WE ARE ACCOUNTABLE TO EACH AND EVERY ONE OF NORWALK’S CHILDREN.
Dear Norwalk Community,

Norwalk’s three-year-olds who started pre-school this year will be graduating high school in 2029. The Norwalk ACTS Partnership recognizes that the impact we can have on their lives between now and then – as parents, teachers, administrators, clergy, business leaders, investors, health providers, elected officials and residents – is immense. It is our moral imperative to meet that responsibility by ensuring that all of Norwalk’s children are prepared for success in life, from cradle to career.

Creating the change necessary for the positive future we want for our children – and for our community – often starts with acknowledging current and sometimes undesirable conditions. This Baseline Report speaks to the current state of Norwalk’s children, and it presents the desired outcomes that the Norwalk ACTS Membership, representing over 100 individuals and organizations, is urgently committed to achieving. To improve these outcomes, in a manner that has a meaningful and positive impact on the children and the community at large, requires a bold and confident approach. With that in mind, our Membership has shifted the focus from reactive problem solving to co-creating the future.

The conscious acts of developing a shared vision, of engaging people in genuine problem solving, and of convening around clear actions and outcomes, with no hidden agenda, have created a new type of collective accountability for the Norwalk community.

The real work is about collecting and using data to take courageous action and effect change.

To ensure the success of all children in Norwalk, we are focused on results, improving upon what works, and changing what doesn’t. We recognize that every individual and organization that impacts our children’s growth, from cradle to career, is accountable, and that our collective voice is a part of the solution.

Now is the time for all of us, as a community, to align our wisdom and energy. Regardless of the neighborhood in which you live, your ethnicity or race, your age, your religious beliefs, your political views, your socio-economic status or whether or not you even have children, we can, and we must, do better for all of Norwalk’s children.

We are accountable to each and every child in Norwalk, and we look forward to having you join us.

Sincerely,

Anthony Allison
Executive Director, Norwalk ACTS

Rev. Lindsay Curtis
Chair, Norwalk ACTS Advisory Board

The Membership of Norwalk ACTS
# Table of Contents

3 / Creating a Transformative Partnership.
5 / Behind Every Data Point is a Child.
6 / Norwalk: Our Children’s City.
7 / Organized around Key Outcomes.
8 / Kindergarten Readiness
9 / 3rd Grade Reading
10 / 5th to 6th Grade Transition
11 / 8th to 9th Grade Transition
12 / High School Graduation
13 / Post High School
14 / Social/Emotional Learning.
15 / Health and Wellness.
16 / Norwalk ACTS is about Action.
Norwalk ACTS was initially conceived to proactively address suspension rates in the Norwalk Public Schools, aspects of No Child Left Behind, and the fact that Connecticut has the largest achievement gap in the nation between low-income children and their more affluent peers.

The Norwalk ACTS Membership grew quickly, and its core team - the Mayor, School Superintendent, Executive Director of the Norwalk Children’s Foundation, Chair of the NAACP, Chair of the Early Childhood Council, President of the Teacher’s Union, and President of Norwalk Community College - developed a strategic plan to help close the student achievement gap in Norwalk.

The Norwalk ACTS Membership adopted a three-year strategic plan that established community-based outcome areas of focus.

The Norwalk ACTS strategic planning team was introduced to the concept of “Collective Impact” and the StriveTogether Cradle to Career Network, a national movement to improve education for every child. The underlying premise of Collective Impact is that no single organization alone can create large-scale, lasting social change. Organizations and partnerships need to coordinate their efforts and work together.

Norwalk ACTS adopted the principles of Collective Impact and the methodology of StriveTogether. Norwalk ACTS contracted with StriveTogether to assist with the development of a civic infrastructure and a cradle-to-career roadmap to success.

StriveTogether facilitated a Design Institute for the Norwalk ACTS Membership. The Institute provided Norwalk ACTS with the tools necessary to develop its first 180-Day Plan.

Stepping Stones Museum for Children was chosen as the Anchor Entity for Norwalk ACTS. Norwalk ACTS moved from a fully volunteer to a staffed organization, and became one of 53 communities within the StriveTogether Cradle to Career Network to be designated as a community “Committed to Quality.”

Today, 90% of the Norwalk ACTS’ Membership has signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that holds Norwalk ACTS and its Members accountable for creating a dynamic civic infrastructure that aligns individual and collective action with advocacy and financial investment to strengthen educational, social/emotional, and physical health support systems through the achievement of six community level outcomes.
The Five Conditions of Collective Impact
Adopted by Norwalk ACTS

1/ Common Agenda
All participants have a shared vision for change including a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions.

2/ Shared Measurement
Collecting data and measuring results consistently across all participants ensures efforts remain aligned and participants hold each other accountable.

3/ Mutually Reinforcing Activities
Participant activities must be differentiated while still being coordinated through a mutually reinforcing plan of action.

4/ Continuous Communication
Consistent and open communication is needed across the many players to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and create common motivation.

5/ Backbone Support
Creating and managing Collective Impact requires a separate organization with staff and a specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative and for the coordination of participating organizations and agencies.

Collective Impact:
The commitment of a group of members from different parts of the community to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem, using a structured form of collaboration. The underlying premise of Collective Impact is that no single organization can create large-scale, lasting social change on its own.

"Solving a social problem at the magnitude it exists requires an organization to shift from focusing on short-term incremental progress to focusing on long-term transformational change. The latter is risky, hard to measure, and even harder to achieve, but it provides the inspiration that generates motivation, resources, and a new sense of what is possible. This means developing a goal so bold that achieving it means a social ill has been eradicated."
— When Good Is Not Good Enough
Stanford Social Innovation Review; Fall 2013

Old/Current Behavior

Disorder and Confusion
Inconsistent quality and sporadic accountability perpetuate poor results with some pockets of excellence.

Isolation
Individual pockets of excellence appear disconnected from one another with little ability to scale results. “Everyone for Everything”.

New Behavior

Alignment
Shared ideas and goals begin to galvanize partners and shared aspirations inspire reproposed budgets and “random acts of partnership”.

Collective Impact
Collaborative action rooted in shared responsibility and accountability using aligned budgets; work plans and measurements are understood by all partners and the community.
As students move through the education pipeline, they must obtain the academic, social/emotional, and health and wellness tools necessary to transition successfully to the next level. Norwalk ACTS is committed to building a cradle-to-career community infrastructure that will support a successful journey for each child.

In the following pages, we present a snapshot of what Norwalk looks like today - its population as a whole and the students attending the Norwalk Public Schools.

The data is both sobering and inspiring. It is sobering because it tells a story that is unacceptable for some of our children. It is inspiring because it will allow the Membership of Norwalk ACTS to separate the data into constituent parts, identify trends, and persistently align priorities, activities, and existing resources to support all of Norwalk’s children at key points across the cradle-to-career continuum.
Norwalk, with a population of more than 87,000, is the sixth largest city in Connecticut. A 23-square-mile land area, Norwalk is in the heart of Fairfield County, one of America’s wealthiest counties. Located on Long Island Sound, it has a beautiful landscape with significant waterfront. Norwalk’s proximity to New York City offers a convenient commute for many. With a multitude of historic landmarks, attractions, arts, cuisine and nightlife, as well as a long list of thriving businesses and corporations, our culture is rich and we celebrate our diversity.

Though a relatively small city, Norwalk struggles with the same academic, socio-economic, and financial challenges of Connecticut’s larger urban areas.

The Norwalk Public School District has over 11,000 students in twelve elementary schools, four middle schools, and three high schools. There is a K-8 parochial school, a Montessori middle school, a PreK-8 charter school, a 6-12 Prep School, plus Norwalk Community College, which is one of the area’s most comprehensive and innovative post-secondary institutions. Additionally, the city is home to numerous community-based organizations that are dedicated to the well-being of children, families, and individuals living in Norwalk.

Over the last ten years, Norwalk has experienced significant and rapid demographic change. Most notably, the percentage of families with children that qualify for free or reduced priced school meals has increased to over 50%; English is not the primary language in 42% of households; and more recently, Norwalk has experienced a surge in children entering the school system who are unaccompanied minors.
Organized around Key Outcomes. Focused on Continuous Improvement.

With our commitment to making Norwalk the healthiest city in America for a child to grow up in, we support and promote the following principles:

/ Norwalk ACTS is a Community of Learning. Norwalk ACTS reflects the fact that no single organization can create large-scale, lasting social and educational change. Our Membership is actively engaged in learning from one another to set a common agenda and create a joint approach to improving outcomes.

/ There is No Action Without Data. Using hard data as our guide, and with a commitment to Continuous Improvement, the Community Action Networks (CANS) of Norwalk ACTS convene around outcomes to define problems, test strategies and analyze results. Our Membership is committed to using data-informed decision-making to achieve the desired outcomes.

/ We Align Investment to What Works. Norwalk ACTS supports the disciplined approach of focusing time, talent and treasure on high-impact practices that improve outcomes. We use data to inform our approach to capacity building, advocacy, and civic engagement to accelerate system change.

/ We Act With Shared Accountability and Differentiated Responsibility. As adults, it is our responsibility to shift our own behavior to improve the lives and futures of all children in the Norwalk community. Many organizations work with our schools and families to reinforce measurable results. However, it is through the alignment of the community’s collective efforts and the corresponding commitment to accountability that we will make a sustainable impact.

/ Continuous Improvement: The ongoing effort to use local data in a disciplined manner to improve efficiencies and effectiveness of processes and action.

Community Action Network (CAN): A group of cross-sector practitioners and individuals who use a Continuous Improvement process to develop an action plan with strategies to improve an outcome.

Mission / The mission of Norwalk ACTS is to enrich and improve the lives and futures of all Norwalk’s children and youth, cradle to career.

OUTCOMES

/ Norwalk children are ready to enter Kindergarten.

/ Norwalk students meet the goal level in 3rd Grade Reading.

/ Norwalk students have the necessary skills to successfully transition from 5th to 6th Grade.

/ Norwalk students have the necessary skills to successfully transition from 8th to 9th Grade.

/ Norwalk students successfully graduate from high school in 4 years, ready for College, Post-Secondary Training or Full-Time Employment.

/ Norwalk graduates are career-ready with a College Degree or Professional Certificate.

Note: All current assessments in this Report are for students attending Norwalk Public Schools only.
Norwalk Children are Ready to Enter Kindergarten.

Research demonstrates that providing children with a high quality pre-school education makes a significant difference in their kindergarten readiness and their future success in school, as well as in life. Well-designed pre-school education programs produce higher achievement test scores, lower incidences of grade repetition and the need for special education, and higher educational attainment.

Through collaboration, alignment among key practitioners and strong data capability, the Kindergarten Readiness Community Action Network is reviewing research and identifying best practices to build a prenatal to age 8 quality early care and education continuum that is inclusive of:

- Cognitive, social/emotional and physical development
- High quality infant/toddler and preschool programs
- Effective transitions from prenatal to kindergarten
- Resiliency and the reduction or elimination of toxic stress
- Family engagement and support to meet the needs of our diverse and most vulnerable children and families.

Brain research shows that 85% of the brain’s development takes place before the age of 5 years. It is critical, therefore, that we provide a high quality pre-school experience during these formative years.

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**Fall Kindergarten Inventory Assessment 2014-2015**

- 57% of Norwalk’s Kindergartners were ready for Kindergarten.

**English Language Arts (ELA) Assessments 2014-2015**

- 28% of Norwalk’s Kindergartners were ready for Kindergarten.

**Kindergartners Who Attended a Quality (NAEYC-Accredited) Preschool 2014-2015**

- 42% of Norwalk’s Kindergartners attended a Quality (NAEYC-Accredited) Preschool.
Norwalk Students Meet the Goal Level in 3rd Grade Reading.

Elementary school reading is a critical predictor for high school success. Children learn to read until 4th grade. After that, they read to learn. Norwalk children who are not reading at the 3rd grade reading level will begin to fall behind academically. Without early and systematic intervention, the gap will continue to widen as Norwalk’s children progress through elementary school, middle school, and, ultimately, into high school.

Acting on English Language Arts (ELA), math, and social/emotional learning data, the 3rd Grade Reading Community Action Network will examine assessment data to determine if students are prepared by 3rd grade. Being cognizant of educational equity, student empowerment, self-advocacy, and social justice issues, this CAN is building a framework for student success that will:

- In partnership with teachers and administration, promote and implement systemic improvements in academics, critical thinking skills, and social/emotional growth and development
- Engage parents and families to partner with schools to support academic success
- Close the achievement gap - particularly for English Language Learners (ELL) and other high-risk students, including students with special needs
- Align and expand extended-day and extended-year programs with Norwalk Public Schools and other community-based organizations, to accelerate students’ learning.

“One in six children who are not reading proficiently in third grade fail to graduate from high school on time, four times the rate for children with proficient third-grade reading skills.”

— Annie E. Casey Foundation
A key indicator for a successful middle school experience is a positive transition from elementary school. Many Norwalk students do not have the necessary skills to successfully transition from 5th to 6th grade.

Acting on English Language Arts (ELA), math, social/emotional learning, and health and wellness indicators, the 5th-6th Grade Transition Community Action Network will examine 5th grade benchmarks and 6th grade performance data to assess if students are prepared to transition to and succeed in middle school. This CAN will:

- Review and consider research, best practices and means by which to promote systemic improvements in the areas of academic success, social/emotional growth and development, and health and wellness
- Research methods to assess and evaluate healthy behaviors and the relationship between social/emotional skills and academic achievement
- Determine how to measure and teach the critical skills of grit, perseverance, collaboration and problem-solving.

“Students moving from grade 5 into middle school show a ‘sharp drop’ in math and language arts achievement in the transition year, which plagues them as far out as 10th grade, even risking or thwarting their ability to graduate from high school and go on to college.”

The Program on Education Policy and Governance Working Papers Series at Harvard University

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**Average Test Score for 5th Graders on Math Assessment 2013-2014**

63%

**6th Graders Recommended for 7th Grade Accelerated Math 2013-2014**

35%

Positive performance in 6th Grade Math is considered one of the indicators of a successful transition from 5th to 6th grade.
Norwalk Students have the Necessary Skills to Successfully Transition from 8th to 9th Grade.

Research is clear that 9th grade is the “make or break” year. More students fail 9th grade than any other grade in high school, and a disproportionate number of students who are held back in 9th grade subsequently drop out of school.

Working collaboratively with Norwalk Public Schools and community-based organizations to gather and analyze data, the 8th-9th Grade Transition Community Action Network will identify and recommend best actions and strategies for transition programs and social/emotional development to increase the number of students who succeed in high school. This CAN will:

- Gather and analyze baseline data for major and contributing indicators leading to successful transitions
- Research and implement best practices for current middle to high school transition programs and identify which components are necessary for student success
- Identify and address barriers to parent engagement and student participation in transition programs
- Identify and align community resources and programs needed to support transition programs and social/emotional development.

Students who are on track for graduation during the 9th grade have an 81% chance of graduation. Students who are considered “off track” in 9th grade only have a 22% chance of graduation.

% of 10th Grade Students Earning 6 or More Credits
2013-2014

81%

Students who earn less than 6 credits in 9th Grade are at greater risk of not earning the required 20 credits for graduation.

Average Test Score for 8th Graders on Math Assessment
2013-2014

31% 35%

Norwalk National

% of 8th Graders taking Algebra
2014-2015

23%

23% of 8th Graders are taking Algebra, thus positioning themselves for higher levels of math achievement by graduation.
Norwalk Students Successfully Graduate from High School in 4 Years, Ready for College, Post-Secondary Training or Full-Time Employment.

There is a persistent and pervasive gap between what students are expected to be able to do in college, post-secondary training or full-time employment, and what students actually are prepared to do. Research indicates that students lack crucial academic knowledge and the social/emotional skills necessary to meet the demands of college-level work and workforce readiness.

The High School Graduation Community Action Network is identifying and defining the academic and social/emotional skills necessary for college and career readiness. By determining what systemic changes are needed to instill and enhance these skills, this CAN will:

- Identify, analyze, and act upon the barriers and obstacles to college and career readiness
- Bolster and expand upon existing resources that support mental and social/emotional health
- Assist Norwalk Public Schools with the provision of Personal Learning Plans for every student in high school
- Create better communication platforms between the workforce, and high schools and college, to better define the relevant skills necessary, and to align and create pathways for college and career success.

“High schools are designed to get students to graduate . . . They are not necessarily designed to enable students to succeed in college . . . The time has come to think past admission to academic success.”

– David Conley, Founder and CEO of the Educational Policy Improvement Center (EPIC)

**34% of 11th Graders Met or Exceeded Benchmark PSAT Scores in Math in 2013-2014**

**31% of 11th Graders Met or Exceeded Benchmark PSAT Scores in Reading/Writing in 2013-2014**

**43% of Students Earned a B or Better in Algebra II in 2013-2014**

Research indicates that passing Algebra II is considered a leading predictor of college and work success.

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**CAPT Test Scores of NPS Students across 4 Subject Areas, compared with State 2012-2013**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>NPS</th>
<th>State</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>62%</td>
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SBAC assessments in Reading and Math replaced CAPT assessments in 2013-2014. SBAC data will be available in the Spring of 2015.
Norwalk Graduates are Career-Ready with a College Degree or Professional Certificate.

The value of a college degree is well documented. College graduates earn at least 60% more than high school graduates. The greater Norwalk community, the State of Connecticut, and the nation as a whole will require an ever-increasing supply of civic-minded citizens and highly qualified workers to meet the needs of the 21st century. It is imperative that there is close alignment between educational pathways and current and emerging employment opportunities.

The Post High School Community Action Network is focused on increasing the number of high school degree recipients who pursue a college level degree or other post-secondary credential. With the goal of introducing students early and continuously to various educational resources and economic and employment opportunities, this CAN will:

- Identify and address barriers that prevent high school graduates in Norwalk from pursuing a college degree, post-secondary credential or career
- Identify and expand the continuum of work-based experiences, information about careers, access to mentors, and availability of internships for youth in Norwalk.

Norwalk Graduates Accepted at a 2- or 4-Year College
2013-2014

92%

Norwalk Graduates Enrolled at Norwalk Community College (NCC)
2013-2014

23%

Norwalk Graduates Enrolled at NCC Who Require Remedial Courses
2013-2014

60%

Remedial courses do not award college credits. Therefore, students are paying to take courses that do not contribute to their degree requirements.
Research indicates that teaching social/emotional learning to a child leads to positive social behavior, fewer conduct problems, less emotional distress, academic and professional success, competence, and a sense of purpose. There is great value to children, their families, and the community as a whole if Norwalk embarks on a path that incorporates social/emotional learning into what students are exposed to at school.

Norwalk ACTS has convened a workgroup of cross-sector professionals that is creating a framework around what social/emotional development looks like for a child, from birth to 21 years. The Social/Emotional Workgroup is:

- Examining core aspects of social/emotional learning
- Creating a shared understanding of the fundamental skills that need to be developed within the children of Norwalk
- Identifying existing community resources that support development
- Identifying barriers to alignment of these resources
- Gathering baseline data about the social/emotional development of Norwalk’s children.

A social/emotional baseline data report will be released later in the year. Using this data, the workgroup will then develop action plans that include recommendations for programs that are proven to move the needle for social/emotional learning for Norwalk’s children.

A child’s social and emotional development not only impacts his or her ability to achieve academically, it also influences many key areas of functioning beyond school.
Healthy, active, well-nourished children are happier, more alert, ready to learn, and more prepared to take on the challenges they face every day.

The physical health and wellness of Norwalk’s children is also an important priority to the Norwalk ACTS Membership. In looking at a child’s life holistically, we know that health and wellness are essential to a child’s successful journey through the cradle-to-career continuum.

The Health and Wellness Workgroup has begun examining ongoing health and wellness initiatives, coalitions, and resources and they are working toward aligning the most effective and efficient processes to promote the health and wellness of Norwalk children and youth.

% of Students who Passed the CT Physical Fitness Test 2012-2013

4th Graders: 59%
8th Graders: 45%

% of Students at a Healthy Weight 2012-2013

Kindergarten: 61%
3rd Grade: 54%
6th Grade: 53%
9th Grade: 60%
Norwalk ACTS is about Action.

All the work that has brought Norwalk ACTS to where it is today has been focused on building partnership infrastructure and capacity, convening qualified and committed cross-sector community teams, and collecting baseline data so that the Membership can deliver on its stated mission.

From this day forward, we are about Action.

Norwalk ACTS is a Community of Learning. The Social Justice and Equity Task Force and the Family and Parent Task Force will continue to actively engage youth, families, parents, and other community members to ensure that all the voices of our city are heard and honored as we move forward with our mission. In a few months, Norwalk ACTS will convene a series of Community Listening Sessions to gain a better understanding of the ongoing challenges and opportunities that affect children and families in Norwalk.

There is No Action Without Data. In partnership with Norwalk Public Schools and community-based organizations, our Data Network will be establishing a data system to address existing data deficiencies. The Data Network will develop a robust two-way communication process to ensure accurate, comprehensive and timely data collection and analysis. In turn, the Implementation Team and Community Action Networks will be separating the baseline data into its constituent parts to develop and implement Action Plans that will achieve better results for Norwalk’s children.

We Align Investment to What Works. The Investors Network will be auditing and aligning existing financial resources to ensure that investments are directed toward data-driven strategies and solutions as we advocate for system change.

We Act with Shared Accountability and Differentiated Responsibility. By working daily on Continuous Improvement, our Staff and Membership will be identifying ways to effectively communicate our successes, challenges, and action steps. We are holding ourselves accountable to achieving an effective, data-driven cradle-to-career continuum, and we are steadfast in our mission to improve the outcomes for each and every child in Norwalk.

We are Norwalk. Working Together, Everything is Achievable.
## Join Us.

How can I engage?

1/ Reach Out
Please visit our website and/or get in touch with us to find out how to become a part of our work and of our Membership. Email info@norwalkacts.org.

2/ Share
We are asking organizations joining the Partnership to sign Memorandum of Agreements (MOAs) with Norwalk ACTS. It is important that we align ourselves to achieve shared goals and outcomes. To get a copy of the MOA, please contact Norwalk ACTS staff at info@norwalkacts.org.

3/ Act
Measuring what matters, identifying effective practices, aligning resources, and being committed to Continuous Improvement are necessary actions for the achievement of better outcomes for Norwalk’s children. Please contact us to discuss how you can implement these actions within your own organization or agency.

The Norwalk ACTS Partnership is about action, and we welcome you to join us.

### Our Membership

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Our Membership</th>
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<tr>
<td>A.C.H.I.E.V.E.</td>
<td>Day Street Community Health Center</td>
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<td>After The Bell</td>
<td>Fairfield County Community Foundation</td>
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<td>All Our Kin</td>
<td>Fairfield University</td>
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<td>Appleby School Based Health Center</td>
<td>Family and Children’s Agency</td>
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<td>Aristotle Circle Peer Tutors</td>
<td>Fox Run Family Resource Center</td>
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<td>AT&amp;T</td>
<td>GE Capital</td>
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<td>Be Foundation</td>
<td>Grace Baptist Church</td>
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<td>Carver Center of Norwalk</td>
<td>Greater Norwalk Chamber of Commerce</td>
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<td>Center for Contemporary Printmaking</td>
<td>Grossman Family Foundation</td>
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<td>The Center for Sexual Assault Crisis Counseling and Education</td>
<td>Healthy Families Collaborative</td>
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<td>City of Norwalk</td>
<td>Human Services Council</td>
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<td>City of Norwalk Department of Health</td>
<td>Kids In Crisis</td>
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<td>Connecticut Commission on Children</td>
<td>Let’s Get Ready</td>
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<tr>
<td>Courage To Speak</td>
<td>Liberation Programs, Inc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creative Connections</td>
<td>Literacy How</td>
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<td>Cultural Alliance of Fairfield County</td>
<td>Lockwood Mathews Mansion</td>
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<td>Maritime Aquarium</td>
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<td>Norwalk Education Foundation</td>
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<td>Norwalk Public Library</td>
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<td>Norwalk Public Schools</td>
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<td>Norwalk YoungLife</td>
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<td>South Norwalk Community Center</td>
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<td>STAR Inc.</td>
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<td>Stepping Stones Museum for Children</td>
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<td>United Way of Coastal Fairfield County</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Wilton Family Y/Norwalk YMCA</td>
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### Our Staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anthony Allison</th>
<th>Paula Palermo</th>
<th>Kate Joo</th>
<th>Kelly Heese</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>Data Director</td>
<td>Associate Director, Strategy &amp; Operations</td>
<td>Executive Assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:aallison@norwalkacts.org">aallison@norwalkacts.org</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:ppalermo@norwalkacts.org">ppalermo@norwalkacts.org</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:kjoo@norwalkacts.org">kjoo@norwalkacts.org</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@norwalkacts.org">info@norwalkacts.org</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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