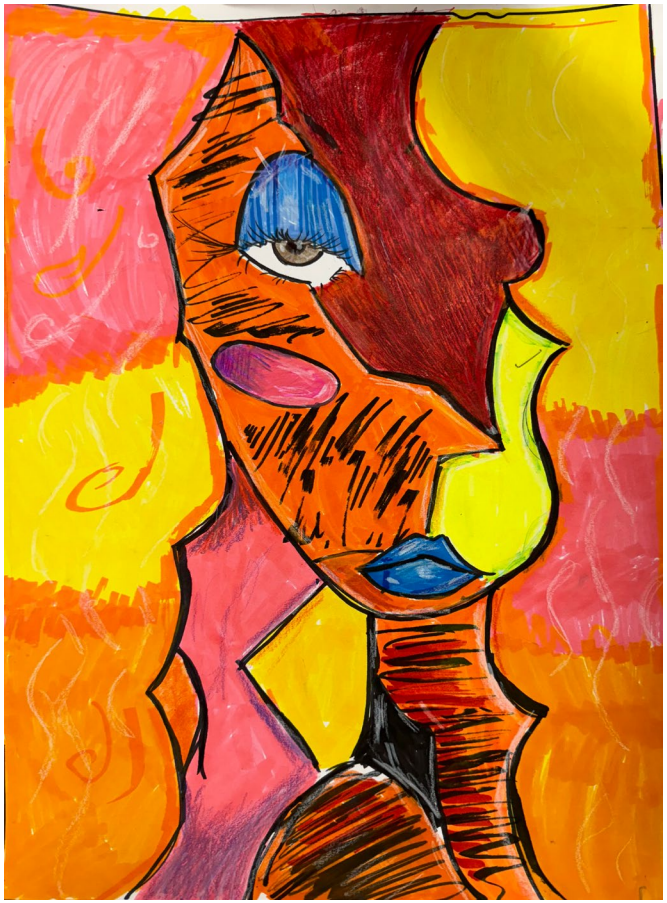
District Objectives and System Data



Markiss Lindsay, Grade 12, Anchor



Grade 3 Gubist Fish 1, Northeast



India Askew, Grade 8, Dolan

Superintendent's Budget Request
2025-26 School Year (FY26)

Dr. Tamu Lucero, Superintendent
Ryan Fealey, Chief Financial Officer

Stamford Public Schools
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Stamford Public Schools

Pre-K to Adult Education

- ➔ APPLES Preschool
- ➔ 10 Elementary Schools
- ➔ 3 K-8 Schools
- ➔ 5 Middle Schools
- ➔ 3 High Schools
- ➔ SPS Anchor
- ➔ Remote Learning Program (9-12)
- ➔ Adult & Continuing Education

2,400+ staff

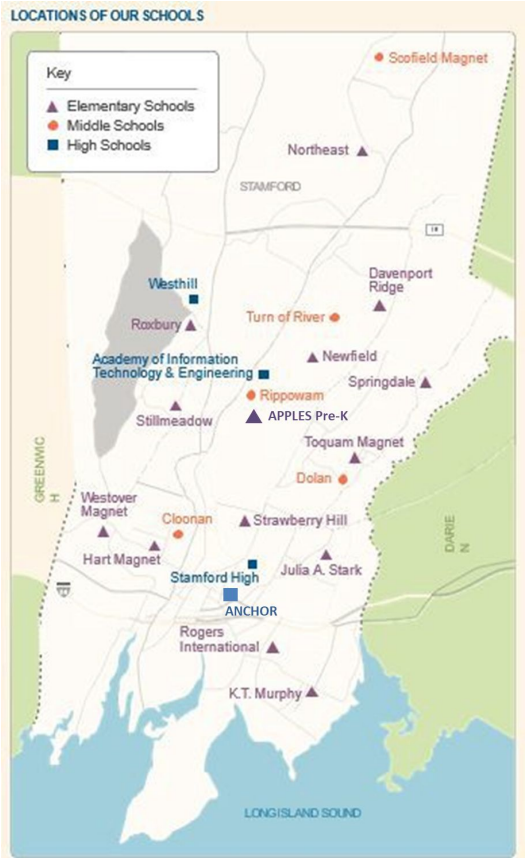
- 86% of staff work directly with students
- 97% of staff work in school buildings

16,239 students*

- 5th largest district in CT
- 19% multilingual learners
- 54% free/ reduced price lunch
- 17% students with disabilities

23 Program Sites

- 3M+ sqft of building space
- 300+ acres of property



* Enrollment data current as of October 2024.

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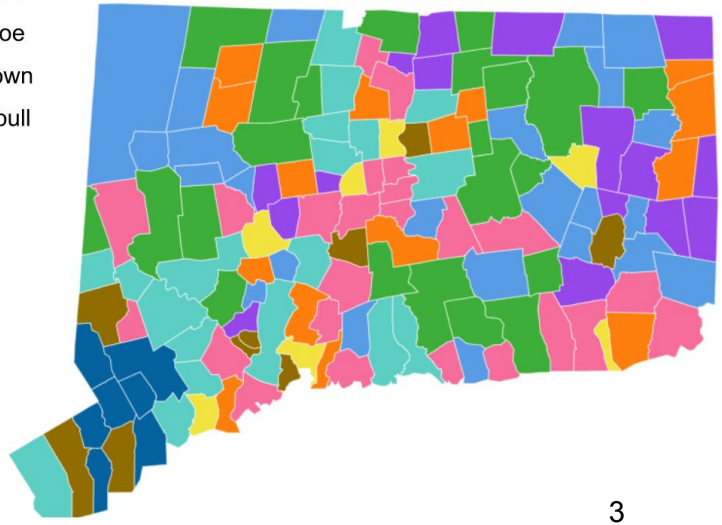
District Reference Groups

The Connecticut State Department of Education divides school districts into nine groups called District Reference Groups (DRGs) based on socio-economic status and other factors.

Fairfield County DRG Assignments

DRG A	DRG B	DRG C	DRG D	DRG E	DRG F	DRG G	DRG H	DRG I
Darien	Brookfield	New Fairfield	Bethel	NONE	NONE	Stratford	Danbury	Bridgeport
Easton	Fairfield	Sherman	Shelton				Norwalk	
New Canaan	Greenwich						Stamford	
Redding	Monroe							
Ridgefield	Newtown							
Weston	Trumbull							
Westport								
Wilton								



DRG Placement Factors

1. Household Income
2. Parental Education
3. Parental Occupation
4. Family Structure
5. Poverty
6. Home Language
7. District Enrollment

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Funding Stamford Public Schools

Operating Budget:

- Day-to-Day Operations
- Funded by City of Stamford

Grants Budget:

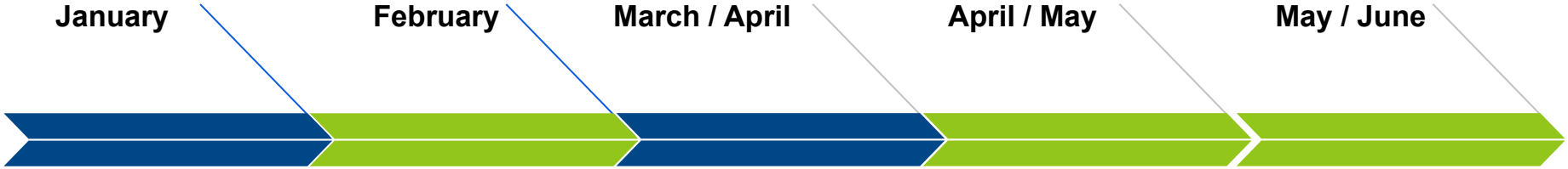
- Designated for specific programs or initiatives
- Funding from federal, state, or private sources

Operating Budget
+
Grants Budget
=
Total SPS Budget

Capital Budget:

- Major investments/projects, including Long-Term Facilities Plan
  - New Westhill High School, Roxbury K-8 School, and South K-8 School are capital projects
- Funding from City of Stamford and State grants
  - State expected to reimburse majority of construction costs of the new Westhill High School, the new Roxbury K-8 School, and the two-campus South K-8 School

Budget Timeline



Central Office

Presents proposed budget to the BOE

Board of Education

Can increase, decrease, or approve Superintendent's budget as submitted

Board of Finance

Can decrease or approve the budget as submitted by BOE

Board of Representatives

Can decrease or approve the budget as submitted by BOF

Board of Education

Reallocates operating budget based on $$$ approved by BOR

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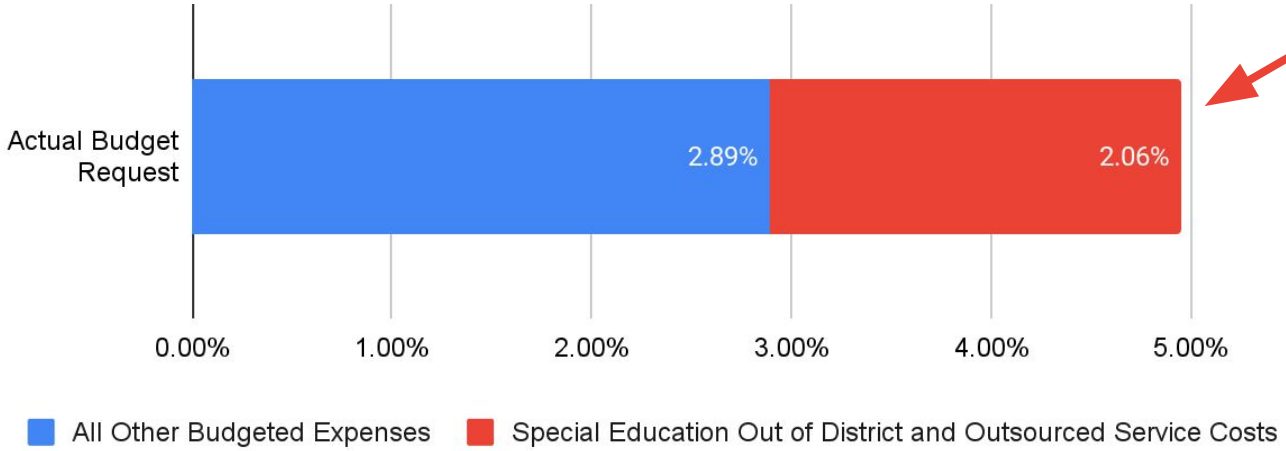
FY26 Budget Request: Target vs. Actual

After moving beyond the “Fiscal Cliff” with an approved FY25 operating budget increase of 5.48%, SPS was determined to submit a status quo budget request for FY26. The target increase was 3%.

10-Year Average:

- SPS Annual Budget Increase: 2.99%
- Annual Increase in CPI-U: 2.91%

Even after cutting $5.1m from other areas in the draft budget, external special education costs still drove the increase beyond the target.



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2025-26 *Operating* Budget Request

2024-25 Operating Budget	$330,737,756
2025-26 Operating Budget	$347,108,125
Change	**4.95%**

2025-26 *Total* Budget (Operating + Grants)

2024-25 Total Budget	$386,249,250
2025-26 Total Budget	$396,657,520
Change	**2.69%**

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FY26 Budget: Reductions & Reallocations

SPS reduced the original draft FY26 budget by $5.1 million with cuts to:

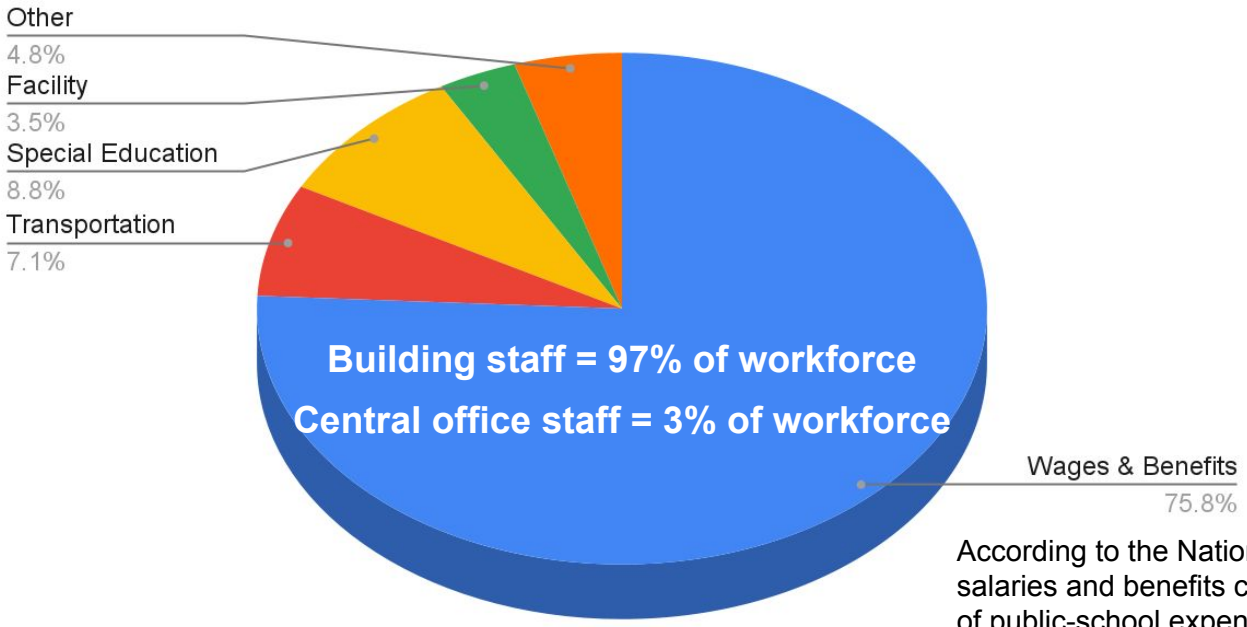
- School Lunch Program*
- Summer School
- Positions per Master Staffing Plan
- DOMUS Family Advocates
- Security Hardware Costs
- Facilities Repair/Maintenance
- Additional Repair Costs to Building Use Fund
- Healthcare Reserve (to Offset Health Care Premium Increase)
- Special Education Reserve (to Offset Out of District Tuition Costs)

*Does NOT impact free and reduced-price lunch program for qualifying students.

SPS Budget Request in Context

District	Requested Increase	DRG	Financial Pressures Driving Requested Increase
Norwalk	9.70%	H	Cites Out of District tuition, transportation, utility costs as drivers
Fairfield	6.40%	B	Cites Special Education costs, union contracts, transportation, utility costs as drivers
Greenwich	5.40%	B	Cites Special Education costs, union contracts, transportation, reduction in grant funds as drivers
Stamford	4.95%	H	
Westport	4.69%	A	Cites union contracts, health insurance as drivers
Darien	4.39%	A	Proposing cuts to Gifted Programs, Elementary Paraeducators

FY26 Budget (All Funding Sources)



Other Category (4.8%) includes ALL of the following:

- Classroom Supplies
- Classroom and Office Furniture
- Textbooks/Workbooks
- Athletic Equipment
- Staff Professional Development
- Districtwide Internet Connection
- Districtwide Software
- Instructional Technology
- Property & GL Insurance
- Telephone Costs
- Postage Costs
- Districtwide Copiers
- Dues & Fees

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, salaries and benefits comprise approximately 80 percent of public-school expenditures in the U..S.

Fixed costs account for more than 90% of the budget:

- Wages & Benefits
- Special Education
- Transportation

Operating Budget by Major Object

Object Number & Description	2024-25	2025-26	Variance	Variance %	FY 26 Budget Impact	Notes
100 Salaries and Wages	$194,516,598	$201,617,803	$7,101,205	3.65%	2.15%	Collectively bargained wage increases, higher wages for substitutes
200 Employee Benefits	$50,750,623	$54,661,250	$3,910,627	7.71%	1.18%	Premium increase of 8% offset by use of $500k from reserve; estimated pension increases
300 Educational, Rehabilitative, and Legal Services	$13,550,153	$13,342,999	($207,154)	(1.53%)	(0.06%)	
400 Building Upkeep and Repair	$10,106,966	$10,611,299	$504,333	4.99%	0.15%	$560k increase in electricity costs; $300k building maintenance costs to be borne by Building Use Fund
500 Transportation, Out-District Tuition, & Other Svcs	$50,950,591	$56,751,877	$5,801,286	11.39%	1.75%	$2.3m increase in transportation costs; $3.35m increase in Special Ed Out of District Tuition incl. use of $250k carryover grant
600 Supplies, Materials, and Heating Fuels	$9,652,725	$9,007,056	($645,669)	(6.69%)	(0.20%)	Increased instructional supply cost offset by reduced cost of gas to heat buildings
700 Equipment	$1,033,034	$928,818	($104,216)	(10.09%)	(0.03%)	$200k reduction to building security hardware budget line
800 Dues and Fees	$177,066	$187,023	$9,957	5.62%	0.00%	
Sum	**$330,737,756**	**$347,108,125**	**$16,370,369**	**4.95%**	**4.95%**	

Summary by Category

	2024-25	2025-26	Variance $	Variance %	FY26 Budget Impact
Wages/Benefits	$245,267,221	$256,279,053	$11,011,832	4.49%	3.33%
Special Education (Out of District tuition, board, and transportation; and contracts for required in-district services**)**	$35,770,859	$42,591,408	$6,820,549	19.07%	2.06%
All Other Expenses	$49,699,676	$48,237,664	($1,462,012)	(2.94%)	(0.44%)
Sum	**$330,737,756**	**$347,108,125**	**$16,370,369**	**4.95%**	**4.95%**

A standard increase in Special Education costs (3%) would have kept the overall budget increase to 3.2%.

Net Reduction in FTE

Object	Description	Change in FTE (Operating)	Change in FTE (Grants)	Change in FTE (Net)	Summary*
510101	Educators (Certified)	(25.0)	(1.3)	(26.3)	(15.0) K-5 due to projected enrollment (class sizes remain within target ranges); (12.0) Special Education per staffing analysis; (2.5) IEP Compliance; (2.1) MS Specialists (enrollment); +2.0 AITE teachers; +4.6 contingencies
510102	Administrators (Certified)	9.0	1.0	10.0	10.0 Special Education Administrators per staffing analysis; 1.0 FTE from Operating to Grants
510103	Teacher Support	4.8	0.0	4.8	2.0 Social Workers; 2.8 School Psychologists
510112	Administrators (Non-Certified Discretionary)	1.0	0.0	1.0	4.0 BCBA, (3.0) Teacher Residents
510114	Clerical/Technical	(7.0)	0.0	(7.0)	Reduction per staffing analysis
510115	Paraeducators	5.0	0.0	5.0	Kindergarten Paraeducators due to increase in K classrooms
Sum		(12.2)	(0.3)	(12.5)	

*For a comprehensive list, please see Section 5 of the Budget Book.

Average K-5 Class Sizes

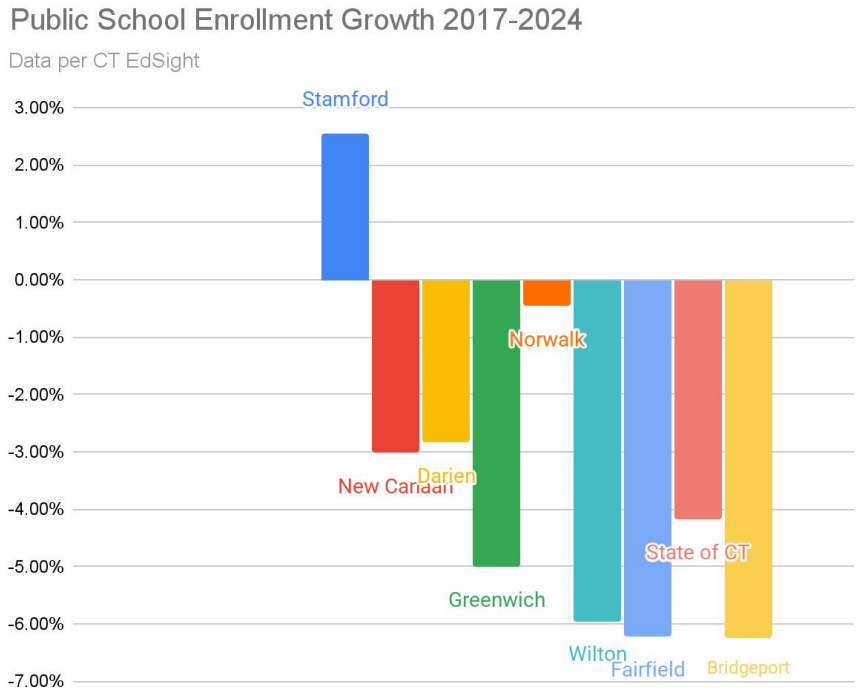
	K	1	2	3	4	5
2024-25 (Actual)	18.6	19.9	20.8	19.8	21.4	21.9
2025-26 (Projected)	20.4	20.3	20.7	21.5	22.2	22.1

Per the BOE contract with the SEA: “In grades K-5 the class size shall not exceed 25 pupils, and any special education or bi-lingual pupils not present a full school day. If the class size exceeds 25, the Board shall employ an educational assistant. Class size may also be reduced through the addition of professional staff, physical expansion and/or portable classrooms.”

Enrollment Trends

From 2017-18 through 2023- 24:

- SPS enrollment grew by nearly 3%, while enrollment statewide and in many local districts decreased.
- Non-public school enrollment of Stamford residents declined by more than 7%.
- SPS enrollment declined in Elementary School, but increased in both Middle School and High School.



Source: EdSight: https://public-edsight.ct.gov/Students/Enrollment-Dashboard/Enrollment-Report-Legacy?language=en_US

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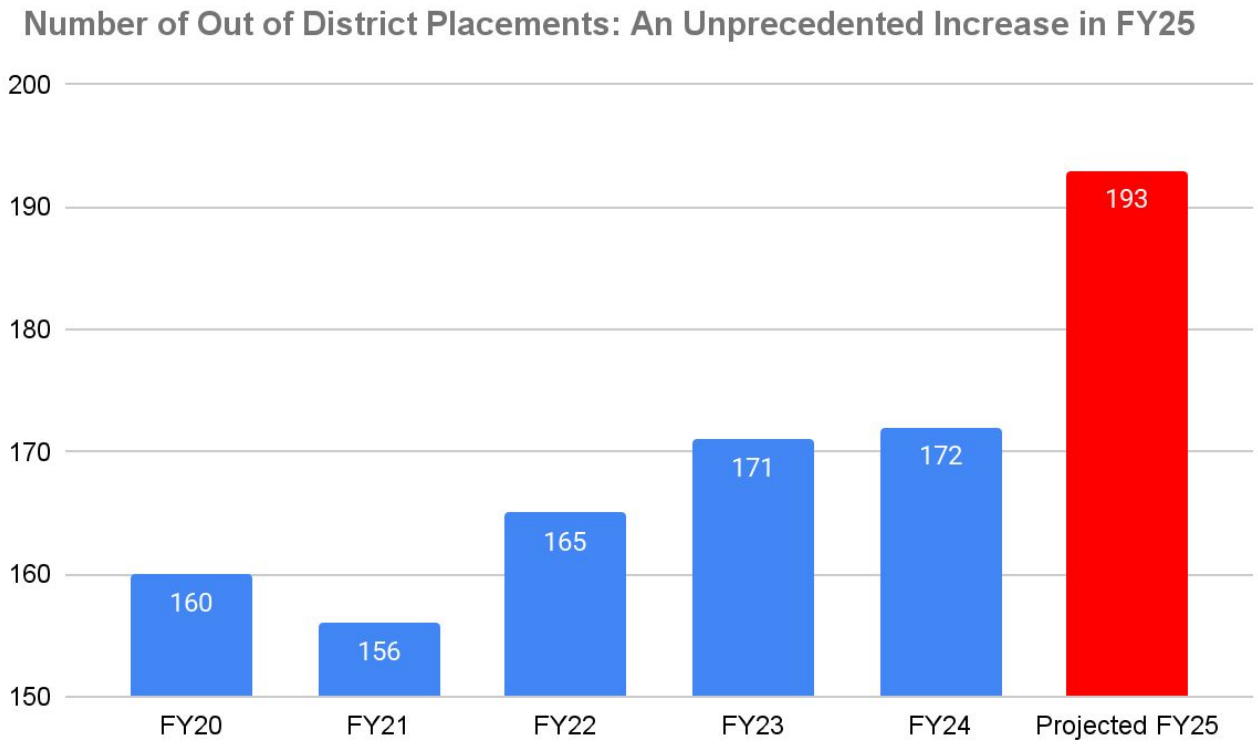
Increased Health Insurance Premiums

- The State Partnership Plan (SPP) is projecting a 10-12% increase, but these early projections are often overstated (chart below). According to an analysis by global professional services firm Aon, the average cost of employer-sponsored health care coverage in the U.S. is expected to increase 9% percent in 2025.
- The FY26 operating budget includes an **8%** increase in premiums.
- A 1% movement in premiums has approximately a **$470,000** effect on the budget.
- Analysis by healthcare industry consultant continues to show multi-million dollar net savings with SPP vs. a a high-deductible alternative. This is based on an analysis of claim data and likely costs for Stop Loss coverage, an HSA, and Administrative expenses.

Fiscal Year	SPP Projected Increase (December 2024)	Actual Increase
2022	9-11%	4.2%
2023	8%	10.5%
2024	9-12%	7.2%
2025	4-7%	2%
2026	10-12%	TBD

Out of District Placements



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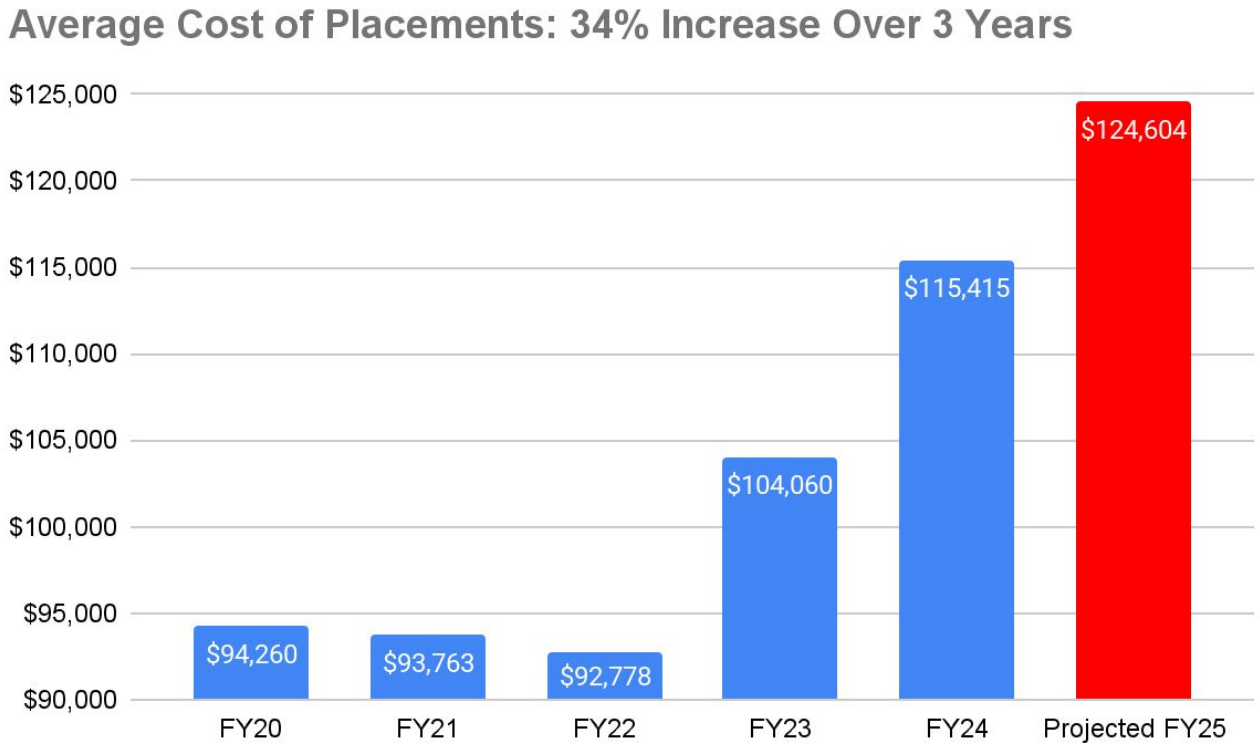
Out of District Tuition: Increase in Cost of Placements



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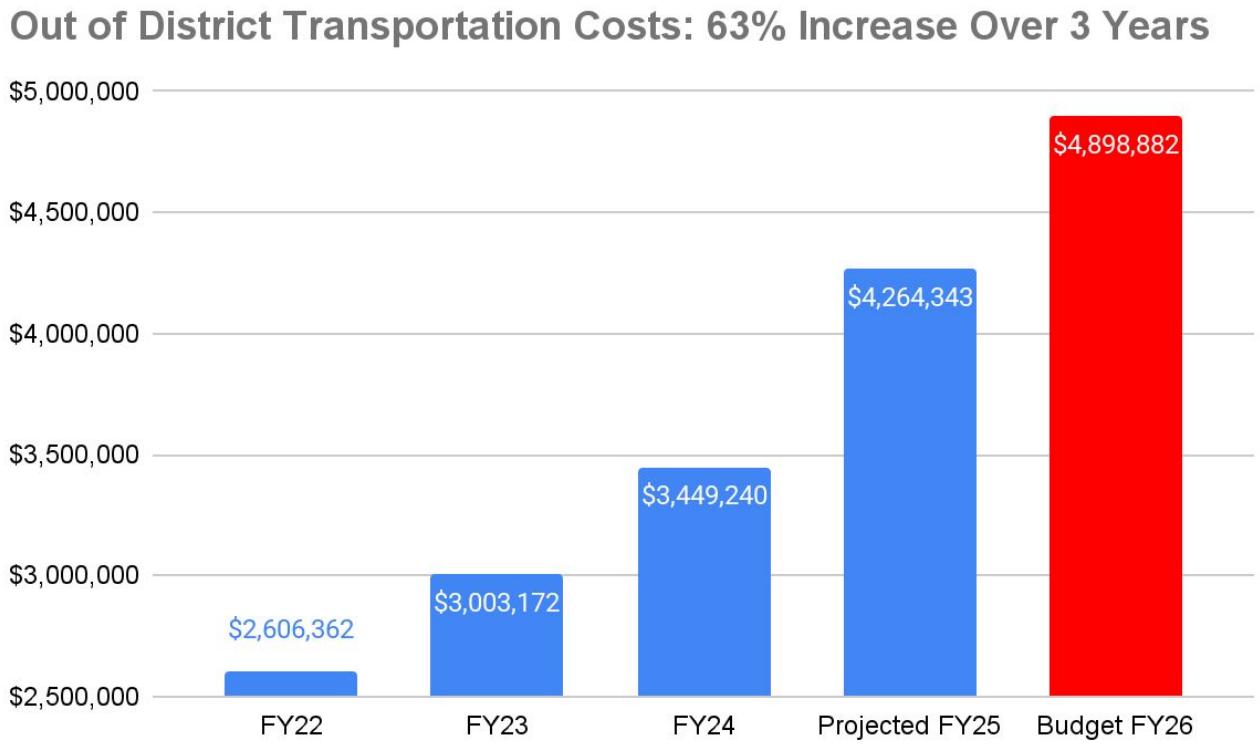
Out of District Tuition: Transportation



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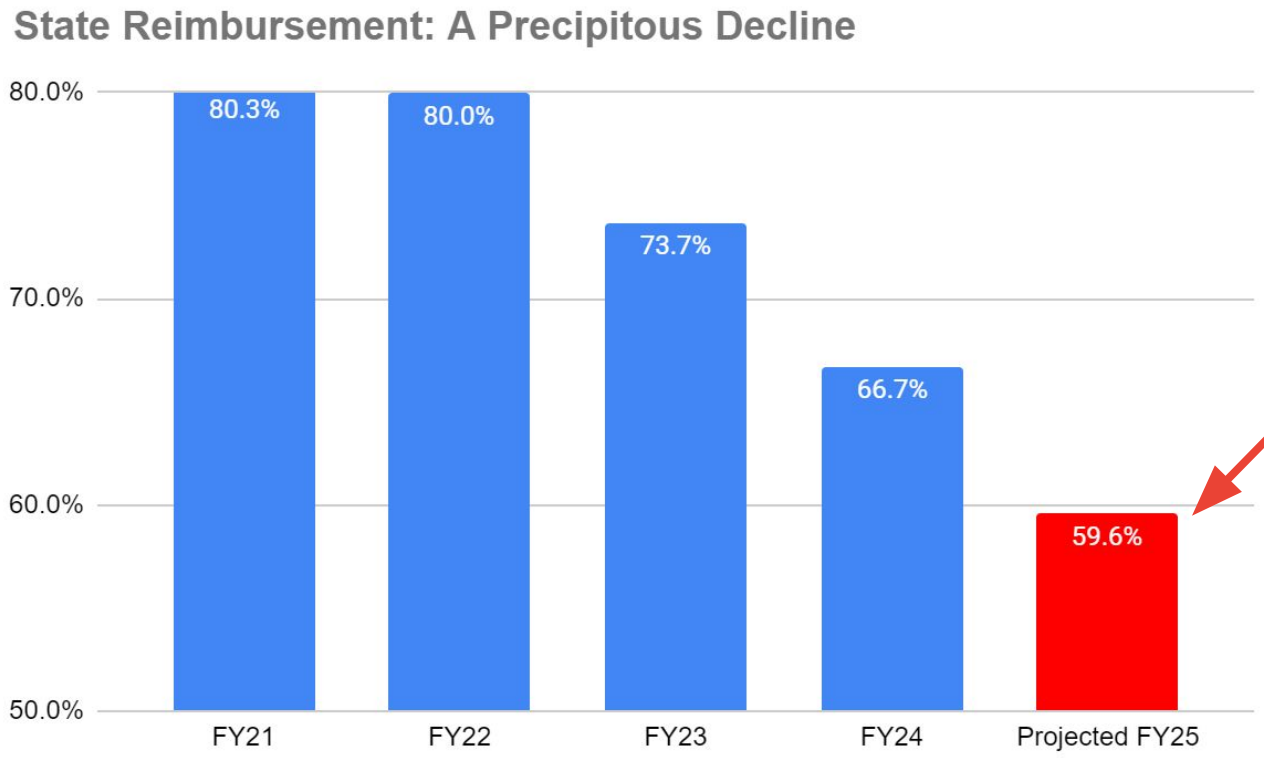
Out of District Tuition: Decrease in State Aid



Creates a $3M funding deficit compared to state law; deficit will be covered by Stamford taxpayers

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Out of District Tuition and Transportation: Summary

	FY25	FY26	Increase	Variance
Out of District Tuition/Housing	$25,212,788	$29,402,827	$4,190,039	16.6%
Out of District Transportation	$3,483,441	$4,898,882	$1,415,441	40.6%
Sum	**$28,696,229**	**$34,301,709**	**$5,605,480**	**19.5%**

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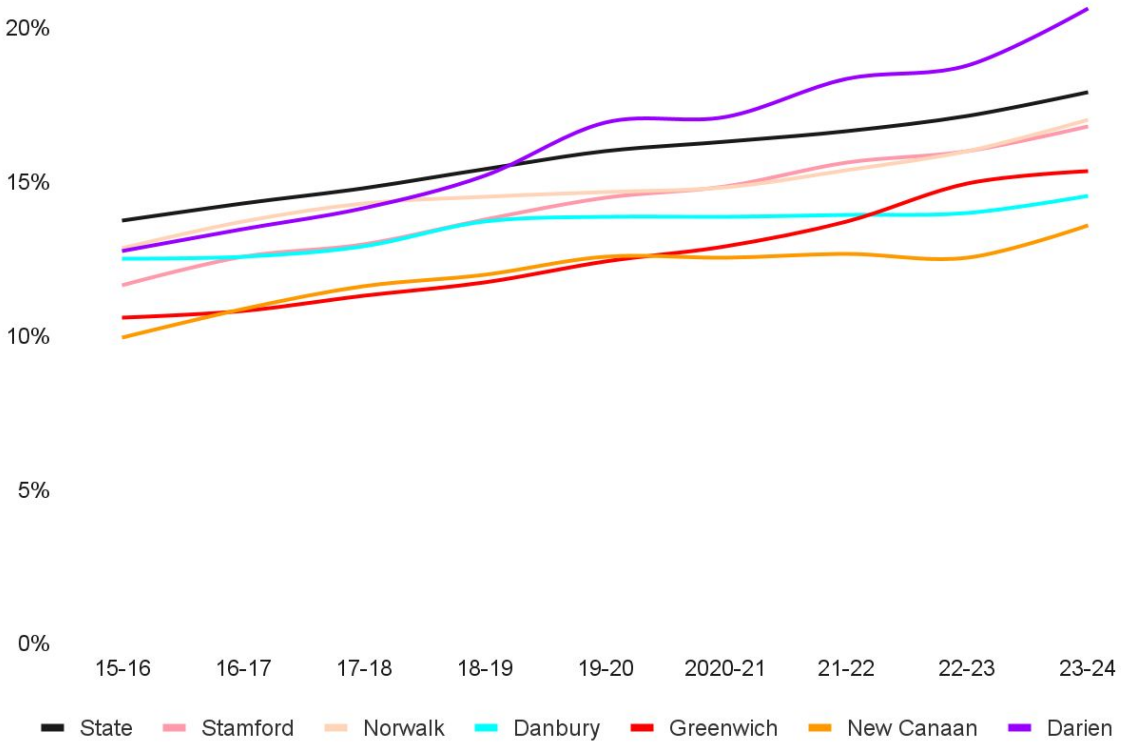
Increase in Students with Special Needs



Students with Special Needs as Percent of Enrollment

	DRG	2015-16	2023-24
Statewide		13.75%	17.92%
Darien	A	12.76%	20.64%
Norwalk	H	12.85%	17.01%
Stamford	H	11.66%	16.82%
Greenwich	B	10.61%	15.36%
Danbury	H	12.52%	14.54%
New Canaan	A	9.94%	13.60%

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District Snapshot: Spending Comparison

Rank	District	DRG	Enrollment*	NCEP 2023-24
1	Redding	A	1,198	$28,976
2	Greenwich	B	8,333	$27,670
3	Weston	A	2,127	$27,096
4	Sherman	C	359	$26,972
5	Westport	A	5,303	$26,652
6	Darien	A	4,634	$25,494
7	Ridgefield	A	4,472	$24,822
8	New Canaan	A	4,152	$24,477
9	Easton	A	1,281	$24,431
10	Wilton	A	3,751	$23,757
11	Fairfield	B	9,314	$23,635
12	New Fairfield	C	2,093	$21,806
13	Stamford	H	15,978	$21,788

Rank	District	DRG	Enrollment*	NCEP 2023-24
14	Norwalk	H	11,855	$21,615
15	Newtown	B	3,992	$21,607
16	Brookfield	B	2,605	$19,832
17	Stratford	G	6,909	$19,645
18	Trumbull	B	6,785	$19,316
19	Monroe	B	3,497	$18,863
20	Bethel	D	3,218	$17,972
21	Shelton	D	4,644	$17,717
22	Bridgeport	I	19,365	$16,630
23	Danbury	H	11,996	$15,666
		Average	**5,994**	**$22,454**

Source: Connecticut State Department of Education Bureau of Fiscal Services
***Average Daily Membership 2023-24**

SPS Expenditures vs. State Average

Compared to state average, SPS spends MORE on instruction and LESS on central office

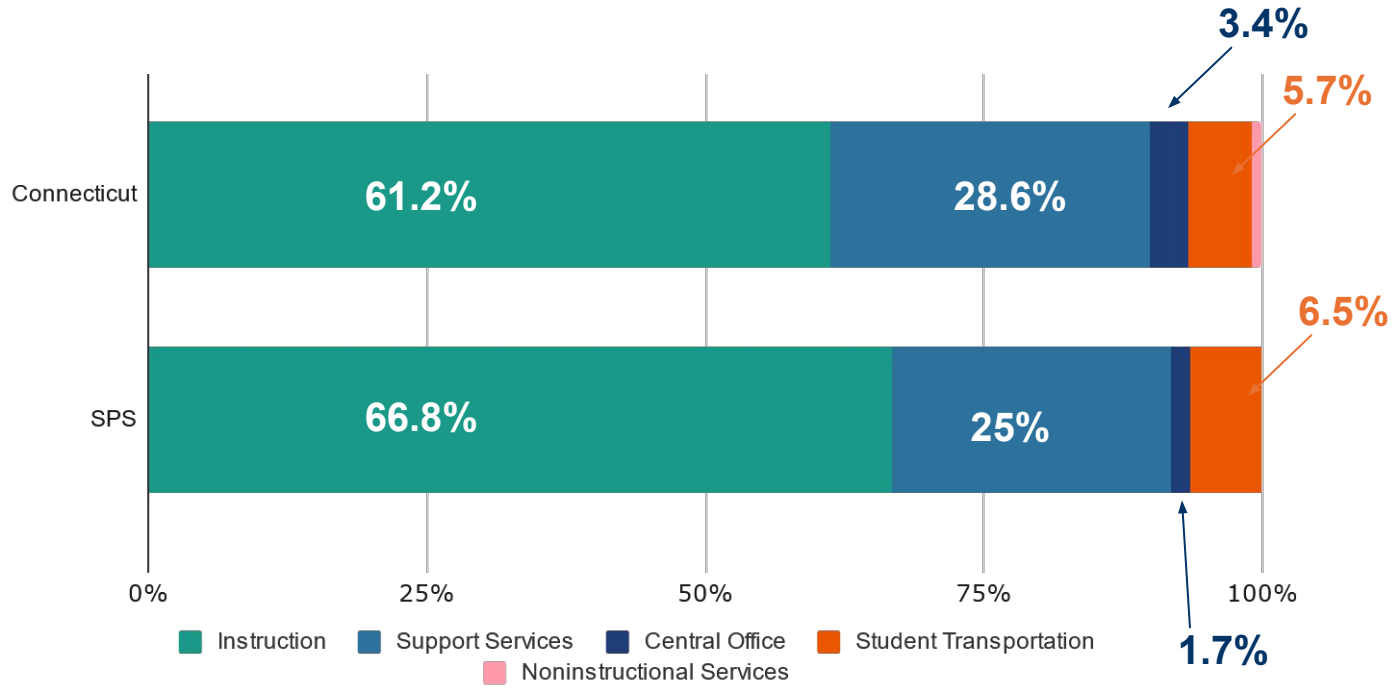

Chart courtesy of School + State Finance Project. Source: Connecticut State Department of Education. (2024). EdSight - Fiscal Resources: Per Pupil Expenditures by Function (District), 2022-23. Retrieved from https://public-edsight.ct.gov/overview/per-pupil-expenditures-by-function---district.

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Lunch Fund Financial Overview

- Between 2015-16 and 2020-21, the average balance in the Lunch Fund was $458,000
- During COVID, the USDA reimbursed districts for all meals served, and at a much higher rate per meal, which allowed the fund balance to increase to $3.7m. These funds can only be used for the Lunch Fund.
- For 2022-23, 2023-24, and 2024-25, SPS has opted in to the CEP (Community Eligibility Provision), which has allowed us to provide all students with free breakfast and lunch
- Based on Stamford's current demographics (which impact funding), CEP creates an operating loss in the Lunch Fund
- The Lunch Fund would require a contribution of $1,000,000 from the Operating Budget in FY26 in order to maintain free breakfast and lunch for all students. This amount was not included in the Superintendent's Request. Even without this, the Operating Budget will need to contribute $250,000 to cover debt arising from unpaid meals.
- Leaving CEP in FY26 will require that families complete applications in order to be eligible for free or reduced lunch, which will put a burden on both families and staff.

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Transportation

- FY26 is Year 2 of a 3-year contract for in-district transportation services that contains annual increases of **9.75**%, **5.5**%, and **5.5**%.

- The cost for school transportation services has been increasing significantly statewide due to a tight labor market for drivers, but Stamford is in a uniquely disadvantageous position.

- Stamford's current vendor owns the bus depot which houses the fleet, dispatch, and mechanical service operations. Without land of our own to offer a competing vendor, it is very difficult to competitively bid this service.

- SPS has been working with the city Operations Department to source potential sites for this purpose, but there are many constraints.

- If a site is not secured by **Fall 2025**, it is very likely that the next contract renewal will take place under the same conditions as the last one.

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26

State Grant Funding Status

Alliance Grant

- ECS Funding, which is the source of the SPS Alliance Grant, is scheduled to remain flat after FY26. Costs for positions, healthcare, and other goods will increase in FY27, creating a deficit of approximately $500,000 that will have to be absorbed by the Operating Budget. This amount will compound annually as long as there is no adjustment to the grant allocation.

Excess Cost Grant

- The state Excess Cost Grant, which is intended to reduce the burden of high special education costs on municipalities, is significantly underfunded. For FY25, the state estimates that only **59%** of these these costs will be reimbursed. For reference, the statutory reimbursement rate per Public Act 23-204 is 85%. The funding shortfall compared to the statutory rate to Stamford for FY25 is approximately **$3,000,000**. If the grant were fully funded, Stamford would be entitled to an additional **$4,142,000 this year alone**. Those are costs that must instead be borne by Stamford taxpayers.

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State Grant Funding Comparison

District	FY24 Enrollment	High-Needs %	High-Needs Students	ECS Funding FY24	ECS Funding/Student	ECS Funding/High-Needs Student
Hartford	16,839	85.8%	14,446	$215,966,982.00	$12,825	$14,950
Bridgeport	19,591	91.5%	17,932	$192,456,851.00	$9,824	$10,733
New Haven	18,966	83.5%	15,833	$165,306,789.00	$8,716	$10,441
Waterbury	18,956	87.2%	16,520	$171,892,005.00	$9,068	$10,405
Meriden	8,789	84.5%	7,422	$71,875,826.00	$8,178	$9,684
Danbury	12,126	72.5%	8,786	$45,682,808.00	$3,767	$5,199
Norwalk	11,520	65.8%	7,576	$14,269,949.00	$1,239	$1,884
Stamford	16,339	64.8%	10,591	$17,145,212.00	$1,049	$1,619

Source: https://public-edsight.ct.gov/Students/Enrollment-Dashboard?language=en_US

https://schoolstatefinance.org/issues/current-year-funding

Fiscal Operations: Grants

SPS applied for **38 grants** and received a total of **$194,107,416** in 2023-24

- **$188,253,038 support facilities projects** at a 60% reimbursement rate
- $14.3M Stark Asset Renewal application is still pending (60% reimbursement rate)
- Application conversion rate **exceeds 80%.**

After School Grant - ALTA
After School Grant - TOR
ARP After School Grant - Scofield
Dalio Innovation - WHS (2023 + 2024)
Ed Rising Mini Grant (2023 + 2024)
CT Stronger Connections Grant
ARP Summer Mental Health Supports
21st CCLC Grants - KTM and Toquam
ARPA Right to Read
FAFSA Challenge
NSL Program - School Food Equipment

Dual Credit Expansion Program Grant (Stamford High and Westhill)
School Security Grant (Multimedia)
School Security Grant (SSCGP)
Teacher Residency Program additional funding
Eversource Rebates
The South Schools (Upper and Lower)
IAQ Grants - Rippowam & Newfield
SHS 1927 Building Roof Replacement
Davenport Roof Replacement
Davenport Abatement and Restrooms

Springdale Energy Efficiency Project
Springdale Flooring Replacement
Northeast Flooring Abatement
Newfield Roof Replacement
SHS Baseball Field
Stark Asset Renewal
Westover NRES Grant Solar
Rogers NRES Grant Solar
Strawberry Hill NRES Grant Solar
SHS NRES Solar Grant

FY26 BOE Budget Schedule



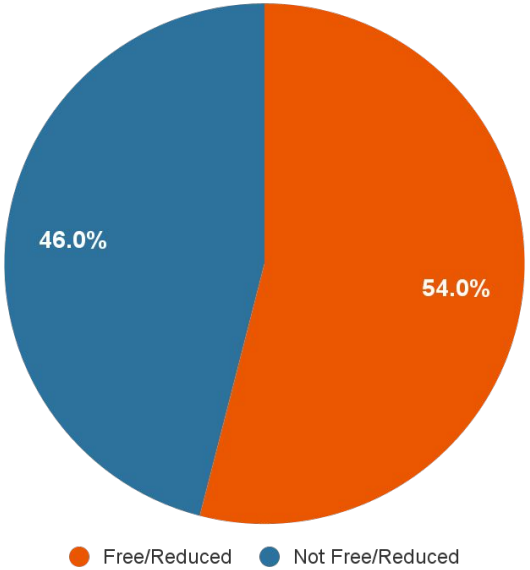
Tuesday, January 21	2025-26 Superintendent's Proposed Budget (Overview Presentation)
Tuesday, February 4	BOE Budget Workshop Meeting (Staffing by School)
Thursday, February 6	BOE Public Budget Hearing
Tuesday, February 18	Special Board Meeting (BOE votes on SPS budget to be submitted to Mayor)

Appendices

Economic Diversity

SPS educates students from all economic backgrounds

- 54% of students qualify for free/reduced-price meals, which for a family of 4 would mean a household income of $57,720 or less.
- 1.5% of students experienced homelessness at least once during the 2023-24 school year
- 7.1% of students live in a zip code where the median household income is above $200K, similar to DRG A



Federal Poverty Levels – 2024-2025

Family Size	100%	125%	130%	138%	150%	185%
1	15,060	18,825	19,578	20,783	22,590	27,861
2	20,440	25,550	26,572	28,207	30,660	37,814
3	25,820	32,275	33,566	35,632	38,730	47,767
4	31,200	39,000	40,560	43,056	46,800	57,720
5	36,580	45,725	47,554	50,480	54,870	67,673
6	41,960	52,450	54,548	57,905	62,940	77,626
7	47,340	59,175	61,542	65,329	71,010	87,579
8	52,720	65,900	68,536	72,754	79,080	97,532

Free meals: students with family income at or below 130% FPL.

Reduced price meals: family income between 130% and 185% FPL.

Stamford Public Schools
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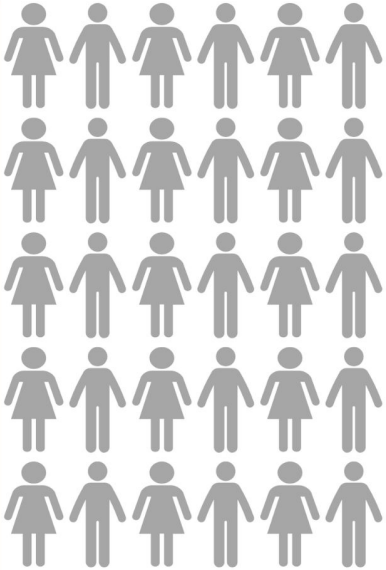
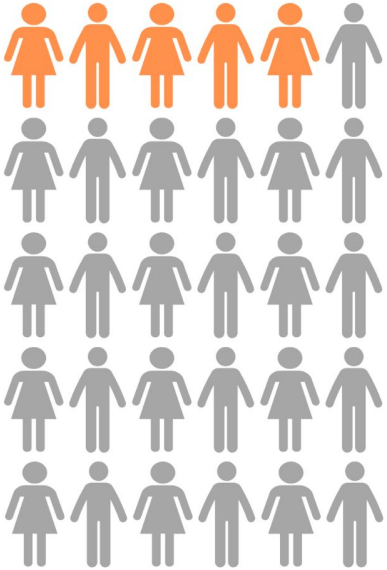
Economically Disadvantaged Students



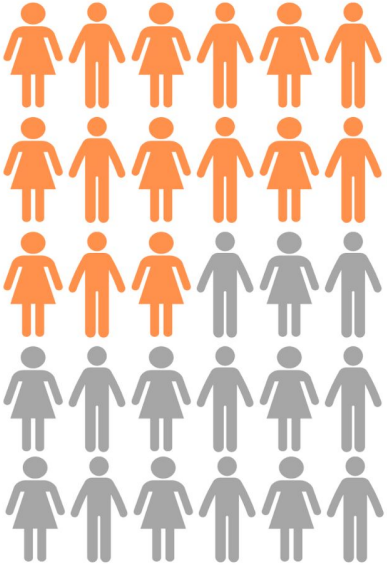
New Canaan Public Schools
DRG A

0 out of 30 students are economically disadvantaged



Greenwich Public Schools
DRG B

5 out of 30 students are economically disadvantaged



Stamford Public Schools
DRG H

15 out of 30 students are economically disadvantaged

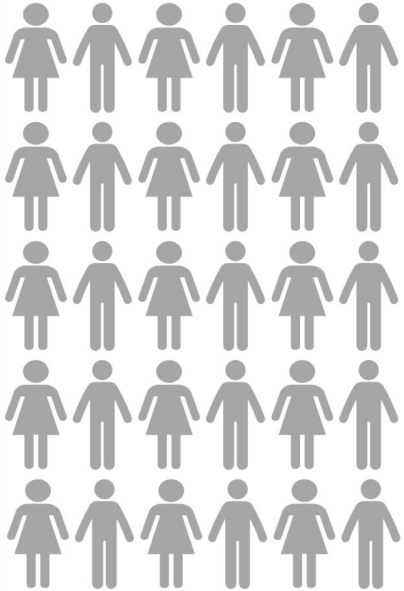
SPS Students qualifying for free/reduced lunch:

52% in 2014-15

51% in 2023-24

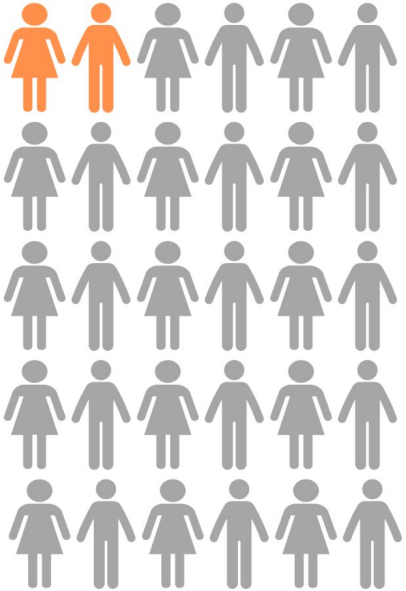
54% in 2024-25

Multilingual Learners



New Canaan Public Schools
DRG A

0 out of 30 students are multilingual learners



Greenwich Public Schools
DRG B

2 out of 30 students are multilingual learners



Stamford Public Schools
DRG H

5 out of 30 students are multilingual learners

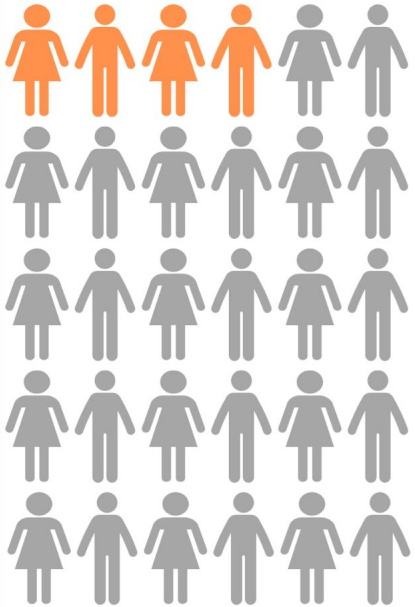
Multilingual Learners in SPS:

12.9% in 2014-15

17.0% in 2023-24

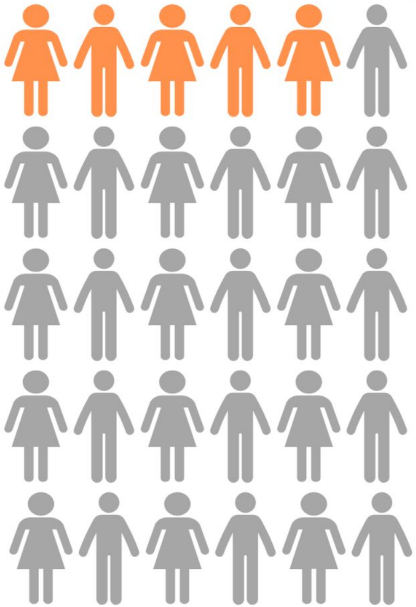
19.2% in 2024-25

Students with Special Needs



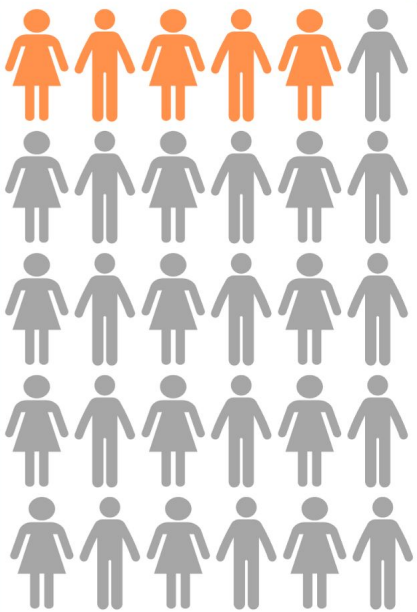
New Canaan Public Schools
DRG A

4 out of 30 students qualify for special education services



Greenwich Public Schools
DRG B

5 out of 30 students qualify for special education services

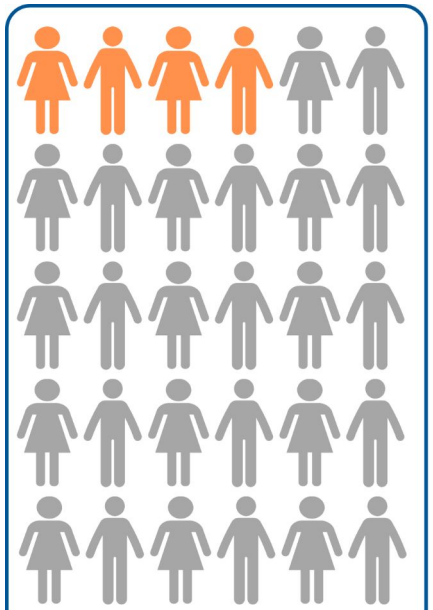


Stamford Public Schools
DRG H

5 out of 30 students qualify for special education services

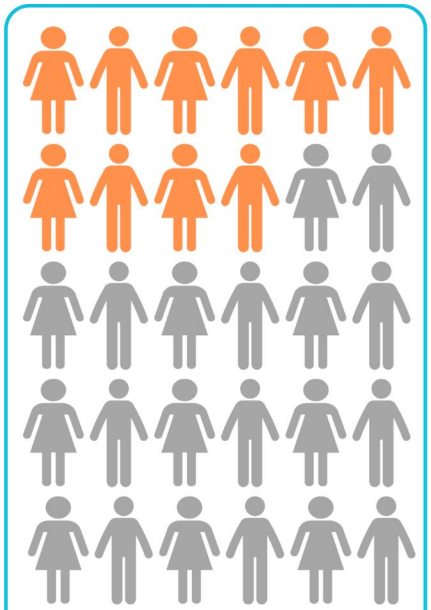
High Needs Students

Defined as students who qualify for free/reduced lunch, receive special education services, or are multilingual learners



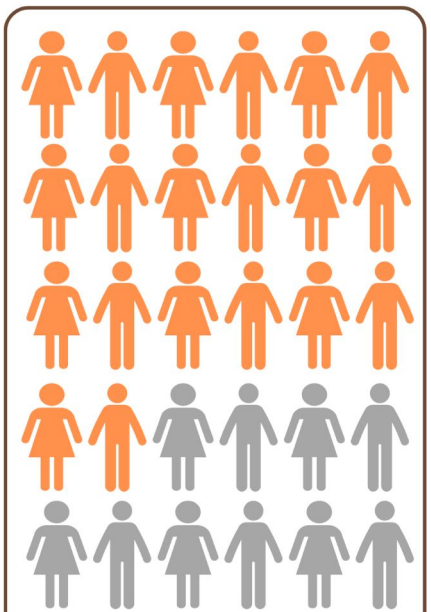
New Canaan Public Schools
DRG A

4 out of 30 students are high needs learners



Greenwich Public Schools
DRG B

10 out of 30 students are high needs learners



Stamford Public Schools
DRG H

20 out of 30 students are high needs learners

High Needs Learners in SPS:

58% in 2014-15

65% in 2023-24

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