NEWS

"Every spring is the only spring — a perpetual astonishment."
ELLIS PETERS, AUTHOR

Finance chief to return to City Hall with West Haven lessons

BY NELLIE KENNEY
STAFF REPORTER

New Haven's public school leaders are seeking roughly $252.6 million from the city for the district's fiscal year 2026-27 operating budget, a request that substantially exceeds the mayor's proposed allotment of $218.3 million.

For at least the last decade, the district has failed to secure its proposed budget amount from New Haven, according to a district official — a perennial problem that district and city leaders alike have attributed to insufficient state funding. They allege that the state's formula for education funds is outdated and fails to account for rising costs and income inequality between the state's school districts.

The district's newest budget proposal — outlined by New Haven Public Schools Superintendent Madeline Negrón and Chief Finance Officer Amilcar Hernandez at a Monday Board of Education meeting and subject to a vote by the full board in June — is what the district needs to maintain current operations, cover budget deficits from recent years and account for increases to salaries, special education expenditures and transportation costs, Hernandez told the board on Monday.

The presentation also included an "adjusted" proposal of $232 million, which accounts for $20.5 million in state and federal grant funding that may help cover general operating costs. The $252 million and $232 million proposals would represent increases of $39.4 million and $18.9 million from the current fiscal year budget, respectively.

Just weeks before Monday's meeting, Mayor Justin Elicker released his proposed city budget for the 2026-2027 fiscal year, which included an increase of only $5 million for public schools, for a total of $218.3 million. Without a larger funding increase from the city, the district is likely to face a budget deficit of more than $10 million next fiscal year.

"The state is not doing their part to keep up with not only inflation, but also the increase of costs, and to support our teachers and our school staff that deserve not only the increases they are getting, but more than that," Hernandez said at the board meeting.

Earlier this month, Elicker's office partnered with New Haven Public Schools to organize student advocacy for state legislation that would increase the state's Education Cost Sharing formula, a per-student payment that has not changed since 2013. He and a contingent of local high schoolers traveled to the state capitol in Hartford to testify.

In his presentation to the board on Monday, Hernandez detailed the district's increasing operating costs across sectors.

He reported steadily increasing expenditures on transportation, including regular busing and transportation for students attending schools outside of the district. This fiscal year, the district underbudgeted for transportation costs by between $7 and $9 million, according to a presentation Hernandez gave at a Finance & Operations Committee meeting last Monday.

Hernandez projected that salary increases this year, in accordance with contracts across the school system's professional unions, would cost the district $7,358,000 in the coming fiscal year.

Next year's budget also accounts for an increase in special education costs. Despite the district's declining overall enrollment, its population of students with disabilities is steadily climbing and now represents 18 percent of the school system's population, Hernandez said. In the current fiscal year, the district spends about a third of its general fund budget on special education expenses, Hernandez said.

The district outsources much of its speci al education instruction to neighboring districts. Hernandez said that the district pays tuition for 278 New Haven resident students with disabilities to attend schools out of the district, at a total cost of $36 million during fiscal year 2026, the presentation showed.

Hernandez outlined how the district used funds from the Individuals with Disabilities Act, or IDEA, to cover more than $7 million in costs for special education, which include salaries for paraeducators, psychologists and social workers, as well as pupil services and tutors.

At Monday's meeting, Hernandez repeatedly discouraged Board of Education members from relying too heavily on outside grants to cover general operating expenses and staffing, noting that under "the current climate at the federal level," the district should not take these awards for granted.

On Thursday, President Donald Trump signed an executive order directing his secretary of education to "facilitate the closure of the Department of Education," the latest step in his campaign to dismantle an agency that administers programs like IDEA, among dozens of grant programs for public schools across the country.



NELLIE KENNEY / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

Michael Gormany — who in April will return to the role of New Haven controller, now in a permanent capacity, after two years as West Haven's finance director — is looking for permission to keep living outside of New Haven.

"I will take this opportunity to tell you how dangerous it is for us to keep relying on grants to pay for the services for our students," Hernandez said. "We celebrate when we get them. It makes us happy, because it gives us additional funding to provide the services at the level that our students deserve, but it can also create a very bad habit where we start functioning under the assumption that we are going to get this grant every single year."

Elicker, who serves on the Board of Education and appoints four of its members, noted that it would be unrealistic to operate without grant funding, and cautioned against attempting to pay for all of the district's expenditures with the general fund.

"We cannot live without grants," board member Abie Benitez agreed at the board meeting. "But I like the dream. I like the fact that we are dreaming that we could find that money that grants give us and not need it."

In fiscal year 2026, New Haven Public Schools received $213,263,784 from the city, much of which came from the state's Education Cost Sharing program.

Contact **NELLIE KENNEY** *at nellie.kenney@yale.edu.*

Public school leaders seek more money than mayor proposed

BY SABRINA THALER
STAFF REPORTER

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For at least the last decade, the district has failed to secure its proposed budget amount from New Haven, according to a district official — a perennial problem that district and city leaders alike have attributed to insufficient state funding. They allege that the state's formula for education funds is outdated and fails to account for rising costs and income inequality between the state's school districts.

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SABRINA THALER / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

New Haven Public Schools superintendent Madeline Negrón proposed requesting more than $252 million for the district next year, a nearly $40 million increase from this year's budget. Mayor Elicker has proposed a $5 million increase.

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