



The Horizons Program Overview

Vision

Building a more just and equitable society.

Mission Statement

Transforming the lives of underserved children and youth through year-round academic and enrichment programs to inspire learning, encourage success, and close the opportunity gap.

Values

- Equity through opportunity
- Educating the whole child
- Joyful and nurturing community

Population Served

Horizons at NCCS serves 400 kindergarten through grade twelve students from under-resourced Stamford and Norwalk public and public charter schools each year. 100% of admitted students come from households experiencing financial need, with incomes that are at or below 200% of federal poverty guidelines. At least 67% of admitted students are experiencing academic and/or social-emotional need. Horizons at NCCS receives many more applications than there are openings, with an average three year overall acceptance rate of 18%. All of our programs are tuition-free.

Landscape

Fairfield County, Connecticut has the biggest gaps in academic achievement and economic opportunity in the nation. As pandemic relief programs fade, Black and Latino adults who live with children are hit hard by food insecurity, lack of adequate transportation, and internet access. Children from these families attend under-resourced schools and do not have access to summer educational opportunities and lose two to three months of academic ground during the summer months. Many low-income students are three grades behind by fifth grade. Students who are not proficient in reading by third grade have a 60% chance of being below proficient in reading in middle school. African American children ages 5-19 are nearly six times more likely to drown in a swimming pool than their White peers. 45% of Hispanic/Latino children and 64% of African American children have little to no swimming ability. The research shows that swimming ability is passed down through generations. A survey found that over 26% of African American caregivers and 32% of Latino caregivers reported they never learned to swim, compared to less than 4% of White caregivers.

100% of Horizons students graduate from high school in four years in a state where only 80% of students eligible for free or reduced lunch are on track to graduate in four years, compared to 94% of their more

affluent peers. Our students are beating the odds with a three-year average college enrollment rate of 95%, compared to a 51% college enrollment rate for Connecticut students who are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Many of our students are the first in their families to attend college and this opens many doors for them. Horizons is changing the odds for our students by providing them with the resources and opportunities they need to succeed in school, college, career, and life.

Program Overview

Horizons is anchored by an intensive six-week **summer program** held on the campus of New Canaan Country School. During the summer, Horizons gives approximately 300 children and youth in kindergarten through 9th grade a chance to have new experiences, meet new friends, take part in academic and enrichment classes, eat nourishing breakfasts and lunches, swim, and become part of a diverse family of caring teachers and staff. Horizons just completed the last year of a five-year growth phase, which has been slowly increasing our student population. This growth allows us to admit more students earlier in their academic careers to ensure they meet developmental milestones. In summer 2025, we welcomed for the third year an additional class of kindergarten students (24 total, instead of 12), and 15 additional 4th grade students.

The project-based educational model is designed to fuel a lifelong passion for learning, using a blend of high-quality academics with cultural enrichments and confidence-building activities like swimming, arts, and sports. In small classes led by professional teachers, students dive into a rich curriculum with a focus on literacy and STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math). Each student receives close to 200 hours of academic enrichment/classroom time and benefits from the 3-to-1 student to staff ratio, including the support of reading specialists and social workers. Our students experience academic growth during the six-week summer program through purposeful literacy and math instruction and differentiated support and interventions. We implement STAR pre- and post-math and literacy assessments during the summer to identify areas of weakness and strength for each child to help guide teachers in individualizing their instruction, as well as to measure progress made during the summer program. Swimming is a life and safety skill that many disadvantaged children do not have the opportunity to acquire. Swimming instruction is a hallmark of the Horizons summer program, and almost all students learn to swim during their time in the program. Horizons also exposes students to new experiences in the summer through field trips, arts and cultural events, and community wide learning events and celebrations. Transportation is provided to and from the program each day.

The Horizons **school year program** continues the learning and connections that began in the summer, as six weeks alone is not enough to make the progress we set out to make. The school year program gives students in grades one through eight the opportunity to build on the academic and social and emotional progress made during the summer. We identify the students who are below grade level and provide them with in-person one-to-one tutoring with a focus on math and literacy. Students in grades 1-8 are encouraged to join us for fall and spring **Super Saturdays** and students in grades 1-10 participate in our five week **winter program** in January and February. These events provide connection and engagement at regular intervals. These Saturdays are complemented by four other opportunities to connect through our fall and summer kickoff events, and two community-wide events in the spring that bring Horizons and NCCS families together on campus. The school year program also provides one-to-one social work services for students or families in crisis, and referral for subsidized longer-term support, when necessary.

A partnership with the Sasco River Center will give students who are struggling to make progress in school access to neuropsychological and psycho-educational evaluations. These evaluations are beyond the evaluations that school districts have the capacity to offer and are unaffordable for families with financial need but can be instrumental in correctly identifying challenges and creating an effective intervention plan.

The **high school program** provides a robust list of programming and supports during the school year to ensure students graduate high school with a post-secondary plan along with the skills and resources to execute that plan. Programming includes one-to-one tutoring, academic, life skills and college readiness workshops, college counseling, college tours, career exposure and career readiness programs, volunteer opportunities, and social events. High school students are invited to volunteer and help out during the Super Saturdays as well. An SAT prep course is offered during the winter program for juniors, and juniors also participate in a spring, multi-day regional college and post-secondary tour.

The **caregiver and family program** at Horizons encourages caregivers to get involved. Studies have shown that active family involvement correlates to increased academic success and social behavior for our students. Horizons caregivers participate in our programming, from our Holiday Dinner to volunteering at our Faculty and Staff Appreciation Lunch. We have approximately 30 Family Grade Reps who meet bi-monthly with a subset of our full-year staff to give their opinions and recommendations on programming, educational workshops, and recruit volunteers for family events. An additional bi-monthly Family Council meeting is held as well that all caregivers are invited to attend to hear program updates and contribute ideas and feedback. Each summer, caregivers participate in weekly adult swim lessons and make major strides in learning how to swim. Our families recognize the value of the experience their children are receiving through Horizons and are actively engaged as partners in their children's success.

Horizons **alumni association** provides an opportunity for Horizons graduates to stay connected with each other and take advantage of the valuable educational and professional network that exists within the Horizons community. The alumni association started with a closed Facebook group and now has 375 members. Each year, graduating seniors are inducted into the Alumni Association during the high school graduation ceremony, and an alum is also selected to speak at the event.