



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee General Obligation Bonding Subcommittee Commissioner Charlene M. Russell-Tucker March 25, 2025

Good morning, Senator Miller, Representative Napoli, Senator Hwang, Representative Piscopo and members of the Bonding Subcommittee. My name is Jessica Brunetti, and I am a Chief of Fiscal and Administrative Services for the State Department of Education. I am here testifying on behalf of the Commissioner of Education. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you to discuss the Department of Education's bonding needs, which address 4 areas.

Low Performing School Bonds

The first category is low-performing schools. These represent grants-in-aid to targeted local and regional school districts for alterations, repairs, improvements, technology, and equipment in low-performing schools. Funds primarily support K-12 learning-related outcomes and for capital projects that will reduce or eliminate the physical and technological barriers to maintaining and achieving high-quality facilities and programs in support of these outcomes. The remaining balance of these funds is \$15,075,996, which we anticipate a partial request at an upcoming State Bond Commission meeting. A Request for Proposal (RFP) process took place, and from that, there are 26 individual school projects to be allocated this fiscal year totaling nearly \$7.4M. We anticipate a second RFP process to occur for the remaining balance of the funds once this first round has been awarded.

Charter School Bonds

The second category is grants-in-aid to assist charter schools with capital expenses. The remaining balance is \$13,945,833. These funds provide grants to Charter Schools to finance school building projects and/or make improvements to school buildings to meet some of their facility needs. Funding for schools is determined by a Request for Proposals. (RFPs). A new RFP is being finalized for release the week of March 24, 2025, for the balance of the funds. We hope for the unallocated funds to satisfy the requests made by charter schools relative to the upcoming RFP but will request additional funding in upcoming state budget cycles, as the need for school improvements is on-going.

RESC Magnet School Bonds

The Governor's budget proposes new grants-in-aid to regional educational service centers for capital expenses at interdistrict magnet schools, not exceeding \$20,000,000. The current funding balance is \$22,869,311 and is needed for grants-in-aid from the sale of bond fund capital improvement projects at magnet schools operated by Regional Educational Service Centers (RESCs). These entities do not have taxing authority and, therefore, rely on these funds to support rehabilitation, maintenance and improvement of existing magnet schools to support enrollment, programming, and safe learning environments. Goodwin University is also a magnet school operator without a tax base to support capital improvements. Many of the ongoing and proposed projects are older facilities that require facility maintenance and improvement for student safety as well as to promote a learning environment that attracts students from different

towns to support statutory enrollment goals. An RFP was recently released for the balance. This grant supports facility maintenance, such as roofing, sidewalks, lighting, and technology.

In accordance with PA 22-118 section 314(f), the following RESCs received grants-in-aid in the aggregate amount of \$18,130,689 for FY24 and 25 based on authorization from the Bond Commissioner:

1. CREC- \$10,000,000
2. ACES-\$2,648,930
3. CES-\$2,373,850
4. EASTCONN-\$2,727,174
5. LEARN-\$380,735

Funds have been requested for allocation by the Bond Commission. They were requested during the June 30, 2023, bond commission meeting in the amount of \$10,000,000 for CREC, and at the June 7, 2024, bond commission meeting in the amount of \$8,130,689 for RESCs outside the Sheff Region. To date, \$11,356,817.30 has been paid to RESC operators. Timing can vary for final expenditure, based on the project and the type of material and services required. In general, projects will typically span 2 fiscal years.

Special Education Bonds

The Governor's budget proposes \$4,000,000 for FY27 for special education to support in-district programming for students with disabilities. This will assist and incentivize local school districts to develop or expand programs for students with disabilities in their local schools. Districts may also work collaboratively to develop regional programs with the goal of reducing the need to place a student in an out of district program. The funding will cover construction costs required to outfit buildings and/or classrooms to meet the educational and safety needs of the students. This funding would cover the complete projects in the districts, from design to construction. Districts may also utilize in-kind funding for these projects, but there will not be any additional state resources available. The anticipated completion timeline would be within one year of the receipt of funds, while allowing flexibility for construction and/or supply chain delays.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and we are happy to answer any questions you have at this time.