YOUNG PEOPLE FIRST

A Bold Plan to Address **Connecticut's Statewide Crisis**

Connecticut Conference of Municipalities


119K

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Letter to Connecticut's Residents

Envision a Connecticut where every young person has an equal opportunity to achieve their greatest potential; where families, schools, employers, public institutions, and communities support them along the way; and where people and systems help them get back on track when they struggle.

Imagine what Connecticut would be like for your child, their friends, and young people in your community if this were true. Imagine what it would feel like as a parent and resident. Imagine the benefits for children and taxpayers alike, and the example Connecticut would set for the nation.

We have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to transform Connecticut to achieve this vision, positively impacting every town across the state and helping tens of thousands of young people and their families. To do so, we must confront the statewide crisis affecting our young people and communities.

One in five young people – 119,000 in total – between the ages of 14 and 26 are at-risk of not graduating high school or have already disconnected from education and the workforce. This is a crisis that started before the pandemic, and that the pandemic accelerated[1].

Young people are struggling to navigate trauma and mental health challenges, overcome significant learning loss, and conquer persistent barriers to opportunity, including inequitable resourcing, housing, and transportation. They also shared feeling bored and lonely.

As adults, we are missing opportunities to collaborate with and in support of young people. The systems we lead are not serving them adequately. Our education system does not always provide young people the necessary skills to succeed in life and work. Our hyper-localized town governance systems too often allow young people to become functionally invisible as they move between agencies or across town boundaries. Decisions made over resources too often incentivize zero-sum competition as opposed to coordination between organizations working to help young people. Too often, we do not hold ourselves accountable for making the necessary choices to help all young people thrive in Connecticut.

The crisis we are facing affects every town and has enormous costs for Connecticut taxpayers. Connecticut is leaving $750M on the table every year by not confronting this statewide crisis, including $350M in lost tax revenue and $400M in government spending[1]. Conversely, addressing this crisis offers a substantial opportunity for economic self-sufficiency and family stability as well as economic growth and community revitalization, benefiting everyone in Connecticut[1].

We believe it is imperative to address this crisis. That is why the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities launched the

119k Commission in March 2024. We've developed a strategy that cuts this crisis in half – getting 60,000 young people back on track – over the next 10 years, and helps local municipalities proactively serve this population. The Commission has highlighted this number as a bold yet achievable goal with the right leadership and resourcing[1].

After eight months of listening and learning, we offer a strategy that emphasizes building and sustaining coalitions, establishing robust service coordination, increasing capacity in schools, non-profits, and public institutions, and finding ways to fund these efforts. This report lays out a 10-year strategy, but leadership and action are required now.

As Commissioners, including 11 bipartisan municipal leaders who represent cities and rural and suburban towns, we present this strategy to Connecticut residents because success will require everyone working together across communities in a sustained, collaborative manner. In Connecticut, we have the means to realize this generational opportunity; the question is whether we have the will. And that starts with all of us. Join us in building a Connecticut where every young person has the chance to reach their full potential.

Together, we can make a difference.

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Mayor Elinor Carbone
Co-Chairperson,
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Town of Canterbury

Mayor Mike Passero
City of New London

Mayor Caroline Simmons
City of Stamford

Mayor Danielle Wong
Town of Bloomfield

Context for the Strategy

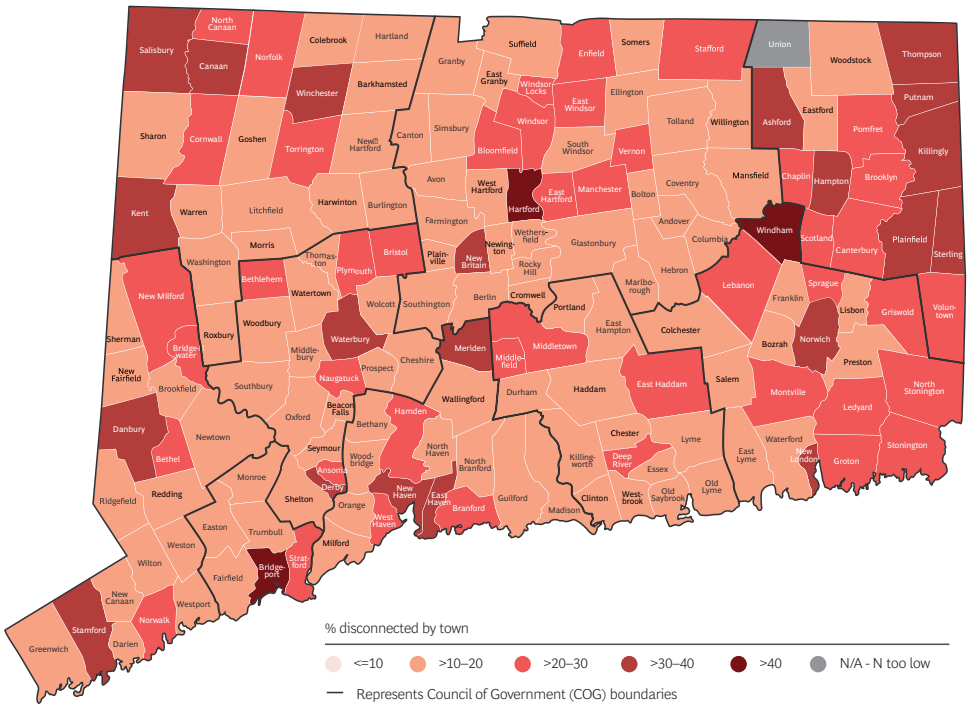
The release of Dalio Education's *Connecticut's Unspoken Crisis* report in October 2023 marked a pivotal moment for Connecticut, shedding light on the severe issue of youth disconnection across the state. This report highlighted an acute problem that results in a significant lost opportunity for Connecticut's future. The statistics are stark and compelling:

- 119,000 young people in Connecticut are either at-risk or disconnected from education and the workforce, accounting for nearly 20% of the youth population aged 14 to 26[1].
- 44,000 of these young adults have high school diplomas but cannot secure and maintain meaningful jobs, even though there are over 90,000 job openings in Connecticut[1].
- 13% of Connecticut's children live in poverty[2], with significant geographical and racial disparities. 37% of children under 18 in Hartford County[3] live below the poverty line; even in Fairfield County, the county with the lowest child poverty rate at 12%, 25% of Hispanic children and 19% of Black children live below the poverty line[4].
- Nearly 5,500[5] Connecticut students were impacted by homelessness in the 2023-2024 school year, the highest rate in a decade.
- 70% of CT's high school students report that their mental health is "not good". One-third of students felt sad or hopeless for two weeks or more, but only 25% of those who felt that way sought help[6]. A study conducted in New Haven found that nearly 50% of students in selected grades scored within the clinical range for PTSD, indicating a high prevalence of trauma-related symptoms among youth[7].

This crisis impacts every town across Connecticut, from urban centers to rural communities, underscoring the widespread nature of the problem and imperative for leaders across the state to work together to address this challenge.

In targeting support to address this crisis, Connecticut needs to reach both young people who are already disconnected, as well as those who demonstrate risk factors for future disconnection. We know that those off-track at any point in high school are up to 40% more likely to be neither enrolled in postsecondary education nor employed one year after high school; other significant risk factors for disconnection include student transiency and attending high-poverty schools[1].

% of young people disconnected one year after high school



Since the report's publication, Connecticut's statewide graduation rate declined for the first time in recent history, and nearly 20% of ninth-graders are off-track to graduate. Connecticut research suggests that fewer than half of off-track ninth-graders will graduate high school in four years. In 2024, almost 90,000 students were chronically absent from school, despite Connecticut's efforts to help students get back on track[8]. Every year, another 10,000 high school leavers are becoming disconnected for the first time[1].

The economic implications are equally profound, with an estimated annual cost of $750 million if the crisis remains unaddressed ($350 million in lost tax revenue, plus $400 million in government spending on services)[1].

Addressing this crisis would have immense positive impact on Connecticut's economy, not only filling a large portion of unfilled jobs – with a diverse and talented workforce – but increasing Connecticut's GDP by up to $5.5B[1].

In addition to enabling opportunity for individuals, there is a strong economic case for the strategy

For each disconnected person getting back on track, Connecticut stands to gain approx. $150k-$180k in additional tax revenue and approx. $60k in lower spending on government services over their lifetime[1].

Helping a young person get a postsecondary diploma can increase their median wages up to approx. $19k annually[1].

Employers see meaningful returns from apprenticeship investments ($1.44 in benefits for every $1 invested[9]).

Understanding the historical context is crucial to addressing this crisis. Dating from the establishment of social safety net programs in the mid-20th century, civil and social sector actors have evolved significantly to support communities. However, investment priorities historically have not focused sufficiently on young people, leading to gaps in services and support for young people[10]. For example, in the early 2000s, the U.S. spent almost two and a half times as much per capita on government programs for the elderly as on government programs for children[11]. In 2012, Social Security, the most impactful poverty reduction program in the United States, served 17.5 million seniors, but only 1.6 million children (either directly through survivor payments or indirectly via a family member's retirement, disability, or survivor benefits)[12]. As a result of these social investment patterns, the US social safety net lifted 69% of elderly people out of potential poverty from 1970 to 2017, while only 44% of children were lifted out of potential poverty over the same time frame[13]. The investment in support for the elderly shows the impact that investments in safety nets can have – but that investment has not been made equitably.

Additionally, practices of segregation by income and race have created enduring disparities in educational and social opportunities, disproportionately affecting low-income and minority communities. To this day, Connecticut is one of the most economically and residentially segregated states in the country, with two-thirds of people of color living in fewer than 10% of the state's 169 towns[14]. Segregationist policies, such as redlining (the historical practice of color coding the loan-worthiness of neighborhoods, often with racial implications) and discriminatory housing practices, left generational impacts that limited access to high-quality education, social services, and economic opportunities for many young people[15].

These systemic challenges shape the foundation for the crisis affecting Connecticut today. Chronic absenteeism, homelessness, joblessness, persistent opportunity gaps, multi-generational poverty, and many other challenges are the symptoms of these historical roots. Indeed, it is no surprise that we see significant racial disparities in graduation, employment, and incarceration rates. More than 40% of young men of color end up disconnected in Connecticut[1]. These realities highlight the need for comprehensive strategies to transform Connecticut and ensure a brighter future for all of Connecticut's youth and communities.

Guided by a singular goal to reduce the statewide crisis by half within 10 years, the 119k Commission led an open and inclusive strategy development process that spanned eight months and covered every corner of Connecticut.

The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities organized and launched the 119k Commission in March 2024, after hosting multiple listening tours and local forums across Connecticut. Since then, the Commission has held six regional public meetings in New Haven, Mansfield, Trumbull, Meriden, Hartford, and New London, focusing on issues like poverty, housing insecurity, and inadequate education. The Commission has heard from more than 400 young people, superintendents, police chiefs, non-profit leaders, Connecticut agency leaders, youth development workers, residents, and many others. These meetings provided invaluable insights and allowed the Commission to gather diverse perspectives on the challenges and opportunities faced by Connecticut's young people. Thousands have engaged with these meetings through live streams and recordings on Facebook.

The Commission has gone directly to more than 225 young people in their communities, listening to their ideas and learning from their experiences. The Commission organized eight roundtable discussions with a diverse set of young people who are at-risk, moderately disconnected, or severely disconnected, including incarcerated individuals. Young people shared concerns about feeling bored in school, unsafe in their communities and schools, and struggling to find necessary resources. They emphasized the importance of having trusting relationships with adults they admire. This firsthand input from those most affected by disconnection was crucial in shaping our strategies and ensuring they are relevant and impactful.

The Commission also collected over 55 pieces of testimony through its website, 119kcommission.org, providing an accessible platform for individuals to share their experiences and suggestions. Common themes include the need for better communication among agencies, streamlined services, and more equitable funding for education.

Five local forums hosted by Commissioners deepened the Commission's understanding of regional issues and opportunities, while one-on-one interviews offered detailed insights from leaders deeply engaged in addressing youth disconnection. The Commission hosted briefings by organizations like the University of Chicago Crime Lab, and interviewed eight national experts. Robust Connecticut research informed the Commission's approach, including briefings by the Boston Consulting Group, Community Science, and the CT School + State Finance Project.

This multi-faceted approach ensured a thorough and well-rounded understanding of Connecticut's statewide crisis, enabling the Commission to develop a comprehensive strategy that equips communities to enhance support for this population of young people.

Illustrative notes from the eight roundtable discussions organized with more than 225 young people across Connecticut

The Commission's process surfaced several gaps in the existing ecosystem

Lack of engagement, belonging and empowerment

> "I've had horrible experiences ... If it wasn't for my Family Advocate I wouldn't come to school - it's like having a second Mom.
>
> **- At-risk young person**

> "There are a lot of programs for boys, but not for females. They tried to send me to Massachusetts or Rhode Island because nothing for girls here in Connecticut.
>
> **- Disconnected young person**

> "When you skip class, automated message [is] not helpful - [I] skip because class is boring and not helpful.
>
> **- At-risk young person**

Insufficient educational resources and infrastructure

> "I qualified for a program to get my associates [degree] during high school, but I wasn't given the opportunity to take summer classes, so now I can't get my associates.
>
> **- At-risk young person**

> "I am not in district for my school because I qualified for a special program, so no bus assigned. I have to walk 20 minutes to closest station. I figure out every morning how to get to school.
>
> **- At-risk young person**

> "The school I used to work at hasn't had soap in the bathrooms for the last 6 years. Many teachers lock the bathrooms to prevent kids from choosing violence to resolve conflicts or inappropriate/illegal activities. Most students avoid using the restroom all day for their safety.
>
> **- At-risk young person**

Insufficient workforce development opportunities

> "I tried to get a job but didn't get into any programs. We need job programs that last all year, then we don't need to be outside all day in the hot sun.
>
> **- Disconnected young person**

> "Teach us more hands on, vocational stuff: fixing cars, workshop, culinary arts, life skills. Teach us how to make our own jerseys and bikes. You put your hands to work, gets your mind right.
>
> **- At-risk young person**

Fragmented, underfunded patchwork system of services

> "To get housed you must stay on the phone for hours with 211, then you MUST use the right language because "I'm sleeping on a friend's couch and about to get kicked out" does not qualify as homeless. If you get through, it takes months to get into housing.
>
> **- Nonprofit organization**

> "We are not funded at a level that allows us to compensate Youth Development Professionals – who some young people trust even more than their parents – as they deserve. Many would remain in these positions for the duration of their careers if able to do so financially.
>
> **- Nonprofit organization**

Lack of data transparency and usability

> "Many people are working hard in their respective silos doing the best they can with the resources and tools available to them. Everyone is under-resourced and over-worked, and we lose young people through the cracks.
>
> **- Government official**

> "Sharing data and resources across agencies, including education, health, social services, and law enforcement, ensures that interventions are informed by a holistic understanding of the challenges faced by the youth, rather than relying on schools alone to address systemic inequities.
>
> **- Nonprofit organization**

Lack of accountability across various stakeholders

> "We need initiatives that allow young parents like my daughter to prepare for a meaningful career while earning enough to care for their children. This means providing affordable childcare, flexible scheduling for school and work, and education opportunities that don't require them to sacrifice their ability to provide for their families.
>
> **- Mother of disconnected young person**

> "High-poverty areas often face complex, interrelated issues such as limited access to quality education, healthcare, safe recreational spaces, and economic opportunities. A place-based strategy can foster collaboration among local stakeholders who understand the unique needs of the youth and the broader community dynamics.
>
> **- Nonprofit organization**

A set of principles guided the Commission's work to meet these gaps

Several agreed-upon principles shape the strategy, ensuring a comprehensive and inclusive approach to addressing Connecticut's statewide crisis:

Address all populations: The strategy must address all populations of at-risk and disconnected young people across the full age range (14-26) and across the entire state, including rural, suburban, and urban areas.

Preventative and recuperative strategies: The strategy must include both preventative and recuperative strategies that not only serve current at-risk and disconnected youth but also help prevent new generations of young people from becoming at-risk or disconnected in the future.

Youth and family-centric approach: The strategy must put youth and families at its core, ensuring services are delivered in an accessible, person-centric way, and consider the needs of the entire household.

Nonpartisan nature: The strategy must be nonpartisan in nature to promote widespread buy-in and long-term implementation.

Balance support and accountability: The strategy must offer greater support for young people and stronger accountability mechanisms to drive positive behavior. Similarly, the strategy must provide more resources for public education while also strengthening accountability for districts and schools.

Address in-school and out-of-school factors: The strategy must address prevailing in-school and after-school factors driving disconnection by focusing on community development, such as building and growing community engagement hubs and recreation centers to offer after-school programs, and evidence-based in-school content, like career-connected learning.

Build on existing efforts: The strategy must involve some new initiatives and build on the breadth and depth of existing activity and organizations working to support at-risk and disconnected young people in the state.

Acknowledge broader ecosystem: The strategy must focus on addressing the needs most proximate to young people aged 14-26 while recognizing that many challenges emerge earlier in the youth development continuum (e.g., early childhood education, literacy) and may be related to more foundational issues (e.g., poverty).

Immediate and long-term action: The strategy's implementation must begin immediately, but in its entirety, it will take approximately 10 years to achieve. Several milestones for progress and metrics around reductions in at-risk and disconnected populations have been included in the Reaching Our Goals section.

The Commission's work resulted in a Bold Plan for Connecticut

Mission and Vision

The strategy begins with a north star mission for Connecticut: to get 60,000 at-risk and disconnected youth back on track by 2035

In alignment with the north star, the Commission offers a long-term vision: We envision a Connecticut where every young person has equal opportunity to achieve their greatest potential; where families, schools, employers, public institutions, and communities support them along the way; and where people and systems help them get back on track when they struggle. When leadership focuses its efforts and holds one another accountable, Connecticut's success and economic growth will be advanced for generations to come.

Measurable Goals

By the tenth year, this strategy aims to reduce the number of young people in Connecticut who are at-risk and disconnected by 30,000 people each – a 50% reduction overall

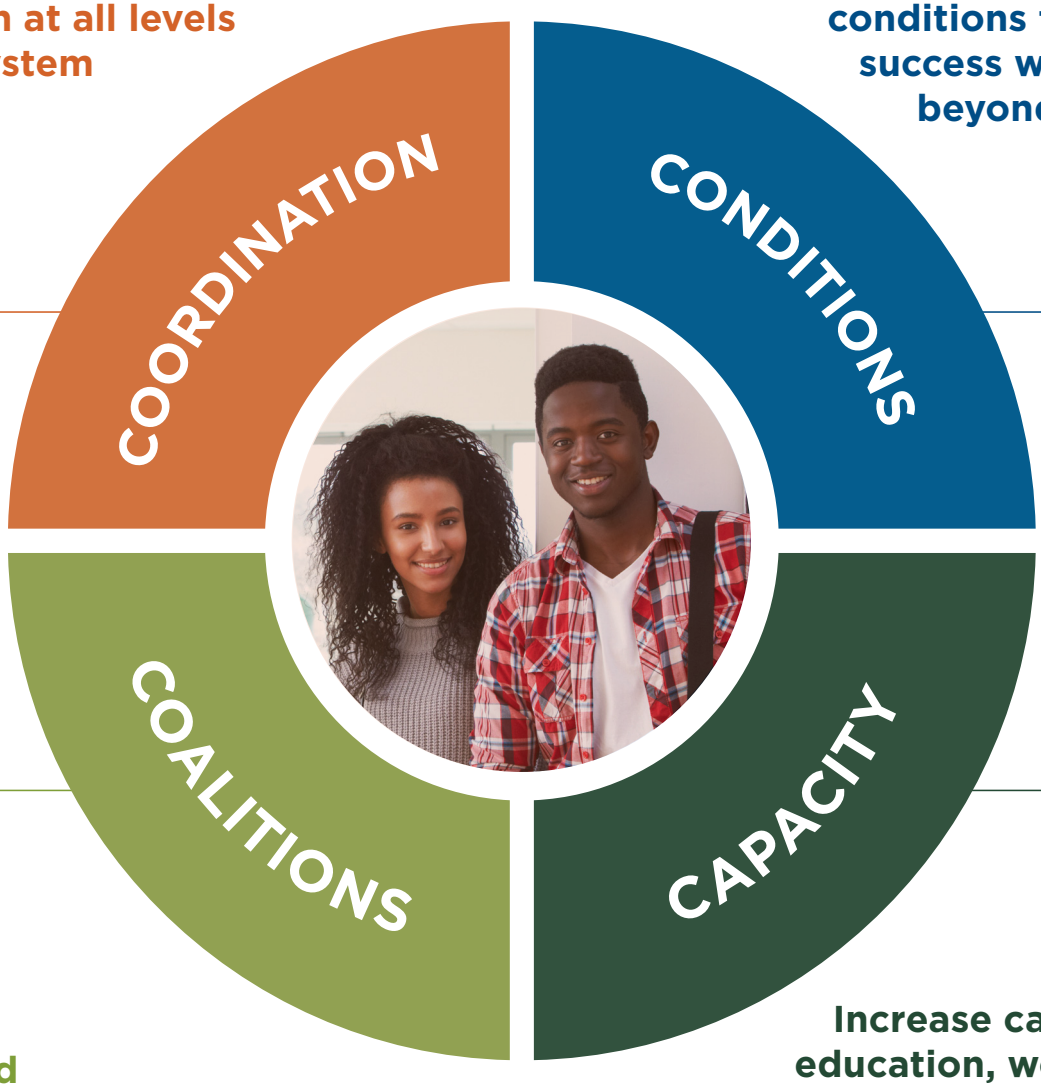
This will involve both preventative actions to keep young people from becoming at-risk and at-risk young people from disconnecting, as well as recuperative actions to get at-risk high school students back on track and reconnect disconnected young people to high-quality education and employment. In particular, the strategy focuses on early intervention to get newly disconnected and at-risk young people back on track within a year.

Strategic Pillars and Aligned Actions

The strategy is organized around four strategic pillars that are key to achieving the strategy's goals:

Coordinate supports for youth at all levels of the system

Create stronger conditions for youth success within and beyond schools



Build and sustain coalitions

Increase capacity in education, workforce, and the social sector

This will take time and sustained commitment, which is why the strategy spans a decade.

Under each of these pillars are a set of Aligned Actions to achieve the strategy's goals. The Commission's strategy development process initially surfaced these actions. The Commission then identified those that address a core challenge facing at-risk and disconnected young people, as well as those likely to impact a meaningful share of young people. Finally, the Commission prioritized actions likely to have a positive Social Return on Investment, as well as those that are feasible to implement.

The strategy centers around the following 22 interconnected Aligned Actions, phased and implemented over 10 years to achieve the goals. These Aligned Actions integrate increased investment with added accountability and transparency, leading to stronger conditions and capacities necessary to achieve transformative results.

Connecticut must faithfully adopt and implement all Aligned Actions and remain committed for ten years to address this statewide crisis. By working collaboratively, Connecticut can transform this statewide crisis into an opportunity for growth and success for all youth and communities.

Strategic Pillars

1. Coordinate supports for youth at all levels of the system

1. Improve visibility of the number and nature of at-risk and disconnected youth and strengthen accountability at state, regional, and local levels

2. Redesign local service delivery to ensure young people have the support they need, supported by strong regional oversight boards and a state-wide Office of Youth Success

3. Revamp CT's 211 system and develop a new user-friendly application to help at-risk and disconnected youth access existing resources

2. Create stronger conditions for youth success within and beyond school

POLICY

4. Strengthen public education accountability structures and approach to improve student outcomes

5. Reform school policies to be more supportive of the needs of youth

6. Support justice-involved youth and reduce recidivism through a balance of increased diversionary programs, support services, and added community-based accountability

FUNDING

7. Review CT's K-12 funding formulas to ensure equitable education funding based on student needs

8. Support policies to implement a federal Child Tax Credit

9. Create The 21st Century Fund to reward consolidation in services to reduce administrative overhead and drive more funding to highly effective strategies in school classrooms and in town youth services

10. Engage CT's federal delegation on federal policy and funding to support success of at-risk and disconnected youth

11. Create outcomes-based Connecticut Career Accelerator Program to support workforce pathways programs

3. Increase capacity in the system

EDUCATION

12. Increase school and educator capacity to support young people at risk of disconnection

13. Strengthen career-connected learning and pathways from education to work

14. Create Support Networks to provide technical assistance for educators, schools, and districts with the highest needs

WORKFORCE

15. Scale transitional employment programs, apprenticeships, and summer employment programs

16. Launch the Connecticut Youth Service Corps

SOCIAL SECTOR

17. Build the capacity of nonprofits who serve severely disconnected young people

18. Launch Center of Excellence at a CT partner university, focused on at-risk and disconnected youth

19. Support workforce reintegration programs for currently and formerly incarcerated youth

20. Support community recreational hubs and summer enrichment activities to increase emotional engagement, academic outcomes, and employment prospects for at-risk and disconnected youth

21. Fund the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness' efforts to identify and help young people experiencing homelessness

4. Build and sustain coalitions

22. Launch a state-level cross-sector coalition supported by philanthropic capital involving community, labor, business, civic, faith, philanthropic, and government leaders, forming and advancing a statewide community architecture that enables this strategy to live beyond any single administration at any level; support community-based organizing and advocacy efforts

STRATEGIC PILLAR 1: COORDINATE SUPPORTS FOR YOUTH AT ALL LEVELS OF THE SYSTEM

Aligned Action 1: Improve visibility of the number and nature of at-risk and disconnected youth and strengthen accountability at state, regional, and local levels

The Commission proposes that CT:

1A. Measure and improve understanding of the number and nature of at-risk and disconnected youth across state and local levels

1B. Strengthen transparency of funding, resource allocation, and results of investments in at-risk and disconnected young people, so that investments and programs are improved over time

1C. Build state-level data infrastructure, including a data platform and intermediary to support secure data and information sharing across agencies, Youth Service Bureaus, and community providers

1D. Require K-12 school districts to invest in high-quality data tools and implement Student Success Team structures to regularly analyze and act upon data to support youth success

Launch cost (2024 $): Approx. $25M

Incremental annual run-rate costs (2024 $): Approx. $16M

Existing resources that could be leveraged: P20 WIN expertise; federal Department of Labor grants

Implementation assumption: Reporting to begin in 2024, with data infrastructure to be built over next three years

Impact: Enables transparency and near real-time actionable data across all approx. 615,000 young people in CT from ages 14-26

1A. Measure and improve understanding of the number and nature of at-risk and disconnected youth across state and local levels:

The first step in addressing the challenge of youth disconnection in Connecticut is broad awareness of the size and needs of the population. The *Connecticut's Unspoken Crisis* report in October 2023 estimated that 119,000 young people in CT are either at-risk or disconnected from education and the workforce, accounting for nearly 20% of the youth population aged 14 to 26[1]. In addition to estimating this top-line number, the report analyzed the geographic distribution of disconnected youth and key risk factors (e.g., attending high-poverty schools, moving schools two or more times). Public Act 24-45 (HB5437, 2024) codified this approach and requires the State of Connecticut to refresh the analysis on an annual basis[16].

This was an important step and is only the beginning. Further progress requires:

- Adding agencies (e.g., Department of Correction and Court Support Services Division) that were not fully integrated in the initial analysis, to better understand youths' experiences and interactions with public systems
- Continuing progress in longitudinal analysis to understand more about young peoples' journeys all the way to age 26, including the long-term effects of experiences while still in school
- Creating highly visible, easy-to-use, always-on dashboards that ensure this data is available at the state, regional and local levels
- Continuing to supplement quantitative data with opportunities for young people to engage and share their stories with decision makers
- Engaging stakeholders throughout the system (at state and local levels) on this information, so that it is not only available, but known and used

We will know we are making progress with this action when all public leaders in Connecticut – from the Governor and Legislature, to state agency leads, to Councils of Governments, Regional Educational Service Centers, and Workforce Development Boards, to Youth Service Bureaus and Juvenile Review Boards, to school boards and municipal leaders – know this data and feel accountable for impacting not only the number but also the day-to-day context of at-risk and disconnected youth within their scope of influence.

1B. Strengthen transparency of funding, resource allocation, and results of investments in at-risk and disconnected young people, so that investments and programs are improved over time:

After creating visibility of this population, the second way in which data and transparency can advance CT's efforts to support at-risk and disconnected youth is by creating a feedback loop based on which investments are working for young people, which are not, and how approaches can be improved over time.

Many stakeholders in this process shared how difficult it is to access budget information and questioned whether expenditures are producing results[31]. Going forward, even with the many promising actions described in this strategy, the population and context of young people will continue to evolve dynamically. For the structures described in Action 2 below to be effective at the state, regional and local level, people must be informed by an up-to-date understanding of what is working.

The State of Connecticut and every town and local board of education must create and publish interactive dashboards that clearly show all budgets and expenditures to every resident. This is important to ensure there is accountability on the significant sums of money Connecticut already spends on programs and services. By increasing transparency, Connecticut will increase the likelihood that leaders and providers are held accountable.

Furthermore, the data intermediary described in Action 1C should include within its scope acquiring the necessary data to provide the underlying state, regional and local level analysis to make youth-related resource allocation, and the impacts of those resources, transparent. This will require partnering with the CT Office of Policy and Management (OPM) to incorporate state spending data, as well as identifying and tracking significant local and private sector investments. Tracking impacts will require additional capacity and work; being able to link additional public sector and non-profit programs with outcomes at the individual participant level in Connecticut's longitudinal database, as described further in Action 1C, is an important step to enable this progress.

Finally, as described more in Actions 1A and 1C, resource allocation and program impact data should be included in dashboards that the data intermediary creates to inform the decision-making of state, regional, and local level leaders.

1C. Build state-level data infrastructure, including a data platform and intermediary to support secure data and information sharing across agencies, Youth Service Bureaus, and community providers:

Creating the level of transparency needed to make real progress on this crisis requires stronger state-level data infrastructure.

While CT has a starting point in the state's Preschool through Twenty and Workforce Information Network (P20 WIN), there are three challenges with the current P20 WIN data system:

- Agencies retain a high degree of discretion over their participation, only sharing and integrating data on a case-by-case basis and in response to requests. No data flows are automated or recurring. Sharing of data – even where non-sensitive, anonymized, and aggregated – is governed by a lengthy data sharing agreement process, which requires substantial capacity on the part of a requestor and the agencies from whom data is requested
- There is no comprehensive dataset on young people – only individual records in agency databases – which limits the ability to understand where young people have fallen through the cracks, especially for those in private schools or homeschools, those who are self-employed and / or do not report earned wages to Connecticut Department of Labor.
- Data is only collected from participating state agencies, not the full suite of organizations serving young people

Public Act 24-45 has created an imperative to act, requiring P20 WIN "to develop a plan to establish a statewide data intermediary to provide technical support, create data-sharing agreements, and build and maintain the infrastructure needed to share data between non-profit organizations serving disconnected youth[16]."

To realize the vision of the legislature and advance this work, Connecticut must create this plan and establish this statewide data intermediary. This intermediary should have capabilities to:

- Define common and most powerful use cases for the data system
- Establish a revised governance structure to enable greater access to data while protecting sensitive information, which includes securing data sharing agreements with non-profit service providers
- Create or engage a partner to create a data warehouse
- Design and populate public dashboards to provide more information about the population
- Provide feedback to agencies on how to evolve data collection and quality over time

No existing state agency is well positioned to serve and succeed as the intermediary. Therefore, the Commission recommends that the State of Connecticut launch a competitive RFP to identify and stand up an independent intermediary within three years. Enhancing P20 WIN's data hub with an intermediary with deep data and analytical capabilities would provide comprehensive visibility on each youth's needs and the services they receive, facilitating better integrated case management, service coordination, and outcomes.

The intermediary should have at least five initial priorities in improving data and data availability. Some of these may be able to be advanced by the current P20 WIN system in advance of the intermediary's creation:

- An improved comprehensive count of young people in Connecticut. Connecticut should create a data platform storing census data as well as matched data from service providers, giving a holistic view of which young people are in Connecticut, which state services they are accessing, and their longer-term outcomes
- Addition of service providers to the above data – including non-profits and other providers outside of government
- Data on program delivery and impact, enabling evaluation of the impact of particular programs
- Widely accessible public dashboards providing summary statistics and views on common queries at state, regional, and local level
- To enable faster access to data, governance processes should be reformed to enable automatic access to non-sensitive data, and reserve time-consuming data sharing agreements only for sensitive data

Similar integrated data hubs have been successful elsewhere, such as Colorado, Kentucky, Rhode Island and New York, where partnerships among agencies have comprehensively linked data across early childhood, K-12, postsecondary, and workforce. Colorado leveraged data from education, migration, foster care, and homelessness sources to identify over 30,000 K-12 students experiencing high transiency, which enabled students to be linked to trained school counselors providing academic and emotional/social support[17]. In Kentucky, the State linked summer jobs and K-12 data to determine that summer employment boosted high school graduation rates[18]. Rhode Island created a dashboard to evaluate the impact of workforce training on participants' postsecondary outcomes[19]. In New York City, integrated data helped identify and enroll over 30,000 young children for Pre-K services[20]. Similar use cases in Connecticut would help identify at-risk and disconnected young people more quickly, connect them to social services, and would help the State better understand the Social Return on Investment of education and

workforce programs serving these young people. Integrated and modernized P20 data platforms, particularly those with interactive dashboard functionalities, can also increase transparency for taxpayers and policymakers by providing data on the state of at-risk and disconnected youth, their current access to support services and remaining gaps, and the impact of funded interventions on longer-term employment outcomes. Connecticut's upfront investment in this data system also has the potential to unlock substantial external funding, both from the federal government and philanthropic groups, that provide resourcing to scale high-potential integrated data systems.

1D. Require K-12 school districts to invest in high-quality data tools and implement Student Success Team structures to regularly analyze and act upon data to support youth success:

Connecticut's Unspoken Crisis[1] highlights several identifiable risk factors for a student not graduating from high school, including absenteeism, suspensions, and off-track credit accumulation. Across Connecticut, educators are missing early warning signs because data systems are insufficient. Students slip through the cracks because districts and schools have not implemented data tools that can pinpoint student needs.

First, the data that districts provide is often not in real-time, focusing more on retrospective evaluations rather than real-time insights that could actively guide educators in addressing students' needs and improving outcomes. Second, districts, schools, and educators lack user-friendly data tools necessary to understand, in real-time, which students need support, when they begin to struggle, and where they are experiencing challenges. The Commission heard from educators that they are forced to rely on multiple, disconnected data platforms – if they have real-time data available at all. Third, districts experience challenges when students transfer between districts and schools because data-sharing between districts and schools is often very limited, cumbersome, and slow. Finally, many schools lack the capacity to regularly analyze data, as well as the resources to support identified at-risk students.

In concert with Action 4 calling for a stronger Connecticut accountability framework, educators must have access to high-quality data tools to identify student needs and trends over time, across grade levels and subgroups, and for multiple indicators of student success (e.g., attendance, behavior, grades, credits, postsecondary plans, postsecondary access milestones). Taken together, an accountability framework establishes measures of success and transparently reports school and district performance on an annual basis, while real-time data tools allow educators to monitor school and student performance, allowing for midcourse supports and interventions.

Moving forward, Connecticut must require every district to invest in high-quality data tools that allow them to know which students are off-track and why, as well as which students have not identified a postsecondary plan or made meaningful progress relative to that plan. Additionally, Connecticut must require districts and schools to implement Student Success Teams, with fidelity, to make regular use of the data in support of student success. Student Success Teams are educators who meet at the school level every week to review student information, align on shared goals, develop personalized plans, and coordinate their efforts to advance student performance. School Success Networks, as described in Action 14, can help to facilitate these structures and provide technical assistance.

Aligned Action 2: Redesign local service delivery to ensure young people have the support they need, supported by strong regional oversight boards and a state-wide Office of Youth Success

The Commission proposes that CT:

2A. Identify a coordinating organization in each region or municipality to lead integrated case management within and across municipalities

2B. Build regional coordination and accountability structures by launching Youth Success Oversight Boards, through which funds flow for local hubs

2C. Create a state-wide Office of Youth Success (OYS), with statutory authority and a singular focus of leveraging resources and data to align and coordinate stakeholders and systems to support at-risk and disconnected youth

2D. Leverage resources to incentivize long-term cooperation as opposed to competition

Launch cost (2024 $): Leverage existing resources

Incremental annual run-rate costs (2024 $): Approx. $15M

Existing resources that could be leveraged: Local organizations and local experts to operate as hubs and serve on boards; staff within State government to be leveraged for OYS

Implementation assumption: Process to identify organizations for integrated case management to start in 2025; Youth Success Oversight Boards and OYS to be set up in 2025

Impact: Provides integrated case management services for approx. 10,000 disconnected young people, backed by enabling support structures to coordinate execution across multiple disconnected youth focused initiatives

2A. Identify a coordinating organization in each region or municipality to lead integrated case management within and across municipalities:

Every Connecticut town is home to young people who are at-risk or disconnected. In every town, there are direct service providers, such as schools and social service agencies, working to meet young people's needs. Despite best efforts, young people report that this approach – where Connecticut relies on individual providers working in uncoordinated ways and without sufficient resourcing – is not working for them[28]. Youth shared that despite the variety of agencies providing services, they are often not organized in a way that makes it easy to engage; individuals often must reach out and coordinate with several entities and organizations to secure their needed services.

Across every Commission meeting, stakeholders (including young people themselves) raised the need for integrated case management at the local or regional level. Integrated case management is a holistic approach to helping young people that involves coordinating and integrating services across different organizations and fields (e.g., education, mental health, basic needs, housing, etc.) in order to improve service delivery and ultimately meet the needs of young people. There is clear evidence that this approach leads to positive youth outcomes[21].

This integrated case management approach should also involve local Department of Children and Family (DCF) resources. Given the importance of DCF in identification and intervention for at-risk youth, as well as the correlation between receiving DCF services and disconnection data shows that the disconnection rate among young people receiving DCF services is 2.3 times higher than those not receiving DCF services[1], there are also opportunities to examine the role and mandates of DCF staff (including funding, staffing, policies, and training). The Commission received input that in many cases, DCF may be aware of at-risk young people and families, but unable to require services unless cases meet thresholds of outright child abuse or neglect. Additional investigation of policy changes that might enable DCF to enroll families more proactively in preventative programs may help address these challenges. Examination of DCF training, and ensuring all staff are using best-in-class, trauma-informed approaches, would also ensure that care centers the needs and well-being of at-risk young people.

Building integrated case management models in Connecticut starts with putting youth and families at the center by asking them what they need and considering the needs of the entire household. It is then necessary to identify coordinating organizations or 'hubs' to perform four main functions: (i) identify and convene direct service providers in response to the needs of young people and their families; (ii) manage a common data system that includes the direct service providers; (iii) provide funding to direct service providers; and (iv) coordinate the delivery of services in a manner that is seamless, timely, and effective for the young people and their families.

To create this system, Youth Success Oversight Boards (as outlined in Action 2B) would run a competitive process to designate local organizations to serve as a 'hub.' Hubs would become part of a network where they would receive resources in return for managing integrated case management models

in their communities. Depending on the town or region, hubs would bring together multiple direct service providers – schools, alternative education providers, housing resources, social services, mental health and addiction support providers, Youth Service Bureaus, Workforce Development Boards, and other agencies – as necessary to meet the needs of young people who are at-risk or disconnected.

In communities where there are effective Youth Service Bureau models already in place, such as Middletown and New London, Youth Service Bureaus may become the hub in this new network with additional resourcing. In other communities where StriveTogether collective impact models are operating, such as Norwalk, Danbury, Stamford, Bridgeport, and Waterbury, those models may possibly become the hub. Ultimately, the hub will depend on local context; the key is having a coordinating organization in each region or municipality to lead integrated case management within and across municipalities – and resourcing that organization as part of the larger network.

Under the hub's leadership, the direct service providers would collaborate to connect individuals to necessary services and support in a user-friendly, person-centric way, reducing duplication of services across service providers while ensuring nobody falls through the cracks. Hubs would be responsible for collating a consistent and connected data set across all participating organizations so that there is a consistent "source of truth" regarding an individual's circumstances and needs. Ideally on a weekly basis, they would leverage the 'by-name list' model to review everyone in their purview and discuss current status and next steps for service coordination. This could be modeled on Connecticut's Coordinated Access Networks for homelessness response, Norwich's Collaborative Case Team meeting, Hartford's cross-agency rapid response protocols for youth violence victims, Clifford Beers' Integrated Care for Kids model, the United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut Hub model[16], or Ohio Bridges' case management system for young adults aging out of foster care.

2B. Build regional coordination and accountability structures by launching Youth Success Oversight Boards, through which funds flow for local hubs:

Leadership and accountability are needed at the regional level for at least three main reasons. First, we see through the experience of young people that they oftentimes become most vulnerable when they transfer schools, move across town boundaries, or change service providers. Without leadership and accountability at the regional level, young people fall through the cracks of Connecticut's hyper-localized system. Second, there are important differences in regional context across the state, including wide disparities in resourcing and capacity at town levels, especially when the needs of youth and young adults up to age 26 are considered. By working together, a regional approach offers a path forward for strengthening capacity and marshaling necessary resources. Third, this work requires stronger coalitions to sustain funding and priorities. As we have seen through examples like Youth Service Bureaus, it is important that new structures are funded sustainably over time to ensure their continued impact. A regional approach offers possibilities for developing coalitions strong enough to transcend administrations and sustain funding.

Connecticut should create regional Youth Success Oversight Boards to work in coordination with hubs, municipalities, school districts, social service agencies,

and relevant state government agencies in implementing the Actions described in this strategy. Each Board would be charged with five main responsibilities: (i) mapping regional needs and maintaining current databases of service providers; (ii) ensuring visibility and engagement within the region around the number and nature of at-risk and disconnected young people; (iii) selecting and overseeing the hubs to implement the integrated case management models described in Action 2A above; (iv) funding the hubs; and (v) holding the hubs accountable for high performance while providing capacity building support where necessary.

Boards should receive new and existing state funding to carry out these core functions as part of the larger system of integrated case management. Flowing existing state funding through these boards would help Connecticut streamline and improve service delivery as well as incentivize cooperation as described in Action 2D below.

Boards should be housed at the Councils of Governments, organized across the nine regions, and include representatives from public, private, and social sector organizations that engage with youth, as well as individuals with relevant lived experience and young people themselves. Critically, Boards should be staffed by talented individuals with track records of success in youth-serving domains, including schools, community-based organizations, transitional employment and workforce development, and social services.

2C. Create a state-wide Office of Youth Success (OYS) with statutory authority and a singular focus of leveraging resources and data to align and coordinate stakeholders and systems to support at-risk and disconnected youth:

The local hubs and regional boards described in Actions 2A and 2B above are critically important, but state leadership is also required to transform Connecticut's service delivery system. Leaders in Connecticut's Executive and Legislative branches have the power to: (i) lead a coordinated state-wide agenda that aligns State agency leaders; (ii) leverage agency budgeting and rule-making authorities to strengthen coordination at local and regional levels; (iii) track and report data on at-risk and disconnected young people as described in Action 1 above; (iv) fund integrated case management across all levels of the system and service providers; (v) hold regional Youth Success Oversight Boards accountable, as described in Action 2B above; (vi) convene stakeholders and help shape priorities; and (vii) align existing state-level efforts, from committees to the Connecticut Kid Governor's Cabinet, in order to streamline and align approaches.

These seven functions exemplify how state leadership can act in ways that the local and regional structures cannot, and thus form the basis for the Commission's recommendation to create a state-wide Office of Youth Success (OYS). Establishing the OYS would create a centralized structure to coordinate efforts, track progress, and foster collaboration among regional Youth Success Oversight Boards, ensuring a unified and effective approach to addressing the needs of at-risk and disconnected youth.

There are a range of potential models for housing the OYS, including in the Executive Branch under a cabinet-level Commissioner, in the Legislative Branch as a Policy Oversight Committee, or in a social sector institution that works in close collaboration with government. To be successful, it is essential that the OYS is staffed by the right leader and team, and that said leadership has the support of the

Governor and Legislative leaders. Ideally, this structure would be designed in such a manner that transcends any one public administration and maintains bipartisan support, recognizing that the statewide crisis impacts every town in Connecticut.

Several offices provide potential models for Connecticut to consider. Maryland's Governor signed an executive order in 2024 establishing the Governor's Office for Children, whose focus will be on building a network of services for children and families to promote well-being, including reducing homelessness, improving education and job readiness, and increasing economic opportunity, among others[22]. New Jersey passed legislation in 2022 that establishes both a task force and a Youth Disconnection Prevention and Recovery Ombudsperson, who is housed in the state's Department of Education and works with officials to ensure that school districts are reengaging disconnected young people[23].

Within Connecticut, the state's Office of the Child Advocate serves as another potential model; housed in the Office of Government Accountability, this office independently monitors and evaluates public and private agencies that protect children and reviews state agency policies and procedures to ensure they protect children's rights. The state's Office of Health Strategy, established in 2018, is another leading model focused on convening stakeholders and state partners, using a comprehensive and integrated database to understand outcomes and areas for improvement, reporting health data transparently to the public, and developing a strategy for system innovation and reform. Connecticut's academic institutions also provide models worth considering, including the Institute for Municipal and Regional Policy at The University of Connecticut.

2D. Leverage resources to incentivize long-term cooperation as opposed to competition:

Key to the integrated, state-wide approach described above is leveraging funding to align service providers and ultimately improve service delivery for young people and their families. This Action is about creating a network where direct service providers, hubs, and Youth Success Oversight Boards all receive funding if they operate successfully and collaboratively at local, regional, and state levels.

To achieve this vision, Connecticut must confront the reality that direct service providers unduly compete to secure funding for critical programming. Some competition is necessary, since funding is limited and more funding should go toward programs that are most effective and have a track record improving youth outcomes, and ineffective programs should conclude. However, public and private funds are often awarded in ways that go beyond favorable market competition, resulting in detrimental effects to the very programs and populations the funds are intended to support. For example, funding decisions work against long-term cooperation between organizations and institutions when funds are restricted to short time periods or when funding terms impose undue requirements and restrictions on programming. Moreover, funding decisions shape priorities even if they aren't aligned to community priorities. Non-profits and service agencies spend an inordinate amount of time developing grant proposals and satisfying funder requests; this represents time and energy that should be going toward increased youth services and outcomes.

Connecticut must address this competitive dynamic, so organizations spend less time and energy competing with one another

for resources and more time coordinating their services in support of young people and communities through hubs and Youth Success Oversight Boards. The Commission surfaced four specific ways to achieve this aspiration:

- First, Connecticut leaders at the state and local levels must act strategically when determining how to award funds under their discretion. They should insist that providers operate collaboratively within coordination networks led by hubs under the oversight of Youth Success Oversight Boards, and they might even make this a term of eligibility for funding consideration. They might also consider ways to encourage public-private partnerships.

- Second, state and local leaders should consider the procurement practices and contract designs under their control, and look for ways to make competitive grant processes more accessible to organizations at different stages of development or size. This is especially important since the Commission heard from community leaders who are serving youth with incredible passion and promising models, but without much funding. State and local leaders must ensure that procurement processes do not exclude or overlook them.

- Third, private funders should seek to aggregate their resources as much as possible. When philanthropists collaborate to establish shared goals and funding terms, it allows service providers to work more efficiently by aligning their efforts with consistent expectations across funds. This not only simplifies their processes but also fosters greater collaboration between providers as they can focus on shared objectives and strategies that best align with the unified priorities set by the funders. There are many examples of funder collaboration and capital aggregation across the country, including Blue Meridian Partners, Robin Hood in New York City, and the Tipping Point Community in San Francisco.

- Fourth, it is important to form alliances that bring together non-profit organizations so that they compete for funding as one collaborative unit, which often increases the likelihood that smaller, community-based organizations receive funding. The YMCA Alliance exemplifies this approach in Connecticut and Chicago's Metropolitan Peace Initiatives offers a national example.

Aligned Action 3: Revamp CT's 211 system and develop a new user-friendly application to help at-risk and disconnected youth access existing resources

The Commission proposes that CT:

3A. Invest in refreshed 211 system – including launching a rebranded digital app – with reduced wait times, easy navigation, more youth-centric functionality and availability in multiple languages

3A. Invest in refreshed 211 system – including launching a rebranded digital app – with reduced wait times, easy navigation, more youth-centric functionality and availability in multiple languages:

211 Connecticut, also known as 2-1-1, began in 1976 as a public-private partnership between the State of Connecticut and United Way called Infoline. At the time, it sought to integrate services across hundreds of agencies creating one single front door for human services in Connecticut. Almost 50 years later, 211 is in high demand from Connecticut residents. 211 CT responded to more than 45,000 unique service requests from 3,300 youth ages 14-24 in 2024[24] - a 25% increase in five years[25]. However, CT residents frequently report long wait times on 211 calls and difficulties in being connected to the right services[26,27].

Across all youth engaged as part of this process, few mentioned 211 as a valuable resource they had used or planned to use. Rather, young people indicated that when

Launch cost (2024 $): Approx. $2M

Incremental annual run-rate costs (2024 $): Approx. $1-2M

Existing resources that could be leveraged: Department of Social Services (DSS) funding for 211ct.org, 211 Information and Referral contact center; 211 Mental Health Crisis contact center (988, Youth Mobile Crisis, and Adult Mobile Crisis); social media and communications networks and strategies at 15 United Ways across CT

Implementation assumption: App development and launch in 2025, with continuous improvement thereafter

Impact: Aims to serve needs of >12,000 young people per year

they seek support and are either denied or unable to connect to support services, not only do they lose out on support but are also pushed to seek it elsewhere – a potential driver of further disconnection[28]. For example, young adults calling 211 about workforce programs may be discouraged by long call-waiting times and program wait-lists, and subsequently seek out less sustainable and safe ways to earn a living. Overall, 211 CT is not meeting the needs of the 119,000 young people experiencing some form of disconnection.

The State must leverage modern technology to build an updated version of 211 that delivers a better return on the State's investment in human services for youth and will provide a trusted way for young people to access services. Connecticut must invest in bolstering 211 contact center capacity to ensure live, individualized help is available 24/7/365. Additionally, 211 Connecticut needs a digital app that is easy to navigate, available in multiple languages, and has one-stop-shop functionality. Text messaging services, predictive analytics, and an Artificial Intelligence (AI)-powered chatbot would streamline operations to shorten wait times when users need human help. For example, Denver's Sunny AI chatbot supports 72 languages, helping to optimize service requests and improve efficiency and user satisfaction, while San Jose's 311 system uses predictive analytics to address issues before they escalate[29]. The app could also contain a feature that tracks 'What's Going On In CT' including sporting events, concerts, recreational leagues, festivals etc., which would address concerns of youth boredom heard throughout this process.

Connecticut must market 211 more broadly to young people to increase their trust and familiarity with the system – and therefore the likelihood that they will utilize it when in need. To ensure we build a solution that delivers good value for money and positive social return, Connecticut can incorporate young people in the testing, branding, and marketing of the portal, including by improving social media functionality, the strategic placement of QR codes, and incorporating peer-to-peer awareness campaigns.

On the back end, Connecticut must provide a pool of flexible funding for 211 CT to administer to meet critical immediate needs when required services are unavailable. These funds serve as a 'gap filler', helping the organization provide funds to minimize barriers to education and work (e.g., cell phone bills, attire / footwear needed for specific jobs, bicycles, subsidies for transport, licensing and exam fees, car repair costs, etc.). This upgraded and refreshed tool must collect data on recurring service gaps to inform public policy, program development, and direct investment for at-risk and disconnected youth. Once fully developed, the tool should be used to identify in real time areas where there are immediate needs and required services are unavailable, and where available services did not meet the needs sought out by the young person. Combining this real time information on gaps with other data such as that analyzed by P20 WIN will position CT to build out a network of services that holistically meet the full scope of young people's needs.

STRATEGIC PILLAR 2: CREATE STRONGER CONDITIONS FOR YOUTH SUCCESS WITHIN AND BEYOND SCHOOLS

Policy

Aligned Action 4: Strengthen public education accountability structures and approach to improve student outcomes

The Commission proposes that CT:

4A. Improve Connecticut's Next Generation Accountability System for schools and districts

4B. Reimagine Alliance Districts to maintain funding while improving support for districts with the highest needs

4C. Phase out Commissioner's Network Schools to invest in Community Schools to drive improved outcomes in middle and high schools with the highest needs

4D. Adopt high standards for alternative education programs and encourage transition toward regional programs

Launch cost (2024 $): Approx. $42M

Incremental annual run-rate costs (2024 $): Leverage existing sources

Existing resources that could be leveraged: Incremental / continuous improvements on EdSight; existing State Department of Education policy and standards resources; budget of Commissioner's Network

Implementation assumption: School facilities to be upgraded in 2026; challenge funds to be awarded in 2026

Impact: Provide 80,000-90,000 high school students with access to Community Schools; support seven alternative education innovative pilots across the state

4A. Improve Connecticut's Next Generation Accountability System for schools and districts:

Connecticut's Next Generation Accountability System is used to measure school and district performance. Every year, schools and districts receive a performance index score based on a holistic assessment of their performance during the prior school year. The score reflects a composite score across 12 different student performance indicators, including assessment proficiency and growth, chronic absenteeism, and postsecondary readiness. Metrics are weighted differently and vary across elementary, middle, and high school levels.

A decade after this system was first implemented, there is an opportunity to improve Connecticut's Next Generation Accountability System so that it represents a strong and compelling vision for student, school, and district success. The Commission has heard many young people describe feeling unprepared for life and work, while spending time on subjects that have no utility or interest for them[21]. Schools are currently evaluated on a set of metrics that are weakly linked to student experience, family and community values, or postsecondary study and work outcomes. The Commission has heard from educators who have explained why it is necessary to evaluate schools with a broader, more flexible grading model that promotes experiential learning at all grade levels.

Connecticut must revise the Accountability System in at least two significant ways. First, certain measures must be revised in their weighting. For example, Grade 9 on-track achievement and postsecondary readiness should be weighted more heavily than other indicators. Second, other measures must be added. There is currently no accountability for whether students are graduating from the K-12 system with a postsecondary plan (e.g., 2/4-year college, trade/technical/certificate programs, military, workforce)[1]. Moreover, current measures do not assess availability and effectiveness of student support services or school safety (which has been consistently highlighted by young people as a barrier to school attendance) nor do they take a longitudinal view of student success in postsecondary education and careers.

In making these improvements, Connecticut must ensure all measures can be supported by reliable and accurate data collection and sources. Relatedly, Connecticut must ensure that accountability data is available in a more timely manner. Currently, schools and districts receive accountability data for the prior school year many months into the following school year. Instead, schools and districts must have the data infrastructure and tools necessary to track real-time progress, as described in Action 1D.

Within the next year, Connecticut must commit to a comprehensive and inclusive revision of the Accountability System and seek the necessary federal waivers. Connecticut currently has a Working Group, led by the Connecticut Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers-Connecticut, focused on revisions to the system. The Commission encourages the Working Group to consider this recommended Action.

4B. Reimagine Alliance Districts to maintain funding while improving support for districts with the highest needs:

Young people, educators, and other stakeholders repeatedly told the Commission that Connecticut's current efforts to support high-needs schools and districts are not working. Connecticut's

Alliance District program started in 2012 to support high-need districts in "pursuing bold and innovative reforms[30]." However, graduation rates in Alliance Districts have declined by 3.8% over the past five years, compared to a 1.5% drop in non-Alliance Districts in the same time frame. This has had a disproportionate impact on Black and Hispanic students. In the 2018-2019 school year, Black students in Alliance Districts had a 1.3% lower graduation rate compared to their non-Alliance District peers. By 2022-2023, that gap had widened to 10.2%, as Alliance District graduation rates among Black students fell by 5.9% while graduation rates among Black students in non-Alliance districts increased by 2.9%. Similarly, Hispanic students in Alliance Districts began with a graduation rate of 82.8% and saw a 1.9% decline, leading to a 9.7% gap with their peers in non-Alliance Districts[8]. These declines highlight the program's challenges in effectively closing achievement gaps for the students it was designed to support.

The Alliance District program was premised, in part, on the beliefs that the State of Connecticut would have the political will and resources to implement transformative reforms, and that local boards of education, district administrators, and union leaders would work together in meaningful ways to drive significant and lasting improvement. This collaboration has been more challenging in practice. A growing number of stakeholders believe that the program is not working well, especially for students with higher needs and those who are born into poverty[31]. Educators too often experience the program as a burdensome compliance exercise that does little to hold adults accountable.

A new vision for public education requires new accountability structures so that adults are accountable for helping students develop necessary skills to thrive in school, career, and life. The Commission recommends reimagining Alliance Districts over the next two years. Connecticut – the State, local boards of education, and municipalities – must improve support for districts with the highest needs, while holding them accountable for student success. This report outlines several strategies that should be included in Connecticut's revised approach:

- Increased State funding both through additional weight in the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) formula to support high-need students, particularly for economically disadvantaged students, concentrated poverty, and students with disabilities, as well as a review of schools facilities funding to address capital needs, such as unsafe bathrooms and insufficient transportation (described in Aligned Actions 7A and 7B).

- Targeted financial and programmatic support to fill educator and other staffing needs, including through capacity building and professional development opportunities (described in Aligned Actions 12A, 12B, 12C and 12D).

- Targeted support in implementing revised Next Generation Accountability System and graduation standards that better align school efforts to improve student experience, safety, and learning and postsecondary readiness (described in Aligned Actions 4A and 5A).

- Technical assistance and capacity building through district-, school- and educator-level Support Networks to implement evidence-based practices and policies, and replace policies that are not working, such as disciplinary, transfer, and attendance policies (described in Aligned Actions 5B, 5D, 5E, 12C, 12D, and 14A).

- Priority in piloting and expanding promising programs that serve high-need students, such as alternative learning strategies, behavioral management, dual enrollment, employer partnerships for work-based learning, and Success Coaches (described in Aligned Actions 5D, 12C, 12D, 13A, and 13B)

This recommendation is not intended to reduce funding and support for Connecticut's highest-need districts, schools, and the students they serve. Rather, it is intended to help prioritize these highest-need districts and schools in receiving the support they need to achieve true transformative outcomes for their students.

4C. Phase out Commissioner's Network Schools to invest in Community Schools to drive improved outcomes in middle and high schools with the highest needs:

Connecticut's Commissioner's Network program launched the same year as the Alliance District program to advance student outcomes through school turnaround initiatives. However, the program has had limited success. Over the past five years, schools in the Commissioner's Network have seen a significant decline in graduation rates, with an average drop of 10.4%, compared to a 2.1% decline in non-Network schools[8]. Particularly concerning are the declines among White and Black students, who saw reductions of 15.4% and 9.1%, respectively, indicating that the current support structures are insufficient and/or misaligned with the needs of these students[8].

Accordingly, the Commission recommends phasing out the Commissioner's Network program by allowing current member schools to complete the program and not admitting new schools into the program.

This recommendation is not intended to reduce funding and support for schools. Instead, Connecticut should invest in establishing Community Schools in high-poverty areas that provide wraparound supports and linkages to health, housing, transportation, food services, workforce and job placement resources, and family support services onsite. There is strong evidence from across the U.S., including city- or state- wide programs in New York, Florida, California, and Indiana, that Community Schools, when implemented with fidelity and sustained with adequate funding over time, drive better student and school outcomes, especially for at-risk students in high-poverty schools[32].

Anaheim Union High School District is a promising example of community schools in action; since 2014, the district has made substantial investments in adding social workers and family engagement specialists at all school sites, launching parent leadership academies, focusing on students' career and civic outcomes, measuring whole-child learning, and developing a cross-sector collaborative with area businesses and non-profits. Alongside these investments, the district has seen improvements in student enrollment and college persistence, reduced behavioral challenges, and increased completion rates for courses required for admission to the State's universities. Given these outcomes, the district was designated as a California Community School "Deep Dive Site" and selected for a $23 million California Department of Education grant over five years to continue developing community school models at 13 out of their 19 school sites[33].

Earlier this year, two K-8 schools in New Haven received a $2.5M grant from the Department of Education to improve community supports and family resources

in partnership with Clifford Beers Community Care Center[34]. Connecticut should support these K-8 schools in their planning and implementation, generate learnings from these local pilots, and fund replication of full-service Community Schools across other high-need areas in Connecticut, focusing on middle and high schools. Community School models should be designed and implemented with educators, families, and social service providers leading the process.

4D. Adopt high standards for alternative education programs and encourage transition toward regional programs:

Alternative education, e.g., dropout diversion, credit recovery, expulsion program, public transition program, can be an important tool in addressing students' diverse social, emotional and learning needs, and has the power to drive improved academic and behavioral student outcomes[35]. Unfortunately, the Commission consistently heard about poor outcomes of students who have participated in alternative education across Connecticut. Two-thirds (67%) of students ever in alternative education settings become disconnected, making them three times more likely to be disconnected than those never attending alternative school[1]. Relatively few Connecticut students have access to effective programs today, and many students describe alternative education curricula as lacking in real-world skills and trades skills[28].

Connecticut must strengthen current Guidelines for Alternative Education Settings by raising and enforcing high standards for alternative education programs. Connecticut must also encourage efforts to regionalize alternative education, since doing so would enhance program quality and resourcing. Today, there are more than 80 alternative education programs operating in Connecticut, collectively serving approximately 2,500 students. Only 35 of these programs serve 20 or more students[36]. Connecticut law already allows Cooperative Arrangements between boards of education to provide alternative education programming, and these approaches should be encouraged and incentivized (see Action 9). Connecticut should consider empowering Regional Educational Service Centers or other providers to take a more active role in operations and monitoring of these programs at the regional level.

Aligned Action 5: Reform school policies to be more supportive of the needs of youth

The Commission proposes that CT:

5A. Reimagine Connecticut's graduation standards to promote greater workforce readiness

5B. Strengthen policies to improve student attendance, enrollment, and transfer support

5C. Increase access to Connecticut's Career and Technical High School System

5D. Reduce school suspensions and implement new models for managing student behavior

5E. Expand alternative learning strategies to combat student distractions and improve engagement

5A. Reimagine Connecticut's graduation standards to promote greater workforce readiness:

Far too many young people are not being prepared for work and life by Connecticut's education system. The Commission heard from numerous students who feel bored, unmotivated, and disinterested by school, which reflects what the State is (and is not) choosing to prioritize in its current graduation scope and sequence.

Launch cost (2024 $): Approx. $7M

Incremental annual run-rate costs (2024 $): Approx. $85-90M

Existing resources that could be leveraged: State Department of Education policy and standards resources; expertise from Learner Attendance and Engagement Program (LEAP); resources for Career and Technical High School (CTECS) programs

Implementation assumption: Policy changes related to graduation standards to occur over remainder of 2024-2025 school year resources for chronic absenteeism programs to be expanded, starting in 2025; enrollment for CTECS program to increase in 2027; additional staffing for school suspension reductions to begin in 2026; pilot for alternative learning pathways to launch in 2026

Impact: Additional 1,000-2,000 enrollees per year at CTECS institutions; support to address barriers to attendance for 90,000 students who are chronically absent; new behavioral management model for 56,000 at-risk students; 5,000-10,000 elementary school students in alternative learning pathway pilots

Over the years, Connecticut's graduation requirements have become more rigid and prescriptive. At the same time, student outcomes have not improved. Student readiness and success in multiple and diverse postsecondary pathways cannot be achieved with a formulaic high school experience. Starting with the graduating Class of 2023, students must earn 25 credits to graduate from high school. The 25 credits must include nine credits in humanities, nine credits in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), one credit in physical education and wellness, one credit in health and safety, one credit in world languages, and one credit in mastery-based diploma assessment[37]. This approach eliminates opportunities for choice based on students' individual interests, passions, and postsecondary aspirations, and does not include sufficient life- and work-skills training.

Moreover, Connecticut's graduation requirements establish a minimum expectation, and districts may add local requirements on top. This perpetuates inequities within and across systems, and sometimes prevents at-risk young people from graduating due to districts' varying graduation requirements. For example, students may reach junior or senior year in the more "rigorous" high school and find they will not earn the 30 hypothetical credits to graduate; students in these situations are often coached to transfer to another school that has lower graduation requirements. These inconsistencies promote the gaming of systems as opposed to ensuring all students gain the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in education, career, and life.

Connecticut has a Working Group, led by the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, focused on developing ways to revise high school graduation requirements. The Commission encourages the Working Group to 1) increase choice and agency for students to prepare for their aspired postsecondary path, and 2) rethink the traditional reliance on the Carnegie Unit as the measure of learning time and instead permit students to complete work-based learning experiences, competency-based assessments, and soft skills development.

Connecticut must revise the state's graduation requirements without lowering expectations for students, by defining the basic knowledge, skills, and fluency that all students must possess by the end of their high school careers and giving students more choice and agency in gaining the experiences they will likely need for their chosen career path. Competency-based approaches can help students meet requirements without sacrificing quality and learning. For example, New Hampshire's Minimum Standards for Public School Approval state, "credits shall be based on the demonstration of district and/or graduation competencies, not on time spent achieving these competencies. The credit shall equate to the level of rigor and achievement necessary to master competencies that have been designed to demonstrate the knowledge and skills necessary to progress toward college level and career work[38]."

Connecticut is currently ranked as a "developing state" when it comes to competency-based education (CBE), providing flexibility for schools to adopt CBE but lacking comprehensive policy alignment and active state support[39]. Connecticut should learn from its many neighbors such as Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island, all considered 'advanced states' by Aurora Institute's CompetencyWorks for having clear policies and established roles in building educator capacity in local systems for competency-based education[40].

5B. Strengthen policies to improve student attendance, enrollment, and transfer support:

Approximately 90,000 students, or 21% of the student population of CT, were chronically absent in the 2023-2024 school year[1]. Recent levels of chronic absenteeism far surpass pre-pandemic levels (approx. 10% in 2018-19[41]). Attendance does not only affect students who are chronically absent; in schools with high chronic absenteeism, teachers must constantly reteach content and provide one-on-one support for students who missed key lessons. This affects students who attend school regularly, which may explain why districts with high chronic absenteeism (e.g., Bridgeport, Hartford, New Britain, New Haven, Waterbury, etc.) see low achievement even among the students who attend on a regular basis[1].

Students describe very real barriers to attendance. Some describe being forced to take public transit or walk 30-40 minutes one-way to school because school buses are only available if they live more than two miles from school. Parents describe three students sharing one school bus seat and understaffed cafeterias leading to unfed students[42]. Connecticut must ensure that students have adequate resources to reach and thrive in school every day.

Connecticut must take a multi-pronged approach to meaningfully address issues of engagement and attendance. First, Connecticut must address these material barriers and create educational environments where students feel welcomed and engaged. Second, Connecticut should expand existing initiatives such as the Learner Engagement and Attendance Program (LEAP, currently in 15 districts). Third, Connecticut must review current attendance policies and programs and provide necessary funding to enforce evidence-based policies. Connecticut has very detailed attendance policies, including policies that impose a financial penalty on parents whose children are truant from school[1]. Some schools tie attendance to credit completion, which discourages disengaged and disconnected young people, particularly those without well-resourced families who can help them navigate the bureaucratic landscape of these policies, from re-engaging in school. It is worth noting that schools and districts implement a fraction of these policies, in part because funding is often not provided for Attendance Review Boards and other programs to boost attendance[43]. Connecticut must review these policies to ensure that schools are implementing attendance-related policies that are evidence-based and aligned with best practices, as well as provide full funding to high-need schools to provide high-touch attendance support, access to real-time data (Action 1D), Success Coaches (Action 12D), and technical assistance via Support Networks (Action 14). These supports will also help families address root issues impacting attendance.

Connecticut must also review transfer policies and procedures to better support transient students. *Connecticut's Unspoken Crisis* found that transient students (those who change high schools two or more times) have rates of disconnection almost two-and-a-half times those of non-transient students[1]. To reemphasize the risks of inaction, a report from the Office of the Child Advocate[44] found that from 2018-2022, 30% of preventable deaths of 18-21 year-olds whose educational records were identified had a history of educational disruption due to transferring, moving, or discontinuing schooling. Connecticut must ensure seamless data sharing of student performance, needs, and support services when they are moving from one school to another, further underscoring the need for a state-level data platform outlined in Action 1 as well as the local coordination hubs and Youth Success Oversight Boards outlined in Action 2.

Lastly, Connecticut must help more low-income students attend schools in high-opportunity communities, without disproportionately draining resources from low-income sending districts. Transfer students utilizing Connecticut's Open Choice program have displayed significant

improvements in reaching academic proficiency when compared to their counterparts from their districts who did not participate in this program, narrowing the achievement gap between suburban students and urban transplants by 40%[45]. This program should be augmented by utilizing a more robust dataset of student outcomes to provide the most rewarding experiences and address historical concerns about varying quality across exchange programs. The combination of Open Choice offerings, enlarging catchment areas of districts in low-income communities, and strengthening accountability for integration provides policymakers with an additional lever to bring diversity and equity across districts.

5C. Increase access to Connecticut's Career and Technical High School System:

Despite high demand from Connecticut's young people, less than seven percent of Connecticut high school students are currently enrolled in career and technical education[46]. Connecticut's Technical Education and Career System (CTECS) schools often have waitlists of up to 400 students and a lottery system[47]. Connecticut should provide funding to CTECS to expand their capacity on the condition that CTECS (1) strengthens the current educational experience since student outcomes across the system must improve; and (2) revises enrollment policies to ensure that high-need students (including those with learning disabilities) can attend with greater flexibility. Connecticut should also provide funding to incentivize CTECS schools to find innovative ways of delivering technical education to more students in comprehensive schools, for example in partnership with local school districts, apprenticeship programs, and transitional employment programs. Additionally, investing in programs that bring some of the best elements of technical schools into traditional high schools can help ensure every high-need high schooler has access to an effective postsecondary pathway.

5D: Reduce school suspensions and implement new models for managing student behavior:

Students from pre-K to high school are being driven to disengagement and disconnection by overuse of in-school-suspensions (ISS), where students remain in school and receive varying levels of academic and behavioral support, and out-of-school suspensions (OSS), where students are sent home from school for up to five days at a time[48]. Students experiencing either ISS or OSS describe falling behind in their schoolwork and being unable to complete credits; students experiencing OSS additionally describe being unable to find safe transportation home from school and not having safe places to go during school hours[28]. Adults working with frequently suspended young people describe suspension as "driving the school-to-prison pipeline[42]." This is supported by National Institutes of Health (NIH) data highlighting a concerning link between school suspensions and future incarceration. Students who experienced at least one suspension between Grades 7-12 were 288% more likely to be incarcerated in young adulthood compared to those who were never suspended; students who were suspended in multiple grades were 164% more likely to be incarcerated if they do not complete high school[49]. While there is no perfect way to disaggregate underlying behavior vs. the suspension itself in contributing to future incarceration, there is no doubt that more attention should be given to this population.

Public Act 15-96 saw some success in reducing suspensions and expulsions[50], but Connecticut has reversed its progress during and after the Covid-19 pandemic, seeing a 31% surge in expulsion and 14.4% increase in out-of-school suspensions from the 2021-22 to the 2022-23 school year[51]. This means that one in every 14 Connecticut children received a suspension or expulsion — with that number being disproportionately higher for Black

students (1 in 7) and Latino students (1 in 11). This alarming trend underscores the urgency for Connecticut to reassess its disciplinary practices.

While Public Act 24-45 includes important reforms to suspension policy including requiring support services for young people suspended out-of-school and limiting out-of-school suspensions for students in pre-K through second grade to two days at a time[52], Connecticut must go further in implementing evidence-based alternative approaches to managing student behavior. While shifting students from OSS to ISS leads to slightly better academic outcomes and attendance compared to exclusionary discipline[53], ISS still has notable negative effects on academic performance and attendance rates[54]. Instead, Connecticut must transition away from punitive practices towards restorative, child development-focused, and trauma-informed approaches to address root causes of, manage, and improve student behavior. Restorative practices, which focus on repairing harm and fostering dialogue, have been shown to cut suspension rates in half across demographics[55]. The Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) framework, a universal prevention strategy comprised of early intervention and behavioral counseling that has been implemented in over 29,000 schools, showed a 50% decrease in suspension rates along with a 33% decrease in disciplinary referrals, with the strongest effects among children first exposed to the program in kindergarten[56]. Furthermore, integrating mental health and counseling as an extension of these efforts has been shown to further reduce repeated offenses and suspension rates, with one study observing a 40% reduction in both OSS and ISS suspensions[57].

Schools must have standardized guidelines, implicit bias staff training, and monitoring and accountability to prevent ensure that disciplinary measures are applied fairly and consistently across all student groups. During the policy transition period, Connecticut should fund programs that support suspended or expelled students to minimize the extent to which they fall behind academically while out of school, such as the Alternative Education Academy run by Watertown High School for expelled students to complete class work during the duration of their expulsion, and the program proposed by the Torrington Youth Service Bureau (TYSB) to allow suspended students to spend their time at TYSB offices and the Northwestern CT YMCA[58].

This will require Connecticut to not only change disciplinary policies but also increase teachers' and schools' capacity to manage students' behavior while protecting all stakeholders' safety and wellbeing, as outlined in Action 12. Despite school administrators' best intentions of implementing exclusionary discipline to make the school climate safer for other students and faculty, research shows that these practices are ineffective at improving school safety or deterring future infractions as they don't address the underlying reasons that lead to these infractions[59]. While implementing alternative strategies will require an upfront investment in restorative behavioral infrastructure, the impact on disciplined students and reduction in future misbehavior reduces the total load on school resources in the long-term.

5E: Expand alternative learning strategies to combat student distractions and improve engagement

Many of Connecticut's young people report being bored and disengaged from their classrooms. The rise of the digital revolution, particularly the prevalence of short-form content, has significantly reduced students' attention spans, falling from 2.5 minutes in 2004 to just 47 seconds today[60]. Rigid and prescriptive traditional teaching methods drive disengagement that not only disrupts classrooms, as teachers spend more time on disciplinary measures instead of teaching[61], but also contributes to unnecessary diagnoses of behavioral issues and learning disabilities[62]. This then

creates strain on already limited education resources for students with disabilities and further isolates, stigmatizes, and disengages students who could otherwise be on track. To help students stay engaged and prepare them for a dynamic workforce environment, Connecticut should implement two strategies to better support diverse student needs prior to high school.

First, Connecticut should integrate alternative learning strategies into K-12 curriculum and hold professional workshops for educators to understand learning styles and how to address them. Integrating fast-paced, collaborative, and hands-on learning activities into lesson plans will help distracted students focus and retain information by better engaging kinesthetic, visual, and interpersonal learning styles[63]. The State should conduct curriculum reviews, support schools in tailoring lesson plans, and fund professional development workshops for schools reporting the highest levels of disengagement. Connecticut can leverage proven alternative learning practices from the Success for All Foundation, a national organization providing targeted programs to improve student outcomes through collaborative learning. This program has been implemented in 1,000 schools across 48 states and was shown to reduce the number of students assigned to alternative needs classes while also cutting the Black-White student achievement gap in half in participating schools[64].

Second, Connecticut should set minimum standards for vocational and STEM education offerings, such as coding, workshop, and engineering, for students at the K-8 level and provide funding to highest-need schools to ensure all students have access. While most vocational education focuses on high school and postsecondary opportunities, we know that many students are already disengaged from learning before ninth grade, a critical developmental inflection point. This can be executed through training existing staff to deliver online learning tools (Spark, code.org, SamLabs) and hiring STEM educators in schools without sufficient technology infrastructure and staffing. For an increasing number of students feeling like educational content isn't "real life", these offerings can help them reengage with learning and connect with opportunities such as apprenticeships and vocational schools offered later in their academic careers.

By investing in these pathways early, Connecticut can keep students who don't thrive in traditional academic settings on-track and engaged, as data shows that non-college bound students display lower engagement levels[65]. At the same time, these initiatives help avoid mislabeling distracted students with behavioral and learning disabilities while equipping Connecticut's youth with fundamental learning and vocational skills to support their chosen postsecondary pathways and achieve success in the modern workforce[66].

Aligned Action 6: Support justice-involved youth and reduce recidivism through a balance of increased diversionary programs, support services, and added community-based accountability

The Commission proposes that CT:

6A. Mandate, standardize and scale diversionary programs for young people

6B. Integrate restorative justice processes into Juvenile Review Board protocols to enhance accountability of justice-involved youth with members of their community

6A. Mandate, standardize and scale diversionary programs for young people:

Justice-involved young people describe traumatic encounters with police and prisons leading to a desire to avoid the State and State-offered supports altogether – even those that have nothing to do with the criminal justice system[21]. Connecticut must mandate, standardize and scale diversionary programs that alleviate this erosion of trust between disadvantaged young people and the State. While H.B. 6888 (Public Act 23-188) created the Automatic Prearrest Diversion Plan to decrease youth involvement with the justice system, implementation of the plan has been hampered by a lack of coverage and standardization among community-based supports and diversionary infrastructure. For example, to date only 88 of Connecticut's 169 municipalities have established Juvenile Review Boards[67], and there is no state agency overseeing these, nor are there overarching guidelines to ensure consistency and effectiveness in handling juvenile cases statewide. In FY23, there

Launch cost (2024 $): Leverage existing resources

Incremental annual run-rate costs (2024 $): Approx. $10M

Existing resources that could be leveraged: Staff managing existing programs and Juvenile Review Boards (JRB)

Implementation assumption: Policy work to begin in 2024; processes and programs to be standardized and scaled in 2025

Impact: Additional approx. 6,000 arrested young people (14 to 26) in all towns with medium to high at-risk / disconnected youth concentrations to be funneled into diversionary programs, etc.

were 2,561 youth served through the JRBs, with a 76% rate of successful completion[68]. As advocated for by Connecticut's police chiefs, Connecticut must mandate that each Youth Service Bureau establish a Juvenile Review Board and create state-level oversight of it.

While Juvenile Review Boards support children under the age of 18, Connecticut can also explore diversionary programs to support older youth from age 18-26. Connecticut already has substance abuse-related suspended prosecutions, but it should explore additional diversionary programs, such as Florida's Civil Citation program that has achieved an 80% completion rate for youth, with less than 5% recidivism for youth following the program[69]. Similarly, California's Youth Justice Initiative has reduced recidivism by 30%[70]. Critically, these programs provide essential support services such as counseling, education, and community service opportunities, addressing the root causes of delinquent behavior.

6B. Integrate restorative justice processes into Juvenile Review Board protocols to enhance accountability of justice-involved youth with members of their community:

In addition to diversionary programs, better community engagement and accountability are needed for justice-involved young people. There was repeated mention in public meetings that short of committing a violent crime, many young people receive minimal consequences for lower-level crimes that endanger themselves and others, and that much of the violence in communities is driven by repeat offenders[71]. Community-based accountability that is appropriate for their age and offense can help youthful offenders better integrate into their communities. Recently, there has been a push to move to restorative justice models to serve youth being diverted, representing a sizeable shift in thinking from one of punishment to one of accountability. Research indicates that young people who participate in restorative justice programs are less likely to reoffend, and are more likely to express satisfaction with how their cases were handled, accept responsibility for their actions, and complete restitution agreements compared with youths who are processed traditionally in the juvenile justice system[72].

The Connecticut Youth Services Association (CTYSA), in conjunction with the Department of Children and Families, has embarked on a pilot program to test new protocols and procedures for JRBs to operate in a restorative manner. Six JRBs have spent the last year piloting these new and updated protocols based on restorative justice. Restorative questions are used to explore the incident that occurred, who was harmed, how they were harmed and how they can fix the harm done. Together, the youth, parents and JRB members create and agree to a plan to repair the harm done. This process specifically focuses on holding youth accountable for their behavior. Connecticut must study the results of these pilots and compare them to similar approaches being implemented across the country. Examples of Youth Accountability Boards based on the same concept include Community Justice Committees in Maricopa County, Arizona; Neighborhood Conference Committees in Travis County, Texas; Community Panels for Youth in Cook County, Illinois; and Restorative Justice Conferences in Winona County, Minnesota[73]. Connecticut must study the results of the CTYSA pilots, and, if successful at reducing recidivism and improving engagement between young people and their community, fund the replication and scale-up of these restorative protocols across all Connecticut towns and municipalities.

Funding

Aligned Action 7: Review CT's K-12 funding formulas to ensure equitable education funding based on student needs

The Commission proposes that CT:

7A. Review and revise the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) formula

7B. Review funding to ensure equitable facilities

7A. Review and revise the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) formula:

The Commission supports the work of existing organizations, including School + State Finance Project, to promote student-centered and equitable funding that directs additional and adequate funding to at-risk students. Connecticut has significant disparities in school funding:

- Predominately BIPOC (Black, indigenous, and people of color) districts cumulatively receive $674M less in education funding than predominately White districts[75]
- Districts with >75% BIPOC students spend approximately $2,500 less per student than districts with <25% BIPOC students
- Districts with the lowest per-student spending serve more students with additional learning needs[76] than their higher spending counterparts

These gaps are problematic for many reasons, including the fact that it is more costly to educate students with higher levels of need due to poverty, trauma, and violence (with studies citing ranges of 40% more to double the cost to educate a low-income student to achieve comparable academic outcomes as their high-income peers[77]). Additional resources do not necessarily translate to better outcomes, but funds spent strategically can assist students with learning and language differences, mental health needs, and broader economic challenges.

Launch cost (2024 $): Approx. $2M

Incremental annual run-rate costs (2024 $): Approx. $500-$550M in direct state funding to schools

Existing resources that could be leveraged: $2,361M in ECS funding in FY25; approx. $800M allocated across various types of public school construction, upgrades, and maintenance[74]

Implementation assumption: Equitable facilities needs assessment and capital plan development to be conducted over 2025; recommendations for equitable facilities to be reflected starting in 2026 budget

Impact: Ensure equitable outcomes and access to modern facilities for Connecticut's 513,000 K-12 student population

Funding inequity in Connecticut is largely driven by Connecticut's overreliance on property taxes to fund public education[1]. As a result, towns that require additional resources to serve disconnected young people or prevent higher need and at-risk students from becoming disconnected may lack the financial resources to do so. This results in lower-income communities lacking resources for critical facilities and infrastructure investments that support student learning, recreation, and well-being. For example, many young people

shared difficulties finding transportation to and from school, extracurricular activities and other programming, e.g., needing to walk 30 minutes each way to reach the bus station, unsafe bus routes, etc. Furthermore, district budgets are significantly impacted by tuition billing policies for choice schools that allow some schools to charge fees to districts that may surpass the funding districts receive from the State for educating those students as well as unfunded and unproductive educational mandates that place an undue burden on schools. These policies mean that every extra dollar spent on needed salary raises, infrastructure or technology updates must come out of the classroom or be funded from additional property taxes. Connecticut has an Education Mandate Review Advisory Council working to review mandates; the Commission urges the State to evaluate the recommendations of the Council.

The Education Cost Sharing (ECS) formula is meant to correct for some of these inequities by allocating State education funding relative to student needs and municipality wealth. However, the ECS has historically been underfunded and critical components of the ECS formula are outdated, resulting in unmet need in municipalities with high numbers of at-risk and disconnected young people. State funding has also not kept pace with inflation, growing at 1.72% year-over-year compared to the average inflation of 3.64% between 2017 and 2024 – resulting in a decrease in State funding in real terms[78].

The Commission recommends that Connecticut review and update the ECS formula, including but not limited to:

Inflation adjustment to per-student foundation: The foundation amount is meant to reflect the cost of education for the average student. This amount, currently $11,525, has not been updated since 2013, despite average inflation of 2.77% between 2013 and 2024[79]. Connecticut should update the foundation amount to reflect the real costs of student education today as well as continue to adjust going forward by indexing increases to the State spending cap (currently projected to grow at 3.96%[80]).

Addition of weights for students with disabilities: Currently, there is no weight or additional State support for serving students with disabilities, despite the costly expenses to serve these young people. In 2019, Connecticut spent an average of 1.76 times more per student with special education needs, compared to students receiving general education[81]. Connecticut is one of 15 states where disability needs are not included in the primary education funding model[82], and one of only two states, alongside Rhode Island, that funds serving students with disabilities as a high-cost services reimbursement for districts that meet the threshold for extraordinary costs. Statewide education costs for students with disabilities increased over 30 percent between 2007 and 2019, largely driven by costs to out-of-district schools, making it difficult for home districts to support these expenses[83]. There is extreme volatility in special education costs at the local level, especially for smaller districts, making budgeting challenging[42]. Given rising district requests for Excess Cost Grant funding, the State's reimbursement has declined (from 100% to 72% between 2008 and 2019[42]). To provide these students the services they need, and districts the financial resources to do so, the Commission recommends adding funding weights that reflect counts of students with disabilities based on updated district data.

Increase in economically disadvantaged and concentrated poverty weights: Students who are economically disadvantaged, as measured by eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch, especially those who live in concentrated poverty areas, as defined by districts where 60% or more of the enrollment is economically disadvantaged, often have higher costs

to achieve the same learning outcomes as their higher-income peers – some estimations place this as high as $10,000-17,000 more per student[84]. This is driven by increased needs for wraparound supports, including transportation, health services, mental and behavioral health, free meals, and learning time expansion including after-school and summer programming.

Increase in multilingual learner weights: Multilingual students can require up to $20,000 in additional funding per student[85] for hiring Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) teachers, multilingual academic support for other subjects, communicating with students' families, and after-school and summer programming. This cost varies widely depending on the number of multilingual students and languages spoken in each school.

The Commission estimates that these revisions to the ECS formula would result in an increase of $500-550M in state funding to Connecticut municipalities to support their students' educational needs.

7B. Review funding to ensure equitable facilities:

In addition, the State should conduct a review of its school facilities funding policies to identify opportunities for more equitable funding. The aim of this assessment would be to devise a reimbursement approach that accounts for capital investments required to create more equitable facilities across districts, particularly where a lack of infrastructure is cited by students as leading to a lack of safety at school. Currently, Connecticut uses State reimbursements to fund school construction costs; the State uses adjusted equalized net grand list per capita (AENGLC) as a measure of wealth (published by the State Department of Education), to determine the State reimbursement rate for school construction projects[86]. In the lowest-wealth areas, for example, the State reimburses 70% of school facilities projects for new construction. However, the remaining 30% of costs is still a barrier for many high-need districts, with local municipalities unable to assume the balance. There is opportunity to enhance equity of school facilities funding by increasing State support (i.e., up to 100% for highest-need districts), as well as using a broader set of indicators (e.g., number of low-income and multilingual students) to more holistically assess district ability to pay for school construction (similar to the evolution of the ECS formula to add weights for student characteristics). With a thorough analysis of its current school facilities and infrastructure funding approach, including benchmarking to best-in-class peer states, Connecticut could enhance the equity of its facilities funding and enable much-needed capital improvements to high-need, low-wealth schools and districts.

Potential changes to the Education Cost Sharing formula would significantly increase State funding to public K-12 schools

Key formula components:	Foundation	Economically disadvantaged weights	Concentrated poverty weights	Multilingual learner weights	Students with disabilities (SWD) weights	Total cost in FY26 ($M)	Incremental cost in FY26 ($M)
Current ECS formula	$11,525	30%	15%	25%	0%	2,411	-
Scenario 1: Adjust foundation for 2024-2026 estimated inflation	$12,488	30%	15%	25%	0%	2,604	193
Scenario 2: Adjust foundation and add SWD weights of 25%	$12,488	30%	15%	25%	25%	2,699	288
Scenario 3: Adjust foundation and increase all weights	$12,488	30%	20%	30%	30%	2,744	333
Scenario 4: Adjust foundation and increase all weights	$12,488	40%	20%	30%	30%	2,864	453
Scenario 5, recommended: Adjust foundation and increase all weights	$12,488	40%	20%	35%	50%	2,956	545
Scenario 6: Adjust foundation and increase all weights	$12,488	50%	20%	30%	50%	3,062	651
Scenario 7: Adjust foundation for inflation from 2017	$14,801	30%	15%	25%	0%	3,065	654
Scenario 8: Adjust foundation for inflation from 2013	$15,580	30%	15%	25%	0%	3,229	818

Note: All scenarios assume the ECS formula is fully funded, with holding harmless overfunded towns. Special Education students in Regional School Districts were apportioned into the towns that they are comprised of.
Source: School + State Finance estimates, BCG analysis

Aligned Action 8: Support policies to implement a federal Child Tax Credit

The Commission proposes that CT:

8A. Support adoption of an expanded federal Child Tax Credit

8A. Support adoption of an expanded federal Child Tax Credit:

Launch cost (2024 $): Leverage existing resources

Incremental annual run-rate costs (2024 $): $0M

Existing resources that could be leveraged: Policy making teams and resources

Implementation assumption: Dependent on federal and CT State legislature

Impact: ~80% of children in CT who would be impacted by the federal tax credit reduction in 2025

Young people who are disconnected and at-risk of disconnection shared at length about the impact of poverty on their education and lives[28]. Living below the poverty line during childhood has long-term adverse effects, including an average of 0.9 fewer years of schooling completed compared to those from households earning between one and two times the poverty line[87]. According to *Connecticut's Unspoken Crisis*, 44% of students who attended a high-poverty school in high school in Connecticut ended up disconnected. Furthermore, poverty exacerbates the experience of disconnection. Young people who experience poverty are twice as likely to experience disconnection compared to their peers who do not experience poverty, and those who disconnect remain disconnected for more than three years[1].

To reduce child poverty, the Commission recommends adoption of an expanded federal Child Tax Credit (CTC), such as the one introduced by Connecticut Representative Rosa DeLauro with the American Family Act[88]. Studies have demonstrated that continuation of the federal CTC would result in a one to three percentage point increase in national high school graduation rates, with more significant impacts on males and Black children[89]. In 2021, a temporary federal child tax credit played a significant role in reducing child poverty, keeping 80,000 youths in Connecticut above the poverty line[90]. However, this federal tax credit will be reduced by 50% in 2025, impacting approximately 80% of children in Connecticut[76].

Additionally, the Commission also supports adoption of a State Child Tax Credit (and the ongoing advocacy work of CT Voices, the United Way of Connecticut, and others), since Connecticut is currently one of just three states in the US that taxes income without adjusting for households' number of children or childcare expenses[91].

Aligned Action 9: Create The 21st Century Fund to reward consolidation in services to reduce administrative overhead and drive more funding to highly effective strategies in school classrooms and in town youth services

The Commission proposes that CT:

9A. Award funding to school districts and towns that elect to combine services or share administrative positions

9A. Award funding to school districts and towns that elect to combine services or share administrative positions:

Connecticut has 169 towns and more than 200 local education agencies. 70% of public school districts serve fewer than 3,000 students each, and 84 districts serve fewer than 1,000 students each[92]. This hyper-localized town governance system results in costly inefficiencies that ultimately take money away from serving young people. For example, every public school district has a superintendent earning >$150,000 every year and dozens of vendor contracts that would be more economical at scale[92]. On the other hand, small districts do not have enough resources to sustain full-time teams in critical roles, including data, IT, and

Launch cost (2024 $): Approx. $25M

Incremental annual run-rate costs (2024 $): Leverage existing resources

Existing resources that could be leveraged: Existing staff and expertise in administrative roles; organizations that provide technical assistance

Implementation assumption: Funds to be awarded in 2025

Impact: Enable five districts / towns to leverage scaling for service improvement and efficiency

at-risk youth support. Connecticut must incentivize consolidation and reduction, not in the districts themselves, but in administrative overhead. Where districts and towns elect to share administrative positions or where municipalities elect to combine services, the 21st Century Fund would award new funding for promoting positive youth development and strengthening the educational experience at the classroom level.

Aligned Action 10: Engage CT's federal delegation on federal policy and funding to support success of at-risk and disconnected youth

The Commission proposes that CT:

10A. Apply for new Medicaid Section 1115 waiver to expand coverage for critical services and social determinants of health that impact this population

10B. Support organizations in leveraging federal funding to serve at-risk and disconnected youth

10C. Advocate for full federal funding of IDEA to support learners with disabilities and increase per student funding to students with disabilities

Launch cost (2024 $): Leverage existing resources

Incremental annual run-rate costs (2024 $): <$1M

Existing resources that could be leveraged: Advocacy efforts; state efforts to develop additional Medicaid Section 1115 waivers

Implementation assumption: Advocacy to be continued through 2025, with support for organizations to apply for federal funding starting once Office of Youth Success is set up (i.e., 2026), as discussed in Action 2C

Impact: Provide critical services and social determinants of health coverage to the >950,000 HUSKY Health participants in CT today[93]; enable >160 youth-oriented nonprofits to access existing federal funding; unlock greater federal funding for approx. 82,000 Connecticut students with disabilities[94]

10A. Apply for new Medicaid Section 1115 waiver to expand coverage for critical services and social determinants of health that impact this population:

Connecticut should identify health and social determinants of health areas with largest funding gaps for disconnected young people and young people at risk of disconnection – e.g. behavioral health, disabilities, and substance use disorders – and apply for Medicaid Section 1115 waivers to expand support for them. Many other states have approved or pending waivers to this effect, including Arkansas' Tax Equity and Fiscal Responsibility Act expansion to serve children with disabilities, New Jersey's FamilyCare Comprehensive Demonstration for children with behavioral health needs, New York's Medicaid Redesign Team for children with behavioral health needs at risk of institutional care, North Carolina's Medicaid Reform Demonstration for parents and caretaker relatives of children and youth in foster care making efforts for family reunification, Oregon's Health Plan for youth with special healthcare needs, Tennessee's TennCare III for children with disabilities and children adopted from state custody, and Maine's Substance Use Disorder Care Initiative for parents with substance use disorder who are involved or at risk of involvement with Child Protective Services. Connecticut already has experience with Medicaid waivers that can be leveraged for this effort, having applied for a Substance Use Disorder Demonstration to expand services to incarcerated individuals. Connecticut can leverage this experience to demonstrate the benefits of expanding coverage for this population, both for the young people themselves and for taxpayers in terms of future cost savings and improved outcomes.

10B. Support organizations in leveraging federal funding to serve at-risk and disconnected youth:

Nonprofits serving young people, from homeless shelters to enrichment

hubs to workforce programs, are often oversubscribed with long waitlists. Young people describe enjoying the programming offered by Domus, Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and others, but experiencing shortages in supply[28]. United Way of Connecticut estimates a waitlist of more than 1,300 young people to access programs from seven surveyed nonprofits[25]. The Office of Youth Success (OYS), as described in Action 2, must provide Connecticut nonprofits with visibility and support in accessing funding to run and grow their operations, particularly as federal funding requires specific expertise and knowledge to successfully access.

The Commission has identified three examples of federal funding pools that OYS should support nonprofits in accessing, among others:

- Connecticut only has one organization receiving Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act YouthBuild grants: the Alliance for Community Empowerment. YouthBuild grants range from $700,000 to $1.5M over 40 months and are awarded to approximately 75 organizations per year[95]. Connecticut should support nonprofits serving at-risk and disconnected young people in accessing these and other funds.

- Connecticut should expand CT Pathways, the current Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment and Training program where the Department of Social Services reimburses 50% of costs. Connecticut should either support capacity expansion within the current 17 service providers or increase the number of included service providers[96].

- Connecticut currently has three institutions receiving Child Care Access Means Parents in School Program (CCAMPIS) to support childcare for young parents, with a total award of $447,000 in 2023[97]. Both in terms of award size (nationwide the average award was $317,108, while one CT recipient only received $40,000) and in number of grantees, Connecticut should support its educational institutions serving the highest-need populations to receive adequate funding to support their students.

10C. Advocate for full federal funding of IDEA to support learners with disabilities and increase per student funding to students with disabilities:

Young people with disabilities are at higher risk of disconnection and require additional support from schools, social services, and workforce preparation programs. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has not been fully funded since 1975, creating critical shortfalls in funding to serve disabled individuals and young people. While the initial legislation stated that the federal government would contribute 40% of state costs of educating students with disabilities, this has never been achieved, and in fact typically only ~6% of Connecticut's education costs for students with disabilities are covered by the federal government[98]. Full funding for FY20 would have been ~$340M for Connecticut, but the State received just ~$145M, causing a gap of ~$195M that the State has had to close on its own[99]. This has created not only a shortage of service provision but also inefficiencies as service providers cobble together other sources of less reliable funding. Furthermore, the formula determining IDEA funding allocations between states creates significant disparities in per-child funding. In 2023, Connecticut received an average of $2,410 in IDEA funding per child with disabilities, 32% less than the state with the highest funding level[100]. The State should advocate to increase the funding available to support Connecticut's young people and help address this statewide crisis.

Aligned Action 11: Create outcomes-based Connecticut Career Accelerator Program to support workforce pathways programs

The Commission proposes that CT:

11A. Design the Career Accelerator Program to help disconnected young people secure wraparound supports, job training, and careers

11A. Design the Career Accelerator Program to help disconnected young people secure wraparound supports, job training, and careers:

Young people often cite the cost of skilling and certification and the lack of transportation and childcare as barriers to pursuing career paths that pay good wages and offer benefits[27]. Fortunately, the State of Connecticut has passed legislation to create the Career Accelerator Program to support people pursuing commercial driver's license training, as well as careers in other sectors of the labor market, including healthcare and manufacturing[101]. The Career Accelerator Program is eligible to receive up to $5M in State municipal bonds to help launch it.

Launch cost (2024 $): Approx. $5M

Incremental annual run-rate costs (2024 $): Leverage existing resources

Existing resources that could be leveraged: $5M state bond fund to be used for pilot program

Implementation assumption: Pilot program to launch in 2025

Impact: Enable approx. 1,000 unemployed individuals with high school diplomas or GEDs to access training

Under the leadership of the State's Office of Workforce Strategy, Connecticut has been planning the Career Accelerator Program for some time. As envisioned, it could be used to pay for training, certification and licensing fees, wraparound services (including transportation and childcare), overcoming barriers to pursue these roles (e.g., paying existing fines to get driver's licenses reinstated, paying upfront fees to get required credentials), and added supports like financial literacy and mental health services.

It is critical that Connecticut launch this program in 2025 to support workforce training for high-demand industries and to prioritize ways to engage young adults who are experiencing disconnection. To ensure this population is connected to these opportunities, substantial emphasis on marketing (including potential salaries for these roles) and partnerships with high schools, technical schools, community institutions, Career ConneCT, American Job Centers, and Workforce Development Boards will be essential.

A promising public model to emulate is New Jersey's Pay It Forward Program, launched by New Jersey State, the New Jersey CEO Council, and Social Finance, which is beginning a pilot program with Commercial Driver's Licenses. Under this workforce development initiative, participants receive zero-interest, no-fee loans at no upfront cost, as well as non-repayable living stipends and wraparound supports and enroll in credential, certificate, and degree programs at qualified education and training providers in high-need sectors. Participants who find jobs earning above a specific income threshold repay their tuition over time, with payments capped at 10% of discretionary income and forgiveness of loan balances after five years for borrowers in good standing[102]. While this approach has the potential to expand access to education and training, thoughtful program design and guardrails are essential to ensure positive learner outcomes and loan transparency. For example, the program will need public oversight to monitor program quality and job placement rates, ensuring that students gain valuable skills and securing jobs that enable them to manage debt. Additionally, fair repayment structures with income caps, alongside transparency, accountability, and financial literacy courses tailored to disconnected youth will help beneficiaries understand both their financial obligations and available supports.

STRATEGIC PILLAR 3: INCREASE CAPACITY IN THE SYSTEM

Education

Aligned Action 12: Increase school and educator capacity to support young people at risk of disconnection

The Commission proposes that CT:

12A. Ensure sufficient staffing support for at-risk students in districts with the highest needs

12B. Support trauma-informed professional development and educator training

12C. Invest in school operational infrastructure to better integrate mental health professionals and community supports directly in classroom settings

12D. Pair students in the highest need schools with Success Coaches who build positive relationships and help them get back on-track, specifically focusing on 9th grade

Launch cost (2024 $): Approx. $13M

Incremental annual run-rate costs (2024 $): Approx. $55M

Existing resources that could be leveraged: Analysis on educational disparities

Implementation assumption: Teaching resources to be added in 2025; challenge fund for trauma-informed approach to be awarded in 2025 and pilot training to launch in 2026; pilot for additional mental health resources to receive fund in 2025, launch in 2026 and continue over next 4 years; resources for Success Coach program to be added in 2025

Impact: Lower teacher-to-student ratio in schools with 10,000-20,000 students; educators supporting 56,000-70,000 students receive trauma-informed training; approx. 10,000-20,000 students receive incremental access to mental health support at school; approx. 26,000 at-risk students are paired with coaches

12A. Ensure sufficient staffing support for at-risk students in districts with the highest needs:

Overwhelmingly, young people mentioned educators as the most defining aspect of their school experience. While some described positive interactions with

educators, several described experiences of inconsistent educator practices and perceived lack of educator attentiveness to their needs. Young people also shared how they often do not have a full-time teacher due to high teacher vacancies. They explained that substitute teachers are common, and that teacher vacancies dramatically impact their learning and lead to classroom management challenges[28].

Statewide, Connecticut has acute shortages of teachers, particularly those of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), Bilingual Education, and Special Education. The Special Education population has increased by 35% between the 2014-15 and 2022-2023 school years, while Connecticut has seen a dramatic increase in the number of multilingual learners[103]. Furthermore, there is significant inequity in how these resources are distributed across the state, with much higher teacher-student ratios in high-poverty districts across many subjects, as well as acute shortages of School Psychologists and Speech and Language Pathologists. These are critical roles needed to support populations of young people at high-risk of disconnection.

Districts with the highest needs also experience higher rates of teacher vacancies across all content areas, especially at the start of the school year. For example, New Haven Public Schools had 220 vacancies in August 2023, including 83 classroom teachers, and 198 vacancies in August 2024, including 77 classroom teachers. Hartford Public Schools and other districts with the highest needs have similar – and in some cases – higher rates of vacancies than New Haven Public Schools[104]. These trends mirror ongoing challenges with the teaching profession; in a recent Connecticut Education Association survey, 72% said they were dissatisfied with their working conditions and 74% said that they are more likely to leave the profession early or retire compared to a couple years ago[105].

Connecticut must continue to invest in targeted recruitment and expansion of educator pipelines, and review compensation and other incentives to ensure that students in high-poverty districts have access to the same high-quality support as their peers in higher-income districts. Strategies to consider include subsidizing tuition and certification fees for teachers who commit to serving high-need districts and subjects, recruiting teaching assistants, providing training and pathways to higher education from within local communities, improving teacher compensation and providing incentives for high-need districts, as well as investing in teacher retention supports such as mental health counseling and childcare.

12B. Support trauma-informed professional development and educator training:

In addition to addressing shortages and classroom vacancies, Connecticut must also invest in helping current and future educators better meet the needs of high-risk students. For example, 77% of kindergarten or preschool teachers surveyed in Waterbury indicated having worked with children whose parents were incarcerated; 76% worked with children with serious physical or mental health conditions; 75% worked with children experiencing or witnessing violence in the home; 71% worked with children witnessing or experiencing verbal/emotional abuse; and 40% worked with children experiencing sexual abuse or assault[106]. While there is a limited base of evidence for trauma-informed approaches in schools improving student outcomes directly[107], there is evidence that professional development focused

on trauma-informed care can help teachers better support students in the classroom[108] as well as reduce teacher burnout[109]. There are several organizations nationwide and in Connecticut providing professional development opportunities to educators working with at-risk youth, including the Youth Intervention Programs Association, which provides training on mental health, adverse childhood experiences, juvenile justice interventions, behavioral interventions, and intercultural engagement. The Trauma-Informed Educators Network and Resilient Educators also provide professional development opportunities focused on trauma-informed educator strategies, while the Council for At-Risk Student Education and Professional Standards provides training and certifications for teachers to increase their own capacity as well as that of their students. Connecticut should provide funding for schools to access professional development for their teachers through these programs, as well as partner with these organizations to inform teacher training curriculum across Connecticut universities, community colleges, and other organizations providing training and accreditation to educators.

12C. Invest in school operational infrastructure to better integrate mental health professionals and community supports directly in classroom settings:

As mentioned in Action 5D, pulling students out of class for disciplinary reasons contributes to student disengagement and disconnection, as students fall behind academically and lose trust in their teachers and schools. Misbehaving students are often struggling with mental health issues, bullying, or have had experiences of trauma – an overwhelming majority of at-risk young people engaged in this process described various traumatic experiences and challenges at home that make it difficult to engage productively at school[28]. Rather than punishing these students through suspensions or pulling them out of class to deliver mental health support in a separate environment, Connecticut should fund high-need schools to pilot models of student support that enable educators to collaborate more closely with specialized support staff serving at-risk students. The University of California Los Angeles Center for Mental Health in Schools has developed evidence-based recommendations for school operational infrastructure that include bringing mental health support staff into the classroom. In these integrated models, counselors are present in classrooms to observe student interactions, intervene as behavioral issues or crises arise, and provide support to teachers, rather than pulling students out for separate sessions. This can help create a more supportive environment for students and cause less disruption to learning. In an early collaboration with Sabine Parish in Louisiana, this approach was found to help raise graduation rates and improve academic performance[110]. In Connecticut, this involves bringing mental health professionals and Success Coaches, as described in Action 12D below, into the classroom.

12D. Pair students in highest-need schools with Success Coaches who build positive relationships and help them get back on-track, specifically focusing on 9th grade:

Positive adult relationships can make the difference between students staying on track or dropping out. Some young people shared that: "If we didn't have Domus Family Advocates, we wouldn't go [to school][28]". National research shows that Grade 9 on-track achievement (i.e., whether a student earns the credits they need during the first year of high school)

is the single best predictor of on-time, four-year high school completion – more so than race/ethnicity, test scores or family income[1]. However, in 2023, nearly one in five Connecticut ninth graders were already off-track during their first year of high school. Grade 9 on-track rates in Connecticut have steadily decreased over the last three accountability cycles, and high-needs students are significantly less likely to be on-track (74%) relative to their peers (93%)[111].

Connecticut must place a stronger emphasis on Grade 9 and helping students navigate the transition between middle school and high school. Success Coaches can support these transitions by working directly with students to assess pain points, connect students to additional resources, and otherwise help them get back on track. At least two organizations in Connecticut have already successfully modeled what this role can look like: Domus Family Advocates in Stamford and the Connecticut RISE Network serving multiple schools across the state and region. Where these models have been implemented with fidelity, schools have seen positive student outcomes, leading to improved on-track and graduation rates[1].

Connecticut must require schools with the highest numbers of at-risk students to pair off-track students with Success Coaches. Aligned to Action 1D, schools must have a way to identify Grade 9 students if they become off-track during this make-or-break year of high school, and hold regular Student Success Team meetings to strategize around the needs of their students.

Aligned Action 13: Strengthen career-connected learning and pathways from education to work

The Commission proposes that CT:

13A. Enable seamless dual enrollment

13B. Improve access to work-based learning programs

13A. Enable seamless dual enrollment:

Dual enrollment programs allow high school students to earn college credit. Young people, especially those with risk factors for disconnection, benefit immensely from dual credit and enrollment. U.S. Department of Education evidence has shown positive effects of dual enrollment on high school academic performance and completion, college enrollment and credit accumulation, and degree attainment[112]. Given this evidence, in 2023, Connecticut invested $3.8M in 89 school districts for dual credit programs[113].

However, Connecticut must do more to promote dual enrollment. Less than a quarter of Connecticut 11th and 12th graders

Launch cost (2024 $): Leverage existing resources

Incremental annual run-rate costs (2024 $): Approx. $23M

Existing resources that could be leveraged: Overhead and administrative support from Office of Youth Success (as recommended in Action 2C); existing funding allocated towards dual enrollment expansion

Implementation assumption: Dual enrollment revolving grant for low-income high school students to be designed in 2024-2025 school year, rollout starting in 2025-2026 school year

Impact: Enable 8,000-9,000 public high school Grade 11 and 12 students across CT to be dual-enrolled in community college tuition free

in 2023 – and even fewer students from low-income families, multilingual learners, and students with disabilities – earned three or more college credits prior to high school graduation. While 24% of Connecticut students meet benchmarks for dual credit, the same is true for only 17% of Black and Hispanic students and 15% of high-needs students[112].

Currently, the University of Connecticut and Connecticut State Community College (CT State) serve nearly 90% of Connecticut's dual education students[114]. The Commission heard testimony that many dual enrollment programs are currently done in a piecemeal manner due to the lack of a statewide strategy and consistent funding pools, resulting in "random acts of dual enrollment" that struggle to realize the full potential benefits of dual enrollment for Connecticut's young people. John Maduko, the President of CT State, told the Commission that efforts to expand dual enrollment have been hampered by insufficient funding architecture. In fact, he noted that "Connecticut is the only state in New England without a funded dual enrollment infrastructure." He explained that in many other states, districts receive funding dedicated to helping them establish dual enrollment partnerships with local colleges; however, no similar funding infrastructure exists in Connecticut. He added that additional support is needed for wraparound services such as mental health counseling, advising, and food pantries, particularly as the at-risk population of students tends to require more high-touch support to successfully navigate dual enrollment systems[42]. Recognizing these challenges, Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU), of which CT State is a part, is working with Social Impact Partners to develop a statewide strategy to roll out high-quality, consistent dual and concurrent enrollment programs across Connecticut[115].

Connecticut must amplify and ensure cohesion of these investments in high-quality, seamless dual enrollment, starting with schools with the highest rates of at-risk students and schools in high-poverty districts. First, Connecticut should provide funding to train and credential educators, develop materials, provide academic and wraparound supports, and subsidize costs for low-income students. Second, Connecticut should convene and facilitate partnerships between institutions of higher education, districts, and individual schools to expand dual credit programming. Third, Connecticut should standardize credit transfer agreements and streamline requirements for participation, e.g., GPAs and test scores, among all schools and institutes of higher education. Connecticut should also support schools in conducting needs assessments and evidence evaluations that they need to fully leverage federal funding for dual enrollment through the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and the Carl D. Parkins Career and Technical Act.

13B. Improve access to work-based learning programs:

Young people interviewed expressed a high desire for Connecticut to "train us in trades and jobs we can do right after high school[28]". Evidence suggests that investing in career-connected learning can drive higher student engagement; one study of nearly 10,000 high school students in New Hampshire found that students who engaged in at least one career-connected learning activity reported being more engaged and hopeful in school than those who did not[116]. Connecticut should mandate that high schools, especially those with high populations of at-risk students, or in communities with substantial workforce shortages or unique talent needs, build out

postsecondary pathway offerings involving employer partnerships to provide all high school students with work-based learning and apprenticeship opportunities, such as the Connecticut Technical Education and Career System (CTECS)[117] work-based learning program. This mandate should be paired with state-funded technical assistance to assist districts and/ or schools in examining needs, creating or scaling effective programs, and collecting data to monitor student progress and impact. One student even suggested having twice-yearly career fairs in high schools focused on the top 10 trade jobs with vacancies in the state[21]. Connecticut should emulate Delaware's Pathways program, where over 30,000 students participate in dual enrollment in 13 different career tracks, and employer partnerships allow these students to take three to six work-based learning courses for community college or four-year college credit[118]. Texas is also a leader in postsecondary pathways, with nearly two million students annually are enrolled in career-connected learning[119] organized around 14 different fields of study, including intensive options like P-TECH and T-STEM.

Aligned Action 14: Create Support Networks to provide technical assistance for educators, schools, and districts with the highest needs

The Commission proposes that CT:

14A. Launch Support Networks to improve instructional practice, accelerate school performance, and drive system-wide improvement

14A. Launch Support Networks to improve instructional practice, accelerate school performance, and drive system-wide improvement

Given that one in three students are at-risk of not graduating high school in Connecticut, it is imperative that the State strengthen its approach for technical assistance and capacity-building in public education. Support Networks, which connect peers with similar goals and challenges to support and learn from one another, offer a clear way to expand capacity and improve results across Connecticut's classrooms, schools, and districts. Similar models have been effective elsewhere, such as New Visions in New York City, Network for College Success in Chicago, Carnegie Foundation

Launch cost (2024 $): Approx. $3M

Incremental annual run-rate costs (2024 $): Leverage existing resources

Existing resources that could be leveraged: Local service and technical assistance providers

Implementation assumption: Policy changes in 2025; pilot Support Networks to launch in 2026

Impact: Networks enhance the educational experiences of approx. 500,000 students in public schools

for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning, RISE Network in Connecticut, and California's CORE districts, among others.

Specifically, the Commission envisions three different types of Support Networks: Educator Support Networks for helping educators improve their instructional practice at the classroom level; School Support Networks for helping schools coordinate continuous improvement efforts to accelerate student achievement; and District Support Networks for helping district teams make system-wide improvements. Each type may bring educators, schools, and districts together across traditional town boundaries, enabling opportunities for cost efficiencies, resource-sharing, learning, and collaboration. Educators, schools, and districts should not automatically be assigned networks and providers based on their region, but should select which network to join, unless assigned for specific performance improvement purposes.

Educator Support Networks would support communities of educators in improving their skills, ranging from instructional practice to trauma-informed care (Action 12B). Connecticut's Teacher of the Year Council should be empowered to select the professional development providers leading these networks across the state in direct response to educator needs. These would not be 'one-size-fits-all' networks, but specialized communities with distinct focus areas based on school needs. Thus, membership in these networks would require buy-in and participation at the school and district levels.

School Support Networks would involve a community of schools facilitated by a technical assistance provider, which could be a non-profit organization, an institution of higher education, a Regional Educational Service Center, or the State Education Resource Center. In School Support Networks, schools with common goals and challenges would be clustered together in groupings across districts. The technical assistance provider would offer resources and capacity building support to each school and facilitate a continuous improvement network across the schools to help achieve student outcome goals (e.g., Grade 9 on-track achievement, on-time high school graduation). By functioning as a network or improvement community, the schools and technical assistance provider can effectively share best practices and support school teams in their implementation and refinement.

District Support Networks would bring together districts who share common operating challenges and require technical assistance to improve. For example, a network could bring districts together for the purpose of improving their talent acquisition and retention strategies, especially if they struggle to fill teacher vacancies or attract educators of color. Other networks could help districts to improve their procurement and budgeting practices, integrate mental health professionals and community supports directly in classroom settings (Action 12C), or launch Community Schools (Action 4C), etc. In these networks, the technical assistance provider would function as the hub convening district leaders, adding critical expertise to solve common challenges and facilitating continuous improvement efforts.

The Commission recommends phasing these Support Networks in over the next two years, in conjunction with efforts to adequately fund public education (Action 7) and strengthen accountability structures in the state (Action 4). Connecticut should adopt the necessary policy architecture in 2025 to define Support Networks, detail

criteria, secure funding, and empower the Commissioner of Education to identify organizations to lead School and District Support Networks. Developing a vetted pool of providers who have demonstrated track records of improving outcomes in public education will be critically important.

Starting in 2026, educators, schools, and districts would opt-in to Support Networks based on demonstrated interest and need. In 2027 and beyond, Support Networks may continue to serve educators, schools, and districts who opt-in. In addition, schools and districts may require educators to participate in Support Networks as part of their professional development; and the Commissioner of Education may require schools and districts to join Support Networks based on their performance, as measured against the revised Accountability System (see Action 4A).

Workforce

Aligned Action 15: Scale transitional employment programs, apprenticeships, and summer employment programs

The Commission proposes that CT:

15A. Scale transitional employment programs that integrate case management and wraparound support services and align to career pathways

15B. Support apprenticeships for young people without or with little prior work experience

15C. Partner with Workforce Development Boards to secure full funding for Connecticut's Youth Employment Program

15A. Scale transitional employment programs that integrate case management and wraparound support services, and align to career pathways

Transitional employment programs are essential for helping disconnected young

Launch cost (2024 $): Leverage existing resources

Incremental annual run-rate costs (2024 $): Approx. $75M

Existing resources that could be leveraged: Institutional knowledge and best practices from existing programs; existing federal funding sources; overhead support from Office of Youth Success (Action 2C)

Implementation assumption: Scale-up with additional support to begin in 2025, given programs already exist in pockets

Impact: Get 15,000-20,000 at-risk and disconnected youth back on career pathways

adults secure and maintain jobs – and ultimately connect to careers. Effective transitional employment programs are designed to help individuals overcome barriers to employment. Such programs offer real work opportunities in a fully developed business environment, teach industry-specific skills, help participants develop soft skills for succeeding both at work and in life, prepare participants for success in subsequent employment, help them connect to such opportunities, and pay wages equivalent to what participants would earn in the market if they had the skills necessary to retain employment in that industry. Transitional employment programs are most impactful when these characteristics are integrated with case management and support services. Transitional employment programs are normally operated by non-profit organizations or social enterprises, where operating revenues are supplemented by significant funding from public and private sources.

Connecticut is home to a handful of transitional employment programs, such as EMERGE CT in New Haven, Forge City Works in Hartford, and Domus Works in Stamford. These programs require increased and sustained funding along with capacity-building technical assistance to develop and eventually scale. It is important that Connecticut support the development of these programs, and transitional employment more generally, since they are vital links in the current workforce development ecosystem that seek to connect disconnected young adults to open positions in the labor market. In doing so, Connecticut should learn from national models, such as the Center for Employment Opportunities in New York and More Than Words in Boston, among others. Connecticut should also study and seek to emulate California's recent investment of $25M to create the Regional Initiative for Social Enterprise to strengthen the state's social enterprise sector by delivering capital and customized technical assistance to organizations that employ, train, and support individuals overcoming barriers to employment.

15B. Support apprenticeships for young people without or with little prior work experience:

Young people describe difficulty getting hired due to their lack of prior work experience[28]. Apprenticeships focus on developing 21st century skills, particularly for individuals that employers do not see as "ready-to-hire". Apprenticeships can help young people learn not only specific skills and trades, but also workplace and life skills that are critical to being hired and retained by future employers, such as time management, responsibility and communication. On average, workers who complete apprenticeships see a $300,000 increase in career earnings compared to a scenario where they remained in their pre-apprenticeship employment[120], and 91% retain their employment after completion of the apprenticeship[121].

Paid part-time apprenticeships are particularly promising for the population of young people at risk of disconnection for three reasons. First, they give young people living in poverty an immediate wage to support their own and families' financial needs without dropping out of the education system entirely. Second, they help improve school engagement by reinforcing lessons learned in the classroom. Third, they provide a safe and healthy activity, community, and place for young people to spend time outside of school.

Given 81% of Connecticut employers struggle to find and retain workers[122], these programs have the added benefit of creating new talent pipelines. Most

employers in the Urban Institute's Youth Apprenticeship Intermediary program achieved positive economic returns, with an average of $1.44 for every $1 invested in a registered apprenticeship[9].

While Connecticut has seen an almost 50% increase in the number of apprentices from 4,618 in 2013 to 6,655 in 2022, the number of employers operating apprenticeship programs has stagnated in recent years at approximately 1,900[123]. Connecticut's Workforce Development Boards should support more employers to create high-quality apprenticeship programs by allocating resources to helping employers register apprenticeships and apply for Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act funding for On-The-Job Training (OJT) and Related Training and Instruction (RTI). Connecticut should also facilitate knowledge transfer to prospective apprentice employers from successful programs, such as the BioLaunch apprenticeship program operated by ConnCAT and Yale University to help New Haven residents without college degrees obtain entry-level technician roles in biotechnology and life sciences, and the Teamsters-Sikorsky Career Pathways Union Mentoring Program for young people to apprentice in aerospace manufacturing. Additionally, Connecticut should fund the expansion of high-quality programs providing supportive services for apprenticeships, such as the Opportunity Youth collaboration, which integrates disconnected youth into the workforce through tailored job training and support services.

15C. Partner with Workforce Development Boards to secure full funding for Connecticut's Youth Employment Program

Connecticut's five Workforce Development Boards operate Connecticut's Youth Employment Program (YEP) in collaboration with towns and employers. YEP provides summer work experience opportunities for low-income youth, where young people can earn up to $1,800 in wages. In 2024, 8,500 young people applied for summer employment opportunities through YEP, but only 3,900 youth were enrolled and secured paid summer jobs. The remaining 4,600 young people could not participate due to lack of funding. The Commission heard from young people who participated in New London's YEP program and shared how critical it is to earn wages, gain work experience, and participate in programming that offers wraparound support alongside on-the-job training. They also shared how much they enjoyed YEP, since it gave them positive opportunities to pursue with their friends, as well as experiences they found interesting and relevant to their passions and career aspirations.

The Commission reviewed outcome data from Hartford's Summer Youth Employment and Learning Program, which offers youth the chance to gain work experience during the summer complemented by wraparound support services to address barriers to employment. 83% of Hartford YEP participants graduated from high school, compared to 71% of all Hartford high school students[124]. The Commission encourages Connecticut to fully fund YEP in 2025 and every year thereafter, so thousands more young people across every town may gain work experience while earning wages. This will require the State to ensure transparency and enforcement around rules and regulations for employing youth, as the Commission heard that current policies may be confusing, unclear, and restrictive, discouraging employers from hiring young people.

Aligned Action 16: Launch the Connecticut Youth Service Corps

The Commission proposes that CT:

16A. Build from existing initiatives to launch the Connecticut Youth Service Corps to create career pathways through paid service and workforce training with integrated wraparound supports

16A. Build from existing initiatives to launch the Connecticut Youth Service Corps to create career pathways through paid service and workforce training with integrated wraparound supports:

Connecticut has seen a decline in public sector employment over the last 15 years, particularly at the municipal level, with a 10% decline in the municipal workforce during the pandemic, leading to delays in important services, as well as knowledge loss as retirement-age workers transition out of the workforce[125,126]. Connecticut non-profits are also facing an 18% vacancy rate and significant challenges in recruiting employees, along with increased demand; 59% report waiting lists for services and 68% have noted rising needs over the past two years[127]. The State's manufacturing sector also continues to see labor shortages, providing an opportunity for young people with the right skills to find high-quality employment[128]. The State also experiences growing demand for youth development professionals, such as

Launch cost (2024 $): Leverage existing resources

Incremental annual run-rate costs (2024 $): Approx. $33M

Existing resources that could be leveraged: Overhead support from Serve Connecticut and AmeriCorps

Implementation assumption: Program configuration and funding finalized by 2026; first class of nonprofit interns start work in summer 2027

Impact: Additional approx. 1,000-2,000 disconnected youth benefit from one year of subsidized work experience, across CT public, non-profit, and priority private sectors

mentors and Success Coaches, who can develop positive, trusting relationships with young people. Meanwhile, tens of thousands of young adults are currently disconnected from the workforce even though they have high school diplomas, GEDs, or higher educational attainment[1].

While AmeriCorps provides some opportunities for supported employment in the non-profit sector in CT, the program has a limited scope of partners and recruits 'ready-to-hire' employees (e.g., requires GED, some college, Microsoft skills). Initiatives such as Hartford Youth Service Corps and Stamford Youth Service Corps provide part-time paid service opportunities integrated with wraparound supports to help young people develop skills and gain job experience. Other existing initiatives, such as Public Allies, offer 10-month civic service apprenticeships that help young people connect to service careers in their communities. These and other initiatives funded by Serve Connecticut, as well as national programs like City Year and the American Climate Corps, are building blocks from which Connecticut should design and launch the Connecticut Youth Service Corps, leveraging federal AmeriCorps funding and national philanthropy for start-up capital.

As envisioned, Serve Connecticut could operate the Connecticut Youth Service Corps as a state-wide opportunity for paid-service year fellowships that help young people connect to careers and receive the wraparound support they need to succeed. Critically, the paid fellowships would align with and lead to careers in high-need sectors, such as public sector employment, manufacturing, and social sector employment. Given the substantial role of these organizations in serving and reconnecting this population, greater commitment to hiring individuals with relevant lived experience and paying them competitive wages will ensure a more robust pipeline of workers for the state.

It is essential to create the Connecticut Youth Service Corps for three reasons. First, we must find ways to support disconnected young people in securing and maintaining employment in Connecticut. Employers need trained workers and young people need good paying jobs. Second, we must create opportunities for young people in every town. Current initiatives are largely focused on the state's cities, leaving young people in Connecticut's East and West without sufficient opportunities to connect to resources and ultimately careers. Third, we must design programs that build bridges across Connecticut's towns, bring people together, and lead toward tangible benefits for communities.

Examples to emulate include Maryland's Service Year Option and Tennessee's Youth Employment Program (YEP), which demonstrate the advantages of combining practical, hands-on training with technical assistance and upskilling. Maryland's initiative places high school graduates in roles within sectors experiencing workforce shortages, offering them over 30 hours of paid professional experience weekly[129]. Similarly, Tennessee's YEP provides state-funded job opportunities for low-income youth and those in foster care, focusing on real-world job skills and work experience. These programs also include mentorship, career planning, and continuous skill development workshops[130]. This approach not only strengthens the workforce but provides a vital opportunity for at-risk and disconnected youth to gain meaningful employment and career development[131].

Social sector

Aligned Action 17: Build the capacity of nonprofits who serve severely disconnected young people

The Commission proposes that CT:

17A. Fund and provide capacity building to existing nonprofits serving severely disconnected young people to ensure coverage across CT's highest need communities

17B. Fund training of outreach workers in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and behavioral approaches

17A. Fund and provide capacity building to existing nonprofits serving severely disconnected young people to ensure coverage across CT's highest need communities:

Effective services for young people who are experiencing severe disconnection can change and save lives, and positively impact the broader community[132]. For example, in Chicago, the CRED program – which connects severely disconnected young adults to a network of five trusted adults, including outreach workers, life coaches, clinicians, tutors, and employment coaches – has significantly reduced violent

Launch cost (2024 $): Approx. $1-2M

Incremental annual run-rate costs (2024 $): Approx. $60M

Existing resources that could be leveraged: Approx. $15-20M in operating funding across CT Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) Youth Violence Initiative, Project Longevity, and Youth Services Prevention

Implementation assumption: Nonprofit scale-up to be completed by 2026 and programs for severely disconnected youth to be expanded in 2027; first wave of CBT trainings to be completed by 2026 and continuous training for new staff and volunteers thereafter

Impact: Engage approx. 6,000 severely disconnected youth; targeted evaluation and learning over key policy changes and programs

crime arrests among participants with a 73% reduction in arrests for violent crime within two years[133]. The CRED program invests approximately $35,000 in each youth participant, which is half of what Connecticut pays to incarcerate young people[134].

Approximately 12,000 young people are experiencing severe disconnection in Connecticut[1]. Some of these young people are currently incarcerated and many others are at risk of involvement in the criminal justice system in their communities. Organizations like COMPASS Youth Collaborative in Hartford, Roca's Hartford Young Mother's Program, Catalyst CT's StreetSafe in Bridgeport, and Connecticut Violence Intervention and Prevention (CTVIP) in New Haven exist to support these young people and help them get back on track. These organizations - and several others - are leading important work, and yet significantly more capacity is needed to meet the needs of Connecticut's severely disconnected young people, since these organizations collectively serve fewer than 1,000 young people every year[135].

Long-term investments are required to build the capacity of community-based organizations. As COMPASS, Roca, CTVIP, and Catalyst CT explained in testimony to the Commission[136]: "Community-based organizations providing violence intervention and prevention services are the frontline of a strong, interconnected, and collaborative community architecture working to curb community violence. Should the State, municipal leaders, and other funders be compelled to invest in violence prevention and intervention programs, it is critical for the organizations providing these services to be funded at the true cost of doing so, as well as to receive ongoing resources to continue strengthening every aspect of their operational capacity."

Community-based organizations are currently "not funded at a level that allows [them] to compensate [youth development professionals] as they deserve." The starting salaries for youth development professionals at COMPASS, Roca, Domus Kids, Our Piece of the Pie, CTVIP, Forge City Works, and Catalyst CT range from $35,000 to $50,000, whereas the cost of living exceeds $100,000 for a family living in any of Connecticut's major cities[137]. To expand these programs and attract the very best talent, Connecticut must ensure service providers earn at least a living wage, if not a wage competitive with private sector roles for a similar talent level.

In addition to long-term funding, capacity-building technical assistance is also required. Approaches like the Connecticut Opportunity Project's social investment approach to help community-based organizations build their organizational capacity are essential. Just as Connecticut must invest in community-based organizations, it must also invest in the capacity-builders who help them. As Connecticut stands up Youth Success Oversight Boards, as described in Action 2B, the boards should identify areas where there are gaps in service provision and work with public and private funders to secure necessary resources to support organizations who serve Connecticut's severely disconnected youth.

17B. Fund training of outreach workers in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and behavioral approaches:

Community outreach workers are often the first to connect with severely disconnected youth and form positive, trusting relationships. Across multiple conversations with at-risk and disconnected youth, young people shared that one trusted adult relationship can have a transformative

impact on their lives[28]. However, for outreach workers to be effective, they must be paid salaries that provide a stable livelihood and are competitive with private sector jobs of the same talent level, and they need training to equip them to address trauma and behavioral challenges more effectively. As the Commission has heard from testimony: "There is extensive evidence for the efficacy of [CBT] in helping to mitigate the damaging psychological and physiological effects of experiencing a traumatic event or a series of traumatic events, including gun violence, community violence, and domestic violence[42]."

The Commission recommends that Connecticut create a specific fund to which community-based organizations employing outreach workers can apply to secure resources for upskilling their staff. Funds can be used towards third-party training providers or to "productize" high-quality training programs (e.g., an asynchronous self-study module) that can be widely deployed across Connecticut.

Aligned Action 18: Launch Center of Excellence at a CT partner university, focused on at-risk and disconnected youth

The Commission proposes that CT:

18A. Establish and fund a Center of Excellence at a CT partner university focused on researching, piloting, and evaluating programs for at-risk and disconnected youth

18A. Establish and fund a Center of Excellence at a CT partner university focused on researching, piloting, and evaluating programs for at-risk and disconnected youth:

Chicago is one of the cities across the country where long-term collaborative efforts have led to significant progress in getting disconnected young people back on track. Chicago is fortunate to

Launch cost (2024 $): Leverage existing resources

Incremental annual run-rate costs (2024 $): Approx. $1-2M

Existing resources that could be leveraged: Expertise from best practices (e.g., Tow Youth Justice Institute at the University of New Haven)

Implementation assumption: Center to launch by 2027, once data infrastructure and hub are in-place

Impact: Evaluation and learning of state policies and nonprofit programs / pilots targeting disconnected youth

have the University of Chicago's Crime Lab and Northwestern University's Center for Neighborhood Engaged Research and Science (CORNERS), each of which play important roles as "Centers of Excellence" focused on working with communities to research, pilot, and evaluate programs for at-risk and disconnected youth. The Crime Lab and CORNERS have different approaches and specialties, but they show how "Centers of Excellence" are critical components of the broader community architecture necessary to achieve and sustain transformative results at scale.

Informed by models in Chicago and elsewhere, a "Center of Excellence" is (i) an institute or center within an institution of higher education that (ii) focuses on researching and evaluating programs for at-risk and disconnected youth, (iii) works in close coordination with practitioners, (iv) provides technical assistance for program design and training, (v) operates sophisticated data systems as necessary to analyze data from multiple sources, display data dashboards, and publish research, (vi) raises significant public and private funding, and (vii) maintains credibility with all stakeholders, especially community.

Connecticut is home to many great institutions and the State has pockets of research and evaluation activity related to at-risk and disconnected youth. However, there is no systematic approach across Connecticut to identify and pilot promising initiatives, evaluate their effectiveness, and scale successful efforts. Connecticut should launch a competitive process to select and seed a "Center of Excellence", as defined above, for applied research focused on the drivers and solutions for youth disconnection in the state.

This Center would have academic staff with the mandate to monitor and evaluate promising initiatives and programs in Connecticut, review successful interventions in other contexts and assess their applicability to Connecticut, and create policy briefs to educate policymakers, administrators, the public, and other stakeholders. For example, the Center could inform further evolution of the student need-centric Education Cost Sharing formula by filling research gaps on the cost to public schools to effectively serve K-12 students with characteristics correlated to disconnection, e.g., having adverse childhood experiences, experiencing poverty, and learning English as a second language. Over the years, having a "Center of Excellence" in Connecticut would enable the State to focus taxpayer resources on funding and scaling programs that are working, while maintaining a consistent basis of evaluation across new efforts.

Aligned Action 19: Support workforce reintegration programs for currently and formerly incarcerated youth

The Commission proposes that CT:

19A. Fund organizations that provide incarceration bridge support, wraparound services, and job market reentry support to currently and formerly incarcerated youth

19B. Incentivize employers to hire formerly incarcerated youth and support GED completion through tax credits

19A. Fund organizations that provide incarceration bridge support, wraparound services, and job market reentry support to currently and formerly incarcerated youth:

Giving formerly incarcerated youth a pathway to a job is a critical element of avoiding recidivism, enabling economic independence, and creating stronger families. One study found that individuals securing jobs after release from prison had significantly lower recidivism rates (19% recidivism) compared to individuals without stable employment before and after prison (41% recidivism)[139].

Launch cost (2024 $): Leverage existing resources

Incremental annual run-rate costs (2024 $): Approx. $23M

Existing resources that could be leveraged: Resources from existing initiatives and smaller-scale pilots (e.g., Second Chance I-Best Program); approx. $26M budget for Juvenile Justice Outreach Services[138]

Implementation assumption: Work reintegration program to scale up in 2027; employer incentives to hire incarcerated youth to launch in 2027

Impact: Approx. 1,800 formerly incarcerated youth receive access to support and employment opportunities

Throughout the Commission's process, justice-involved young people consistently shared that there is a need for more support for young people moving from incarceration back into the community,

including hands-on skill-building and life skills training (e.g., filing taxes, building credit) that ultimately help lead to greater long-term economic stability.

The Commission heard from several reentry and incarceration bridge support programs in Connecticut, including the Next Level Empowerment Program in New Haven, T.R.U.E. at Cheshire Correctional Facility, and the Second Chance I-Best Program. Many of these programs have shown meaningful improvements in employment upon re-entry[140]. For example, Workforce Alliance's program offering job placement, resume support, and career counseling for formerly incarcerated young adults[141] had 90% of participants feeling the program improved their job choices and options in the future[142]. However, these programs often have long waitlists and / or are limited in the support they can provide to young people due to funding limitations.

The State should:

1. Increase funding by $12M to cover reentry and bridge services for an additional 1,800 formerly incarcerated young people, flowing through regional Youth Success Oversight Boards outlined in Action 2B to support high-quality service providers helping formerly incarcerated young people reconnect to society.

2. In doing so, expand the pool of providers operating in Connecticut, including by partnering with national models with strong results (such as the Center for Employment Opportunities, the largest reentry employment provider in the country, which does not currently operate actively in CT).

3. Engage the Research Center of Excellence (see Aligned Action 18) to study the impact of post-incarceration workforce programs, concentrating funding in those providers with evidence of long-term impact.

19B. Incentivize employers to hire formerly incarcerated youth and support GED completion through tax credits:

Currently, there are limited incentives for companies and organizations to employ young people that have been formerly incarcerated. A tax credit partially covering wages for a formerly incarcerated young person would not only provide an incentive to give a young person a chance, but also encourage the employer to employ that young person for as long as possible. Other states have leveraged employer tax credits to support young people's outcomes – Maryland offers employers a tax credit for hiring from specific groups, including the formerly incarcerated[143], while Kentucky offers tax credits to employers who assist their employees in completing a learning contract that includes obtaining a General Education Development (GED) certification[144]. Connecticut subsidizes GED fees for young adults, with no charge for young adults under the age of 21, but many young people either do not know or do not have time to access these opportunities[145]. Employers can serve as a critical channel to get information about GED completion opportunities to workers in entry-level jobs and are instrumental in creating time and space for young people to obtain a GED while working. There is also a benefit to employers themselves: employers participating in GEDWorks report four times higher retention rates among participating employees[146]. Creating a tax credit to encourage employers to both employ formerly incarcerated youth and support GED completion, will help give young people a chance without forcing them to choose between learning and earning.

Aligned Action 20: Support community recreational hubs and summer enrichment activities to increase emotional engagement, academic outcomes, and employment prospects for at-risk and disconnected youth

The Commission proposes that CT:

20A. Provide flexible funding for operations and expansion of organizations running recreational hubs

20B. Support summer enrichment programs to ensure all youth across the state have access

20A. Provide flexible funding for operations and expansion of organizations running recreational hubs:

Young people describe themselves as highly bored in schools, lonely, and craving in-person connection as well as a reprieve from constant inundation of social media[28]. There is high demand for safe and engaging places and activities, both during the

Launch cost (2024 $): Approx. $27M

Incremental annual run-rate costs (2024 $): Approx. $15M

Existing resources that could be leveraged: Connecticut State Department of Education funding for summer enrichment programs; expertise from local organizations running recreational hubs

Implementation assumption: New hubs to be built and new programs to be developed by 2026; usage scale-up to start in 2027

Impact: Approx. 11,000 young people served by recreational hubs; 5,000-6,000 enrollees in summer academies and similar enrichment programs

school year and summer. While some high-quality programming exists, many young people described disappointment at not being able to sign up in time for limited available spots. Research shows that recreational hubs can improve school attendance, academic performance, social and emotional development, and reduce juvenile justice involvement[147], and that youth who participate in afterschool programs are 20% less likely to drop out of school[148]. These hubs offer safe environments where young people can connect, participate in tutoring, and access homework help and enrichment activities, helping them stay in school and improve academic performance. Moreover, these hubs play a significant role in developing essential life and job skills that are critical for long-term employment. For example, Leadership, Education, and Athletics in Partnership (LEAP) in New Haven operates a successful program that hires and trains young adults as summer counselors, helping them to earn wages while also empowering them as mentors for younger program participants. CT must provide more flexible funding, through competitive processes run by the Office of Youth Success, to hubs that provide high-quality programming, such as the Connecticut PAL program, the YMCA, and the Boys and Girls Club. With additional funding, CT's hubs can expand operations and learn from other best-in-class hubs, such as California's After School Education and Safety (ASES) program and Ohio's 21st Century Community Learning Centers.

20B. Support summer enrichment programs to ensure all youth across the state have access:

Research shows that students engaged in summer programming have better academic and non-academic outcomes, including improvements in math and reading performance, equivalent to 20% of a year's learning, and enhanced social and emotional learning benefits[149]. High-quality recreational programming (e.g., sports, arts, music) gives young people a safe place to spend their summers. Connecticut does have local examples of effective summer programs, such as the Summer Learning Academy in New Haven and Hartford's Summer Bridge Program, but these tend to be concentrated in high-density areas, like cities with service providers, whereas lower-resourced areas, such as rural communities, tend to lack these offerings. Connecticut should expand these programs statewide and provide technical assistance to ensure consistently high program quality.

Aligned Action 21: Fund the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness' efforts to identify and help young people experiencing homelessness

The Commission proposes that CT:

21A. Fund Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness to improve capacity, service quality and reach.

21A. Fund Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness to improve capacity, service quality and reach:

Young people bear a significant burden of the homelessness and housing insecurity crisis in Connecticut, with nearly 5,500[5] Connecticut students impacted in the 2023-2024 school year. Over the last three years, the number of young people experiencing homelessness increased significantly. In 2021, there were 385 people under 18

Launch cost (2024 $): <$1M

Incremental annual run-rate costs (2024 $): Approx. $2M

Existing resources that could be leveraged: CCEH expertise and infrastructure

Implementation assumption: Youth homelessness study to be completed in 2025; capacity to be expanded in 2026

Impact: Serve up to 5,500 Connecticut young people who experience homelessness

and 184 people ages 18-24 experiencing homelessness; those counts were 677 and 263, respectively, as of the 2024 'point in time' count[150]. The *Unspoken Crisis* report[1] found that students receiving homelessness services had a 2.7 times higher rate of disconnection compared to those not receiving these services[1]. Many young people don't even receive available services as they are afraid to admit they are homeless out of fear of losing their freedom, going into foster care, or being taken away from their families[28].

Strengthening coordination and funding in support of the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness (CCEH) would enhance efforts to identify and assist young people experiencing homelessness. CCEH serves as the backbone agency of the statewide collective impact initiative: CT CAN End Homelessness. It coordinates a system of integrated case management in close partnership with a network of providers and state agencies, provides training and technical assistance, engages in grassroots organizing, and hosts an annual training institute. It is more efficient to support their existing, effective, and proven ongoing efforts to bolster this system rather than creating new programs[1]. Enhancing financial support will enable CCEH to scale its efforts and support their partner agencies, ensuring that young people receive the necessary services and support to overcome homelessness and housing insecurity through effective partnerships and coordination. Together, these organizations can provide comprehensive support services and foster better, data-driven coordination between the existing homelessness response system and school districts.

STRATEGIC PILLAR 4: BUILD AND SUSTAIN COALITIONS

Aligned Action 22: Launch a state-level cross-sector coalition supported by philanthropic capital involving community, labor, business, civic, faith, philanthropic, and government leaders, forming and advancing a statewide community architecture that enables this strategy to live beyond any single administration at any level; support community-based organizing and advocacy efforts

The Commission proposes that CT:

22A. Launch cross-sector coalition to advocate for policy support for young people, pool funding and provide longer-term stability for organizations supporting young people, and catalyze cross-sector partnerships supporting this population

22B. Support community-based organizing and advocacy efforts

22A. Launch cross-sector coalition to advocate for policy support for young people, pool funding and provide longer-term stability for organizations supporting young people, and catalyze cross-sector partnerships supporting this population:

Research shows that cross-sector coalitions are effective for driving long-term systems change in a community and are more

Launch cost (2024 $): Leverage existing private and philanthropic funding

Incremental annual run-rate costs (2024 $): Leverage existing private and philanthropic funding

Existing resources that could be leveraged: Philanthropic networks; infrastructure and expertise from Office of Youth Success (Action 2C); Center of Excellence (Action 18); other local organizations

Implementation assumption: Collaboration to be enhanced starting in 2025

Impact: More support for all youth, especially 63,000 disconnected youth and 56,000 at-risk youth

durable than policy changes made by a single administration[151]. Impactful cross-sector coalitions at the level of a state, region, or major city are rare, but where they do exist, they have the following things in common: (i) alignment around big goals and methods for measuring progress and holding partners accountable, (ii) alignment around strategies and tactics to achieve those goals, (iii) partnerships involving diverse stakeholders and clear value propositions that keep these partners working together, and (iv) diversified sources of power and resources, so their collective existence isn't dependent upon any one partner. Cross-sector coalitions are impactful when they endure for long periods of time and leverage their power to ensure their goals are prioritized by all, including stakeholders outside of the coalition. For example, in Chicago, a cross-sector coalition of civic, business, faith, community, and philanthropic leaders has worked together for a decade to ensure that local and state public administrations prioritize young people, especially their safety from gun violence[133]. This coalition has helped to ensure that prioritization of young people's needs transcends mayors and governors and has helped to increase public and private funding toward programs that serve young people. This coalition isn't perfect, but it provides an example of what's possible when cross-sector coalitions exist.

A state-level cross-sector coalition does not exist in Connecticut today. While there are many entities in Connecticut involved in youth development, and there are early signs of partnership and coordination across agencies and initiatives, Connecticut must create state-level infrastructure to bring together educational institutions at all levels, workforce development organizations, business and industry leaders, non-profit / social sector leaders, unions, faith and community leaders, philanthropic leaders, and municipal leaders. In doing so, Connecticut must address two initial design questions: whether to organize the cross-sector coalition around the needs of at-risk and disconnected young people between the ages of 14 to 26 or, more broadly, the needs of young people, cradle-to-career; and whether to structure the cross-sector coalition as an organization with operating infrastructure, or as a convening platform with aligned organizations operating at different levels of the system. The Commit Partnership in Dallas[152] offers a great example for what it would look like for structuring the cross-sector coalition as an operating organization modeled on collective impact, whereas the Chicago coalition model offers a good example for a more distributed leadership structure.

Regardless of which option Connecticut pursues, it is essential that the coalition have a clear mission, a credible and well-connected leader, and a defined operating approach for how it will interact and collaborate with diverse partners. The state-level coalition should build on and align with existing collaborations around the state, such as United Way's Campaign for Working Connecticut, the STRIVE Network initiatives, Social Impact Partners, and the Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative, among many others. Ideally, the state-level coalition would:

- Convene organizations on an ongoing basis to align around shared goals and strategies
- Pool philanthropic funds to support proven service providers and sustain effective multi-year programming
- Share data on the status of young people and analyze policy and programmatic implications

- Highlight promising practices and programs around the state that are positively impacting young people

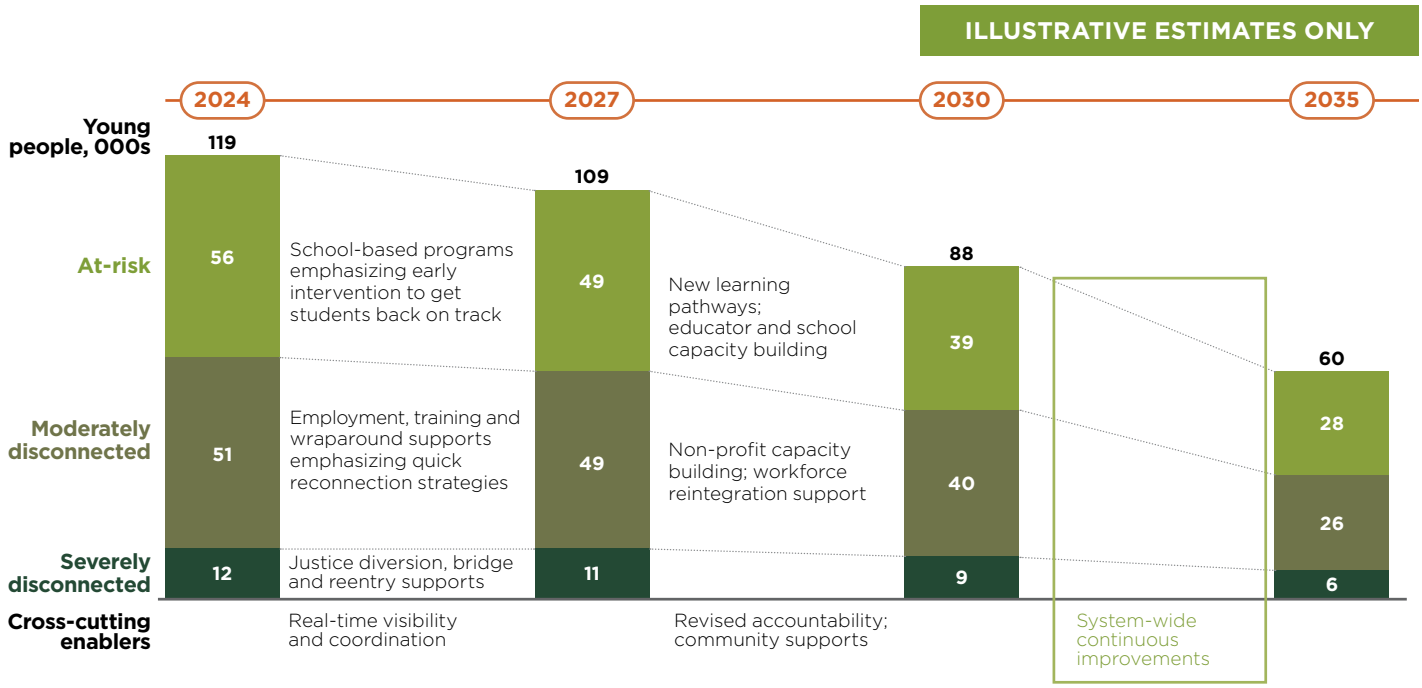
- Collaborate with the Center of Excellence, as envisioned in Aligned Action 18A, to share research findings about the effectiveness of interventions and programs

22B. Support community-based organizing and advocacy efforts:

Community-based organizing and advocacy efforts are critically important in addition to the state-level cross-sector coalition described above. Communities across the state are home to passionate advocates who represent the needs of their communities and help young people in making their voices heard. The Commission heard from many of these advocates, including the CT Black and Brown Student Union. Community leaders, especially youth leaders, deserve greater support. Their role in the collective effort to transform Connecticut's systems in service of young people is essential.

Reaching Our Goals

The Commission has set a goal of reducing the number of at-risk, moderately disconnected, and severely disconnected young people by 50% over the next 10 years.



The Commission estimates the strategy will support approximately 60,000 young people through both preventative and remedial Aligned Actions:

- Approximately 12,600 on-track young people will be prevented from going off-track
- Approximately 33,000 at-risk young people will be brought back on track
- Approximately 7,200 at-risk young people will be prevented from fully disconnecting
- Approximately 8,400 disconnected young people will be reconnected to high-quality education and employment

For example, Aligned Actions aiming to prevent on-track young people from becoming at-risk include improving data-sharing between districts and schools (Action 1), addressing chronic absenteeism (Action 5B), lowering teacher-to-student ratios (Action 12A), pairing students with Success Coaches (Action 12D), expanding dual-enrollment program (Action 13A), and increasing capacity at summer apprenticeship (Action 15B) and recreational hubs (Action 20B). Similarly, Aligned Actions aiming to quickly reconnect disconnected youth include integrated case management (Action 2A), diversionary and restorative

justice programs (Action 6), transitional employment programs (Action 15), employment opportunities at nonprofits (Action 16 and 17), the GEDWorks program (Action 19) and supporting the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness (Action 21).

ILLUSTRATIVE

Preventing an on-track student from becoming at risk

Megan is a **9th grader** who just moved to a new district. She has to **walk 30 minutes to the school bus** and has started missing morning classes. She is also **learning English as a second language**.

Learner Engagement and Attendance Program (LEAP) staff visit Megan's house (Action 5) and talk to her family about safe transportation resources they had not known about.

Megan's **new school** receives educational performance information and previous educator notes from her **old school** and identifies **areas where Megan needs additional learning support (Action 1)**.

Megan enrolls in classes with a **Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) educator (Action 14)** and is assigned a **Success Coach (Action 12)** who checks in on her and helps her apply to extracurricular programs she is eligible for.

Megan is connected to a **recreational hub (Action 20)** served by a bus from her school, where she takes **art lessons with peers and makes friends outside of school**. Over the summer, she participates in a **summer employment program in biosciences (Action 15)**.

Megan signs up for **dual-enrollment classes (Action 13)**, with a plan to study biosciences at the local **community college after graduation**. She has a **strong support network** at her high school and outside of it.

Reconnecting a disconnected young person

Tyler is **17** and **homeless**, moving frequently between shelters and friends. He **left high school** after **multiple suspensions** and has not found steady work. He was recently **arrested** for possessing **illegal substances**.

Juvenile Review Board (Action 6) directs Tyler to nonprofits offering diversionary programs that provide him with **treatment for substance use** and **community service opportunities**.

Tyler's **local Youth Success Oversight Board-designated integrated case management hub (Action 2**) works with **Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness (Action 21)** to find stable housing for Tyler

Tyler participates in a **transitional employment program (Action 15)** where he receives training, wages, and a credential. His employer **connects him to the GEDWorks program (Action 19)** and he completes his GED while working part time.

A **Youth Success Oversight Board-designated hub organization (Action 2)** continuously checks in with Tyler on his needs, including **mental health support, housing options, and permanent employment**.

Tyler finds a **job with a nonprofit serving disconnected young people that pays his rent and living expenses (Action 16/17)**. He receives **mental health support** and **feels well-connected** to his community.

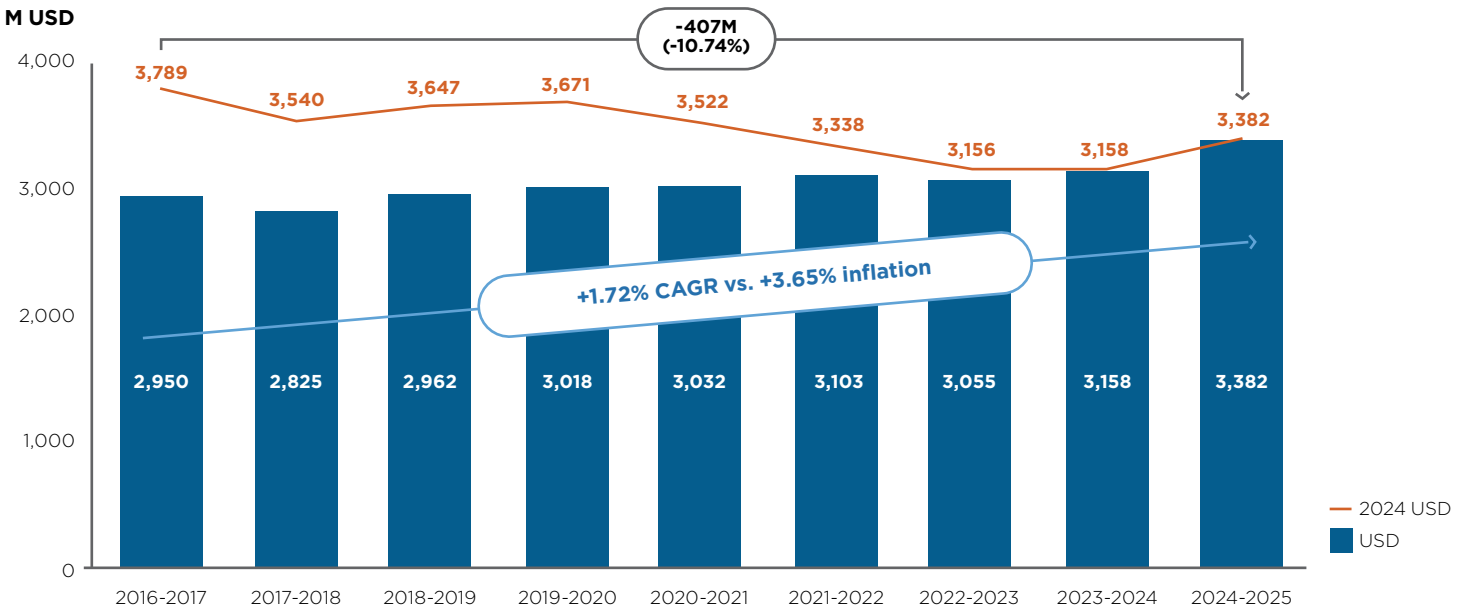
Investing in Supporting Connecticut's Young People

To see this impact, Connecticut must make the necessary investments. Across all Aligned Actions, this report estimates that Connecticut will need to invest ~$150M upfront and ~$410M annually thereafter.

The biggest cost drivers are Aligned Actions 5 (school policy), 12 (increasing school and educator capacity), 15 (employment programs), 16 (Youth Service Corps) and 17 (building nonprofit capacity), which combined account for 80% of the total spend on an annual basis. In addition, the Commission estimates that revisions to the ECS formula resulting from the review outlined in Aligned Action 7 may result in an incremental investment in public education of $500-550M. Connecticut has a constitutional duty to ensure sufficient funding for all Connecticut students to receive free public elementary and secondary education. However, the State has historically only funded a minority of public education expenditures. Moreover, failure to keep up with inflation has resulted in a decline in state K-12 funding in real terms.

State funding to Department of Education decreased by $407M in real terms since 2017

Note: This excludes CTECS, Office of Early Childhood, State Library and Teachers' Retirement Board funding which constitute the rest of state K-12 funding



While stakeholders may have different perspectives on the best way to fund this investment, what is indisputable (and indeed, was echoed consistently among the stakeholders with whom the Commission engaged), is that inaction is not an option.

Doing nothing is not a costless decision – it is the most expensive option of all.

Staying the course means that Connecticut continues to experience 10,000 new disconnections among our young people every year. Not only does this come at a staggering cost for these young people, their loved ones and communities, but these disconnections will cost all Connecticut taxpayers. Each disconnected young person is estimated to cost the state ~$11,000 in lost tax revenue and increased spending on government services[1]. This alone will cost Connecticut an additional >$100M every year – compounding as more young people disconnect and remain disconnected – on top of the current $750M lost annually from the existing 119,000 disconnected and at-risk young people, and the opportunity cost of up to $5.5B per year in GDP uplift, higher employment, and new investment[1].

Furthermore, doing nothing guarantees that Connecticut residents continue to see disproportionate property tax increases as the local share of public education costs continues to climb, with the accompanying inequitable outcomes for young people.

While the Commission is united in its belief that doing nothing to change the status quo is not an option, it is not taking a position about the best ways to avoid these significant human and financial costs and pay for the investments proposed by this plan. Rather, the Commission has laid out several options to consider, with the hope that doing so will advance the public conversation. Ultimately, the Commission encourages State leaders to adopt a portfolio of the below options to meet the investment needs of our young people.

Connecticut can pay for annual cost through three major sources

Reinvesting fiscal impact of strategy

$650 - 750M

Incremental tax revenue

Reduced spending on government and social services

Re-allocation of spending

$500 - 900M

Increased efficiency and consolidation

Phasing out ineffective programs

Reprioritization

New or expanded revenue sources

$300M - $2B

Spending cap carve-out

Investment

Philanthropy

Federal funding

New taxes

Without new action...

$750M - $5.5B
10K disconnections

Human cost of disconnections

Continued property tax burden on towns, worsened inequity

Foregone fiscal impact and GDP uplift

REINVESTING FISCAL IMPACT: (Tax Increase Required: NO)

As mentioned above, prior analysis in the *Connecticut's Unspoken Crisis* report calculated up to $5.5B in GDP uplift and $750M in annual fiscal impact (comprised of added tax revenue and reduced spending on government services) by reconnecting young people who are experiencing disconnection from education and employment. This translates to each disconnected person who gets back on track generating ~$150k-$180k in additional tax revenue and ~$60k in savings in lower spending on government services over their lifetime.

As this strategy yields incremental increases in fiscal performance and GDP growth over time, it will help to pay for itself. Therefore, the Commission believes there is a strong case for Connecticut to pay for this strategy through two mechanisms that raise external investment on the promise of future fiscal returns:

- **State-issued bonds:** While Connecticut typically issues bonds for capital investments, the State Bond Commission should expand access to General Obligation bond-backed funds to programs supporting young people (e.g., grants from Urban Act[153] or Community Investment Fund[154] bonds). Connecticut should also consider the creation of new bond programs to pay for key investments proposed by this strategy, in the mold of the Community Investment Fund. Additionally, the Commission could extend tax-exempt bonding authority to other institutions. For example, Iowa and Missouri extended tax-exempt bonding authority to community colleges to finance workforce development initiatives[155].

This strategy would lock in longer-term funding and commitment to the project but requires the state to identify an entity or organization to issue bonds and manage funds.

- **Outcomes-based financing:** Connecticut could raise funds from investors tied to youth reconnection outcomes, either through impact metrics, in the case of social impact bonds (SIBs), or through future payroll tax revenue, in the case of tax increment financing (TIF). This approach is envisioned, for example, to help pay for Aligned Action 11. Moreover, the city of Portland in Maine has used TIF to finance workforce training programs including in clean energy, commercial driving, and English language instruction[156]; while New York City and Massachusetts have used SIBs to reduce juvenile recidivism and address chronic homelessness[157]. While both TIF and SIBs provide higher municipal control and flexibility for the state to use funds directly, the variable repayment structures introduce higher risk for both the state and investors compared to state-issued bonds, require careful structuring of terms, and may require new entities and/or capacity to administer.

REALLOCATING EXISTING SPENDING: (Tax Increase Required: NO)

Connecticut can reallocate existing spending by (a) phasing out programs that are no longer driving intended results (e.g., the Commissioner's Network as described in Aligned Action 4C), (b) shifting funds from lower-priority topics toward investments in young people, and (c) realizing savings through more efficient operations across government (e.g., as envisioned in Aligned Actions 2D and 9). For example, a 2021 report from the Office of the Governor of Connecticut identified opportunities for $600M-900M+ worth of savings from improving efficiency[158]. These reallocations can yield sufficient financing to pay for the whole strategy, but require difficult trade-offs with other public interests.

NEW OR EXPANDED REVENUES: (Tax Increase Required: OPTIONAL)

Education carveout from the state spending cap: Connecticut can explore exempting education expenditures from the spending cap, which is a fiscal control restricting general budget expenditures based on a formula involving income growth and inflation. Including education spending as part of the spending cap only serves to guarantee the State continues to reduce its proportion of education spending while forcing continued property tax increases at the local level. Exempting education spending would allow the State to utilize existing surpluses to pay for a portion of the needed increases in education funding.

Philanthropy: Existing foundations and individual donors will continue to play an important role in providing funding

for many of the programs that serve Connecticut's highest need young people. At the same time, Connecticut must explore ways to encourage additional donors to enter the market. For example, Connecticut has a significant number of individuals and families with $10M+ in disposable assets, many of whom have not yet pursued a coordinated philanthropic strategy (e.g., via a family foundation). To supplement existing philanthropic dollars and to incentivize this population to donate in a way that supports the urgent need outlined in this strategy, the State could offer tax credits to individuals who donate funds towards selected programs supporting young people. As envisioned, only individuals who have yet to establish foundations and who have assets in the tens (not hundreds) of millions of dollars would be eligible for these tax credits.

This could provide a meaningful multiple on state investment. Furthermore, making key investments in public education, data infrastructure, and workforce will better position Connecticut for philanthropic grants, especially from national foundations. For example, launching the Connecticut Youth Service Corps as envisioned in Aligned Action 16 may attract new national philanthropy to Connecticut.

Federal funding: As outlined in Aligned Actions 8 and 10, there are significant pools of federal funding that can support this strategy, including IDEA, Medicaid, Child Tax Credits (CTC), WIOA, SNAP, and CCAMPIS, among others. Full funding of IDEA would yield an additional ~$195M annually for supporting Connecticut's children with disabilities[99], while a Medicaid Section 1115 waiver could yield a similarly

substantial amount (a New Jersey waiver including behavioral health, community supports, and substance use disorder treatments for targeted low-income children made available ~$4B in estimated savings for Medicaid expenditures annually, though only a portion of that would be able to be utilized to fund actions in this strategy[159]). If the federal government passed a Child Tax Credit (CTC), such as the one introduced by Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro, Connecticut would receive substantial federal funding to reduce child poverty. United Way analysis estimated that a $600 fully refundable state CTC would result in ~$306M to Connecticut families every year[160] – an expanded federal CTC could yield two to five times that amount (for reference, Connecticut received $858M in CTC payments from July-December 2021 alone under the previously expanded CTC[161]). Investing in public education, data infrastructure, and workforce will also better position Connecticut for federal investments. For example, expansion of the Connecticut Youth Service Corps (Aligned Action 16) has the potential to leverage incremental AmeriCorps funding, and modernization of the State's P20 WIN data infrastructure (Aligned Action 1) has the potential to make Connecticut eligible for additional federal grant dollars.

Tax increases: Connecticut can explore a variety of new taxes, including taxes on income, wealth, property, or "sin taxes". This would provide a relatively stable and predictable income source, though there is a wide variance in projected revenue based on the specific taxes implemented. A potential model to emulate is the Massachusetts "Millionaire's Tax", which taxed incomes above $1M by an additional four percentage points, earmarked for education and transportation initiatives, and raised $1.8B in the first nine months of 2024[162].

Appendix

Estimated impact of illustrative revised ECS formula on individual CT towns

Current and proposed estimated state funding to towns under ECS for FY2026:

Town	Current ($K)	New ($K)	Change ($K)
Andover	1,585	1,930	+344
Ansonia	21,004	25,732	+4,729
Ashford	2,582	3,196	+615
Avon	1,038	1,206	+169
Barkhamsted	1,345	1,636	+291
Beacon Falls	4,116	4,848	+732
Berlin	6,288	7,503	+1,214
Bethany	1,094	1,289	+196
Bethel	9,022	10,860	+1,838
Bethlehem	1,150	1,381	+232
Bloomfield	8,652	10,561	+1,908
Bolton	2,195	2,569	+374
Bozrah	756	885	+129
Branford	4,018	4,790	+772
Bridgeport	208,835	264,653	+55,817
Bridgewater	176	180	+4

1. All assume fully funded with holding harmless overfunded towns. 2. Special Education students in Regional School Districts were apportioned into the towns that they are comprised of. Source: School + State Finance estimates, BCG analysis

ILLUSTRATIVE ESTIMATES ONLY

Town	Current ($K)	New ($K)	Change ($K)
Bristol	56,214	69,737	+13,522
Brookfield	1,270	1,507	+237
Brooklyn	6,760	8,045	+1,285
Burlington	4,559	5,001	+442
Canaan	23	26	+3
Canterbury	2,943	3,452	+509
Canton	4,267	5,094	+827
Chaplin	1,217	1,453	+236
Cheshire	7,963	9,396	+1,434
Chester	951	1,126	+176
Clinton	3,310	4,000	+690
Colchester	8,877	10,736	+1,859
Colebrook	162	200	+38
Columbia	1,889	2,189	+300
Cornwall	31	35	+3
Coventry	7,085	8,410	+1,325

1. All assume fully funded with holding harmless overfunded towns. 2. Special Education students in Regional School Districts were apportioned into the towns that they are comprised of. Source: School + State Finance estimates, BCG analysis

Town	Current ($K)	New ($K)	Change ($K)
Cromwell	5,793	6,848	+1,055
Danbury	58,990	72,302	+13,313
Darien	539	646	+108
Deep River	1,680	1,991	+311
Derby	11,225	13,893	+2,667
Durham	3,358	3,777	+419
Eastford	650	761	+111
East Granby	1,536	1,798	+262
East Haddam	3,098	3,673	+575
East Hampton	6,612	7,909	+1,297
East Hartford	70,654	87,516	+16,862
East Haven	20,105	24,610	+4,505
East Lyme	4,718	5,744	+1,026
Easton	315	343	+28
East Windsor	5,669	6,123	+453
Ellington	9,939	11,851	+1,912
Enfield	29,824	35,622	+5,798
Essex	246	262	+16
Fairfield	1,136	1,366	+230
Farmington	2,151	2,532	+380
Franklin	514	587	+73
Glastonbury	5,406	6,308	+902
Goshen	419	426	+7

1. All assume fully funded with holding harmless overfunded towns. 2. Special Education students in Regional School Districts were apportioned into the towns that they are comprised of. Source: School + State Finance estimates, BCG analysis

Town	Current ($K)	New ($K)	Change ($K)
Granby	4,932	5,828	+896
Greenwich	1,031	1,227	+196
Griswold	10,904	13,533	+2,629
Groton	25,040	26,643	+1,603
Guilford	377	444	+67
Haddam	3,789	4,213	+423
Hamden	43,086	52,435	+9,350
Hampton	474	588	+114
Hartford	230,388	289,839	+59,451
Hartland	494	576	+81
Harwinton	2,471	2,837	+367
Hebron	4,249	4,907	+658
Kent	41	47	+6
Killingly	15,574	16,952	+1,378
Killingworth	2,216	2,489	+273
Lebanon	2,876	3,527	+650
Ledyard	12,347	15,006	+2,658
Lisbon	2,320	2,781	+461
Litchfield	913	1,101	+188
Lyme	320	329	+9
Madison	285	335	+50
Manchester	48,764	59,324	+10,560
Mansfield	13,630	16,096	+2,466

1. All assume fully funded with holding harmless overfunded towns. 2. Special Education students in Regional School Districts were apportioned into the towns that they are comprised of. Source: School + State Finance estimates, BCG analysis

Town	Current ($K)	New ($K)	Change ($K)
Marlborough	2,794	3,231	+438
Meriden	85,289	107,311	+22,021
Middlebury	2,746	3,036	+291
Middlefield	2,209	2,652	+442
Middletown	26,593	32,296	+5,702
Milford	9,226	11,126	+1,900
Monroe	4,423	5,234	+810
Montville	12,757	15,625	+2,869
Morris	294	300	+6
Naugatuck	34,338	42,206	+7,869
New Britain	122,517	153,779	+31,262
New Canaan	480	556	+76
New Fairfield	1,083	1,301	+218
New Hartford	2,922	3,437	+515
New Haven	172,266	215,004	+42,738
Newington	17,805	21,400	+3,596
New London	31,310	39,575	+8,265
New Milford	11,776	14,222	+2,445
Newtown	2,420	2,857	+437
Norfolk	64	70	+6
North Branford	5,679	6,747	+1,068
North Canaan	1,659	1,971	+312
North Haven	4,565	5,417	+852

1. All assume fully funded with holding harmless overfunded towns. 2. Special Education students in Regional School Districts were apportioned into the towns that they are comprised of. Source: School + State Finance estimates, BCG analysis

Town	Current ($K)	New ($K)	Change ($K)
North Stonington	2,135	2,518	+383
Norwalk	16,444	20,116	+3,672
Norwich	49,608	60,953	+11,345
Old Lyme	1,497	1,516	+19
Old Saybrook	131	157	+25
Orange	898	941	+43
Oxford	2,193	2,593	+399
Plainfield	15,364	16,453	+1,088
Plainville	12,807	15,364	+2,557
Plymouth	9,637	11,944	+2,307
Pomfret	2,227	2,561	+334
Portland	4,940	6,034	+1,094
Preston	2,220	2,590	+370
Prospect	6,204	6,971	+767
Putnam	8,340	8,992	+652
Redding	289	316	+26
Ridgefield	529	629	+100
Rocky Hill	8,469	10,046	+1,577
Roxbury	239	244	+5
Salem	1,949	2,289	+340
Salisbury	69	77	+8
Scotland	850	1,064	+214
Seymour	12,260	14,852	+2,593

1. All assume fully funded with holding harmless overfunded towns. 2. Special Education students in Regional School Districts were apportioned into the towns that they are comprised of. Source: School + State Finance estimates, BCG analysis

Town	Current ($K)	New ($K)	Change ($K)
Sharon	27	31	+4
Shelton	9,592	11,551	+1,959
Sherman	42	48	+6
Simsbury	7,683	9,174	+1,491
Somers	5,094	6,003	+909
Southbury	7,633	8,428	+795
Southington	21,014	25,162	+4,148
South Windsor	8,552	10,061	+1,509
Sprague	2,611	3,124	+514
Stafford	7,865	9,600	+1,735
Stamford	22,036	26,983	+4,948
Sterling	2,307	2,748	+441
Stonington	224	266	+42
Stratford	32,661	39,807	+7,146
Suffield	5,980	7,097	+1,117
Thomaston	4,873	5,777	+904
Thompson	7,535	7,988	+453
Tolland	7,557	8,965	+1,409
Torrington	35,855	44,275	+8,419
Trumbull	4,259	5,049	+790
Union	155	180	+25
Vernon	24,342	29,802	+5,460
Voluntown	1,312	1,547	+235

1. All assume fully funded with holding harmless overfunded towns. 2. Special Education students in Regional School Districts were apportioned into the towns that they are comprised of. Source: School + State Finance estimates, BCG analysis

Town	Current ($K)	New ($K)	Change ($K)
Wallingford	21,455	26,097	+4,642
Warren	172	177	+5
Washington	360	366	+6
Waterbury	204,581	257,257	+52,677
Waterford	318	382	+64
Watertown	13,012	15,669	+2,658
Westbrook	79	95	+16
West Hartford	26,661	32,097	+5,436
West Haven	58,528	71,956	+13,428
Weston	247	289	+43
Westport	617	719	+102
Wethersfield	15,816	18,863	+3,047
Willington	3,116	3,822	+706
Wilton	442	525	+83
Winchester	8,025	8,532	+507
Windham	35,341	44,719	+9,379
Windsor	12,130	13,065	+935
Windsor Locks	5,225	5,817	+592
Wolcott	11,165	13,391	+2,227
Woodbridge	625	658	+33
Woodbury	3,292	3,680	+389
Woodstock	4,328	4,993	+666

1. All assume fully funded with holding harmless overfunded towns. 2. Special Education students in Regional School Districts were apportioned into the towns that they are comprised of. Source: School + State Finance estimates, BCG analysis

Glossary of terms

Alliance Districts
Connecticut districts designated as the lowest-performing school districts in the state. Districts receive state funding and support to implement educational reforms aimed at improving student outcomes, addressing disparities, and closing achievement gaps, with a focus on enhancing opportunities for students in underserved communities

Attendance Review Board (ARB)
School-based boards tasked with addressing chronic absenteeism by reviewing cases of students with attendance issues and developing intervention plans to improve their attendance

At-risk and disconnected young people
Combined population of 14- to 26-year-olds who are either at risk of not graduating high school on time (four years) or experiencing disconnection through limited educational attainment and low to no labor force participation. For readability, this report describes the subgroups within this population as "at-risk young people" and "disconnected young people," but it is critical to note that these terms signify temporary conditions that are experienced and can be overcome. They are not intended to be read as descriptors of these individuals or any who may share in their lived experience.

At-risk
Population of high school students who are at heightened risk of not graduating; combines students who are off-track, severely off-track, and at-risk due to other factors

> **Off-track**
> Students not on track to graduate due to low credit attainment (as defined by the Connecticut State Department of Education)
>
> **Severely off-track**
> Students off-track due to low credit attainment and displaying additional risk factors of absenteeism and/or behavioral incidents (suspensions and expulsions)
>
> **At-risk due to other factors**
> Students on-track with credit attainment, but displaying concerning trends in attendance and/or behavioral incidents

BIPOC
Individuals and populations identifying as black, indigenous, and/or person of color

Carnegie Unit
A traditional measure of student progress based on the amount of time spent in class (typically 120 hours per course), as opposed to competency-based measures which focus on skills mastery

Competency-based education (CBE)
An educational approach that focuses on students mastering competencies and skills rather than traditional time-based measures like credit hours[163]

Commissioner's Network
The Commissioner's Network established by the Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) Section 10-223h (2016) as a commitment between local stakeholders and the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) to dramatically improve student achievement in 25 low performing schools.

Community-based organizations (CBOs)
Local organizations that deliver services directly to relevant populations through case-management, outreach, and wraparound support

Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS)
Federal grant program providing funding to educational institutions to support childcare for students who are parents[164]

Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness (CCEH) A coalition of shelter providers, traditional housing providers, community outreach organizations, and private partners addressing homelessness[165]

Credit Attainment
Student's cumulative credit attainment compared with what they need to graduate, as defined by the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) graduation requirements (e.g., for years that CSDE required 20 credits to graduate high school, on-track 9th graders attained at least 5 credits, 10th graders attained at least 10 credits, etc.)

Court Support Services Division (CSSD)
Oversees pretrial services, family services, probation supervision, and secure juvenile residence centers while administering a network of CBOs that deliver treatment and support services for justice-involved youth and adults[166]

CT CAN
CT CAN End Homelessness. An initiative launched by the CCEH in 2023 providing a legislative agenda to stabilize and strengthen Connecticut's homeless response system by investing in emergency response funds, shelters, and resource allocation organizations[167]

CT Pathways
A program providing employment training and support for individuals eligible for federal SNAP benefits[155]

Connecticut Technical Education and Career System (CTECS)
State organization providing workforce development programs and career education resources serving 11,200 high school students in 31 technical programs[168]

Disconnected
Combined population of 14- to 26-year-olds who are experiencing either moderate or severe disconnection, defined as:

> **Moderately disconnected**
> Includes high school diploma holders, both traditional graduates and those who have attained an adult education diploma/ equivalent (e.g., GED), who are neither employed nor enrolled in postsecondary education, as well as high school non-graduates who are employed
>
> **Severely disconnected**
> Includes individuals neither employed nor holding a high school diploma, as well as incarcerated individuals

EdSight
Connecticut's data system for education that provides a comprehensive database of school and district performance and student outcomes[8]

Education Cost Sharing (ECS)
Connecticut's primary funding mechanism for funding public schools through grants assigned to districts[169]

Excess Cost Grant
State reimbursement program that helps school districts cover education costs for students with disabilities that exceed a certain percentage of their budget

Gainful employment
Employment that provides progressive advancement in earned wages, skill development, and position within the organization; all enabling economic self-sufficiency

General Educational Development (GED)
A high school equivalency diploma

High-poverty school
A school where more than 75% of students are eligible for a free/reduced-price lunch

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
A federal law providing funding for education services for students with disabilities[170]

Juvenile Review Boards (JRBs)
Diversionary program for youth under 18 who have been involved in minor criminal offenses, providing alternatives to court involvement and restorative justice recommendations

Justice-involved
The population of young people who have ever been arrested and/or incarcerated

Justice system
Includes both the juvenile justice system (serving youth under the age of 18) and the criminal justice system (serving young adults and adults 18 and older)

K-12
Refers to the entire public education system from kindergarten through 12th grade, as well as any students outside the associated age profile that participate in the system

Leadership, Education, and Athletics in Partnership (LEAP)
A New Haven based program that hires young adults as mentors to work with younger students during the summer[171]

Learner Attendance and Engagement Program (LEAP)
A relational home visit model and a targeted (Tier II) student intervention that serves as part of a comprehensive system of support for families whose students are struggling with consistent attendance[172]

Office of Policy and Management (OPM)
Connecticut's chief planning and budgeting agency, responsible for overseeing the development and allocation of the state budget and long-term fiscal planning[173]

Opportunity gaps
Disparities in access to resources, support, and opportunities that allow individuals to succeed, often based on factors like race, socioeconomic status, or geography

OSS and ISS
Out-of-school suspensions, in-school suspensions

Office of Youth Success (OYS)
Proposed state-level office to coordinate resources, funding, and data to support at-risk and disconnected youth across Connecticut

Preschool through Twenty and Workforce Information Network (P20 WIN)
The CT data system used for integrating longitudinal data from multiple state agencies across educational stages and workforce outcomes

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)
Framework used in schools to promote positive behavior, improve school climate, and reduce disciplinary issues by focusing on teaching and reinforcing appropriate behaviors, while providing interventions and supports for struggling students[174]

Public-private partnerships (PPP)
Collaborative agreements between government entities and private sector companies to jointly deliver public services

Preventative and recuperative strategies
Approaches in education and youth development that focus on both preventing challenges before they occur by providing early support and development resources (preventative) and helping individuals recover from setbacks through interventions, mentoring, and assistance after difficulties have arisen (recuperative)

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
A mental health condition that can develop after an individual experiences or witnesses a traumatic event. These events can include, but are not limited to, natural disasters, serious accidents, war, domestic violence, or any other situation that causes intense fear or helplessness.

SDE
Connecticut State Department of Education

Social Impact Bonds (SIBs)
A form of outcomes-based financing that funds social programs by paying back investors based on a set of predetermined social outcomes

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
Federal assistance program providing food benefits to low-income individuals and families[175]

Social Emotional Learning (SEL)
Programs that teach students how to recognize and manage their emotions, build healthy relationships, and make responsible decisions, improving both academic and personal outcomes

Social return on investment
A framework for measuring the broader social, environmental, and economic value generated by an initiative, project, or organization beyond financial returns. It evaluates the positive impact on communities, individuals, and society by quantifying benefits like improved well-being, social equity, or environmental sustainability relative to the investment made

StriveTogether
National network of collective impact organizations working at the community level to improve equity and transform failing systems. In Connecticut, member networks include Norwalk ACTS, Bridgeport Prospers, Stamford Cradle to Career, and Waterbury Bridge to Success Community Partnership[176]

Student behavioral incidents
Includes in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, and expulsions (does not include detention or other minor incidents)

Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)
Certification for educators to provide ESL classes and teach multilingual learners

Transiency
The frequent movement of students between schools or districts. A student is considered transient if they have changed schools two or more times.

Transitional Employment Programs (TEPs)
Programs designed to help youth gain employment by offering work opportunities and wraparound support services

Tax Increment Financing (TIF)
Bonds issued by the State backed by portion of future tax revenues (typically property or payroll)

Workforce Development Boards (WDBs)
Regional organizations partially funded by the WIOA that fund workforce development initiatives

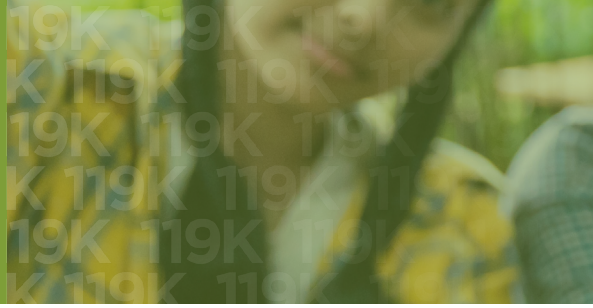
Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)
Federal law that provides funding for workforce development programs. Distributed at the state level to workforce development boards

Youth Employment Program (YEP)
State program that provides summer employment opportunities for low-income youth

Youth / young person / young people / young adult
Population aged 14–26, which covers the continuum across school-aged youth and young adults

Youth Service Bureaus (YSBs)
Local organizations responsible for coordinating services for at-risk and disconnected youth in Connecticut, primarily through managing diversionary programs and providing case management services

Acknowledgments



Hundreds of stakeholders were involved in the development of the 119k Commission strategy and report. We would like to thank and acknowledge the many panelists, Connecticut stakeholders and experts, roundtable and local forum participants, external experts and researchers, and CCM Board members that were engaged as part of this process. Your input and expertise were critical in shaping the Commission's understanding of the current landscape and opportunities to reconnect Connecticut youth.

Panelists

Lisa Tepper Bates (United Way of Connecticut), LaShante James (Brien McMahon High School, Norwalk), Erika Nowakowski (Tow Youth Justice Institute), Bill Carbone (Tow Youth Justice Institute), Danielle Cooper (Tow Youth Justice Institute), Vanessa Liles (PT Partners), Jackie Santiago (COMPASS Youth Collaborative), Angel Cotto (Youth Action Hub), Stacey Violente Cote (Center for Children's Advocacy), Michele Conderino (Open Doors), Lucy Freeman (Inspirica), Sarah Eagan (Office of the Child Advocate), Sharmese Walcott (Hartford Judicial District), Thea Montanez (Office of the Governor), Joseph McNeil (City of Stratford), Kevin Glenn (City of New Haven), Ronnell Higgins (CT Dept. Emergency Serv.), Emily Pallin (RISE Network), Mary Yordon (Norwalk Federation of Teachers), David Bosso (Berlin High School Educator), Michael Hyman (Domus Kids), Leonard Lockhart (CABE), Kate Dias (CEA), Alexandra Estrella (Norwalk Public Schools), Melane Thomas (Meriden Public Schools), John Maduko (CT State Community College), Edgardo Figueroa (East Hartford Public Schools), Girard Dawes (Our Piece of the Pie), Ajit Gopalakrishnan (CSDE), Chris DiPentima (CBIA), Paul Mounds, Jr. (Yale New Haven Health), Steve Sigel (Garde Arts Center), Joe Carbone (The WorkPlace), Michael Nogeloe (Eastern CT Workforce Investment Board), Shannon Marimon (Ready CT), Paul Lavoie (CT Office of Manufacturing)

Connecticut stakeholders and experts

Lisa Hammersley (School and State Finance), Adhlere Coffy (Dalio Education), Maryanne Butler (Stonington Schools), Allison Van Etten (Stonington Schools), Catherine Osten (Connecticut State Senate), Michelle Zabel (University of Connecticut), Sarah Fox (Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness), Ryan Beach (Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness), Ben Barnes (City of Stamford), Jeff Currey (Connecticut House of Representatives), Jake Edwards (Social Finance), Chris Davis (CBIA), Vincent Candelora (Connecticut House of Representatives), Lisa Tepper Bates (United Way Connecticut), Tanya Barrett (United Way Connecticut), Amy Casavina Hall (United Way Connecticut), Daniel Fitzmaurice (United Way Connecticut), Anthony Barrett (CT Office of Workforce Strategy), Sandy Mackie (Capital Workforce Program), Jim Boucher (Capital Workforce Program), Connecticut Community Non-Profit Alliance, Connecticut Police Chiefs Association

Expert testimony and interviews

Additional experts outside of Connecticut were engaged to deliver targeted expertise and testimony, which helped the Commission draw on national expertise on best practices for serving at-risk and disconnected youth. The Commission appreciates the time and insight from Brandi Gilbert, Danielle Gilmore, and Carlos Anguiano (Community Science); Roseanna Ander and Kim Smith (Chicago Crime Lab); Robyn Ince (Rutgers Policy Lab); Dar'tavous Dorsey (Chicago Back to Our Future); Le'Yondo Dunn (YouthBuild Philly); Tamar Mendelson (Johns Hopkins Center for Adolescent Health); Mary Collins (Boston University); and Liliana Belkin (New York University)

Roundtables and local forums

A critical input into the strategy development process has been direct engagement with young people, going to them, in their communities, to learn about their experiences, challenges, dreams, and perspectives. Since April, the Commission has spoken with approx. 225 youth currently enrolled in high school, alternative school, residential centers, and those who are 18+ and looking for work. The Commission thanks the participants from the youth roundtables in Waterbury, Stamford, Stratford, Bridgeport, Hartford, Torrington, and New London.

Several towns hosted their own local forums to discuss challenges and opportunities with at-risk and disconnected youth in their communities. The Commission acknowledges the local forum participants and leaders in Stonington, Torrington, Canterbury, North Haven, and Norwich

Online testimony

The Commission acknowledges the over 55 pieces of online testimony submitted through the 119k website and thanks the individuals and organizations who took the time to share their perspectives and recommendations

CCM Board Members

While many of the CCM Board members were on the 119k Commission, several other Board members played an active role in shaping the strategy development and report process, including Jason Bowsza (East Windsor), Jeff Caggiano (Bristol), Mary Calorio (Killingly), Fred Camillo (Greenwich), Paula Cofrancesco (Bethany), Carl Fortuna (Old Saybrook), Joe Ganim (Bridgeport), Matthew Hoey (Guilford), Rudolph Marconi (Ridgefield), Matthew Knickerbocker (Wilton), Kurt Miller (Seymour), Edmond Mone (Thomaston), Maureen Nicholson (Pomfret), Brandon Robertson (Avon), Gerard Smith (Beacon Falls), John Salomone (Norwich), Lori Spielman (Ellington), Mark Walter (Columbia)

Endnotes

1 2023 Dalio Education Report: An Unspoken Crisis

2 Explore Children in Poverty in Connecticut | AHR

3 Data about Hartford Children and Youth in Poverty - CTData

4 Children Living in Poverty | County Health Rankings and Roadmaps

5 Homeless Dashboard - CT.gov

6 The State of Youth Mental Health in Connecticut

7 Acknowledging Childhood Trauma In Connecticut - Bridge to Success

8 EdSight Data

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10 Understanding the Challenges Young People Face in Navigating the Safety Net - Urban Institute

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13 The austere US safety net for poor, non-elderly adults who are not raising children and do not receive disability benefits - Brookings

14 A Steady Habit of Segregation - Poverty and Race Research Action Council

15 Connecticut Zoning and Discrimination 2021 Report

16 CT passes K-12 education bills aimed at improving teaching environment - CT mirror

17 Colorado State Department of Education State Longitudinal Data System

18 Kentucky Center for Statistics (KYSTATS)

19 Rhode Island Talent Dashboard

20 NYC Pre-KIDS (Pre-K Integrated Data System)

21 Research indicates that integrated case management models improve service delivery and outcomes. For example, the Los Angeles County Reentry Intensive Case Management Services (RICMS) program reduced recidivism by 17% compared to other programs by offering extensive wraparound services, such as job placement, mental health support, and housing assistance.

22 Maryland Governor's Office of Children

23 New Jersey Youth Disconnection Prevention and Recovery Ombudsperson

24 Note that each individual need is counted as a distinct service request, i.e., an individual calling for help with food, housing, and workforce would be counted as three service requests.

25 United Way

26 April 2024 Commission meeting on homelessness and housing insecurity (Mansfield, CT)

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28 Youth Roundtable

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35 Alternative Schooling, National Dropout Prevent Center

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39 How State Policy Shapes Competency-Based-Education in K-12 Public Schools - Learning First

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41 CT school performance, attendance scores slow to recover - CT Mirror

42 Town Hall testimony

43 Online testimony submitted by the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education; Online testimony submitted by Stonington Public Schools.

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45 EVALUATING THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF CHOICE PROGRAMS IN CONNECTICUT: A Pretest-Posttest Evaluation Using Matched Multiple Quasi-Control Comparison Groups - Connecticut State Department of Education

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62 3 Reasons Why More Students Are in Special Education - Education Week

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65 Teens are losing interest in school, and say they hear about college 'a lot' - NPR

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177 Connecticut received $2.8B in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding that must be expended by December 31,2026, ~19% of which was channeled to the Department of Education, the Department of Children and Family, The Department of Economic and Community Development, and the Office of Workforce Strategy – four key entities supporting at-risk and disconnected young people. These funds have helped support several important initiatives, including free meals, summer camp scholarships, magnet schools, transitional housing, and workforce development, among others, representing $87M in incremental annual funding in Connecticut. A subset of these line items, representing $15M in annual funding, directly relate to actions outlined in this report (Actions 5, 6, 7, 13, 20 and 21). Given these funds will no longer be available after 2026, alternative funding sources will be needed to maintain current programming.

Notes


119K

YOUNG PEOPLE FIRST

Thank **You**

Connecticut Conference of Municipalities