



# BUDGET IN BRIEF

A HIGH-LEVEL OVERVIEW OF THE FY2025-26  
NORWALK PUBLIC SCHOOLS BUDGET

Prepared by:

**FINANCE DEPARTMENT**  
Norwalk Public Schools

Issue Date: January 21, 2025





# OUR COMMITMENT



## 5 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

### FUTURE READINESS

Prepare all students so they are ready for further education, career and workplace opportunities, and globally engaged leadership.

### EQUITY

Ensure equitable opportunities, facilities, experiences and outcomes for all students.

### EXCELLENCE

Achieve excellence in all aspects of our organization through effective systems, modern learning environments and continuous improvement processes.

### ENGAGEMENT

Ensure all children, families, team members and the community are informed, are involved and feel welcome in our schools.

### HIGH-QUALITY INSTRUCTION & SUPPORT

Foster relevant and intellectually stimulating learning with targeted supports that produce social, emotional and academic growth.

Our work is guided by our strategic plan and priorities.  
We are steadfast in our commitment to our scholars.



# OUR MISSION

Norwalk Public Schools provides an excellent and equitable education, so ALL students graduate future ready as civically responsible, globally engaged and positive contributors to an ever-changing and diverse world.

# OUR VISION

Norwalk Public Schools is building a more equitable and just world where each and every Norwalk student is prepared for all aspects of life.





# NORWALK PUBLIC SCHOOLS BOARD OF EDUCATION

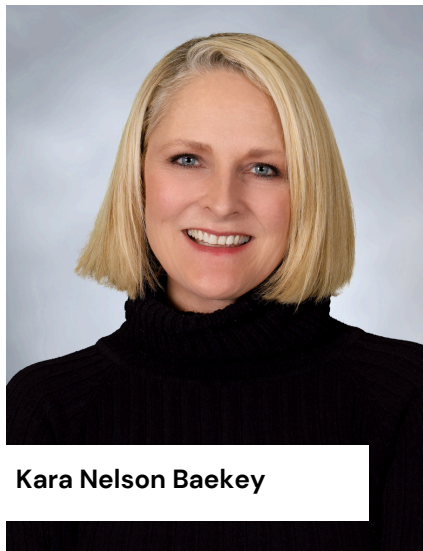
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# A MESSAGE FROM OUR SUPERINTENDENT

**"The progress seen so far is no accident. It results from strategic and deliberate investments in resources that meet the diverse needs of our students. However, sustaining and building on this success requires continued support and commitment. To pause or reduce these efforts would risk undoing our hard-won gains and limiting opportunities for our scholars."**



DR. ALEXANDRA ESTRELLA  
SUPERINTENDENT



Norwalk Public Schools has made steady progress over the last five years, and that success stems from our commitment to our mission: to provide an excellent and equitable education so all students graduate future ready. As we developed the budget for FY 2025–26, each of our decisions was grounded in our strategic plan and the five strategic priorities that are interwoven into everything we do.

Most importantly, this work was grounded in our 'why' — our scholars.

The progress seen so far is no accident. It results from strategic and deliberate investments in resources that meet the diverse needs of our students. However, sustaining and building on this success requires continued support and commitment. To pause or reduce these efforts would risk undoing our hard-won gains and limiting opportunities for our scholars.

With this in mind, my team and I present the Superintendent's Recommended General Fund Operating Budget of \$255.96 million for FY 2025–26. This proposal reflects thoughtful consideration of our district's priorities and the realities we face.

The requested budget addresses rising costs for special education services and out-of-district tuition, employee compensation and benefits, transportation and utilities, and the need to return key program funding to the local budget. It is a balanced approach aimed at maintaining the high-quality education and support services that our students, staff, and families rely on every day.



# A MESSAGE FROM OUR CFO

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**“THIS GUIDE WILL PROVIDE FACTUAL DATA, HIGHLIGHT ACCOMPLISHMENTS DRIVEN BY PAST SPENDING AND REVIEW AREAS OF NEED THAT THE UPCOMING BUDGET WILL ADDRESS.”**

The Budget in Brief is a newly created guide which provides a high-level overview of the school budget with a specific focus on the development of the FY2025-26 budget for Norwalk Public Schools.

This guide aims to explain how funding will be spent and the impact it will have on the Norwalk Public School students' learning and achievements. It provides a format that is easy to use and is intended to be used by a wide cross section of the community at large.

The goal is to create an understanding of the budget and provide transparency for community members so that they may come together to assist in building the budget with priorities that matter to both the community and students. This guide will enable people to take part in informed debate about the choices made by their local government. A public school system uses its budget to describe its program plans for the upcoming year.

It is a bird's-eye view of the school budget process and will answer high level questions. This guide will provide factual data, highlight accomplishments driven by past spending and review areas of need that the upcoming budget will address. Furthermore, this guide will explain the budget process and how student-based budgeting works.

The guide will also provide comparisons to other school districts and feature investments made to our school buildings by the City of Norwalk. Finally, this document will review the top priorities that drive the budget request for FY2025-26. The objective of this Budget in Brief is to connect public finance to everyday living, striving to make our community a better place for all.



LUNDA ASMANI, CPFO  
CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER



# FINANCIAL TRANSPARENCY



2022-23  
2023-24  
2024-25

Norwalk Public Schools believes in financial transparency as well as excellence in reporting and is proud to have received for the third year in a row, the Meritorious Budget Award (MBA), presented by The Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO).

In order to receive the budget award, the Norwalk Public School Budget document had to satisfy nationally recognized guidelines for effective budget presentation. The guidelines are designed to assess how well the budget serves as:

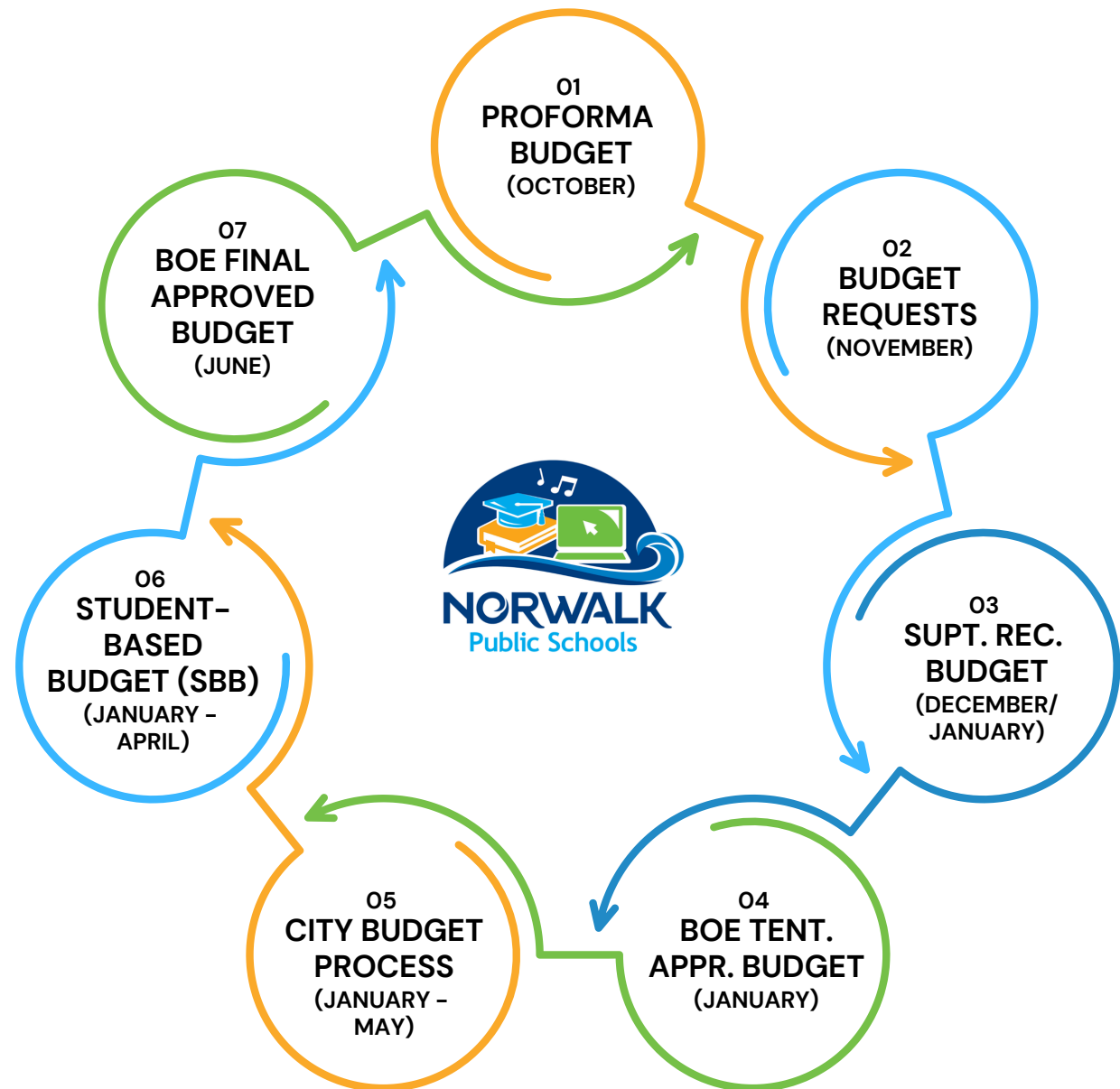
- a policy document
- a financial plan
- an operations guide
- a communication device



# BUDGET PROCESS

## A QUICK LOOK

The annual budget development process is a collaborative process of both internal and external stakeholders. It is a representation of the district's strategic plan combined with the needs and wishes of the community.



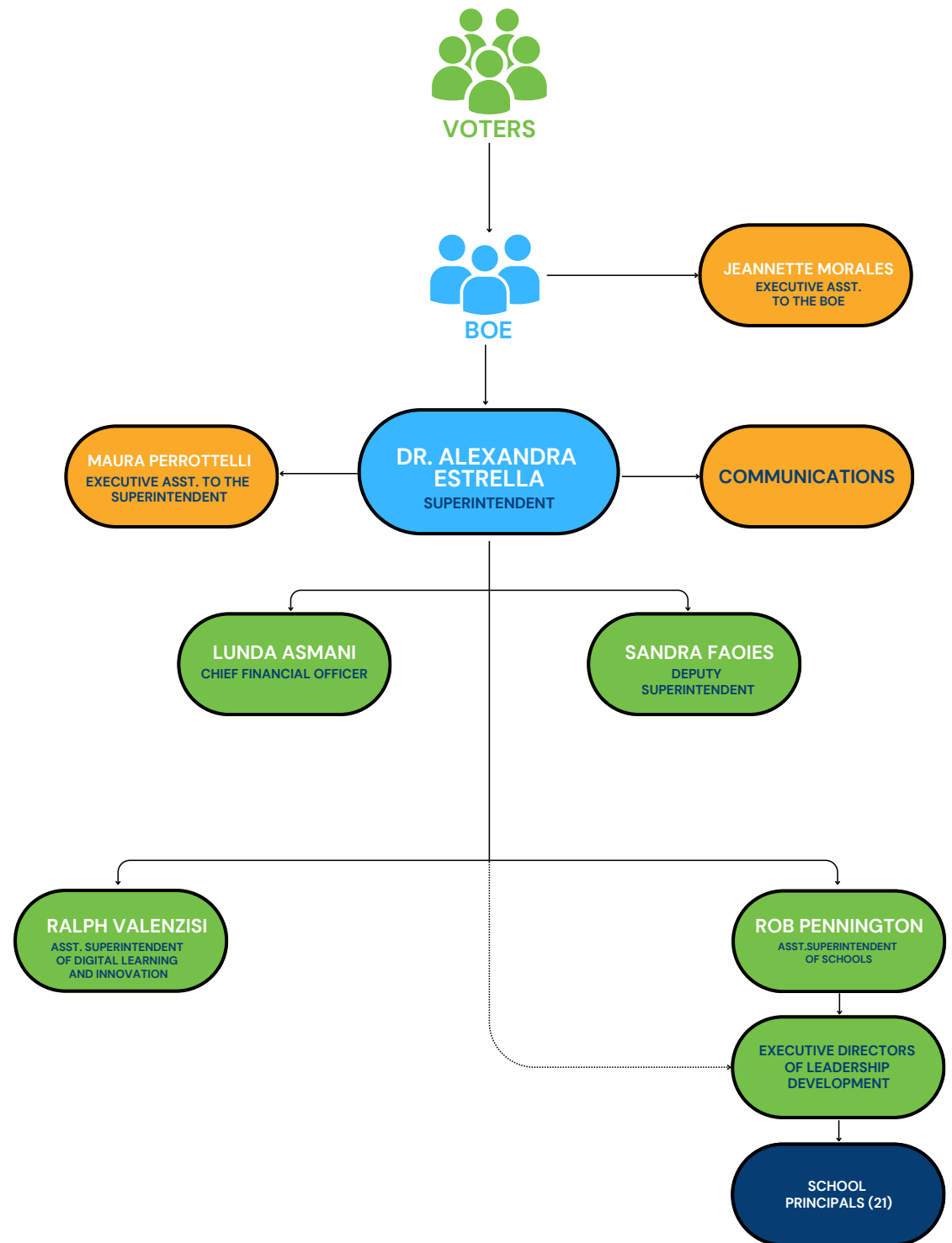


# STAFFING AND PEOPLE

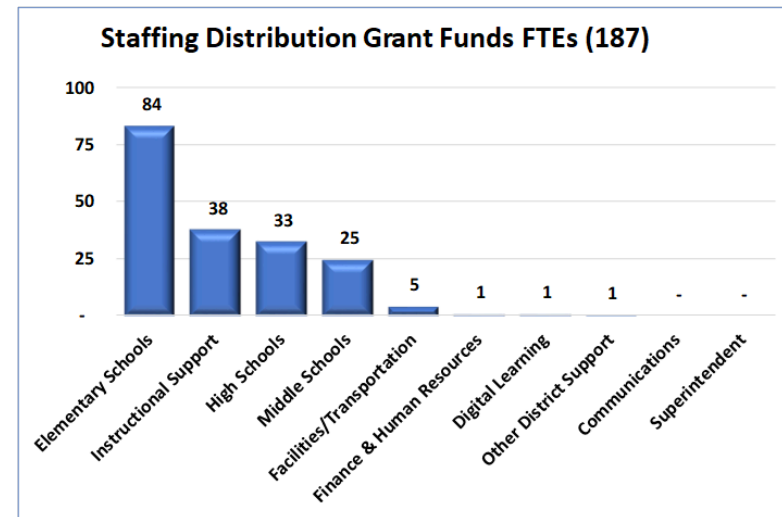
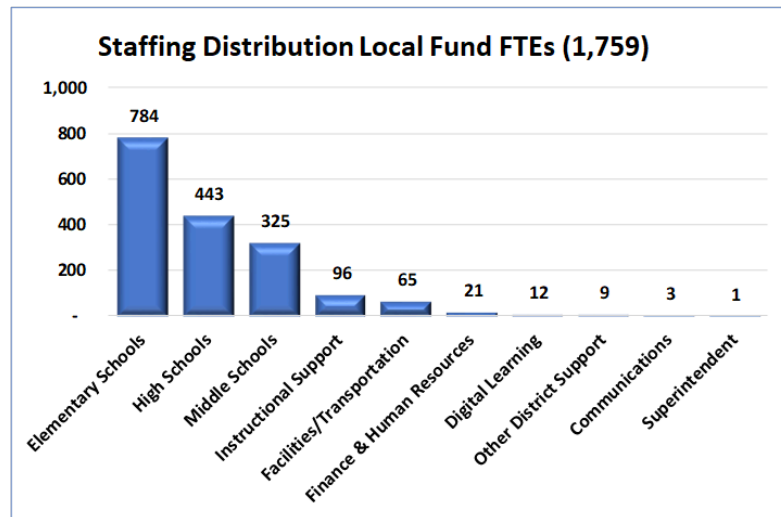
The board's role is to set the mission, vision, and values for the district; hire an able and qualified Superintendent; create the policies to operate the school system; determine the financial needs and direct the funds required to run the schools, and employ the necessary personnel to operate an effective school district.

The Board of Education hires the Superintendent of Schools and relies on the Superintendent and staff to provide them with accurate budgetary and fiscal information upon which to make spending decisions.

Voters have the ultimate impact on the budget connected on both sides of the table of organization, beginning with voting for the BOE members and ending with participation in parent community groups. These local groups provide input on individual school budgets, which is a significant part of the overall district budget.



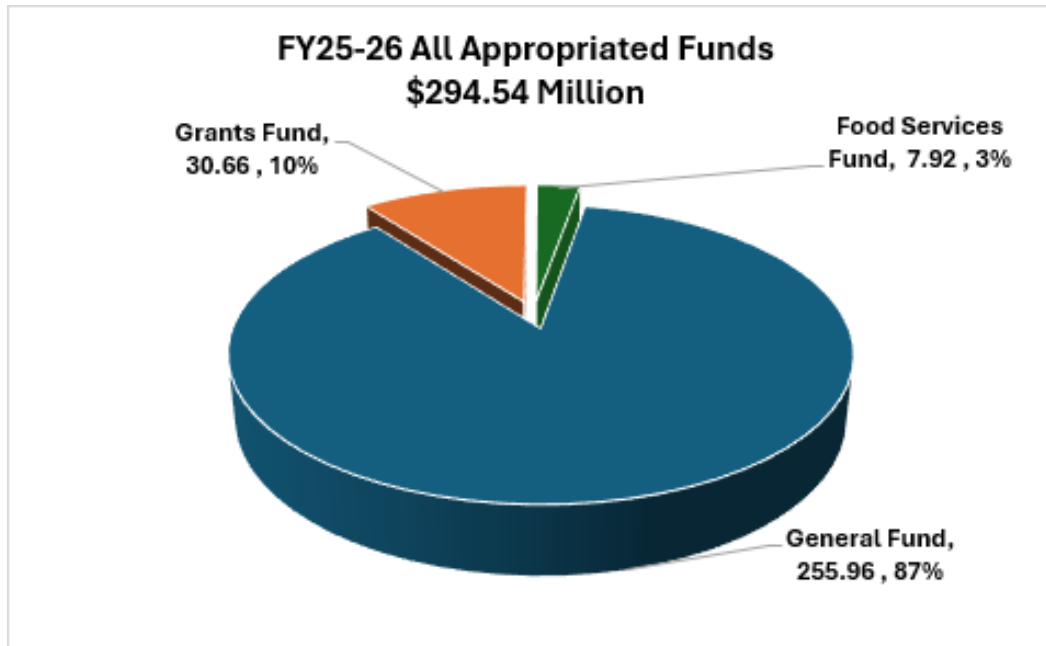
# FY2025-26 BUDGET AND STAFFING DISTRIBUTION



The FY2025-26 Budget consisted of 1,946 Full Time Equivalents (FTEs). These FTEs are funded by various sources including total local funds and grant funds. 85.7% of the budget has been allocated to classroom services which includes student support, teachers, paraeducators, other instructional support and social & emotional roles such as social workers and counselors. 97% of the FTEs in the budget are directly located at the schools working with students. The General Fund, otherwise known as the local fund, comprises the general-purpose functions of the Board of Education (BOE). The Superintendent's Recommended General Fund budget of \$255.96 million for FY2025-26 which accounts for 87% of all BOE operating expenses and is funded through the City of Norwalk's General Fund.



# FY2025-26 BUDGET AND STAFFING DISTRIBUTION



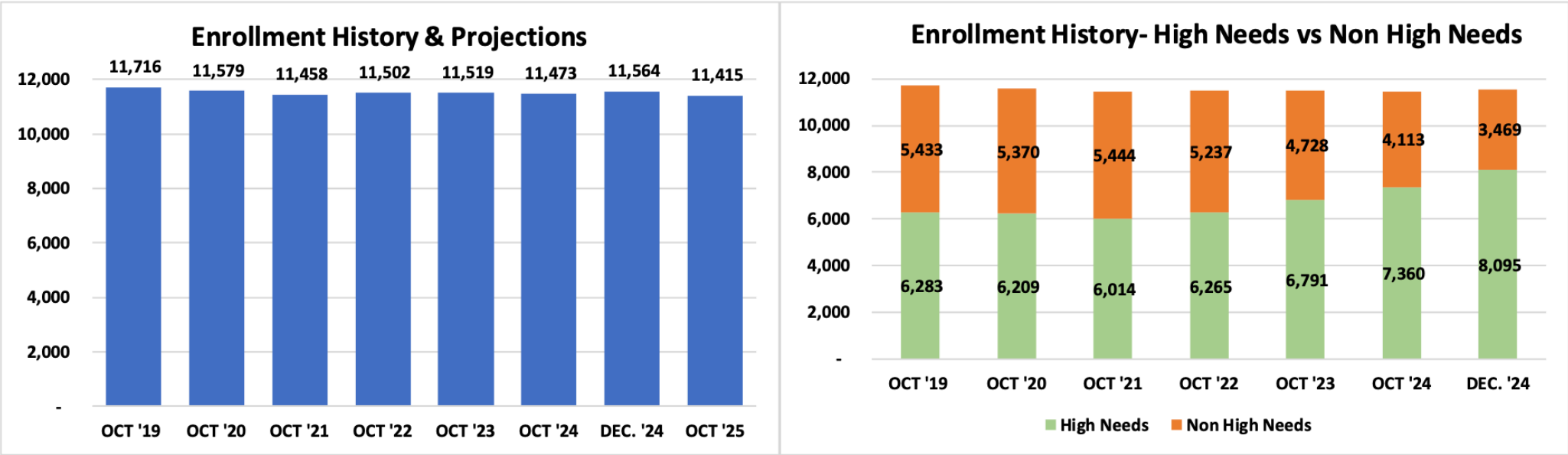
Grant Funds are reported in a separate fund, and are exclusive of local taxpayer funding. Grants include revenue from state, local and private sources and accounts for an estimated 10% of all BOE operating expenses or \$30.66 million for the FY2025-26. Grant funds assist in enhancing and creating programs that are not funded in the local budget.

The FY2025-26 estimated Food Services Budget is \$7.92 million or 3% of all BOE operating expenses for FY2025-26. The School Lunch Fund includes all revenues and operating expenses associated with providing high quality, nutritious, low cost meals. This fund also receives revenues through meal charges and state and federal subsidies that are determined annually.

# ENROLLMENT SNAPSHOT

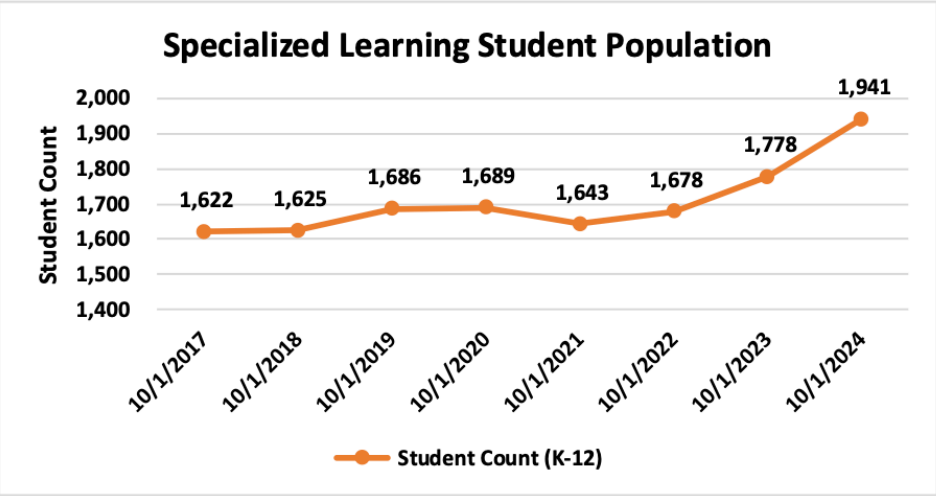
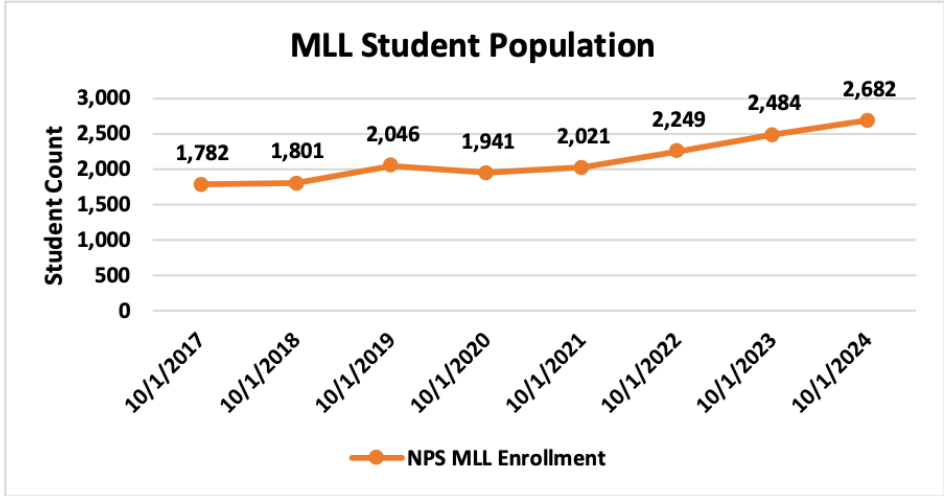
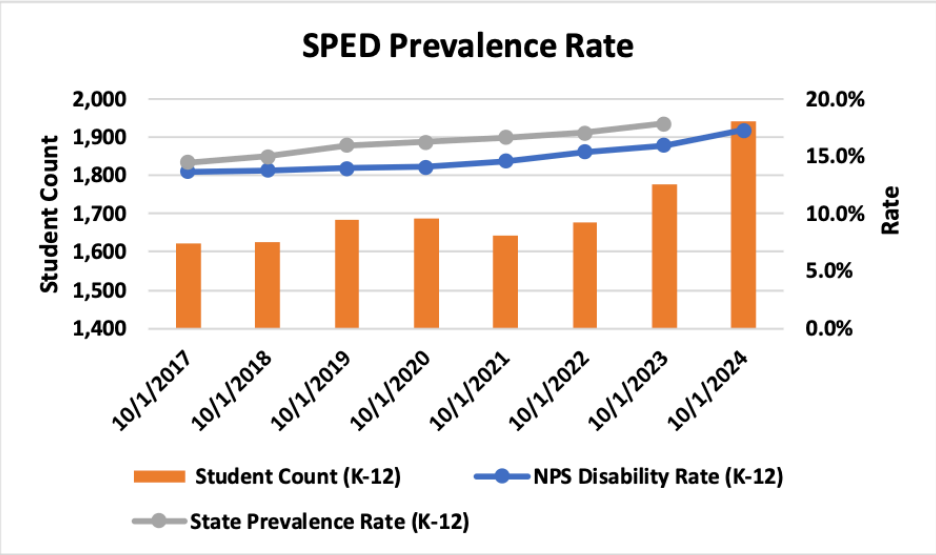
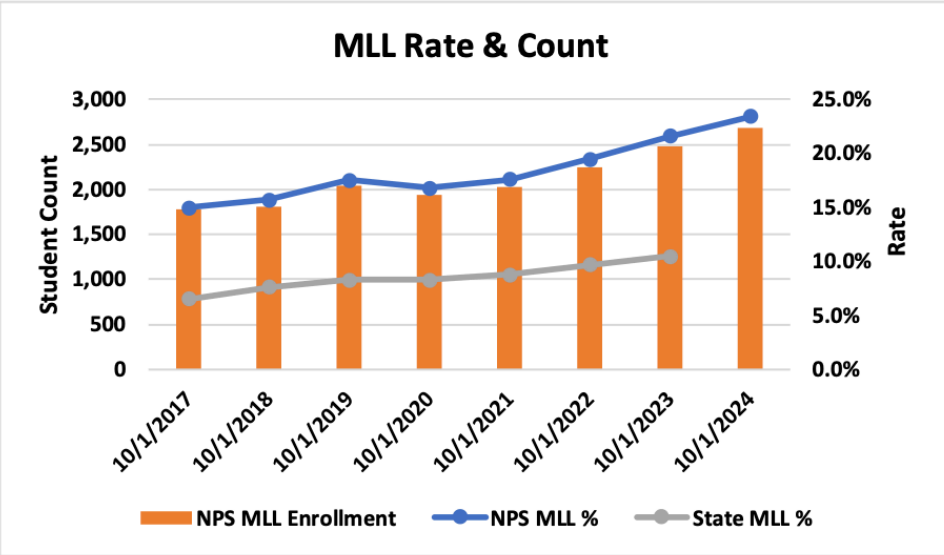
Total student enrollment drives the budget. But more importantly the mix and composition of students each year impacts the budget expenditures. The demographic makeup of students has a direct correlation to the student needs and therefore the cost required in the budget.

The population of Free and Reduced Lunch and Special Education students continues to grow year to year. The specialized learning population was recently impacted by changes in legislation requiring services to continue past the student’s 22nd birthday until the end of the school year. The Multilingual Learner population has also seen a significant spike this year and over the last few years, which translates into higher enrollment projections and associated services needed. During Covid, a flat enrollment cycle occurred. In recent years, we see enrollment trends shifting back to pre-covid levels as projected by external demographers. Recent enrollment projections and actual student enrollment is now more consistent with long-term Norwalk enrollment patterns.





# ENROLLMENT SNAPSHOT

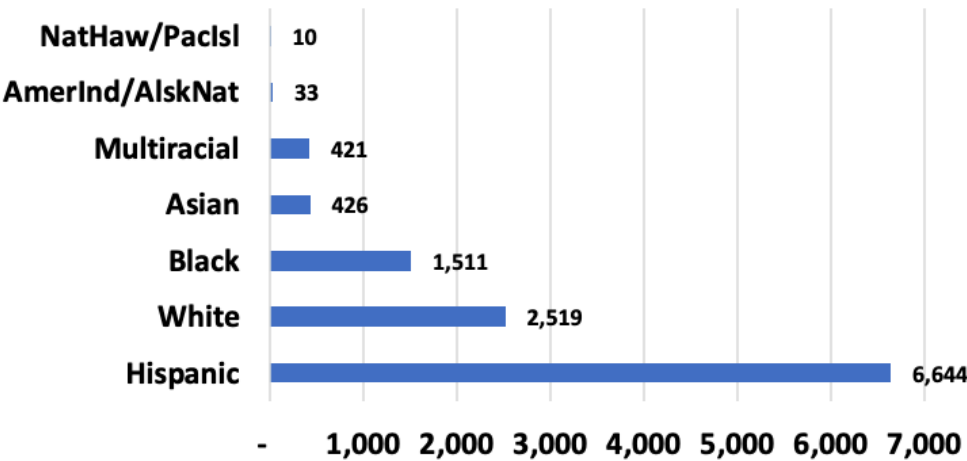


# ENROLLMENT SNAPSHOT

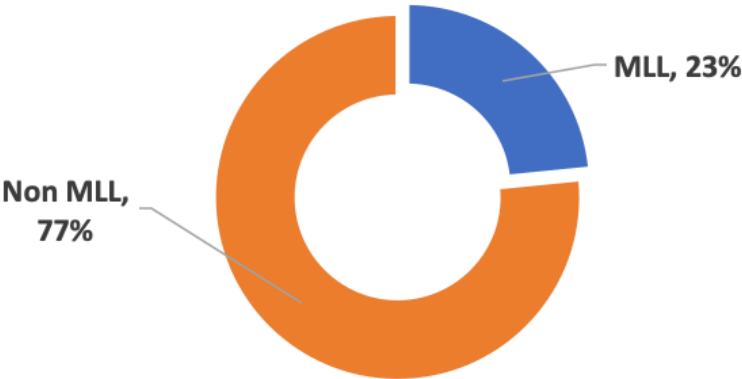
Free & Reduced Lunch



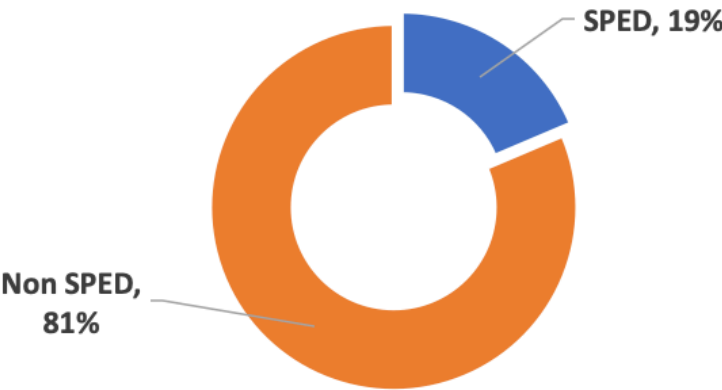
Enrollment By Race/Ethnicity



Multilingual Learners (MLL)



Specialized Education (SPED)





# STUDENT HIGHLIGHTS

The District Performance Index (DPI) is used to track trends in achievement based on state test results. The DPI is calculated by content area for English Language Arts (ELA), Math, and Science.

Using Connecticut's largest cities as a comparison group, Norwalk's performance indices for English Language Arts (ELA), Math and Science rank #1.

Although Norwalk consistently has higher performance indices, compared to large cities, we are constantly striving to exceed the overall state levels.

## District Performance Index (DPI) for Connecticut Cities Population over 70,000

City	ELA DPI			Math DPI			Science DPI		
	2022	2023	2024	2022	2023	2024	2022	2023	2024
Bridgeport	50.1	49.5	49	42.1	41.8	43	45.5	45.4	46.4
Danbury	57.9	57.8	55.4	51.6	52.9	51.8	54.2	54.7	53.3
Hartford	48.3	47.4	47.1	41.5	41.8	42.8	46.9	45.5	45.7
New Britain	47.1	46.4	46.6	37.6	39.9	40.9	46.6	43.1	43.5
New Haven	51.3	50.8	50.9	42.0	43.0	43.7	46.7	46.6	47.6
<b>Norwalk</b>	<b>60.3</b>	<b>59.4</b>	<b>59.5</b>	<b>54.9</b>	<b>55.4</b>	<b>56.8</b>	<b>56.4</b>	<b>56.7</b>	<b>55.1</b>
Stamford	60.4	58.5	57.9	54.3	54.4	54.3	57.3	56.0	56.1
Waterbury	64.2	50.7	51.9	42.3	43.8	44.7	47.1	46.6	46.8
<i>State</i>	<i>64.2</i>	<i>63.9</i>	<i>63.9</i>	<i>58.6</i>	<i>59.7</i>	<i>60.2</i>	<i>61.4</i>	<i>61.6</i>	<i>61.8</i>

## Students - Academic Growth for Connecticut Cities\* SBAC Percent of Target Achieved

City	ELA PTA			Math PTA		
	2022	2023	2024	2022	2023	2024
Bridgeport	60.5%	49.5%	51.3%	56.6%	50.3%	55.2%
Danbury	59.3%	55.2%	52.5%	61.0%	57.2%	52.7%
Hartford	51.9%	50.8%	52.2%	53.6%	52.1%	51.8%
New Britain	53.6%	51.2%	48.9%	55.0%	56.8%	51.0%
New Haven	58.7%	52.1%	56.0%	59.7%	52.9%	52.3%
<b>Norwalk</b>	<b>57.1%</b>	<b>55.3%</b>	<b>57.0%</b>	<b>62.6%</b>	<b>60.1%</b>	<b>60.8%</b>
Stamford	56.6%	52.6%	54.3%	58.2%	56.4%	55.2%
Waterbury	58.6%	50.6%	58.1%	52.6%	51.9%	52.6%
<i>State</i>	<i>60.4%</i>	<i>57.2%</i>	<i>58.7%</i>	<i>65.2%</i>	<i>61.8%</i>	<i>61.4%</i>

NORWALK HIGH SCHOOL / P-TECH NORWALK



# CAPITAL PROJECTS

## BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

Two new school construction projects are currently underway in the district – Norwalk High School/ P-TECH Norwalk and South Norwalk Elementary School.

The new South Norwalk (SONO) Elementary School is providing the South Norwalk community its first neighborhood school in over 40 years. The SONO project will be the first school construction project to be completed with a state reimbursement rate of 60%.

SOUTH NORWALK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL





# BUDGET PRIORITIES

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**The FY2025–26 budget priorities are tied to the district’s strategic plan and goals. The priorities are a reflection of the community feedback and the students’ needs. The priorities also include non-negotiable items, such as state mandates and providing the quality of services required under law. The district’s intention is to provide students with an excellent and equitable education, while graduating future ready and addressing the diverse needs of the population.**



## GRANTS

Norwalk Public Schools (NPS) is projected to receive \$30.66 million in grant funding for FY2025–26, accounting for 10.4% of the total operating budget. Grant funding has decreased overall, with \$2.9 million in grants, primarily for mental health and tutoring, expiring in Spring 2025. A key ongoing funding source is the \$15 million Magnet School Assistance Program (MSAP) grant over five years, aimed at creating a K–12 STEAM pathway.

The district continues to apply for competitive grants, with \$1.6 million in potential funding for FY2025–26. Competitive grants encourage innovation, while entitlement grants provide stable funding for programs such as Title I and IDEA, with restrictions on use. Several programs funded by grants, particularly those related to behavioral support, will be rolled back as grant funding expires.



## FOOD SERVICES FUND

This fund covers all revenue and expenditures related to food services and is intended to be self-sustaining. However, in recent years, the district has had to transfer funds to cover deficits. Federal funding during the pandemic helped maintain the fund, and the district transitioned to the Community Eligibility Program (CEP), providing free meals to all students. For FY2025–26, a \$1.2 million deficit is projected due to reduced state reimbursements. Since implementing CEP, student participation in the meal program has increased by 42.6%. The district must now decide whether to apply for continued CEP participation in future years. Additionally, the district awarded a five-year food services contract to Chartwells, effective for FY2024–25.

# BUDGET PRIORITIES



## SPECIAL EDUCATION AND MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS

The demand for specialized learning services, including those under IDEA, has risen significantly, now comprising over 17% of our student body in FY2025-26. This growth, along with increasing out-of-district tuition costs and unfunded state mandates, has created a financial burden. The district is required to provide these services, whether in-district or through external providers. Additionally, the Multilingual Learner (MLL) population has grown in line with national migration trends.

To address these challenges, NPS is investing in in-district Special Education programs, which offer significant savings compared to external programs. These programs will also foster academic growth, community engagement, and social development. Further investment in teacher professional development will enhance the district's capacity to meet the diverse needs of students and attract families, enriching the educational experience and promoting diversity. This initiative aims to serve as a model for other communities, demonstrating the value of inclusive, community-based education.



## UNCONTROLLABLE INFLATIONARY INCREASES AND ONE TIME FUNDING STREAMS

National inflation in utilities and other costs is placing immense pressure on school district budgets nationwide, with rising energy and water costs diverting funds from critical educational services. For FY2025-26, the NPS transportation department budget is projected to increase by \$1.15 million or 10% due to contract hikes and mandates. Utility expenses, including electricity and natural gas, are also expected to rise by \$1 million next year.

In addition, the expiration of grant funding, alongside contractual increases surpassing the growth in available funding, has further strained financial resources, posing challenges to sustaining excellence across the district.





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