

SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES AND FUNDING MEETING

Location:	CAPSS 26 Caya Avenue West Hartford, CT
Type:	In Person Meeting (Virtual Link Available)
Date:	08/06/2024
Time:	9:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.
Tri-Chairs:	Andrew Feinstein
	Michelle C. Laubin
	Fran Rabinowitz

In Attendance:

1. Adler, Jason (online)
2. Bowman, Alisha (online)
3. CT-N (online)
4. Feinstein, Andrew (Tri-Chair)
5. Flaherty, Tara
6. Hammersley, Lisa
7. Helene, Karen
8. Jackson, Typhanie
9. Laubin, Michelle (Tri-Chair)
10. McCarthy, Patrice
11. Meyers, Kathryn
12. Tartaglia, Heather
13. Turner, Aimee (online)
14. Wanzer, Stephanie
15. Yankee, Susan (online)

Meeting called to order: 9:30 AM

1. Remarks of tri-chairs, including status of press conference on release of finding report

1. Three sort of immediate action items:
 - a. One is the release of the report and those press-based meetings.
 - i. Tiffany requested that we ought to have at least one in New Haven where folks who could not make it to the RESCs and were clearly involved in the special ed process could participate.
 - b. The second issue is that the message we got from Chairman Curry at the last meeting, was that he wanted us to cover every major topic in special ed. The questions are, should we do that? Do we have time? How do we respond to that?

- c. And the third issue is, you know, building an established process for coming up with specific recommendations and doing the work to justify those recommendations, all in a matter of three months.

2. Discussion and approval of RESC based meetings.

- a. Consideration of adding locations.

3. Reading presentation and discussion of funding of special education in Connecticut led by Lisa Hammersley

- The School & State Finance Project is a statewide nonprofit, nonpartisan policy organization founded in 2015.
- They are a trusted resource that works collaboratively with policymakers, school district officials, community leaders, and all individuals.
- They develop data-driven solutions to ensure all public school students receive equitable education funding that supports their learning needs.
- Funding sources for K-12 education in CT come from federal sources, state sources and local sources. The primary source of funding comes from property taxes.
- State funding for public schools can be broken down into multiple categories:
 - ECS/Alliance District Grants
 - School Building Projects
 - Magnet Schools
 - Special Education – Excess Cost
 - Charter Schools
 - Regional Vo-Tech
 - Sheff Transportation
 - Priority School Districts
 - Other Grants less than \$40MM
- CT is one of the few states in the country that does not have a separate special education funding system.
- CT's public school districts primarily receive funding for students with disabilities from the ECS Grant.
- Districts are partially reimbursed for extraordinary special education costs through the state's Excess Cost grant.
 - Excess Cost grant reimburses districts when expenditures for educating a student in special education are 4.5 times greater than the district's spending per pupil
 - The Excess Cost grant was not fully funded in 2024. The amount appropriated by the legislature was \$79.4 million less than what was needed to fully fund the grant.
- Under the current law, if the legislature does not fully fund the Excess Cost grant, districts are to be reimbursed using a 3-tiered system that is based on the wealth of their town.

- Each town is ranked in descending order from 1 to 169, and each tier will be reimbursed at a different rate.
 - The amount appropriated by the legislature for 2024 is not enough to reimburse districts using the tiered system.
 - In 2024 districts were reimbursed at a percentage ranging from 64% to 75%.
- Senator Looney – (2021) – led the charge to change the state’s reimbursement.
- Money goes back to the municipality not the school districts.
- Treated differently in different municipalities.
- Patrice – before ECS was created special ed was reimbursed on a sliding scale. There was some attempt to have equity.
- All students are included in resident student counts used to calculate equalization grants.
- In 1995, the CT General Assembly increased the ECS foundation by \$911 to account for special education costs.
- According to CSDE, approximately 20-25% of ECS funding is assumed to be attributed to special education expenditures.
- ECS formula does not take a district’s special education needs into consideration.
- The ECS formula is used to distribute state education aid to municipalities for their local or regional public school districts,
- The state began providing aid to cities and towns as a result of a 1977 CT Supreme Court decision, Horton v. Meskill.
 - In 1988, CT established the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) formula. It has been revised many times since.
 - In theory, the ECS grant is supposed to make up the difference between what a community can afford to pay and what it costs to run a public school system.
- The ECS formula begins with a foundation amount, which represents the amount of money it costs to educate a child with no additional learning needs.
- In CT, the foundation amount is established by the legislature.
- Currently, the foundation amount is \$11,525.
- ECS Formula’s Student-Needs Weights (more recent adjustments in 2021)
 - Low Income Student Weight – 30%
 - Concentrated Poverty Weight – 15%
 - Multilingual Learner Weight – 25%
- Academic research doesn’t point to percentages to be used.
- Base Aid Ratio
 - A town’s ability to fund its public schools is determined by two factors in the ECS formula. These factors make up the Base Aid Ratio.
 - Property Wealth – 70%
 - Income Wealth Factor – 30%
- Formula adds additional funding for communities that have one of the highest Public Investment Communities (PIC) index scores.
 - The PIC index is calculated annually by the OPM and measures the relative wealth and need of CT’s towns,

- If a town has one of the top 19 highest PIC index scores, under the ECS formula, the town will receive a bonus of 3 to 6 percentage points to its Base Aid Ratio.
- Factors Impacting a Town's ECS Grant
 - Town's prior year ECS grant amount
 - # of students in town
 - # of economically disadvantaged students
 - % of students who are economically disadvantaged
 - # of students learning English
 - # of students sent to regional school districts, and how many grades the regional district has
 - Town's property wealth (ENGLPC)
 - Income of town residents (Median Household Income)
 - PIC Index score
 - Alliance District status
- Formula began implementation in 2019
- Towns receiving increases will be phased in over 8 years (full funding by 2026)
- Towns receiving decreases will be phased out over 14 years (Phase-Out paused for 2022-2025)
- Alliance districts that would otherwise receive a decrease in their grant amounts are held harmless so they won't experience cuts to their ECS funding.
- State ECS support varies widely depending on municipal wealth and student need.
- 10 Different funding formulas
- School District Budget – Federal Revenue – State Revenue = Municipal (Local) Contribution
- Each year every city and town create a "municipal budget". This includes all of the money the town will need to pay for the town's government services.
- Public schools are the biggest expense for every city and town in CT.
- Cities and towns must collect enough money through property taxes to pay for all of the expenses in the municipal budget (fire, police, highway, maintenance of roads, snow removal, parks and recs, public schools)
- Towns are limited in their ability to raise more money through property taxes to fund their local schools.
- There is a mismatch between district needs and district resources to educate students.
- Districts with more need generally have less resources to educate their students.
- Large, urban districts tend to educate the highest number of students with high needs and have student populations composed of the greatest percentages of high-needs students.
- The Special Education Task Force is considering recommending a new student-based weight to the ECS formula.

- This new state level support for special education expenditures would be in addition to the Excess Cost grant that supports local expenditures that are beyond 4.5 times the per pupil expenditure per local public school district.
- The inclusion of a 25% student with disabilities weight for local public school districts will result in an increased cost to the state of approximately \$77 million in 2026.

4. Discussion of process for developing specific recommendations.

- There is a need for uniformity for the way the report is presented.
- The subcommittees were asked to meet, recalibrate based on the findings and move into presenting recommendations for the October meeting.
- Cover all issues in Special Educations – Raise all issues
- When you issue your recommendations which will be from the findings – tell us what the arguments are.
- It took a long time to get to the 13 issues – if recommendations need to incorporate different perspectives that is fine but we need to stay focused on the findings/recommendations.
- There is concern with the enforcement mechanism.
- A question was raise - Is it possible for the subcommittees to keep enforcement and work it into the recommendations.
- Next meeting is in September when teachers and paraeducators come to provide comments.
- Next meeting - September 10th – 4:00 PM – CAPSS, 26 Caya Avenue, West Hartford.
- Fran, Andy & Michelle will get together to discuss next steps for September 10th.

5. Adjournment

Adjourned at 11:30 AM