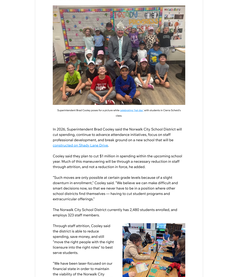
Kenneth Ritz Horan staff 2 days ago

Norwalk district to cut costs and break ground on new school in 2026

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the 38th installment of the "2025 Review/2026 Preview" series spotlighting local agencies, departments, offices, groups, nonprofits and schools. Norwalk Chile News publishes this series annually.



Superintendent Brad Cooley poses for a photo while celebrating his last day with students in Carlos Echevarria's class.

In 2026, Superintendent Brad Cooley said the Norwalk City School District will cut operating costs to advance attendance initiatives, focus on staff development and begin ground work on a new school that will be constructed on Shady Lane Drive.

Cooley said they plan to cut $1 million in spending within the upcoming school year. Much of this manoeuvering will be through a necessary reduction in staff through attrition, and not a reduction in force, he added.

"Such moves are only possible at certain grade levels because of a slight decrease in our student body. We will also be able to make some staffing and smart decisions now so that we never have to be in a position where other school districts find themselves — having to cut student programs and extracurricular offerings."

The Norwalk City School District currently has 2,480 students enrolled, and employs 320 staff members.

Through staff attrition, Cooley said the district is able to reduce spending, save money, and still "move the right people with the right licenses into the right roles" to best serve students.

"We have been laser-focused on our financial state in order to maintain the viability of the Norwalk City School District, and to ensure our resources for public education are under constant scrutiny, and our community members, our taxpayers, deserve this study, our numbers and take action on those things we can control," Cooley said.

Students in Carlosina Martin's second grade classroom in Classroom activities related to the district's new math curriculum.

Norwalk Chile News | Kenneth Ritz Horan

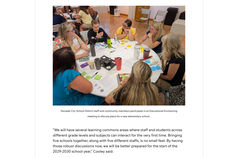
Project Lead the Way's Gold Standard Transport, Joyce Dupont, school board member Eric Gonzales, Kayla Burkett, Jenny Norris, Alison Cranford, Superintendent Brad Cooley, and Director of Operations Ron Marcoulier.

Norwalk Chile News | Kenneth Ritz Horan

Also this year, Cooley said Norwalk City Schools will continue to advance attendance initiatives for students and staff, an area where he said all six schools have already seen improvement.

"By expanding the ways in which we reach out to parents and guardians concerning their student's attendance, there is greater ownership in the process. Showing up every day matters, and kids in our district will receive that support," Cooley said.

For staff members, the district plans to focus professional development sessions on how teaching and learning will look and be executed in a new school.



Norwalk City School District staff and community members participate in a Educational Envisioning meeting for the plans for a new elementary school.

"We will have several learning commons areas where staff and students across different grade levels and subjects can interact for the very first time. Bringing five schools together, along with five different staffs, is no small feat. By having those robust discussions now, we will be better prepared for the start of the 2029-2030 school year," Cooley said.

The district plans to break ground on the new school this summer and have the school open and in use for the 2029-2030 school year.

Cooley said they have approved the schematic design of the new school and are moving into the design development phase.

"I'm looking forward to seeing extensive participation from our local businesses and our community members," he said. "We are in the process of what we should be pushing dirt on the Shady Lane farm this summer, and not long after that, vertical progress will be seen," Cooley said.

The district's educational visioning and planning team, consisting of community members, parents, staff members, and district and building administrators, and facilitators and beyond, said they would most like to see in a new school.

"It was a lively group that was able to visit other school districts and reflect upon what their decision-makers had done well, or not so well, with their design choices for new construction," Cooley said. "The biggest challenge we faced, knowing the gravity of our decisions, was that we were not designing a school just for today, but rather a future-ready learning center that will serve our community 50 years from now."

This is the team from Norwalk City Schools with planning and visioning a new elementary school. Pictured are Director of Operations Ron Marcoulier, Superintendent Brad Cooley, Director of Curriculum Dan Nicholas and Jen Pluchinski, ACT, Stephen Ryan, Hall Davis Design, Jill Bartlett Consulting Group, and Bailey Bearse, Eric Bedard and Lucas Lindy, of Garrison Miller.

Cooley said she is "incredibly proud" of the collective work that has gone into planning the future PreK-8 elementary building.

"This has truly been a team effort involving our administration, teachers, staff, community members, and fellow board members," she said. "From educational visioning sessions to visiting other districts with newly built schools, and collaborating with our architectural firm, we have worked very hard to design a building that reflects our community's values and serves students well for generations to come."

This rendering of what the outside of a new PK-8 school on Shady Lane Drive could look like was shared with the community on November.

Crawford also praised the board's collaboration with the Huron County commissioners.

The commissioners sold 15.8 acres of land on Shady Lane Drive to the Norwalk City School District for $1 million. The board then approved a resolution swapped 10 acres and traded 4 additional acres in exchange for the property that currently holds Main Street School when it is a "base ground, buildable lot."

"This addition of new acreage to add to the Huron County commissioners budget facilitate stronger collaboration between the county and the district, and we are grateful for their willingness to work together in the best interest of our students and community," Crawford said. "We also sincerely thank the many community members who shared their thoughtful input during public meetings and helped move conversations forward in a productive way. That collective effort was essential in allowing us to reach an agreement and continue progress on this important project."

Huron County Commissioners Tony Mason, Terry Boggs, and Chris Phillips.

Huron County Commissioners

In December, an anonymous donor gave nearly $400,000 to Norwalk City Schools to purchase the land from the county commissioners where the new school will be constructed.

Because of this act of generosity, the $400,000 will not need to be deducted from how much the needed to construct a 200,000 square foot facility.

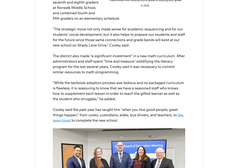
"When that news broke, there were so many people who were both surprised and grateful, and we were so excited that this Chilean-made mention that this is a heart and they were so surprised," Cooley said. "We have big-hearted people that do the unthinkable of the time. I agree with that sentiment, and I never take that lightly."

Crawford said this was one of "the most moving moments of the year."

"This act of kindness had a tremendous impact on our students, staff, and the future of our community. Knowing that someone believes so deeply in public education and in the future of Norwalk is inspiring. We are incredibly grateful for that support," Crawford said.

If community members or business wish to partner with the Norwalk City School District on the construction of the PreK-8 school for the new PK-8 school, they can contact Cooley at 419-668-2179 or cooleyb@norwalkcityschools.org.

"We would love to feature you on our donor recognition wall, displaying your name and your major contribution. Our history and donor walls will surely inspire future philanthropy," Cooley said.



In 2025, the district paid off a debt made grade shifts between buildings, and invested in a new math curriculum.

The Norwalk City School District completely paid off debt from the construction of Norwalk High School a year early, and the cash to each taxpayer to fund the new PK-8 is lower than expected and/or advertised during the "Now for Norwalk" campaign.

Starting this school year, the district decided to move sixth grade to various Norwalk Middle School buildings, fourth and fifth graders at Main Street School, to better prepare sixth graders for middle school.

Cooley said this was "a vital move" for Norwalk City Schools, because it allowed sixth graders with the seventh and eighth graders at Norwalk Middle School, and combined fourth and fifth graders on an elementary schedule.

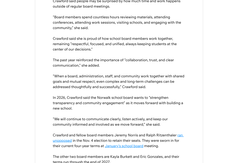
Sixth-graders at Norwalk Middle School are relocated with the fourth and fifth-grade students from Main Street School, transitioned from housing fourth grade to housing ninth grade in 2026.

"The strategic move not only made sense for academic sequencing and for our students' social development, but it also helps to prepare our students and staff for the future since those same connections and grade bands will exist at our new school on Shady Lane Drive," Cooley said.

The district also made "a significant investment" in a new math curriculum. After administrators and staff spent "time and treasure" solidifying the literacy program for the last several years, Cooley said it was necessary to commit similar resources to math programming.

"While the textbook adoption process was tedious and no pack-aged curriculum fit our needs perfectly, we have found a math curriculum that we feel is very close to supplement each lesson to reach the crucial 'this is what we teach' as the student also struggles," he added.

Cooley said the past year has taught him "when you hire good people, great things happen. Our teachers, paraprofessionals, aides, bus drivers, and teachers, he said, have "rose to complete the new school.



Pictured are District Staff, Norwalk School Board members Eric Gonzales, Kayla Burkett, Jenny Norris, Alison Cranford and Superintendent Brad Cooley.

The Norwalk City School District Board of Education serves as the governing body of the district.

Board members are responsible for employing the superintendent and treasurer and working closely with them to establish policy, set the district's vision and long-range goals, and ensure accountability for fiscal health and educational opportunities.

"Ultimately, our work serves the students and families of Norwalk by supporting a strong, well-managed public school system," Crawford said.

Crawford said people may be surprised by how much time and work happens outside of regular board meetings.

"Board members spend countless hours reviewing materials, attending conference, attending work sessions, visiting schools, and engaging with the community," she said.

Crawford said she is pleased that every school board member work together, remaining "respectful, focused, and unified, always keeping the students at the center of our decisions."

The past year reinforced the importance of "collaboration, trust, and clear communication," she added.

"When a board, administration, staff, and community work together with shared goals and mutual respect, even complex and long-term challenges can be addressed thoughtfully and successfully," Crawford said.

In 2026, Crawford said the Norwalk school board wants to "strengthen transparency and community engagement" as it moves forward with building a new school.

"We will continue to communicate clearly, listen actively, and keep our community informed and involved as we move forward," she said.

Crawford and fellow board members Jeremy Norris and Ralph Rittenhouse ran unopposed in the Nov. 4 election to retain their seats. They were sworn in for their current four-year terms at January's organizational meeting.

The other two board members are Kayla Burkett and Eric Gonzales, and their terms run through the end of 2027.

"I am deeply thankful and truly honored to have been elected to serve a second term on the Board of Education. The trust and support of this community means more to me than I can fully express. Norwalk is a community like no other. We are a community defined by pride, thoughtfulness, and a genuine commitment to our students and our future. I'm proud to be part of our schools and of the way Norwalk consistently shows up for its students through collaboration, volunteerism, advocacy, and generosity. The progress we continue to make is only possible because of our shared belief in the value of public education and a collective commitment to doing what is right for our students, not just for today, but for generations to come."

2025 REVIEW/2026 PREVIEW SERIES

Here are links to other stories in this series:

- Huron County Department of Job and Family Services
- Norwalk Area Chamber of Commerce
- Rona and Gary Clubs of Northeast Ohio
- Huron County Clerk of Courts
- Huron County Emergency Management
- 100 Women Making a Difference
- Huron County Probate and Juvenile courts
- Huron County Solid Waste Management District
- Firelands Rail to Trails
- Norwalk Creative Placemaking

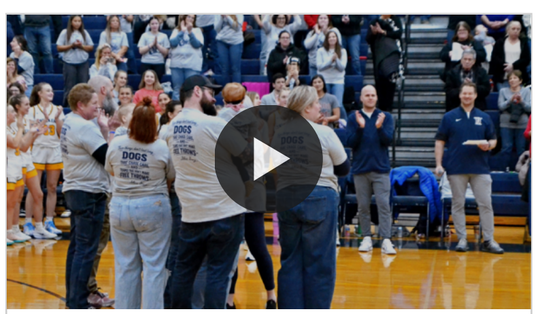
- EHOVE Career Center
- League Street School
- Huron County Park District
- Firelands Historical Society
- Huron County Emergency Management Agency (EMA)
- Huron County Airport Board
- Huron County Board of Mental Health and Addiction Services (MHAS)
- Norwalk Zoning Department
- Norwalk Police Department
- Norwalk Public Library
- Huron County Engineer
- Huron County IT Department
- Huron County Board of Elections
- Norwalk Middle School
- Norwalk Area United Fund
- Huron County Recorder
- Norwalk General Services Department
- Huron County Auditor
- Artists' Open Studio
- Firelands Community Cat Coalition
- Norwalk Catholic
- Norwalk Fire Department
- Main Street School
- CLI
- Norwalk High School
- Norwalk City Council

Education

6

Recent Posts

See All



'Giveback for Gray' event raises more than $13,000...

12

Christian Day Nursery School 4-year-olds perfo...

9

Norwalk wins 1st match in Firelands Challenge...

7