



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Connecticut General Assembly Oversight Committee

Informational Forum on Audit of Special Education Providers

Deputy Commissioner Synthia Sone-Moyano

January 28, 2026

Good afternoon, Senator Gadkar-Wilcox, Representative Dathan, Senator Sampson, Representative Carney, and members of the Government Oversight and Education Committees. I am Deputy Commissioner Sone-Moyano from the State Department of Education and I am happy to appear before you.

At the outset, the Connecticut State Department of Education (Department) extends its sincere appreciation to the Auditors of Public Accounts for their thorough and collaborative work in conducting the Performance Audit of Private Providers of Special Education for the 2022–2023 school year. The Department values the professional partnership demonstrated throughout this process and recognizes the audit of certain operations of private providers of special education that entered agreements with local education agencies, as an important mechanism for strengthening oversight, transparency, and outcomes for students with disabilities.

While the responsibility for service delivery and individualized education program (IEP) implementation is shared by our local school districts and programs, the Department's comprehensive approval and monitoring procedures are designed to ensure high-quality programming, continuous accountability and processes to address identified issues.

School districts place students in a variety of settings (APSEPs, RESCs, private settings, and out-of-state facilities) based on the individual needs of the student. Local school districts' planning and placement teams (PPTs) are required by the Department and federal law to monitor student progress at each outplacement regardless of the location.

The Department takes the audit findings seriously and has initiated concrete actions in response. As noted in the audit report response, the Department's Special Education General Monitoring and Supervision Team has reviewed the findings and implemented appropriate next steps. Where noncompliance was identified, the Department has engaged directly with the identified programs to ensure timely corrective action, documentation of remediation, and where appropriate, follow-up monitoring activities.

It is important to provide context for the Legislature regarding the timing and scope of this audit. The findings are based on data and practices from the 2022–2023 school year. The Department's approval and reapproval decisions for the programs audited occurred prior to the audit and in accordance with the statutory and regulatory requirements in place at that time. APSEPs are approved on a two- to five-year cycle, during which programs are subject to comprehensive on-site reviews. While this cycle provides a structured and rigorous oversight process, the Department recognizes that compliance issues may arise between approval periods, despite corrective actions that have already been undertaken by the Department.

To mitigate this risk, the Department requires all approved private programs to complete an annual Statement of Assurances attestation, signed by the program's executive leadership, affirming continued adherence to applicable standards, laws, and regulations. While this attestation process serves as an important accountability measure, the Department has also developed an off-cycle review risk assessment process which identifies a variety of factors that assist the Department in determining whether additional review activities, including but not limited to off cycle reviews, are warranted to strengthen ongoing compliance and quality assurance.

Consistent with the Department's commitment to continuous improvement, we have incorporated enhancements to the approval and monitoring practices, including expanded use of random sampling of personnel and student records, strengthened documentation requirements, and increased verification of corrective actions. The Department has also aligned its work with newly enacted legislation, including requirements for model contracts and future unannounced site visits, to ensure that oversight mechanisms continue to evolve in response to legislative actions, and emerging best practices.

The Department will continue to work collaboratively with the Auditors of Public Accounts, the General Assembly, local education agencies, and private providers to ensure that students with disabilities are educated in safe, compliant, and high-quality settings. The audit further informs the Department's ongoing efforts to strengthen systems, clarify expectations, and reinforce shared responsibility for improving the outcomes for our students with disabilities across the state.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify, and for your continued partnership in this important work. Upon the conclusion of our testimony, we look forward to you hearing directly from the private providers regarding corrective actions they have implemented.