

# The Norwalk Hour

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## 'Train wreck for public education'

### Officials, advocates say governor's budget shortchanges schools

By **Natasha Sokoloff**  
STAFF WRITER

The fight for more education funding in the state's 2026 General Assembly session has put a spotlight on the way that Connecticut funds K-12 education — and on the consequences of going another year without foundational change.

Gov. Ned Lamont's budget proposal largely maintains funding levels for K-12 education, but it is missing the substantial change to the state's main way of

funding local school systems that advocates say is long overdue.

Despite celebrating Lamont's proposals for free school breakfasts and other education initiatives, several local leaders and education advocates said the proposed fiscal year 2027 budget for public education ultimately puts further strain on Connecticut school districts and towns that could lead to staffing cuts, slashed school programming and higher property taxes.

"The governor's budget is a complete disappointment for public education,"

Meriden Public Schools Superintendent Mark Benigni said. "It's a budget that doesn't recognize the challenges that public schools are facing, and it just shifts the tax burden to our property owners and the challenges to our municipalities."

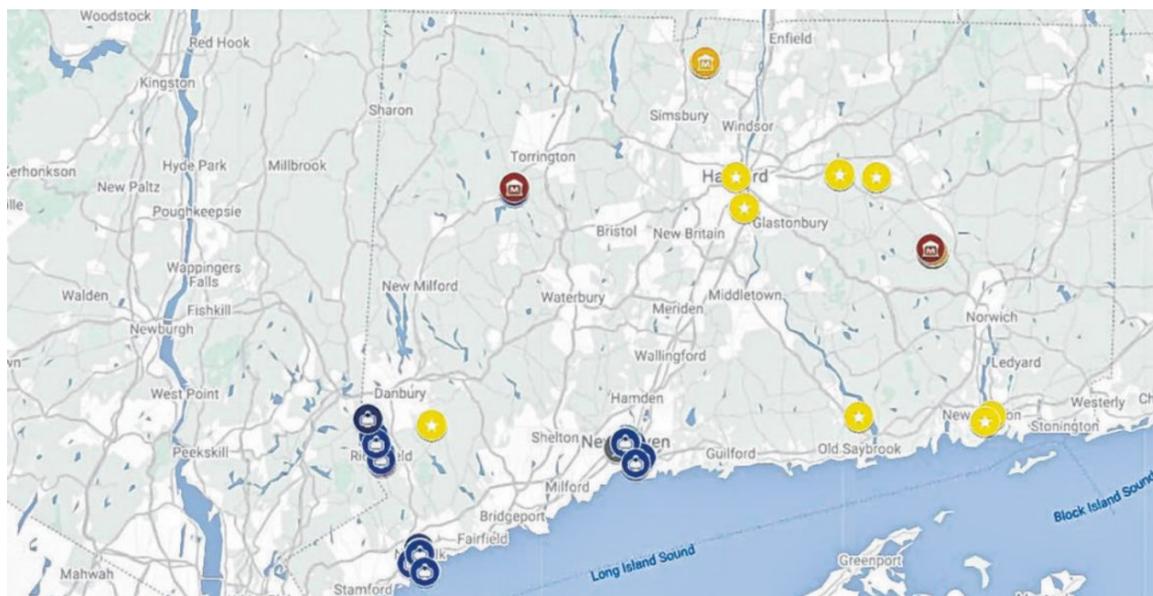
#### Education Cost Sharing grant

The Education Cost Sharing grant — Connecticut's primary form of state funding for K-12 education — has emerged at the center of conversations **Education continues on A4**



Jim Michaud/Hearst Connecticut Media

**The House of Representatives at the state Capitol on Feb. 4. Education leaders are calling for the state to increase its spending on schools.**



Images courtesy of CTVets250

**CTVets250 is creating a Revolutionary War Trail across Connecticut, marking sites of battles and other important events. The project includes development of an interactive digital map.**

## Battle of Norwalk site on digital historic trail

### Veterans mark state's big role in Revolutionary War

By **Jesse Leavenworth**  
STAFF WRITER

Connecticut patriots helped win the Revolutionary War, fighting, spying and provisioning George Washington's army with every necessity from beef to musket balls forged from King George III's melted statue.

Now Connecticut veterans are raising money to honor the Provision State's part in the celebration of America's 250th birthday. The central project of CTVets250, now in the fundraising stage, is a Revolutionary War Trail featuring a digital, interactive map marking battles and other sites across the state that proved vital in the fight for liberty.

The trail will be "gamified" so that people can visit and mark off each site for re-



**The War Office in Lebanon, where patriot Gov. Jonathan Trumbull led planning for the colony's defense and provisioning of the Continental Army. The building on the Lebanon Green is among sites featured on the CTVets250 Revolutionary War Trail.**

wards, such as a discount at a nearby tavern or restaurant, project organizer Christine Pittsley said Thursday. A grand prize will be awarded to those who visit all the sites, said Pittsley, a Navy veteran and Connecticut historian. Organizers hope to roll out the trail platform in

May and have it fully underway by July 4, depending on successful fundraising, she said.

The Revolutionary War Trail includes:

Fort Griswold Battlefield State Park in Groton, preserved site of a fierce battle.

Fort Trumbull State Park, across the Thames River in New London, where traitor and New Haven native Benedict Arnold led British forces in burning the town to the ground in 1781.

The War Office in Lebanon, where Gov. Jonathan Trumbull led planning for the colony's defense and provisioning of the Continental Army. **Trail continues on A6**

## Lamont seeks expansion of state's vaccine authority

By **Cris Villalonga-Vivoni**  
STAFF WRITER

Gov. Ned Lamont has made it clear that one of his goals during the General Assembly's "short" session is to better protect the state from major federal changes — including when it comes to vaccines.

One of his proposals seeks to strengthen the state Department of Public Health by requiring it to rely on evidence-based science and existing public health standards to guide immunization practices, notwithstanding federal recommendations.

As immunization rates slip nationwide, to some, standardizing care is a bold step forward to protect vaccine access. In contrast, others worry the effort may stray from checks and balances by overriding legislative oversight.

Vaccines have made headlines over the past year due to an ongoing effort to align national recommendations with the vaccine skepticism long held by U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

Under Kennedy's leadership, HHS announced it would no longer recommend COVID-19 vaccines for healthy children and pregnant women, replaced the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, and abandoned the long-held position that vaccines do not cause autism.

The latest move came in early January when the ACIP announced a new federal vaccine schedule that sharply narrows the national recommendations for children. Focused more on risk-based and shared decision-making, the new recommendation reduced the number of diseases covered for children from 18 to 11, eliminating **Vaccines continues on A6**



David Goldman

**The CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices has been replaced under U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.**

## Smyth submits \$483 million operating budget, a 7% increase

### Formulating spending plan 'really challenging this year'

By **Shaniece Holmes-Brown**  
STAFF WRITER

NORWALK — Norwalk Mayor Barbara Smyth said the 7% year-over-year increase in her proposed 2026-27 budget is driven by things outside her control.

Smyth presented her initial \$484 million budget

proposal to the Board of Estimate and Taxation Monday night.

"This is my first budget as your mayor, but many of you know it's far from my first budget cycle here in the city of Norwalk," she said. "As a Norwalk resident and your mayor, this is a challenging budget year for Norwalk. **Budget continues on A4**



Arnold Gold/Hearst Connecticut Media

**Norwalk Mayor Barbara Smyth's budget includes a 10% spending increase for the city, and a 4% increase for the Board of Education.**

### Mayor's proposal includes \$6M cut to school request

By **Ignacio Laguarda**  
STAFF WRITER

NORWALK — A recommended cut of about \$6 million to the Board of Education's proposed budget would result in the loss of positions and programs for 2026-27, school officials said.

Mayor Barbara Smyth presented her proposed

budget Monday night during a meeting of the Board of Estimate and Taxation, and in it, she called for an increase of 4% to the school operating budget, which would be \$9.9 million more than the current fiscal year.

But Norwalk Public Schools Superintendent Alexandra Estrella's ini- **Schools continues on A4**

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**Weather:** Breezy with times of clouds and sun.  
High: 39. Low: 14. **Page A10**