

Problems with the Current Education Law

- Currently state law recognizes two types of Local Education Agencies (LEA's): A school district managed by a municipality, or a regional school district consisting of two or more towns.
- Small towns that are part of a regional school district with a larger town or towns relinquish control of not only their school administration but all spending too.
- Regional school districts are allowed only a single funding methodology based on the per pupil costs of children per town. While this works for towns sharing a school building, it does not work in places where towns wish to maintain a neighborhood elementary school.
- The larger towns not only have more numbers for referenda but also have more votes on a regional Board of Education due to constitutional apportionment rules. That means larger towns have either more board members or more weight to the votes they cast. A larger town could vote to close a school in another town.
- State law does allow for "cooperative agreements" under statute 10-158a that can have the full authority of a school district. Unlike a Regional School District these agreements are flexible and allow individual communities to reserve powers that would otherwise be ceded away in a Regional School District.
- The state does not recognize a cooperative agreement as an LEA. This requires towns to administratively "back out" regional activities for reporting back to the state and complying with mandates. This adds layers of local bureaucracy and redundancy in order to comply with state law.
- The federal government currently recognizes the Cooperative Agreement among Chester, Deep River, and Essex (known as the Supervision District) as a financial entity including an EIN number. The Supervision District also has a State of Connecticut tax ID number. Should it not be recognized in the same manner by the Connecticut State Department of Education?
- Special Education programs cannot be created and shared currently, as the Supervision District is not recognized as an LEA and instead as four distinct districts. Allowing the Supervision District to become an LEA would enable all three of our elementary schools the ability to create specialized programs that would serve the needs of students in all three schools at a greatly reduced cost, and eliminate the need for costly out of district placements.

Possible Remedy

- Allow Boards of Education in multiple towns to consolidate school activities under a Cooperative Agreement and have that agreement recognized as an LEA. This would allow efficiencies in consolidating expenditures, state reporting, and staffing. Thus, financial efficiencies enabled.
- Region 4 Schools are already operating as one district. If efficiencies are the goal of this year's budget, it is a simple language correction. The district has tried for years to regionalize and/or cooperate to create financial efficiencies, only to be thwarted by state regulations and mandates. No local voter would accept a regional arrangement that would cede control over schools and taxes to a larger or more affluent neighboring community. Cooperative agreements, being more flexible in nature, can more fairly share staffing and services thus creating the same financial efficiencies as would be achieved in a traditional regional district.
- This would allow towns to consolidate in a way that can be supported by voters, with a school district that is operated as a single shared entity. Given that it is an agreement tailored for each individual situation, towns could make adjustments to the district over time as conditions change.
- Unlike a Regional School District, a cooperative agreement between Boards of Education still requires the traditional avenue of local Board of Finance review and approval of yearly budgets, prior to a town referendum.
- Cooperative Agreements allow for financial flexibility, giving the Boards of Education multiple ways of sharing costs for purchases and programming. Some costs can be shared, while others paid directly by individual towns based on their usage.
- Towns that wish to retain powers or programs would have the option to do so without negatively impacting other communities. For example towns could maintain local neighborhood elementary schools without the burden of population fluctuations impacting the other communities in those non-shared school buildings.