

Essential Considerations for the *Young People First* Report

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) applauds the work of the 119K Commission and the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM) to engage with a broad range of stakeholders since the issuance of the original Dalio Foundation report in October 2023. The CSDE is offering essential considerations for key education stakeholders as many of the report's recommended actions have been completed or are well underway. Through these considerations, the CSDE is also highlighting critical initiatives that were not addressed but are essential to ensuring positive outcomes for Connecticut youth. The CSDE looks forward to joining other state agencies in working collaboratively with the 119K Commission and CCM to achieve our shared goals.

Who are the 119K?

56K of the 119K (or 47%) are in school and labeled as at-risk and disengaged.

More than 3 out of 4 of the 56K students (75%) actually graduate high school.

63K of the 119K (or 53%) are out of school and labeled as disconnected.

Of the 63K, 8K are employed, another 8K have college degrees, and another 20K are not in the labor force.

Report Recommendation	Essential Considerations
#1 Improve visibility of the number and nature of at-risk and disconnected youth and strengthen accountability at state, regional, and local levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recommendation 1D states that “...districts experience challenges when students transfer between districts and schools because data-sharing between districts and schools is often very limited, cumbersome, and slow.” The CSDE’s EdSight Secure platform, which is accessed by over 4,200 educators across schools and districts statewide, transfers all historical, state administrative student data overnight when a student transfers from one district to another. Regardless of the number of prior transfers, the new district receives information from all prior districts that the student has attended. With the implementation of CT-SEDS, Connecticut’s statewide special education data system, complete special education records also transfer overnight from one district to another when a student moves districts. Recommendation 1D also states that “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.” For the past five years, the CSDE has developed, implemented, and made available to authorized users in all districts through EdSight Secure, an early warning system called the Early Indication Tool. This sophisticated model identifies students in Grades 1-12 who need varying levels of support (i.e., Low, Medium, or High) to reach their academic milestones. The model uses attendance, behavior, test scores, mobility, course grades, etc. to identify the levels of support. Recommendation 1C calls on the state to “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.” The challenge to data sharing is not only technical but also legal. Different agencies are governed by different federal laws, e.g., FERPA, HIPAA, Child Nutrition, Judicial, etc. For any transactional data exchanges to occur for case management purposes, the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) will need to advise if such use is permissible, and if so, to craft the governance framework for a system. The OAG was instrumental in the establishment of Connecticut’s P20WIN system. Additionally, the Connecticut State Data Plan serves as a framework for the state’s executive branch agencies to engage in a consistent approach to data stewardship, use, and access.

 Completed
  In Progress
  For Consideration






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#4 Strengthen public education accountability structures and approach to improve student outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Recommendation 4A notes, “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.” Numerous studies and reports show the opposite: Assessing Measures of College-and-Career Readiness in High School; Chronic Absence Patterns and Prediction During Covid-19; On-Track Indicator as a Predictor of High School Graduation; Postsecondary Labor and Earnings (ct.gov); Early Indication Tool Rationale, Methods And Results; Encouraging Participation in Rigorous Courses▲ Recommendation 4A states that “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).” Connecticut’s holistic, multi-factor accountability system was one of the earliest models in the country for such a comprehensive approach to presenting school and district performance. Over the years, the CSDE has sought and incorporated stakeholder feedback to continuously improve the accountability system. The system already includes actual postsecondary entrance as an indicator, not just “postsecondary plans” which may or may not materialize. Direct entry into self-sustaining employment is under consideration, along with potential reweighting of indicators as part of the High School Grading Practice and Accountability Index Working Group of which the CSDE is a member.● Recommendation 4A states that, “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.” Not every indicator needs to be in the formal accountability system to hold the system “accountable” for those outcomes. The EdSight portal already includes staffing capacity reports that present full-time equivalents for student support services such as social workers, school counselors, paraeducators, and school nurses at the state, district, and school levels. The Mental Health Staff Ratios (ct.gov) dashboard presents the ratio of students to mental health workers for roles including certified school counselor, certified school psychologist, certified social worker, and school nurse; additional roles will be added including trauma specialist, behavior technician, board certified behavior analyst, and marriage and family therapist. The Postsecondary Outcomes dashboard on EdSight publicly reports on the longitudinal postsecondary outcomes of high school graduates; it goes beyond postsecondary entrance, to also report freshman-to-sophomore persistence, and four- and six-year graduation from a postsecondary institution for several graduating classes. The EdSight portal also offers a postsecondary labor and earnings dashboard which shows the average earnings for high school graduates over a 15-year period, starting with the class of 2007. These dashboards allow the data to be disaggregated by district and student group. CSDE holds schools and districts accountable for their actions through many other means, e.g., a four-tier system for student discipline identifies districts with high rates of suspension or high disproportionality; a comprehensive special education accountability system; and; an educator diversity dashboard and planning requirement to increase educators of color in schools; an educator preparation dashboard that holds educator preparation providers (EPPs) accountable for enrollment and outcomes; etc.■ Recommendation 4A calls for addition of indicators that evaluate “whether students are graduating with a postsecondary plan” that includes the military. The report however makes no mention of the challenges for states in procuring data from the Department of Defense on the military pursuits of high school graduates. The CSDE has long fought for access to these data and is most appreciative of Senator Chris Murphy for co-sponsoring the <i>Military and Educational Data Integration Act</i> this past June which would give states access to these data. Instead of simply mandating accountability metrics in a vacuum, we encourage CCM to advocate for this legislation which will enable the measurement of broader outcomes.▲ Recommendation 4B indicates the following: “Reimagine Alliance districts to maintain funding while improving support for districts with highest needs.” It must be noted that Section 2 of Public Act 23-208, charges the Commissioner of Education with developing a report of the effectiveness of the alliance district program, described in section 10-262u of the general statutes and making recommendations for reforming such program. This report will be submitted to the legislature by January 1, 2026.

● Completed ▲ In Progress ■ For Consideration



Report Recommendation	Essential Considerations
#5 Reform school policies to be more supportive of the needs of youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Recommendation 5A notes that <i>“Over the years, Connecticut’s graduation requirements have become more rigid and prescriptive.... 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.”</i> It is important to note that Connecticut’s high school graduation requirements are actually among the least prescriptive in the entire country. According to a 50-state scan of High School Graduation Requirements conducted in 2023 by the Education Commission of the States (ecs.org), almost every other state in the country has prescriptive, minimum credit requirements in the four core areas of English, mathematics, science, and social studies. Contrary to those prescriptive requirements that often result in <i>“formulaic high school experiences,”</i> the broad buckets of humanities and STEM in Connecticut’s requirements give ample latitude to local school districts to design and implement course pathways that meet the diverse needs and interests of students. For example, districts could personalize pathways by allowing students in manufacturing pathways to count Blueprint Reading, CAD, and Introduction to Manufacturing courses toward the 9-credit STEM requirement. This flexibility provides school districts with the opportunity to collaborate with local business and industry to create a career and workforce pipeline that directly connects the learner to postsecondary choices. Current Perkins V grant funds allow school districts to build these career-connected learning experiences with access to professional mentors.▲ Recommendation 5A cites New Hampshire as an example where <i>“credits shall be based on the demonstration of district and/or graduation competencies, not on time spent achieving these competencies,”</i> and suggests that <i>“Connecticut should learn from its many neighbors...”</i> While Connecticut is always willing to learn and improve its practices, this report does not recognize Connecticut state law (C.G.S 10-221a) that already provides for a wide range of methods for earning high school credit, including non-seat-time based approaches such as college courses, online courses, work-based learning, and internships. State law also allows for all credits earned in high school to be earned through demonstration of mastery without having to sit through the 120 Carnegie unit seat time hours. The Working Group referenced in the report, of which the CSDE is a member, already recognizes the inherent flexibilities in the graduation requirements and is coordinating efforts to conduct a survey of all districts to understand how they utilize the flexibilities. These best practices unearthed will serve as a catalyst for revision and innovation to increase student voice, choice, and multiple paths to graduation.● Recommendation 5B states that the LEAP home-visitation program is <i>“currently in 15 districts.”</i> In fact, the evidence-based LEAP program has already been expanded to 25 funded districts with representatives from another 75 districts participating in LEAP training. In addition to the \$24.7 million investment by the Governor and legislature since 2021, there is further funding requested for the next biennium.● Recommendation 5B also states that Connecticut policies <i>“impose a financial penalty on parents whose children are truant from school.”</i> While decades old laws may have contained such a provision, the CSDE does not have any policy provisions directing boards of education to impose financial penalties on parents of children who are truant. In fact, there is no statutory or regulatory authority permitting the CSDE to issue such policy provisions. Furthermore, the CSDE is not aware of any instance in which these actions have been imposed on families. Additionally, Public Act 16-147 removed truancy and defiance of school rules as reasons for Family with Service Needs (FWSN) referrals to juvenile court, thereby decriminalizing truancy for students. Instead, Connecticut designed a referral system for Youth Service Bureaus to assist students who are truant. <p><i>continued</i></p>



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	<p> Recommendation 5D calls on Connecticut to “Reduce school suspensions and implement new models for managing student behavior.” The CSDE has been publicly and transparently reporting on student discipline and disproportionality for more than a decade, even prior to the passage of some newer legislation. Since the 2020–21 school year, the CSDE has identified and grouped districts into four tiers based on the overall use of and racial/disparities in exclusionary discipline, including suspensions and expulsions, to provide targeted interventions and supports. Additionally, the CSDE has identified six focus areas for addressing school discipline to create a cohesive system that integrates and aligns internal and external efforts: (1) data monitoring (disproportionality regarding race/ethnicity and special education) and systemic support strategies; (2) policy guidance and professional learning, including technical assistance; (3) emphasis on grades pre-k to grade 2 supports; (4) expand partnerships and identify school and community-based supports; (5) consulting the Connecticut School Discipline Collaborative; and, (6) social-emotional development and behavioral health, including staff wellness.</p> <p> Recommendation 5E states that, “Connecticut should integrate alternative learning strategies into K-12 Curriculum and hold professional learning workshops for educators to understand learning styles and how to address them.” Since 2021, the CSDE has been developing high quality model curricula for use by school districts. They are based on State Board of Education approved, rigorous grade level standards, and provided to all districts at no cost. Each model by grade and content provides districts a structure to develop engaging units, lessons, and engaging tasks that respond to the interests and needs of students. All CSDE model curricula are available as open education resources through GoOpenCT, Connecticut’s Digital Library available anytime, anywhere. Currently through GoOpenCT, the openly available curriculums include: K-8 Mathematics; K-8 English Language Arts; K-8 Science; K-8 Social Studies; K-8 Computer Science; 6-12 Financial Literacy; and 9-12 African American, Black and Puerto Rican and Latino Studies. All model curricula provide resources for demonstrating learning, English learner/multilingual learner supports, identified digital/online learning tools and tasks, instructional resources, content vocabulary, student learning outcomes, and more. Combined, they provide the means to integrate evidence-based practices for incorporating alternative learning strategies that connect with the individual learner where they are. The CSDE is in the process of developing and providing statewide professional learning for educators for the implementation of high-quality curriculum and instruction.</p> <p> Recommendation 5E states, “Expand alternative learning strategies to combat student distractions and improve engagement.” PA 21-46 allows local boards of education to authorize remote learning for students in grades 9-12, beginning July 1, 2022, in accordance with the CSDE Standards for Remote Learning Grades 9-12 (ct.gov). As a result, local education agencies (LEAs) already have permission to design flexible and alternative learning models on campus or off campus while leveraging best practices and existing policies for integrating technology tools, online courses, and other technologies to foster student collaboration and demonstration of learning.</p> <p>The CSDE has procured two high-quality online curriculum tools available for districts at no cost to provide opportunities for flexible or alternative learning, including remote, course/credit recovery, or enrichment. Edmentum Apex Learning provides online courses with embedded accessibility tools for all learners in grades 3-12 that minimize distraction, provide support, and improve engagement. These tools support learners in an alternative method to accumulate an initial course credit, retrieve a credit (for on time graduation), and enrichment or honors access. This tool has also been deployed to CT Adult Education Centers to support the Adult High School Credit Diploma Program. Defined Learning, the second online tool, provides all learners K-12 with online courses and tasks that are designed as hands-on project-based learning tasks. Each task is career-connected to increase engagement. Both can be integrated into the school day as alternative or supplemental learning strategies.</p> <p>CSDE has set standards for STEM education, vis-a-vis the deployment of model curricula for K-8 science, mathematics, and computer science. Each model curricula includes a focus on the science and engineering practices, and mathematical practice standards. The computer science curriculum provides opportunities for students to build upon their foundational understanding of computer science concepts through more sophisticated activities, like the basics of programming, critical thinking skills, and internet safety.</p>




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#14 Create Support Networks to provide technical assistance for educators, schools, and districts with the highest needs	<p>■ Recommendation 14A proposes that Connecticut “<i>Launch Support Networks to improve instructional practice, accelerate school performance, and drive system-wide improvement.</i>” It should be noted that many such networks are already managed through regional educational service centers (RESCs) and the State Education Resource Center (SERC). Other professional associations such as the Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS) for school leaders, Connecticut School Counselor Association (CSCA), Connecticut Association of School Business Officials (CASBO), the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS) also provide support to disseminate best practices and accelerate systems improvements. Additionally, subcommittees of such organizations provide for issue-specific networks among practitioners. For example, CAPSS provides for focused support for alliance district superintendents, innovative schools, assessment and accountability, and curriculum.</p>
#15 Scale transitional employment programs, apprenticeships, and summer employment programs	<p>■ Recommendation 15A states a need to “<i>scale transitional employment programs, apprenticeships, and summer employment programs.</i>” It should be noted that the report makes no reference to the publicly funded adult education system. This statewide system serves over 22,000 Connecticut residents, more than half of whom are multilingual learners, and prepares them for life and work. The system offers basic skills remediation, English language acquisition, and three robust programs for secondary completion — the GED, the Adult High School Credit Diploma Program, and the National External Diploma Program. It should be noted that the system invests over \$2,000 per adult learner.</p> <p>Adult education is highly effective in preparing students for the world of work by teaching them contextualized workplace competencies and study skills that help them to become lifelong learners. These competencies are important for success in today’s economic landscape as they align students’ skills with the market demands of business and industry.</p> <p>Through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Connecticut adult education also works tirelessly to connect students with education and workforce opportunities. Students have expanded opportunities to enroll in postsecondary education and industry-recognized training and credentials, which ultimately leads to a more successful state economy.</p> <p>Adult education invests in families. Last year, the CSDE invested over \$1 million to support family literacy programs across the state. Students in Connecticut who participated in the adult education family literacy programs overwhelmingly reported that because of the program they have increased involvement in their children’s education.</p>
#18 Launch Center of Excellence at a CT partner university, focused on at-risk and disconnected youth	<p>● Recommendation 18A calls on Connecticut to “<i>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.</i>” While this report notes efforts in Illinois, it does not reference the Center for Connecticut Education Research Collaboration (CCERC). The CCERC is a ground-breaking, first-of-its-kind research collaborative that was established by the CSDE established in partnership with public and private IHEs to evaluate the effectiveness of state and local investments. Currently, the CCERC brings together researchers across eight public and private CT IHEs to conduct the studies. The LEAP home visit initiative which is recommended for expansion in #5B was evaluated by CCERC researchers. CCERC has received national recognition through EduProgress — Connecticut Strengthening Evaluation, Research of Education Investments — and Education Reform Now. Further, Forbes.com claimed that Connecticut’s Funding What Works In Education Recovery. They Can Prove It (forbes.com).</p>



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#20 Support Community recreation hubs and summer enrichment activities to increase emotional engagement, academic outcomes, and employment prospects for at-risk and disconnected youth	 Recommendation 20B calls on Connecticut to “Support summer enrichment programs to ensure all youth across the state have access.” It should be noted that since 2021, Connecticut has invested over \$33 million in American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ARP/ESSER) and American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding, to expand low-cost and high-quality summer enrichment programming for thousands of K-12 students, leading to novel learning experiences, greater interpersonal connections with peers and teachers, and improved attendance during the school year. Connecticut has also invested \$6.5 million in ARPA funds over the past two summers to embed social, emotional, and mental health supports into existing summer programming in schools, youth camps, and summer enrichment programs.