



**Board Report**  
**October 18, 2024**



# BOARD UPDATE

From the desk of Dr. Alexandra Estrella, Superintendent

*October 18, 2024*

## EXCELLENCE, EQUITY & INCLUSION

### Communications

#### Quick Links

- [NPS Recognizes Bully Prevention Month 2024](#)
- [NPS Recognizes ADHD Awareness Month 2024](#)
- [NPS Celebrates CT Grown for CT Kids Week at Tracey Magnet School](#)
- [City of Norwalk & NPS Celebrate Steel Topping-Off Ceremony for South Norwalk Elementary School](#)
- [NHS Earns Michaels Jewelers Achievement Award](#)

#### Norwalk BOE Town Hall: FY 2025-26 Budget



The Norwalk Board of Education hosted its first Town Hall focusing on the FY 2025-26 BOE Operating and Capital Budgets on Oct. 10. Ten tables full of BOE and Common Council members, school administrators, parents, and other community members brainstormed a budget wish list then whittled it down to a few top priorities.

The board will be offering additional opportunities for the community to engage in early budget development. Please look forward to upcoming dates.

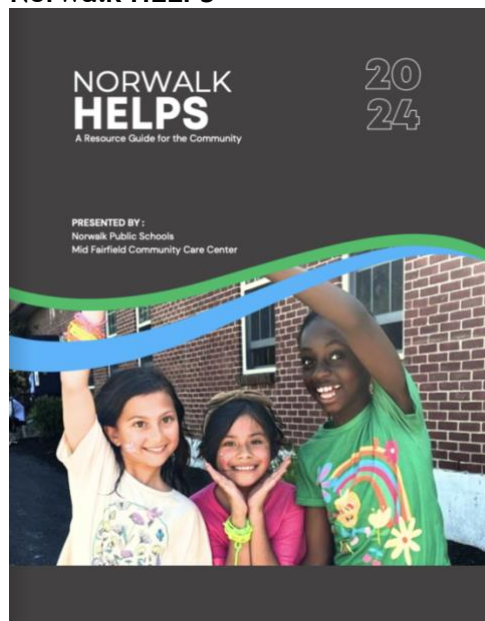
## State of the Schools 2024



Be sure to check out the latest edition of the NPS State of the Schools, highlighting Game Changers in our district -- students who push the boundaries, challenge the status quo, and believe in the power of possibility.

The latest edition also features our new Portrait of a Graduate initiative and many more exciting things happening across Norwalk Public Schools. [Click here to read!](#)

## Norwalk HELPS



Check out the new [Norwalk HELPS Resource Guide](#), providing general guidance and a better understanding of mental health and community supports and services available to students, families, and educators in Norwalk Public Schools. The information contained in this guide is not exhaustive, but the hope is that it will serve as a useful tool for parents and guardians who may have concerns about the mental health and wellness of their child(ren).

None of the information in this guide should be construed as medical or psychiatric advice nor is it intended as a substitute for a trained mental health professional. The intention is to alleviate confusion, reduce misunderstanding, and provide clear and simple answers to frequent questions about the available mental health resources and supports in our community.

### Hispanic Heritage Festival Reminder



Don't forget to attend the Hispanic Heritage Festival next week on Thursday, Oct. 24 from 5:25 to 8 p.m. at Brien McMahon High School.

This year's festival will celebrate "Pioneers of Change: Shaping the Future Together," highlighting influential Hispanic figures whose contributions have shaped our world. Join us to enjoy incredible performances, delicious food and lots of fun!

### Middle School Choice



We hosted the third annual Middle School Showcase on Oct. 9. Over 400 people attended to learn more about our five different middle schools and their excellent programs, getting the opportunity to speak with school administrators and program leaders.

[Click here to see everyone who attended!](#)

The Middle School Choice Lottery is currently open. It will close on Dec. 6, and the lottery drawing will take place on Dec. 16. If families missed the showcase, they will have another opportunity to meet with the schools at individual school open houses taking place before Nov. 15.

Mark your calendars! The High School Showcase will be held on **Wednesday, Dec. 4** from 6 to 8 p.m. at Brien McMahon High School.

## More Awards!

Norwalk Public Schools has won 11 Bonnie B. Carney Awards of Excellence for Educational Communications from the CT Association of Boards of Education (CABE). These awards, in addition to the 9 National NSPRA awards won earlier this year, are a testament to the power of collaboration between NPS Communications, Dr. Estrella, her administration, school leaders and everyone in our school community.

NPS Communications received recognition in the following categories:

### Social Media

- Women's History Month campaign
- Why I Teach campaign
- Long-Tenured Teacher Celebrations

### Annual Report

- NPS State of the Schools 2023

### Computer Generated Project

- 21 Strong
- Hola Familia

### Course Selection Guide

- Norwalk Public Schools Choice - Course Selection Guide

### Websites

- Family Center Website

### District Budget

- Budget in Brief

### Special Project

- First Book 2024 Campaign

### Special Project (AV)

- Inside NPS

### In Case You Missed It

#### ¡Hola Familia! (VIDEO)

Check out the latest episode of “Hola Familia,” our award-winning Spanish-speaking news show!





### What Does P.R.I.N.T. Mean to You? (VIDEOS)

Hear from Tracey Cubs and their teachers about their favorite P.R.I.N.T. values!



### **NPS Family Center - Spanish Conversation Classes**



One of the most popular learning opportunities hosted by the Family Center this year has been the Spanish Conversation Classes. So many in our community want to learn to speak Spanish so they can better communicate with students, parents and neighbors.

**NPS Shorts (VIDEOS)** - Be sure to watch more of our NPS Shorts (VIDEOS). You'll never miss one if you follow us on Instagram @norwalkschoolsc

- City of Norwalk & Norwalk Public Schools Celebrate South Norwalk School Steel Topping-Off Ceremony (VIDEO)
- NPS Celebrates CT Grown for CT Kids Week at Tracey Magnet School (VIDEO)

## **Important Dates**

**Tuesday, Nov. 5** - Election Day/Staff Professional Development (No School); Central Office Retreat (at Pinstripes)

**Monday, Nov. 11** - Veterans Day (No School/Central Office Closed)

**Thursday, Nov. 14 & 21** - K-5 Conferences (2-Hour Early Dismissal)

**Wednesday, Nov. 27** - Thanksgiving Break (2-Hour Early Dismissal)

**Thursday, Nov. 28 & 29** - Thanksgiving Break (No School/Central Office Closed)

## **Upcoming Events**

### **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 to take away.

### **Halloween Nightfair**

**Saturday, Oct. 26 from 2-10 p.m.**

**50 Washington St. in Norwalk**

Norwalk will transform Washington Street into a Halloween extravaganza for its annual Halloween Nightfair on Saturday, Oct. 26 from 2 to 10 p.m. at 50 Washington St.

Families are invited to enjoy Halloween-themed activities including pumpkin painting, bounce houses, games, a Trick or Treat trail, and the chance to meet the Sanderson Sisters from Disney's “Hocus Pocus” and more!

Click here for more information: [www.halloweennightfair.com](http://www.halloweennightfair.com)

### **All City String Festival**

**Wednesday, Oct. 30 at 7:30 p.m.**

**Norwalk Concert Hall, 125 East Ave. in Norwalk**

Did you know that the All-City String Festival has occurred every year in Norwalk Public Schools since 1980? That's a lot of incredible performances!

We can't wait to celebrate this year's festival on Wednesday, Oct. 30 at 7:30 p.m. at the Norwalk Concert Hall. Admission is FREE! The festival will feature string students from across the district including the 5th grade orchestra, the middle school orchestras and the high school orchestras.

### **Spooktacular Drive-by Event**

**Thursday, Oct. 31 from 3 to 5 p.m.**

**NPS Family Center, 1 Park St. in Norwalk**

Please join the Family Center for their Spooktacular Drive-by Event! You won't want to miss an evening of music, free Spooktastic goody bags, and lots of fun!

This family-friendly event is for all scholars! Vehicles will drive around the Family Center, stopping in the driveway to grab a goody bag from Family Center staff. Don't forget to wear your costumes!

### Testing and Accountability

On Oct. 1 students in grades 8 and 9 took the College Board PSAT 8/9. On Oct. 2 students in grades 10 and 11 took PSAT/NMSQT. The purpose of the PSAT is to measure each student's college and career readiness and determine which knowledge areas and skills need more work. The College Board does not send PSAT scores to colleges. These scores are not intended to be part of college admission decisions. The PSAT/NMSQT is the qualifying test for the National Merit Scholarship Program, an academic competition for recognition and scholarships.

Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) fall testing window closed on Oct. 8. Over 3000 students in grades K-3 participated. The purpose of DIBELS is to help teachers and schools assess reading skills and identify students who may need additional support. Across grades the percent student meeting the fall benchmark is showing an upward trend: fall 2022- 50%, fall 2023- 53% and fall 2024- 55%.

### School Quality Review (SQR)

There will be 13 schools receiving a School Quality Review for 2024-25. The schools have all attended training. This week is the first School Quality Review at West Rocks Middle School on Wednesday-Thursday, Oct. 16-17, 2024. This is their second SQR and their first was in 2022-23.

### Research and Analytics

Data dashboards have incorporated beginning of year NWEA, DIBELS, and DESSA data into one place, formatted based on Principal's requests. Work continues refining discipline data dashboards to support the operations department in reducing behavioral incidents and increasing equity.

The team has begun a new practice this year of sending schools emails containing newly available data sets for their review. Rather than only communicating that data is available, which was the practice in prior years, school-specific emails are now being sent. So far two data sets have been sent. One focused on an update to a visualization that allows schools to see how student performance on NWEA changed from the end of the 2023-24 school year to the beginning of the 2024-25 school year. The other focused on student performance, by standard, from the first ELA checkpoint of the year.

### Student Information System



Middle School Lottery has been opened to families. The application will be open until December 6, 2024. The lottery drawing is anticipated to run on Dec. 16, 2024 and results will go out to families within a week of the lottery drawing.



## CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION & SPECIALIZED LEARNING

### Humanities

The past two weeks have been a flurry of support for schools. In conjunction with the Multilingual Learning Department, we are working with Silvermine on alignment of Spanish Language Arts and English Language Arts units of study. In addition, social studies support in middle schools has begun as students are approaching the new inquiry part of the unit. The team supported District Walkthroughs at 7 schools collecting data on planning and instruction. Finally, Oct. 15 was a day of learning for teachers. We provided professional learning in the areas of discourse, social studies planning and resources, Heggerty, the new revised music and art curricula, and world language.



### Math/Stem

Last week, the department supported CGS and the leadership development team as they implemented a new system for benchmark assessments. The STEM department supported with analyzing test questions, norming on grading, and reflections for further work.

The STEM department offered multiple professional learning sessions on Oct. 15, with support from professional learning partners and additional stakeholders in the district and community. Elementary sessions included marine science with the Maritime and the Marine Science Coordinator, Science 4 Us and Gizmos from Explore Learning, Inner Orbit, Physical Education PD, Building Thinking Classrooms for Mathematics, and optional secondary sessions including Physical Education, Physics and Open Sci Ed, IXL, and Gizmos.



Next week, professional learning will continue for science for grades 6, 7, and 8 teachers who are implementing their first year of Open Sci Ed. This is a second training session, with the first being delivered last June. The STEM department has also been supporting coaches with 1:1 meetings focused around building their practices and embedded coaching and support with an observation of practice.

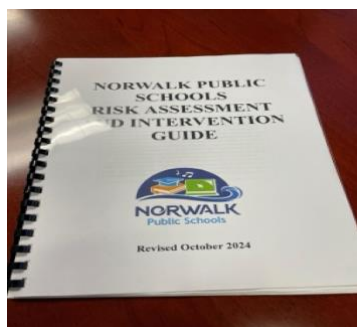
### Multilingual Learners

On Thursday, Oct. 10, Dr. Estrella, Ralph Valensizi, and Frances Saez had the opportunity to present at the Connecticut Performance Matters Conference in Hartford, CT. Ms. Saez presented information on the Multilingual Learner Accelerated Summer program as an innovative program to support our students in attaining credits needed for graduation.

The Multilingual Learner department held a professional learning opportunity at the Family Center for elementary MLL teachers on Tuesday, October 15th. Our elementary MLL teachers engaged in professional development with HD Word, a resource to support students with reading skills and development. A guest teacher joined us from Fox Run elementary school to model different lessons and resources. Additionally, we continued professional learning on how to utilize LAS Links data to inform instructional practices that support Multilingual Learners in the classroom.

### Counseling/Workforce Development

Norwalk Public Schools had the privilege of presenting at the CT Performance Matters Conference in Hartford on the Behavior Health Grant and the SHAPE Assessment. Carol Wiltshire-Toth was able to attend the CT State Tuesday Talks Zoom meeting all about statewide attendance and the NACEP Early College Summit in which they explored dual enrollment in Higher Education. The team met with the high schools for the RISE Post Secondary Collaborative. The NPS Risk Assessment and Intervention Guide has been revised and finalized and will be released for use shortly (see picture below). The work continues on the Scholar Meeting Tracker, in which we are able to use data outcomes to provide more support to scholars and faculty/staff as we refine the information based on School Counselor feedback for Grades 8 to 12.



Workforce Development attended the Chamber of Commerce relative to expanding internship opportunities for our NPS Scholars. The CT State Norwalk partnership met to review potential courses for next year and possible funding. I met with Eversource to discuss the high school field trip to their campus for high school scholars who are 16+. I had the privilege to present at the CT performance Matters Conference in Hartford on Workforce Development and Career Readiness. The work continues on the NPS Internship Program, and the Fall application should be ready to share with our scholars sometime in October. *For all NPS Workforce Development Opportunities and more, visit [www.norwalkps.org/careertraining](http://www.norwalkps.org/careertraining). Please be sure to bookmark the site and check back regularly for new and exciting opportunities!*

## Specialized Learning

Education Administrators, Deirdre McKinnon and Veronica Lenzen, participated in the Board Workshop on Oct. 8, and presented important information regarding data and trends in the department.

Special Education Administrators, Jamie Granite and Rachel Davis, joined Deirdre McKinnon and Veronica Lenzen at the Middle School Choice Fair, held on Oct. 9. The Middle School Choice Fair was a great opportunity to share with families how special education and related services carry over to the middle school level, and we were able to share some fun swag - fidgets and squeeze toys.

Also on Oct. 9, Norwalk hosted a Transition Fair, which was organized by Transition Coordinator, Jessica Ireland, and was a partnership among Wilton, Westport, Stamford, and Norwalk. The 4 Districts were thrilled to welcome Ability Beyond, STAR, DDS, BRS, Kennedy Collective, Project Search, College Steps, Abilis, BESB, Marrakesh, Financial Advisors, CT State Continuing Education, Norwalk Transit, and several other programs and agencies!

Special Education Teachers and Related Service providers participated in Professional Learning Opportunities on Oct. 15. They had the choice to attend 2 of the following sessions:

- Artificial Intelligence Learning Lab
- PPT Best Practices
- CTSEDs Updates
- Alternative/Augmentative Communication
- Administering the Gallistal Ellis and the QRI
- Assistive Technology and Universal Design
- Sensory Strategies
- Positive Behavior Strategies
- Writing SMART Goals and Objectives
- Gestalt Language Processes

## SRBI

Improvement teachers received hands-on professional development on Monday Oct. 7. The session focused on state assessments, data analysis and a social-emotional data review. A regional state representative also came and reviewed with staff on CT-Seds Multi-Tiered Systems Support (MTSS).

Teachers supported professional development on Oct. 15 by providing sessions on phonics and phonemic awareness. This training will help staff understand and implement curriculum for struggling readers.



# LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

## Coaches' Workshop

### EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING FOR IMPROVED CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION

ENHANCE TEACHING AND LEARNING:  
RESEARCH-BASED STRATEGIES &  
INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING

#### 14 POWERFUL TEACHING STRATEGIES (THE SCIENCE OF TEACHING)



Literacy, Math, and Digital Literacy coaches were invited to attend a free webinar hosted by Jim Knight and Bryan Goodwin, where they shared a preview of their upcoming workshop - Effective Instructional Coaching for Improved Classroom Instruction. These two researchers highlighted the importance of combining research-based teaching strategies with effective instructional coaching to enhance teaching and learning in schools from a student-focused lens.

## District Wide Learning Walks



Our district wide learning walks to visit classrooms allowed us to witness the impact of our district's professional learning initiatives. Seeing students being provided with opportunities to engage in critical thinking experiences was truly inspiring. Together, we are building a stronger learning environment for all students.



## BUSINESS & OPERATIONS

### Food Services



CT Grown for CT Kids week was a huge success! Thank you to all those who participated in the event.



Here are some of the farms that were highlighted during the CT Grown for CT Kids event last week.

[Farm to School Spotlight: The Farm in Woodbury, CT](#)

[Farm to School Spotlight: Blue Hills Orchard in Wallingford, CT](#)

These videos can also be found on the NPS [School Foodservice Website](#).



Now that the cold weather is upon us, our secondary schools will be serving up warm chocolate milk at breakfast, stop by for a sip. Our secondary schools will also begin Student Choice. Students will have the chance to vote on new menu concepts and if they love it Chartwells will feature it on the menu.



Sample from previous year

**MOOD BOOST**


**Mood: CALM**

*Today's Tasting:*

**Spinach & Strawberry Salad**

**How it helps you stay CALM:**

- o Strawberries contain **vitamin C** which protects against cellular damage in the body and may reduce anxiety
- o Spinach contains **folate**, a B vitamin, which can help with stable mood



At the Elementary schools this week, Chartwells will begin their award-winning Mood Boost program. This is a great program teaching students how food connects to your mood.

Our FFVP will be serving up Peppers and Apples this week and next week, Kale and Figs.



[Learning & Tasting: Apples](#)



[Learning & Tasting: Bell Peppers](#)

The Food Service Department received a unanimous vote from the Common Council last week for the purchase of a new refrigerated truck!

## Facilities

Roton Middle School Lockers - Pricing was received for Roton Middle School locker replacement and steps are in place to award this project for the summer of 2025. Pricing was lower than expected and planning is in place to include another middle school next summer.

Tracey and Brookside Fuel Tank Replacement - A pre-construction review is in progress with the Dept. of Administrative Services to place these projects out to bid for a summer 2025 completion.

Fox Run Abatement - Ongoing discussions are taking place with the Dept. of Administrative Services to accept this project and allow NPS to bid for a summer 2025 completion.

## School Safety

The School Safety Team continues to work with the NPS Data Analysis Team to further expand and calibrate our incident and disciplinary tracking systems. The data collected helps the district and schools analyze incidents from an overview and granularly, which guide policies, procedures and programs aimed at student support and behavior modification.

## Transportation

NPS will celebrate National Bus Safety Week of Oct. 21 with several district-wide events.

Monday/Tuesday we will partner with NPD for Operation Safe Stop, they will provide patrol services at heavily trafficked bus stops in areas of Route 7, Route 1 and West Avenue. On Oct. 23, Durham will celebrate our drivers with lunch and safety awards.



On Oct. 24 and 25, schools will conduct Bus Evacuation Drills in the morning on arrival. Students will exit from the back of the bus through the emergency door, school staff will be on site to assist. During this week Fox Run, Kendall and Wolfpit will celebrate National Bike, Walk and Stroll to school events. City of Norwalk Bike/Walk Commission, Nuvance Health and Norwalk Health Department will be on site to hand out educational resources and answer safety questions.

## Health Services

A limited supply of Covid tests were received from the state and are available if needed for staff, students, and families.

School nurses attended a robust professional development day on Oct. 15 and attended presentations on bloodborne pathogens, as well as seizure care for school nurses from the [Epilepsy Foundation of Connecticut](#).

## Grants



The Grants Team is excited to share a partnership we have made between Norwalk Public Schools and the Arthur Miller Foundation (AMF). AMF works to provide equitable access to theater education in public schools and aims to increase the number of students that receive a dedicated theater education as an integral part of their academic curriculum. AMF recently held their first Professional Development workshop with eight theatre/dance teachers in Norwalk. Throughout the course of the workshop, AMF provided staff with resources such as theatre tickets for their classes to attend live performances, classroom materials, and collectively they worked towards identifying how theatre education fits within our Portrait of a Graduate. We are very excited to have AMF as a partner here in Norwalk!

## DIGITAL LEARNING & TECHNOLOGY

### Enterprise Software/Data

NWEA RIT Math scores have been successfully imported into the IXL platform. IXL's personalized MAP study plans now guide students toward the exact skills they need to develop, based on their RIT scores.

All building leaders and central office department heads now have access to ClassLink Analytics on their dashboards. These analytics provide a custom dashboard for every educational app and tool available on their LaunchPad. Engagement summaries for each app, across any time period, can be broken down by grade level, classroom, or individual students, offering deeper insights. We continue to provide daily support to all end-user issues.

### Infrastructure/Operations

The team successfully assisted with multiple setups across the District for the Oct. 15, professional development sessions. We are nearing the finalization of security training videos for staff, which we plan to launch on Nov. 5. Additionally, new access points were deployed at Marvin and Brookside.

### Digital Learning

Last week, our Elementary Digital Learning Coaches, along with our administration for Library Media Services and Digital Promise, attended the Fall AI in Education Conference hosted by EdAdvance in Litchfield, CT. We explored new tools available for educators and discussed strategies for implementing these resources within our district.

### Library Media

Our Library Media Specialists will attend the CASL Library Conference on Oct. 21. The theme of the conference is Together We Connect-icut, featuring renowned teacher-librarian and technology innovator Shannon Miller, alongside author Mike Curato. Teacher librarians Jodi Flom Nathanson from Fox Run School, Beverly Boyd from Brien McMahon, and Lynn Payton-Roby, our Coordinator, recently attended the Reimagining the Library Learning Commons in the Age of AI workshop series. They delved into the history of AI, examined trends and challenges, and explored a range of AI tools.

Librarian Grows & Glows Slide Deck: [Link](#)

## FINANCE

The Grants team completed a comprehensive review of the current grants schedule to ensure ongoing alignment with our financial goals and compliance.

Budget request forms for Central Office performance reviews were distributed to various departments, allowing them to submit their financial needs and priorities for the upcoming fiscal year. Additionally, the department successfully convened a community budget town hall, providing an opportunity for stakeholders to offer input and ask questions about the budget process. To further enhance public engagement and accessibility, we are planning a virtual community town hall to ensure broader participation in the budget planning process. We continue to collaborate closely with auditors on the citywide independent audit, maintaining transparency and accountability in our financial practices. Furthermore, the department received state grants specifically designated to offset employee medical expenses for paraeducators, helping to reduce the overall cost burden on the district.

Lastly, a preliminary meeting was held with the superintendent to begin setting budget priorities for Fiscal Year 2026, focusing on long-term financial planning and resource allocation. These efforts reflect our ongoing commitment to fiscal responsibility, community engagement, and strategic planning to support our educational mission.

## HUMAN RESOURCES

Please be on the lookout for our upcoming HR Newsletter, which will feature important updates and information.