will begin again in October! Believe it or not a new Triennial Assessment is due by June 2025.

We are happy to mention we have made great strides in improving Wellness in the district since our [last assessment in June 2022](#).

Among those improvements were an updated Wellness Policy, Nutrition Education, Local Purchasing staff training and district-wide events such as our Safe Streets event this past spring and safe rides to school. You can view our [progress here](#).

### Facilities

Progress has been made towards achieving better cooling at Tracey Elementary School. In our efforts to install temporary air conditioning and a service upgrade, a bid walkthrough was conducted to hire an Electrical and Mechanical Engineer. Once bids are received, a firm will be awarded the design, which is the first step in the process.



Also at Tracey, Jim Travers with the City's Transportation, Mobility and Parking department hosted a ribbon cutting for the new pick-up and drop-off loop at the school. The community feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, not only has student drop-off and pick-up improved tremendously, but there has been marked improvement in the neighborhood traffic during these times.

At Roton Middle School, all student lockers are in the planning to be replaced next summer and the City's Purchasing Department recently placed this project out to bid.

An application for asbestos abatement was sent to the State on September 10 for Fox Run Elementary School. Once a response is received, the plan is to follow the State reimbursement process and anticipate this project will take place during the summer of 2025.

## School Safety



*Thank You*

The School Safety Team continues to work closely with the Norwalk Police Department since Tuesday night when the district was alerted to a possible school threat. It was quickly determined that the same threat was linked to multiple districts across Connecticut and the United States. School and NPD officials continue to investigate and follow up on all threats and reports that were made aware of to ensure the safety and security of our students and staff.

## Transportation



NPS Wellness Chair, Jill Kress and NPS Transportation Administrator, Johanna Zanvettor attended the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual CT DOT Vision Zero Program Distinction Award, Friday, September 13 in Newington. Along with the City of Norwalk Transportation Mobility & Parking Director, Jim Travers and Assistant Director, Garrett Bollela, they were honored for the work completed in Norwalk through the CT DOT Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program. This work included walk audits at Fox Run ES and Cranbury ES during the 23/24 school year and collaboration and participation in planning the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Norwalk Open Streets Festival held this spring at Calf Pasture Beach. This school year they will work with schools to help implement SRTS education, which includes bike and helmet safety and pedestrian safety. In addition to assisting with several school events and a city-wide event in the spring.

[Vision Zero Fox Run](#)

[Vision Zero Cranbury](#)

[Vision Zero Open Streets](#)

## Health Services

On September 18 School Health Services participated in the Norwalk Community Health Center Community Advisory Board and welcomed a student youth member to the group. Progress, workflow, outcomes, and ideas were discussed. Students who attend BMHS, Ponus, and CMS may consent to School-Based Health Center services with NCHC [here in English](#) or [here in Spanish](#).

Expiring emergency medications have been replaced in all school nurse offices as inventory is closely maintained.



Workshops for nurse's professional days are being confirmed and include OSHA bloodborne pathogens training and seizure training with the [epilepsy foundation](#).

Mandated vision and hearing screenings are well underway throughout the district.

## Grants

Title I meetings have been taking place with elementary and middle school leadership to go through site allocations before we submit our application to the CSDE in October. Our Bilingual and Title III grants have been submitted to the State to support our MLL students. In addition to working on Title I, some of our upcoming projects include the Title II and Title IV grant applications, as well as competitive federal applications that support the arts, sustainable school-based food sourcing, and school safety and security.

## DIGITAL LEARNING & TECHNOLOGY

### Enterprise Software/Data

We continue to provide daily support for all staff and students. Departmentalization changes are being added to all respective grade-level applications and platforms. We use PowerSchool-integrated data to modify enrollments on our applications. Most processes are automated, but a few require manual changes.

We are collaborating with the Norwalk Health Department and Nursing department leaders to streamline data processes using the SNAP platform for State BMI findings. Small successes were achieved, and we hope for more in the future.

### Infrastructure/Operations

This weekend, we plan to upgrade the Wi-Fi access points at Nathan Hale Middle School, which has the oldest APs in the District. Brookside, Roton, Naramake, and Marvin are scheduled for AP upgrades later this year.

### Digital Learning

We are excited to announce that our Digital Learning Coach (DLC) from Ponus will be the new mentor for our DLCs through the VILS program. They are heading to Miami at the end of October for coach training. Our Elementary coaches have been supporting all elementary schools with updating and rolling out iPads for their students. We have established a meeting cadence and will meet with technicians once a month starting the first week of October.

## Author Visits

High school librarians Janet Caiola and Beverly Boyd will be hosting author visits courtesy of the Westport Storyfest. Featured authors include Don P. Hooper, a writer and filmmaker of Jamaican heritage; award-winning author Jennifer Baker, who is also an editor, writing instructor, and creator of the Minorities in Publishing Podcast; and Ryan LaSala, a wonderful author who writes about surreal experiences of queer people. The students will enjoy this diverse multicultural selection!

## FINANCE

The Finance Department is currently finalizing the year-end close for the 2023-24 fiscal year. The carryover schedule for 2023-24 has been prepared for Board of Education (BOE) approval. Once approved, it will be submitted to the Board of Estimate and Taxation (BET). This schedule includes remaining encumbrances due to factors such as supply chain delays and a free balance of \$60,000 to be carried over, which is much lower than in previous years.

In accordance with Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-248a, the school district may deposit unexpended funds from the prior school year into a non-lapsing account. This is contingent upon the deposited amount not exceeding two percent of the total budgeted appropriation for education. Expenditure from this account must be used solely for educational purposes and require authorization from the local BOE.

The Finance Department continues to support external auditors with the necessary information for the 2023-24 year-end financial audit. This includes providing documentation related to the Educational Financial System (EFS) state reporting, deferred revenue schedules, and supporting materials for audit selections concerning special education and payroll.

The team is also finalizing the FY 2024-25 approved operating and capital budget book, which serves as the primary document for presenting the district's financial plan and operational results. Its main purpose is to provide valuable financial information that aids in decision-making to best support our students and district goals.

Additionally, the budget process for 2025-26 has begun. Initial discussions between the BOE and the City aim to align budget expectations early in the process. A public hearing is scheduled for Monday, September 23rd, to discuss key topics of interest to the community as we build next year's budget. Internal processes are also underway, including verifying personnel rosters, reviewing budget drivers, assessing contracts, and creating budget templates for departmental use in preparing their individual budgets.

## HUMAN RESOURCES

### HR Information Systems

HRIS and Benefits collaborated seamlessly to successfully complete the benefits enrollment for the 2024-2025 school year, ensuring timely and accurate processing for all employees.

HRIS worked closely with the Leadership Development team to implement and roll out the new Educator and Leader Support Evaluation Plan, enhancing support and evaluation processes across the district.