

STRATFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

INCLUDE, ENGAGE, INSPIRE

A BLUEPRINT FOR
PREPARING STUDENTS
FOR LIFE

AT A GLANCE

STRATFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

WHAT: A diverse Connecticut public school district serving just over 6,000 students from pre-K through grade 12.

WHERE: Stratford, Connecticut

WEBSITE: www.stratfordk12.org



Earlier this summer, two Stratford students represented Connecticut at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) as participants in the Day of AI Leadership Fellowship. There, they joined student delegates and superintendents from across the country to help shape conversations about artificial intelligence in education. For a district serving just over 6,000 students, the opportunity

reflected a system committed to innovation and preparing students for an ever-changing world.

“Over the last several years, Stratford has focused on creating stability, investing in people, and ensuring that every decision we make is tied directly to student outcomes,” says Superintendent Heather Borges. “Our tagline is ‘Include, Engage, Inspire.’” More than a slogan, those words anchor the district’s mission, vision, and strategic operating plan. “In Stratford, we are preparing our students for life—not just for graduation,” Borges adds.

PEOPLE FIRST, PROGRESS FOLLOWS

Over the past four years, every member who has served on the Stratford Board of Education has contributed to the stability and progress we are experiencing today. This year, with the support of the current Board of Education and Town Council, the district was able to add staff in key areas. “We know it takes all of us to provide the education our students deserve,” Borges explains. That culture has helped Stratford continue investing in its people.

“While student achievement is an important measure of success, our ultimate goal is to graduate students who are ready to contribute to their communities, careers, and future,” Borges says. Guiding that work is the district’s Portrait of a Graduate, which emphasizes communication, collaboration, critical thinking, lifelong learning, and engaged citizenship. Supporting it are district-wide commitments to the Science of Reading and the thoughtful, ethical integration of artificial intelligence.

Leadership extends beyond the superintendent’s office. Stratford’s team includes award-winning educational leaders, instructional experts, and assistant superintendents who spend significant time in schools alongside principals and teachers. “We want to model the leadership we expect throughout the district,” Borges says. “We want to be visible and present in our classrooms.”

A district-wide feedback initiative has also strengthened student voice and leadership opportunities. “Leadership doesn’t always have to be loud or in the spotlight,” Borges reflects. “Sometimes it’s simply leading by example.”







Stratford Public Schools Executive Cabinet
Working together to lead, support, and advance the district.

FROM CLASSROOM TO CAREER

Preparing students for life after graduation means giving them meaningful opportunities to explore careers before leaving high school. Stratford's comprehensive Career Pathways program connects classroom learning with college, career, and industry experiences.

Students can pursue pathways in Architecture & Construction, Business Management & Administration, Education & Training, Finance, Health Occupations, Hospitality & Tourism, Information

Technology, Manufacturing, Marketing, STEM, and Transportation, Distribution & Logistics. Each builds academic knowledge along with technical and workplace skills.

"Our goal is to ensure every student graduates with a clear plan for what's next," Borges explains. "Whether that path leads to college, military service, apprenticeships, technical training, or directly into the workforce, we want students to leave Stratford with the knowledge, experiences, and confidence to succeed."



We strive to create
a world where **every
child is a reader.**

ASK US HOW.



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SIMPLE MISSION, COMPREHENSIVE SOLUTIONS

For over two decades, HILL for Literacy has transformed literacy outcomes for thousands of students. While we are a Massachusetts-based nonprofit organization, we partner with states, districts, and schools across the country to increase the number of students meeting state reading standards nationwide.

YOUR COMMUNITY, OUR EXPERTISE, LASTING RESULTS

From rural towns to suburban districts to inner-city neighborhoods, we have partnered with every type of school and community to build sustainable literacy excellence, proving that teaching all children to read by the end of third grade is not just a goal, but an achievable reality.

THE STRATFORD PARTNERSHIP

Our work with Stratford Public Schools began with the HILL MTSS Model: the professional development, structures, and strategies that ensure schools can implement a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) effectively for students with diverse needs. Our model operationalizes the standard MTSS framework that many schools struggle with into a powerful tool for literacy instruction, an approach which has been continuously validated through peer-reviewed research. The results? In just one school year, the percentage of 1st-6th grade students reading grade level passages increased from 44% to 51%.

Visit hillforliteracy.org to learn more about how we can help your school district.



Bina Mejia Romero and Anthony Darbilli
Representing Connecticut as Student Senators at the national Day of AI event in Boston.

The district evaluates and expands pathways based on workforce trends, student interest, and regional needs. Through internships, dual enrollment, industry partnerships, and career exploration, students gain authentic exposure to professions while still in school.

One signature success is the Health Occupations pathway, where students earn industry-recognized certifications and participate in clinical experiences

with healthcare partners. Similar opportunities are expanding across other pathways.

Students also participate in DECA and FBLA, competing at regional, state, and national levels while building leadership and business skills. For Stratford, career readiness is not a single program—it is a district-wide commitment to ensuring every graduate is prepared for what comes next.



Creating and maintaining **CLIMATES** of **RESPECT**

We are thrilled to be collaborating with Stratford in achieving this well-deserved recognition and are proud that we have played a significant role in their work. We both recognize that all learning is relational: 'students don't care about what you know until they know you care'.

Raising academic achievement, achieving equity (academic, behavioral and financial), improving attendance and family engagement, etc. rests foundationally on prioritizing relationships and community building which Stratford has been doing for a generation.

Our partnership is long-standing and pre-dates our recent state legislation replacing our anti-bullying statute with School Climate legislation; requiring all CT public, charter and magnet schools to focus squarely on creating positive school climates and working restoratively to hold students accountable for their behavioral transgressions.

CT is the first state in the nation to correct over 25 years' worth of well-intended but misguided state anti-bullying legislation. Safe school environments are not created by chasing bullies; safety is achieved by focusing on climates where no form of mean-spirited behavior including but not limited to bullying and harassment exists. Doing so has always been a moral and practical imperative. It is now a legal imperative thanks in large part to Stratford's commitment, support and collaboration.

[Our Services](#)

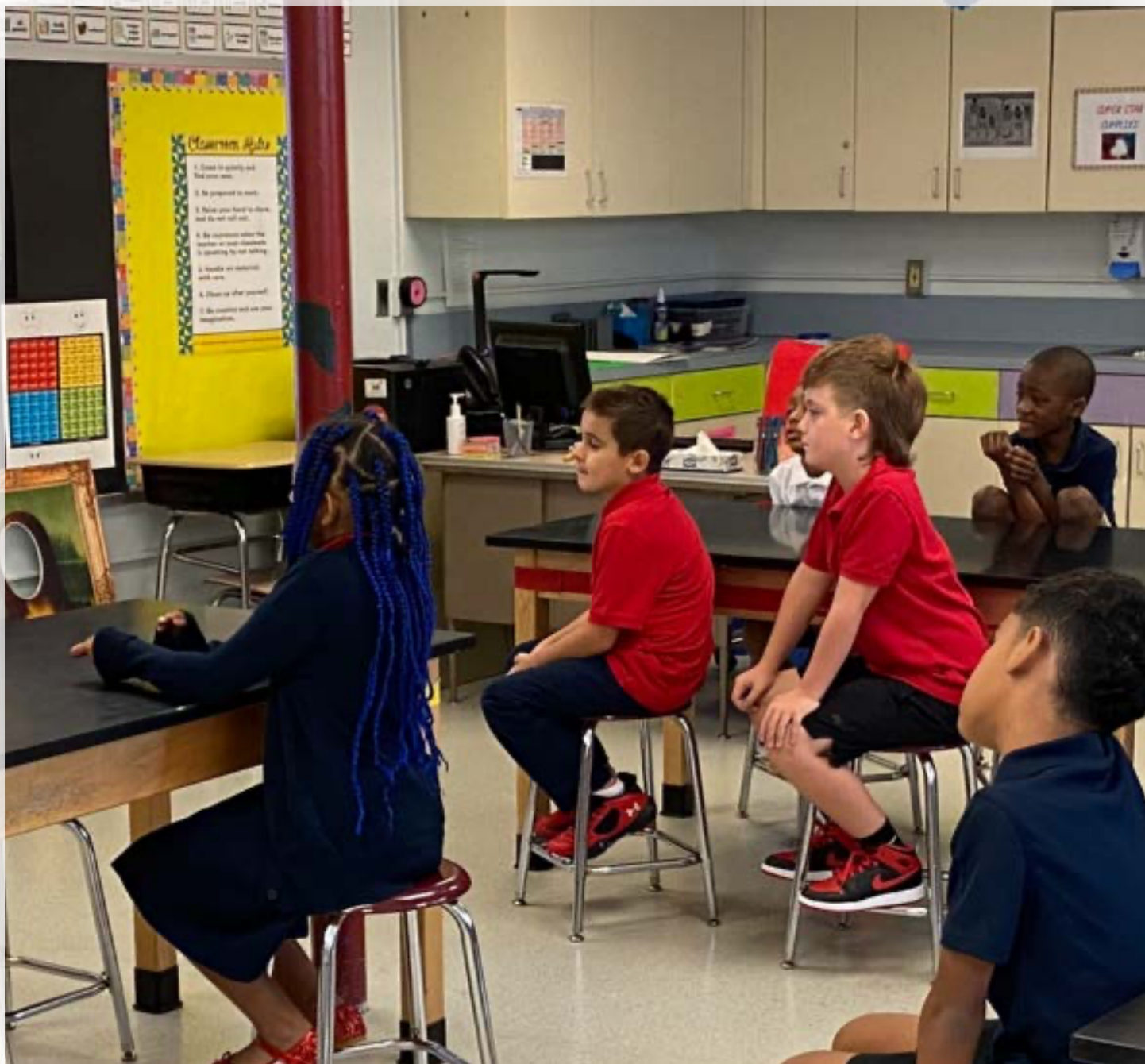
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DIGITAL CITIZENS IN THE MAKING

If Career Pathways demonstrate Stratford’s commitment to workforce preparation, its approach to artificial intelligence reflects its commitment to the future. The district has embraced AI with a student-centered philosophy emphasizing innovation, ethics, and responsible use.

“AI is not something that we should fear as a school district,” says Dr. Michelle Eckler, Director of Instructional Technology. “It’s something that we have a responsibility to teach our students about.

We want to make sure they understand how to use it ethically, responsibly, and effectively.”

That work begins before students interact directly with AI tools. In elementary grades, students learn what artificial intelligence is, how it affects their lives, and the importance of digital citizenship, media literacy, online safety, and ethical decision-making. As they mature, instruction expands to responsible generative AI use, academic integrity, and the role emerging technologies will play in college, careers, and everyday life.



Stratford Partnership
for Youth and Families

EMPOWERING YOUTH. STRENGTHENING FAMILIES.

Supporting the health, safety and well-being of
Stratford's young people through prevention,
education and community connection.

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Stratford Community Services and the Partnership for Youth and Families congratulate the Stratford Public Schools on this well-deserved recognition. As constant collaborators in creating a community where children and families feel a deep sense of belonging, we could not be prouder.

For the past three years, we have partnered with Stratford Parents' Place—the district's Family Resource Center—to offer *Raising Highly Capable Kids*. This 13-week, evidence-based course helps parents connect more deeply with their community while equipping them with tools to navigate both the challenges and joys of parenting. Furthermore, the district has continually prioritized the mental well-being of its students, opening its doors to our team to teach *Teen Mental Health First Aid* to all freshmen in Health I classes. By dedicating critical class time to this initiative, the district helped us equip over 450 students this past year alone with the tools to care for themselves and their peers. Educators and administrators have also dedicated professional development time to participate in *Youth Mental Health First Aid* and other trainings sponsored by the Partnership, ensuring every student's needs are met.

The strength of this partnership is clear: our 2026 youth survey of over 2,000 middle and high school students revealed that 74% of students believe their teachers care about them—a remarkable 9% increase from 2024.

Technology integration is intentional. Students access digital tools that enhance learning, while teachers receive professional learning to ensure technology strengthens instruction rather than replaces it. “We never want technology for technology’s sake,” Eckler explains. “We always want the technology used in a way that makes sense for the instruction.”

Stratford’s work has earned national recognition. The district was selected for a national Digital Wellness Task Force with ISTE + ASCD and Pinterest, helping shape conversations around healthy technology use. Two Stratford students also represented Connecticut at the Day of AI Leadership Fellowship at MIT, collaborating with students and educational leaders on recommendations for AI in education.

Stratford continues engaging educators, students, families, and community partners in conversations about emerging technologies. By approaching AI through ethics, responsibility, and innovation, the district is preparing students not only to use



tomorrow’s technology, but to lead in a world shaped by it.

A MINDSET SHIFT IN EVERY CLASSROOM

At Stratford, improving student outcomes begins with instruction. The Teaching and Learning Department promotes high expectations, evidence-based practices, and engaging experiences that prepare students for success beyond graduation.

“We have a strong commitment to evidence-based instruction,” says Dr. Diana Dilorio, Assistant Superintendent for PreK through Grade 6. “We are constantly learning, refining our practices, and using research to guide the decisions we make for students.”

Stratford was among the first districts selected for the Connecticut State Department of Education’s inaugural Science of Reading cohort. What began as

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Stratford Unified Sports
Competing at Mohegan Sun after being recognized as a Unified Champion School.

an early literacy initiative has grown into a broader commitment to strengthening elementary reading instruction. Through its partnership with Hill for Literacy, Stratford is building consistency across all eight elementary schools and ensuring access to high-quality, research-based instruction.

That commitment extends across subjects. Guided by the district's new Instructional Vision, teachers are creating classrooms that emphasize critical thinking, collaboration, student ownership, and meaningful engagement. Professional learning, coaching, and collaboration with school leaders help educators move beyond delivering curriculum to designing experiences that challenge, inspire, and prepare students for the future.

"Our focus is not simply on teaching a program," Dilorio explains. "It's about understanding the standards, using evidence-based practices, and

creating learning experiences that meet the needs of every student."

Academic excellence is complemented by a commitment to the whole child. Stratford is a K-12 RULER district, implementing Yale University's approach to social and emotional learning. Through tools such as the Mood Meter and instruction in self-awareness, emotional regulation, and communication, students develop skills essential for school, work, and life.

Together, these academic and social-emotional initiatives advance Stratford's Portrait of a Graduate—developing effective communicators, collaborative problem-solvers, lifelong learners, and engaged community members.

CREATIVE DOLLARS, SUSTAINABLE FUTURES



Innovation requires thoughtful stewardship of public resources. At Stratford, every budget decision begins with one question: How will this benefit students? That philosophy has helped the district navigate financial challenges while preserving high-quality opportunities.

When federal ESSER funding ended, leaders faced difficult decisions. Rather than simply reducing services, Stratford redesigned positions and reallocated resources to preserve programming, strengthen instruction, and expand support where it would have the greatest impact. One example was the evolution of library media positions into Technology Integration Specialists, creating new capacity for digital citizenship, instructional technology, and innovative teaching.

“All of our budget decisions are focused on what’s best for students,” says Pamela Mangini, Chief Operating Officer. “We’ve worked hard to redesign our budget strategically, redirect resources where they have the greatest impact, and continue providing outstanding opportunities while remaining fiscally responsible.”

That commitment has strengthened partnerships with the Stratford Board of Education and town leadership. Through transparent budgeting, long-range planning, and collaborative decision-making, Stratford has continued investing in literacy, technology, career pathways, school safety, and student support while maintaining a balanced, sustainable budget.

“Our responsibility is to be good stewards of our community’s investment,” Mangini explains. “We’re



committed to transparency, fiscal responsibility, and making sure every dollar supports student success.”

Looking ahead, Borges says the priorities remain clear: strengthen teaching and learning, expand meaningful opportunities, and ensure every graduate leaves prepared for college, career, and life.

“Every decision we make comes back to our mission,” Borges says. “We’re building a school system that prepares students not only for graduation, but for the opportunities and challenges they’ll face throughout their lives.”

PREFERRED VENDOR/PARTNER

■ HILL for Literacy

www.hillforliteracy.org

HILL for Literacy strives to create a world where every child is a reader. Our mission is to advance equitable literacy outcomes for PreK-12 students by equipping educators with the knowledge and skills to deliver high quality, responsive literacy instruction that meets the unique needs of every child.

■ School Climate Consultants

www.schoolclimateconsultants.com

Our mission is to assist schools and other youth serving community organizations to create safe and respectful learning and social environments for all students and the adults who work with them. We focus on the quality of the school climate and working restoratively when relationships and community have been compromised.

■ Stratford Community Services

www.stratfordct.gov/communityservices

Since 1977, the Town of Stratford Partnership for Youth and Families (Formerly known as the Youth and Family Advisory Board, YAFAB) has worked in cooperation with Stratford Community Services, the local Youth Service Bureau, to develop a coordinated network of services for young people and families.

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