2016-2019 Strategic Operating Plan

Working Together to
Raise the Bar &
Close the Gap

Norwalk Public Schools
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Norwalk, Connecticut 06851
www.norwalkps.org
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1 INTRODUCTION

Norwalk Public Schools (NPS) is poised for implementing the right strategies, systems and supports to ensure that all students leave Grade 12 ready for future academic or work success. This Strategic Operating Plan (SOP) is the result of several months of work, including a Board of Education retreat, input from the District’s Senior Management Team and school administrators, plus feedback received from information sessions for teachers, staff, parents and members of the community.

At NPS, we want to expand the promising strategies initiated under the prior Strategic Plan, while intensifying our efforts to raise the bar for all students and to close achievement gaps.

- **“Raising the Bar”** means that academic expectations for all students increase and additional opportunities are provided for students and their families.

- **“Closing the Gaps”** means identifying struggling students and providing them appropriate interventions and supports, so that students who start the school year behind make more than one academic year of growth each year. NPS strives to close the achievement gaps of subgroups of students within the District, but also any gaps that exist between Norwalk students and the performance of students statewide.

Our Strategic Plan is guided by a Vision (page 3) and supported by a Theory of Action (page 4). The administration and Board of Education have developed six Goals (page 6), which will guide the District’s work. These goals require a set of Strategies – the things we will do, or do differently, to achieve each goal – which are described starting on page 7. Strategies are not listed in any prioritized order, and all are viewed as a crucial piece of the SOP. A number of Performance Measures (see Appendix A) will be used to monitor progress towards realizing each goal.

**A Living Document**

It will take at least three academic years to accomplish all the strategies included in the Plan. Each year, mid-course corrections based on current data and the changing needs of our District (Figure 1). Implementation tasks will be created to plan and prioritize each year’s work.

The Strategic Operating Plan is a living document that guides the District’s work, provides an accountability mechanism for the superintendent and senior staff, and can be adapted to the District’s changing needs.
Norwalk Public Schools is . . .

The most successful city school system in Connecticut.¹

Norwalk students as a whole exceed state average achievement² while high need students have the smallest achievement gap.³ Students’ needs and interests are met through a wide range of school and program choices⁴ that promote diversity and broaden achievement. All students are taught by exemplary educators⁵ in nurturing,⁶ safe, and attractive schools.⁷ Students read on grade level by end of grade 3,⁸ leave 8th grade equipped to do rigorous high school work⁹ and graduate¹⁰ from high school college and career ready.¹¹

Performance Measures

The following footnotes indicate which performance measures (PMs) apply to each vision concept. See Appendix A, starting on page 15, for more detail on the performance measures and their respective targets for 2016-17.

1. Increase in District accountability index; schools increase school accountability index (PM 1)
2. Comparison of Norwalk to state, Smarter Balanced results across grades on Reading (ELA) and Math; NWEA “normed referenced” growth comparison (PMs 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10)
3. Comparison of Norwalk to state, “High Needs Subgroup” results across grades on Reading (ELA) and Math; NWEA “normed referenced” growth comparison (PMs 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10)
4. Directly observable increase in program quality and quantity of intra-District and inter-District schools and programs (PMs 11, 12)
5. Increasing number/percentage of teachers and administrators rated ‘Exemplary’ by Connecticut System for Educator Evaluation and Development (SEED) (PM 16)
6. Annual Student Survey, Dimensions of School Climate (PMs 13, 14)
7. Progress of School Building Program: Implementation of Facilities Master Plan (PM 15)
8. mClass DIBELS at end of grade 3; intervention records (PMs 4, 6)
9. 8th grade PSAT; intervention records; Lexile Reading Scores (PMs 4, 5, 6)
10. 4-year high school graduation rates (PM 10)
11. SAT College and Career Readiness Benchmark; number/percentage of students attending 4 year and 2 year postsecondary institutions (PMs 8, 9)
3 Theory of Action

NPS’s Theory of Action, or general improvement strategy, Managed Performance Empowerment (MPE), provides autonomy to schools with improved performance and closely monitors, and intervenes when necessary in schools that do not meet expected benchmarks for student achievement.

Managed Performance Empowerment is designed to provide autonomy within a system of accountability. Norwalk Public Schools believes that earned autonomy promotes and encourages innovation, while also creating a supportive environment for all schools to improve.

The three areas of autonomy under Managed Performance Empowerment include:

1. Funding and budgeting
2. Talent
3. Operations (including program and use of time).

Some examples of how this will be implemented in Norwalk include:

- Transitioning to school based budgeting will support the theory of action by ensuring that schools receive equitable funds to support their students’ needs.
- Redesigning and strengthening school governance councils will provide high performing schools additional flexibility to make site-based decisions to best support their students, families, and staff.
- Enhancing existing and designing new choice programs.

A “Theory of Action” is an overall strategy for improvement. Norwalk Public Schools believes that earned autonomy promotes and encourages innovation, while also creating a supportive environment for all schools to improve.
4 PERFORMANCE MEASURES

A variety of performance measures (PMs) will be used to monitor progress over the three-year period, and will help us stay on track, identify strengths and weaknesses, and make midcourse corrections.

Because Norwalk Public Schools collects a vast amount of data, we have narrowed down the list of performance measures that align with our vision, our six goals, and the strategies we will implement.

The Strategic Operating Plan includes 17 different performance measures, which assess the various aspects of the educational system. Categories of performance measures include:

- District Performance
- Student Achievement
- Program Quality
- School Climate
- Teacher Quality
- District Systems

The specific performance measures, the types of analysis to be completed, the 2016-17 performance targets, and the status of the PMs can be found in Appendix A, starting on page 15.

An important note on the performance measures:

Due to changing, revised and new state assessment systems, several of the performance measures below will not be used until 2017-18. In several cases, the 2016-17 data will provide the baseline data, which will be used to determine future targets and monitor growth. In addition, some of the initial performance targets are not specific (i.e. decreasing the gap between X and Y), because we do not have enough information to calculate a feasible goal at this point (i.e. decrease the gap between X and Y by 5%). The status of each of the performance measures is noted in the Appendix A, starting on page 15.
5 OUR GOALS AND STRATEGIES

**Goal 1:** Improve achievement of all Norwalk students in reading (ELA), math and science, ensuring students graduate on time and are college and career ready.

**Goal 2:** Increase the achievement of Norwalk’s high needs student subgroups to reduce achievement gaps:

*Internal:* Between Norwalk’s high needs students and Norwalk’s non-high needs students, and

*External:* Between Norwalk’s high needs students and the performance of high needs students statewide.

**Goal 3:** Create educationally robust choices for parents and students that meet diverse needs and interests.

**Goal 4:** Develop exemplary teachers and school leaders; fill majority of school and staff leadership positions through succession planning and development of staff with the District.

**Goal 5:** Ensure safe and attractive schools that support learning and provide a nurturing, inclusive environment, with positive behavior interventions and supports at every school.

**Goal 6:** Develop external partnerships and District operating systems necessary to achieve equity and support the district's strategic priorities in the most cost-effective manner.
Goal 1

Improve achievement of all Norwalk students in reading (English Language Arts), math and science to ensure they graduate on time and are college and career ready.

Strategies

A. **CK3LI**: Implement Connecticut K-3 Literacy Initiative in all elementary schools.

B. **Increase Time for K-5 Math**: Increase K-5 Math instruction from 60 minutes per day to 90 minutes per day, with a focus on group work and differentiated instruction.

C. **Increase Time for Middle School Math**: Increase time allotted for Math instruction in Middle Schools to a 90-minute double block, comparable to ELA.

D. **Update High School Graduation Requirements**: Develop high school programs of study based on a 25-credit graduation requirement and capstone experience, effective with the class of 2020.

E. **Ensure All Students are On Track to Graduate**: Implement learning program (i.e., Blended Learning model) that personalizes instruction, creates greater flexibility in scheduling, and provides opportunities for “recuperative learning” necessary to improving the 4 and 5-year graduation rates.

F. **Assessments**: Implement the Northwest Evaluation Association’s (NWEA) Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) cycle assessments to assess student progress, adjust instruction and determine relative growth.

G. **Curriculum Mapping**: Complete rigorous curriculum design mapping and alignment to Common Core Standards in grades K-12 in Reading (English Language Arts), Math and Science.

H. **Instructional Time**: Utilize resources from the National Center on Time and Learning to add instructional time of at least 300 more annual hours at underperforming schools.

I. **Science Standards**: In partnership with the Connecticut Science Center, pilot experiential science instruction based on Next Generation Science Standards in one elementary and one middle school.
J. **Middle Grades Design**: Redesign middle schools in a manner that provides all students with greater opportunities to learn and better addresses the development needs of the trans-adolescent student.

K. **Explore**: Introduce an “exploratory” program at each middle school to foster the “hands on” application of Common Core Standards.

L. **Academically Talented (AT)**: Redesign Norwalk’s instructional delivery system for gifted education (Academically Talented) utilizing an evidence-based national model and trained staff.

M. **High Quality PreK**: Improve preschool options through the development of more preschool options that are effective in promoting early literacy and Kindergarten readiness.

N. **High School Rigor**: Increase course rigor for high school students.

O. **Blended Learning**: Develop a blended learning center at each high school to provide students opportunities to earn additional credits.

Feedback from public forums
Increase the achievement of Norwalk's “high needs” student subgroups to reduce achievement gaps: 1) Between Norwalk's high needs students and Norwalk's non-high needs students (internal gap) and 2) Between Norwalk's high needs students and the performance of high needs students statewide (external gap).

Strategies

A. **Reform Special Education**: Implement the goals and priority activities of the November 2015 Special Education Review by the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC). For the full CREC Report, visit [www.norwalkps.org/district/special_education](http://www.norwalkps.org/district/special_education).

B. **Elementary Dual Language**: Strengthen and expand existing Dual Language Program for English Language Learners (ELL) and native English speakers.

C. **Expand Dual Language**: Develop a plan for expanding the Dual Language Program to grades 6, 7, and 8 and into high school.

D. **Elementary Tier II Reading Interventions**: Develop and implement a menu of Tier II Reading Interventions, available for students in grades 1 through 4 at every elementary school, to support the Board-adopted Early Literacy Plan.

E. **Elementary Tier III Reading Interventions**: Develop and implement required Tier III reading interventions for any student determined not reading on grade level at end of grades 1, 2, or 3.

F. **Elementary Tier II Math Interventions**: Develop and implement a menu of Tier II math interventions available for students in grades 1 through 5 at every elementary school.

G. **Summer Learning**: Redesign summer learning options as Tier III interventions for students determined to be performing below grade level in reading and math.

H. **Intervention Support**: Repurpose the Norwalk Alliance District Grant to fund materials, systems, teacher training and extra instructional time to support Tier II and Tier III interventions in reading and math in grades 1-9.

I. **Middle School Tier II Interventions**: Develop a menu of Tier II student supports for students in grades 6, 7, 8 and 9 (Read 180, Math 180, Systems 44) for students performing below grade level in reading and math.
J. **Alternate Path to Graduation**: Redesign Norwalk Pathways Academy at Briggs as a flexibly scheduled, accelerated learning center for over-age/under-credit students of both high schools, utilizing a blended-learning, personalized instruction model.

K. **Support for Low Performing Schools**: Develop and implement a District-led intervention plan to support low performing schools.

L. **Expand Summer Learning**: Expand effective summer learning programs to decrease summer learning loss and provide enrichment opportunities.

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**Goal 2 Terms Defined**

**High Needs**: Students who are economically disadvantaged, English learners or students with disabilities.

**Tier II Interventions**: Data-driven, school-level supports to help students progress.

**Tier III Interventions**: More intensive, individualized student supports.

**Blended Learning**: A combination of both in-person and online learning experiences.
Goal 3

Create educationally robust choices for parents and students that meet diverse needs and interests.

Strategies

A. **Intra-District Magnets**: Enhance or develop four theme based, intra-District schools, e.g., STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts & Math), Bank Street College, Dual Language, Montessori.

B. **K-8 Schools**: Develop at least two K-8 school of choice.

C. **Charter Proposal**: Explore the feasibility of developing a District charter school proposal for submission to the State Board of Education.

D. **IB at McMahon**: Complete the development of an International Baccalaureate (IB) Program at Brien McMahon High School.

E. **High School Pathways**: Develop multiple high school pathways of high quality, related electives leading to a capstone experience.

F. **Year-Round School**: Explore the feasibility of offering a “year-round” schedule at one elementary or K-8 campus.

G. **Small Learning Communities**: Develop at least two programmatically distinctive small learning communities at each comprehensive high school (i.e. Norwalk High: Digital & Media Communication and Norwalk Early College Academy; Brien McMahon HS: Center for Global Studies and Health Academy).

H. **Music & Art**: Continue to expand arts offerings and experiences, particularly at the secondary level.
Goal 4

Develop exemplary teachers and school leaders; fill the majority of school and District leadership positions through planning and development of staff from within.

Strategies

A. **Talent Management**: Reorganize current Human Resources Department to create a talent management office, rooted in the seven dimensions of the Talent Management Model.

B. **Performance Management System**: Develop and implement a system of collecting, analyzing, and monitoring, teacher and administrator performance data to meet Connecticut’s System for Educator Evaluation and Development (SEED) requirements and to support District goals.

C. **Build Capacity**: Create a system of support for educators seeking to build their instructional and administrative capacity.

D. **Leadership Pipeline**: Develop and implement a leadership pipeline, cultivating emerging and high potential leaders (i.e., emerging leaders program, aspiring principal fellowship program and principal residency program.)

E. **Succession Planning**: Design and implement a succession plan for the superintendent and key senior management and school leadership positions.

F. **Recognition**: Recognize outstanding individuals and teacher/leader teams for their work in closing achievement gaps.

G. **Develop Career Ladders**: Expand teacher leadership opportunities to build individual skills and develop capacity within the system.

H. **Induction**: Develop and implement a year-long induction program for new teachers and a systematic “on-boarding” protocol for all new employees

I. **Development**: Develop and implement an annual District professional development plan that addresses evidence-based practices, increases capacity to close achievement gaps and ensures professional growth teachers, staff and administrators.
Goal 5

Ensure safe and attractive schools that support learning and provide a nurturing, inclusive environment, with positive behavior interventions and supports at every school.

Strategies

A. **Facilities Plan**: Develop and implement a District-wide facilities plan to accommodate additional enrollment, eliminate the use of modular classrooms and provide state-of-the-art facilities.

B. **School in South Norwalk**: Begin process for construction on an elementary school in South Norwalk that will increase educational choice throughout the District, accommodate enrollment growth, and reduce bussing for South Norwalk students.

C. **Renovate as New**: Plan to “renovate as new” for at one school.

D. **Explore Montessori**: Conduct a feasibility study to site a public Montessori School and implement the primary level in an existing, an acquired site, or new construction.

E. **Inclusive PreSchool**: Consolidate inclusive preschool classes within the Norwalk Early Childhood Center in a newly renovated building on Allen Road.

F. **School Climate**: Develop measurable goals based on an annual school climate survey to improve school climate in every school.

G. **Student Absences**: Develop a system and processes for addressing student truancy and chronic absenteeism.

H. **Safety and Security**: Continue to strengthen school security through additional training, capital improvements and technology.

I. **Behavioral Interventions**: Maximize learning time by implementing behavioral interventions that limit disruptions and time out of the classroom.

J. **School Lunch Quality and Environment**: Improve nutritional quality of school lunches and the dining environment.

K. **Wellness Committee**: Enhance the use of resources and supports, including the District’s school Wellness Advisory Committee, to improve the health and well-being of all students and staff.

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As the City of Norwalk continues to grow, projections in the District’s 10-Year Facilities Study point to the need for three additional school buildings to accommodate growing enrollment.

Planning for a possible school in South Norwalk needs to include representation and input from the community.

Feedback from public forums
Develop external partnerships and District operating systems necessary to achieve equity and support the District's strategic priorities in the most cost-effective manner.

Strategies

A. **Student Based Budgets**: Consistent with the District’s Theory of Action, develop and implement a Student Based Budget to promote and ensure equity within the schools, empower school leaders and governance councils, and to differentiate services and supports based on student needs.

B. **School Governance Councils**: Create and build capacity of School Governance Councils that have additional operating autonomies due to higher performance and/or improvement.

C. **Finance and HR System**: Implement system that provides access to more timely and accurate financial and human resources data that will increase efficiency of District operations, improve decision-making, and reduce administrative operating costs.

D. **Leverage Major Grants**: Utilize major Federal and State grants (such as Title 1, Title 2A, Alliance District/Priority School) to develop curriculum, differentiate instruction, provide interventions and supports, develop staff, and provide students with greater opportunities to learn.

E. **Public & Private Partnerships**: Strengthen and expand public and private partnerships to support the full implementation of the District’s Vision and Strategic Operating Plan.

F. **Partner Alignment**: Ensure that the services of our partners are aligned to the District’s Vision and Strategic Operating Plan.

G. **Communications**: Refine and implement a communication plan that increases transparency, improves feedback to the District, and delivers regular communications (e.g., newsletters) to parents, teachers, staff and the community about NPS events and developments.

H. **Data Dashboard**: Develop an integrated data system to monitor progress on achieving the goals of the Strategic Operating Plan.

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**Partnership examples include relationships with organizations such as the Carver Center, Norwalk ACTS, Stepping Stones, Norwalk Hospital, IBM, Norwalk Community College, Public Square, Be Foundation, Grossman Family Foundation and Dalio Foundation.**
Appendix A: Performance Measures

An important note on Performance Measures: Due to changing, revised and new state assessment systems, several of the performance measures below will not be used until 2017-18. In several cases, the 2016-17 data will provide the baseline data, which will be used to determine future targets and monitor growth. In addition, some of the initial performance targets are not specific (e.g., decreasing the gap between X and Y), because we do not have enough information to calculate a feasible goal at this point (e.g., decrease the gap between X and Y by 5%).

Abbreviations and Definitions

NWEA: Northwest Evaluation Association
PSAT: Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test
SAT: Scholastic Aptitude Test
CMT: Connecticut Mastery Test
CAPT: Connecticut Academic Performance Test
mCLASS: a type of assessment used to monitor student progress
DIBELS: Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills
PELI: Preschool Early Literacy Initiative
EOY: End of Year
ERW: Evidence Based Reading and Writing
SEED: Connecticut’s System for Educator Evaluation and Development

ELA: English Language Arts

Performance Measures

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<tr>
<th>PM</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Types of Analysis</th>
<th>2016-17 Performance Target</th>
<th>Status</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>District Accountability Index</td>
<td>District wide</td>
<td>District-wide accountability index will increase by 5%*</td>
<td>• New, state-determined index</td>
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| 2  | NWEA                | By subgroup and content area       | A. Decrease the gap between NPS “high needs” students and “non-high needs” students.  
B. Decrease the gap between NPS students and national norms. | • Baseline for entire District in fall 2016-17  
• Performance targets will be set after District-wide baseline is collected in fall 2016 |

* Beginning in 2017-18.
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<tr>
<th>PM</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Types of Analysis</th>
<th>2016-17 Performance Target</th>
<th>Status</th>
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</table>
| 3  | CT State Assessments: Smarter Balanced and CMT/CAPT Science Test     | Smarter Balanced • All students • Reading (ELA) and math • All grades (except grade 11) CMT/CAPT Science • All students • Grades 5, 8 & 10 | A. Decrease the reading (ELA) gap (on Smarter Balanced) between NPS “all students” and the state by 10%, as measured by the percent of students achieving levels 3 & 4.  
B. Decrease the math gap (on Smarter Balanced) between NPS “all students” and the state by 15%, measured by the percent of students achieving levels 3 and 4.  
C. Decrease the science gap (on CMT/CAPT Science) between NPS “all students” and the state. | • A & B: Baseline in 2014-15  
• C: Specific target TBD |
| 4  | mCLASS DIBELS, PELI DIBELS, & Intervention Records                  | • Preschool • K-3 • All students                                                  | A. Increase percent of “all K-3 students” meeting benchmark to 85% by 2017 End of Year (EOY) on mCLASS DIBELS.  
B. 100% of K-3 students not meeting benchmark (on mClass DIBELS) receive appropriate tiered interventions.  
C. Increase percent of preschool students meeting benchmark. | • B will require schools to collect data on students’ benchmarks and if they did/did not receive Tier II/III interventions  
• C: specific target TBD |
| 5  | 8th grade PSAT (Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test)                | • Grade 8                                                                          | Increase percent of “all students” reaching benchmark. Target increase will be set when 2015 results are available.                                                                 | • High school readiness  
• Baseline in Dec 2015                                                                                   |
| 6  | Lexile & Intervention records                                       | • Grade 8 • Lexile • Tier II/III intervention records                             | A. Increase percent of grade 8 students at/above proficiency by 10%.  
B. 100% of students not meeting high school readiness expectations in reading (Lexile) receive appropriate reading tiered interventions (at grade 8). | • Will require schools to collect data on students’ benchmarks and if they did/did not receive Tier II/III interventions. |
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<th>Types of Analysis</th>
<th>2016-17 Performance Target</th>
<th>Status</th>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>PSAT</td>
<td>• Grade 10-11</td>
<td>A. Decrease gap between NPS students and state by 10% in ERW (Evidence-Based Reading &amp; Writing)</td>
<td>• Fall 2015 new baseline</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Math and ERW</td>
<td>B. Decrease gap between NPS and state by 15% in math</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Connecticut SAT</td>
<td>• All students</td>
<td>A. Decrease gap between NPS and state for “all students.”</td>
<td>• Spring 2016 new baseline for grade 11</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Grade 11</td>
<td>B. Increase percent of “all students” reaching “College and Career Ready” benchmark.</td>
<td>• To assess college and career readiness</td>
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<td>• High-needs/subgroups</td>
<td>C. Decrease gap between “high needs” subgroup students and “non-high needs” students within NPS.</td>
<td>• Will be able to set specific performance targets in 2016-17</td>
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<td>D. Decrease gap between “high needs students at NPS and state “high needs.”</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>College attendance</td>
<td>• All students</td>
<td>A. Increase the percent of a graduating class enrolled in 2 or 4-year postsecondary institutions (in the first year after graduation) by 5%.</td>
<td>• Baseline is class of 2014</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 2 and 4-year</td>
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<td>• Takes up to two years to receive data</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Graduation Rates</td>
<td>• All students</td>
<td>A. Increase 4 year graduation rates for “all students” by 5% until Norwalk is higher than state-wide rate.</td>
<td>• Graduation rates for the Class of 2016 will be released in spring 2017.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• High-needs/subgroups</td>
<td>B. Increase 4 year graduation rates of high needs subgroups</td>
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