



A Message from Dr. Alexandra Estrella, Superintendent of Norwalk Public Schools

Response to Norwalk Board of Estimate and Taxation Approved Cap for the FY2026-27 Operating Budget

Norwalk Public Schools has worked tirelessly to develop an operating budget for FY 2026-27 that preserves the level of service and resources our schools need to provide every scholar with the highest quality educational experience.

The Board of Education initially approved a tentative operating budget requesting a 6.5% increase, a request grounded in the actual needs of our students, staff, and schools. That request reflected the rising costs of delivering a high quality education, maintaining appropriate class sizes, supporting student well-being, and meeting our contractual and operational obligations. Even at that level, the budget was built carefully and fiscally responsible.

When the Mayor first recommended a 4.0% increase, the district was forced to make reductions that affected school budgets. When that recommendation was later adjusted to 4.9%, Norwalk Public Schools used the additional 0.9% to protect schools directly and avoid reducing staff at the school level. That choice reflected our core priority: shielding classrooms, student services, and school communities from deeper harm wherever possible.

Even under the Mayor's revised recommended budget of 4.9%, the district was required to make difficult reductions to close the gap between that level and the 6.5% originally requested by the Board of Education, a difference of \$3.8 million. In doing so, we prioritized reductions in non-school-based areas and limited school-level adjustments to those driven by enrollment changes.

The decision by the Board of Estimate and Taxation to cap the budget at a 4.0% increase now requires the district to make an additional \$2.3 million in cuts. This decision reflects a serious disconnect between the financial decisions being made and the day-to-day realities of what it takes to effectively serve students. Schools cannot be expected to absorb rising costs, expand expectations, and continue producing strong outcomes while being asked, year after year, to do more with less.

"I am deeply disappointed by the Board of Estimate and Taxation's decision. The discussion remained too focused on staying within a predetermined cap rather than honestly confronting the actual needs of our students and schools. That approach



dismisses the real cost of providing a high quality education and reflects a troubling disconnect from what it takes to effectively support teaching and learning. Our budget should be driven by student needs, not by an arbitrary limit. When we underinvest in our schools, we underinvest in the future of Norwalk,” said Dr. Alexandra Estrella, Superintendent of Norwalk Public Schools.

What makes this decision even more troubling is the imbalance it reveals. While Norwalk Public Schools has been directed to absorb an additional \$2.3 million in reductions, the City itself was tasked with identifying only \$110,000 in additional cuts. That disparity places a disproportionate burden on public education and sends the wrong message about the value of our students, our educators, and our schools.

At the same time, the district could potentially have to absorb a \$3.3 million increase in teachers’ healthcare costs. These are not optional expenses. They are contractual obligations. Yet the responsibility for closing this gap has once again been placed squarely on the school district, further straining the very system that families rely on every day.

Despite every effort to avoid this outcome, we have reached a point where reductions to school-based budgets beyond enrollment adjustments are unavoidable. We will work closely with school leaders to minimize the impact on student-facing services, but the public deserves honesty: these cuts will have real consequences for students, staff, and school communities.

This decision reflects a troubling and ongoing pattern of underfunding public education while continuing to expect the same, if not greater, results. Norwalk proudly celebrates student achievement, school success, and the strength of its community. But those outcomes do not happen by accident. They are the result of sustained investment in people, programs, support systems, and opportunities for children.

Each year, the cost of educating students rises. Expectations rise. Student needs grow more complex. Yet funding has not kept pace in a way that ensures reasonable class sizes, adequate staffing, and the academic, social, emotional, and specialized supports students need to thrive. That gap between expectation and investment is neither sustainable nor responsible.

We also want to address the misconception that district spending on infrastructure is contributing to this challenge. We are grateful for the investments that have already been made in our facilities and for the important capital projects that remain underway across the district. Those investments are valuable and necessary, and they help ensure that our students learn in



safe and well maintained environments. However, capital projects are funded separately from the operating budget.

Strong schools require more than strong buildings. Without adequate investment in teachers, support staff, academic programs, and student services, even the finest facilities cannot meet the needs of our students or fulfill the promise of public education.

“We are grateful for investments in infrastructure, but buildings alone do not educate children. If we continue to fund the shell while hollowing out the people, programs, and supports inside, we are not truly investing in our schools or in Norwalk’s future,” Estrella said.

Investing in our schools is not an expense to be minimized. Strong public schools strengthen neighborhoods, attract and retain families, prepare a skilled future workforce, and contribute to the long-term economic health of the city. The students in our classrooms today are the future taxpayers, business owners, civic leaders, and professionals who will shape Norwalk for decades to come. When we invest in them, we invest in the future strength, stability, and prosperity of our entire community.

Norwalk stands at a critical juncture. The success of our city depends on the success of our scholars. Continued underinvestment in public education puts that future at risk. It weakens the very foundation on which a strong, vibrant, and economically healthy city is built.

We remain unwavering in our commitment to advocate for the resources our students deserve. We will continue to speak plainly about what our schools need, and we will continue to call for decisions that reflect a true understanding of what it takes to educate children well. Our students are worth that investment, and Norwalk’s future depends on it.