

Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents
Leadership for the Future of Learning

CAPSS Blueprint to Transform Connecticut's Public Schools



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CAPSS BLUEPRINT TO TRANSFORM CONNECTICUT'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS) is made up of 164 superintendents and over 100 additional members who are in education or providing support to education.

The Mission of CAPSS is:

To lead in the continuous improvement of public education for all students by advocating public policy for children...

Introduction

Two years ago, CAPSS began to discuss and design a comprehensive, long-term set of recommendations for addressing the educational and fiscal needs of Connecticut's school districts. CAPSS chose to undertake this work seeing the urgent need for fundamental reform of Connecticut public education if the state is to serve equitably and responsibly every student in its public schools. For years, CAPSS had annually established its legislative priorities and policy direction. However, the organization realized that far more needs to be addressed, from changes in funding – local and state – to policy, delivery of services to our neediest children, quality of education, student assessment, teacher hiring, governance, and more, including addressing systemic racism and significant inequities within our schools. CAPSS fully understood that more than a band-aid approach was needed, that in fact, what was needed was a plan for the next decade and beyond.

CAPSS Blueprint to Transform Connecticut's Public Schools articulates a comprehensive set of 30 recommendations that CAPSS believes will move Connecticut closer to assuring that every child receives the high-quality teaching and learning which they are owed. Within this *CAPSS Blueprint* is an all-encompassing, equitable strategy for funding and improving public education in Connecticut, one which addresses the highest priority needs as expressed by Superintendents of Schools. These recommendations are aimed at state funding, legislation, and local and state action. In declaring the *CAPSS Blueprint* as "comprehensive," it signals that the plan goes far deeper than the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) grant for it addresses categorical grants, teaching, and needs and solutions. At this moment, Covid-19 and the continuing economic stresses on the state's budget make any consideration of new ideas and new spending very difficult. However, choosing not to acknowledge the facts and the injustices in Connecticut's public schools, even at this time, would be a grave disservice to its youth and its future.



The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a spotlight on education inequities in Connecticut. During the early days of the pandemic, intense media coverage highlighted that education inequities are inextricably connected to the state of the economy and public health. The pandemic has confirmed what has been known to be true in data and experience: that Connecticut's Public Schools is a system of the haves and have-nots. The State of Connecticut can and should do better in its leadership and funding of public elementary and secondary schools.

This plan is the outgrowth of both old and new ideas for improving public education, some are considered prototypes and others are yet to be tested. The sources of the content are eclectic in that no single philosophical direction gave rise to the recommendations. However, the plan is unwavering in its goals of greater equity and sufficiency in state funding, as well as greater expectations and accountability for higher student achievement, particularly for those with the greatest needs.

The *CAPSS Blueprint* addresses multiple objectives, and its set of recommendations respond to the need for state grants, programs and services, a new funding formula, and local implementation, but does so in a way that is more:

- 1 Comprehensive and long term
- 2 Predictable and sustainable
- 3 Equitable and sufficient
- 4 Coherent and inter-related
- 5 Innovative and efficient
- 6 Demanding and accountable
- 7 Realistic and aspirational



CAPSS views its leadership role in Connecticut as helping to articulate educational needs, and support federal, state, and local initiatives that continuously attack the other inequities that significantly impact countless public school children. Superintendents across Connecticut are acutely aware of the issues of need and inequity in the areas of housing, employment, health care, and transportation. The growth in our country's and our state's wealth and income inequality are clearly reflected in our schools. These social concerns significantly diminish the ability of public schools to achieve greater equality of opportunities and outcomes.

CAPSS does not envy the work of elected officials to weigh competing needs for public funds. However, we believe that the recommendations provided in this report will advance the statewide understanding of educational needs and the value of public education as a long-term investment, helping to address the quality of life. The *CAPSS Blueprint to Transform Connecticut's Public Schools* is a roadmap for 15 years, a plan with a set of 30 recommendations that will keep Connecticut on track in the work of exponentially improving education for every child in the state.



CAPSS Blueprint to Transform Connecticut's Public Schools plan was made possible with support from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation and The Peter and Carmen Lucia Buck Foundation.

Why do all this now?



- Because many very poor towns with high educational needs and high local tax rates are also at the bottom of per pupil spending;
- Because the state's achievement gaps by town, income group, and racial and ethnic groups are demonstratively unacceptable both in terms of opportunities and outcomes;
- And, because the state-funded share of all expenditures for public schools has been roughly the same for the last 30 years. Therefore, the over-reliance on the local property tax continues with inequities not only not having been reduced, but instead having been returned to the level of the 1970s.

It is true Connecticut has made some visible progress in its quest for more equitable school funding and in closing its achievement gaps. However, no one should claim victory and rest on the policies of the past. The glass is only one-half filled. Beyond meeting its legal and legislative obligations, Connecticut must aspire to meet its moral obligation to meet the needs of every student.

Moving Forward

The problems of implementing a lasting educational reform in Connecticut have been no different than elsewhere in that they are political, economic, social, and systematic. There is disagreement on the goals of the reform, roles by elected and appointed leaders and interest groups, the absence of continuity in leadership, the increasing concentration of poverty in Connecticut's major cities, the ever-widening income and wealth gaps, the loss of jobs, the decline in population, and the competition for public dollars from many directions. Moreover, there is a reluctance and/or inability to accept the need to change and strengthen our educational system, our instructional delivery, our expectations, our engagement of students and family, and our use of new technologies and innovations as we prepare students to embrace and thrive in the future.



The best way forward is to: **1) exhibit the will** to transform public education, and **2) implement the appropriate strategies** to bring about sustained change. Each school district and institution must have an improvement plan that focuses on eliminating those systems that are not only not helping students achieve at the highest levels but are denying students the opportunity to do so. Statewide, Connecticut's improvement plan must directly address the inequities (the unfair-ness) in the system and strive for more nearly equal educational experiences as measured by expenditures, other resources, programs and services, and student outcomes. One key measure will be the transformation of Connecticut as a state with one of the highest achievement gaps to one of the lowest.



The following set of 30 recommendations from CAPSS is responsive to that quest. It is hoped that these courses of action will stimulate thought and discussion, but most importantly will result in real change, a change that will yield dramatic shifts in Connecticut public education, resulting in a better future for all Connecticut youth, for our communities, and for our state. These 30 recommendations should be viewed collectively, as a unit, as interlocking pieces that go together as a whole.

Please see Appendix D – For a two-page overview of all 30 recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1

Overall State Support for Public Education

The State of Connecticut cannot and will not reduce inequities in its school funding system unless it significantly increases state aid as a percentage of all revenues dedicated to public schools.

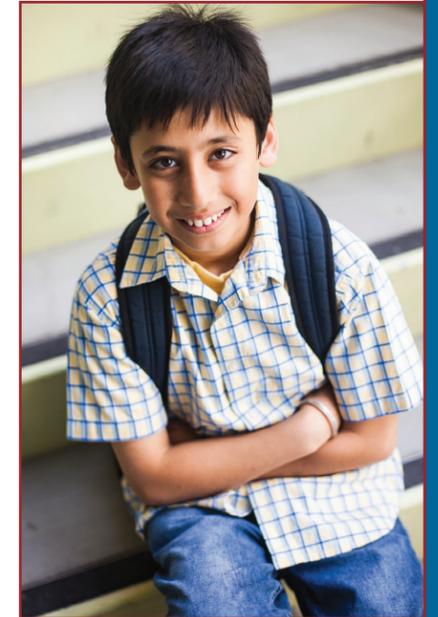
Aspiring towards the goal of the state and its municipalities sharing equally in the total cost of public education would be a major step in the right direction.

The present state share of 41% and local share of 53% of the cost of public education (federal support at 6%) – has been at or around that level for nearly 30 years.

This ratio leaves the majority of funds coming from local property taxes resulting in continuing inter-town inequities that were challenged in Horton vs. Meskill nearly 50 years ago. While state aid, ECS, and other grants have been heavily based on wealth and need since the early 1980s, the aggregate amount of state aid has not been sufficient to help those towns with the greatest educational need and the least capacity to spend more.

Moving toward a state share, not town by town, but in the aggregate of 47% of all costs of public education, with matching local contributions of roughly 47%, is the only fair and equitable solution. This goal should help shape the amount of new funds in ECS and other state grants.

(Please see Appendix A)



2

ECS Predictability

Approving a state statutory prohibition on Executive Branch rescissions after the start of the fiscal year (July 1).

Instituting a May 1st deadline for legislative adoption of the coming year's ECS formula, appropriation, and grant amounts by town.

Agreeing to a rolling three-year approval and projection by the Governor and Legislature of the ECS grants – by town – with all data and grant amounts by year fixed for the 3-year period, and updated only for the next cycle.

3

ECS Improvements

The current ECS formula, adopted in 2017 and due to be fully funded in 2027-28, is a step in the right direction. To meet more fully the State Constitutional mandate for greater equity in the resources available to all students, the state should:

- a) Implement the predictability and sustainability provisions previously identified in #2, and re-consider appropriating multiple years of ECS funding.

- b) Increase the ECS appropriation by 2.5% per year – for the next 15 years – which represents a small increase over the current plan and is still a reasonably digestible amount per year within any one school district. This yields an increase of \$52M more in 2021–22 over 2020–21, and then \$53M, then \$54M, and roughly \$74M in 2035–36. This represents only \$12M to \$20M more per year than the current plan thru 2027–28, which is estimated at a \$40M increase per year. (Please see Appendix B)
- c) Continue to add significant new dollars to the Alliance districts, i.e., those with the highest education needs and lowest wealth.
- d) Eliminate the planned losses for 95 towns with decreasing ECS grants over the next seven years, holding harmless equal to 2020–21 ECS Grants. (The majority of these 95 towns are not wealthy, and yet they are slated to lose \$7M per year for each of the next seven years).
- e) Continue the use of property values per capita (@70%) and median household income (@30%) as the measure of wealth.
- f) Continue the use of Free and Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL) and English Learner (EL) to measure educational need, but consider adding actual student achievement as a third factor, giving equal weight to all three factors, and driving dollars to the districts with the greatest demonstrated educational challenges.
- g) Eliminate the use of “extra” factors added to the formula whose sole purpose is to assist one town or a small group of towns.
- h) Require the use of three years of data for every variable in the formula to eliminate the one-year shock.
- i) Maintain the present Guaranteed Wealth Level – initially – until all other data elements are settled, and then adjust the Guaranteed Wealth Level to accommodate both the desired level of appropriation and a reasonable guarantee.
- j) The Foundation level should have a rationale based on the actual expenditures of Connecticut school districts. One such method to consider is using a rolling three-year average of net current expenses per pupil, in the median K-12 operating district, having excluded Special Education expenses and pupils. This could yield a Foundation level of between \$14,000 and \$15,000 per pupil as compared to the present \$11,525 Foundation. Of course, this raises the aggregate cost of the formula, but that can be reduced in several rational ways.

A more realistic Foundation level can also be used in the discussions of funding schools of choice.

Note: This recommendation for ECS changes does not include a town-by-town distribution for several very good reasons:

- a) The multi-year database for all variables is not available and appropriately verified/ audited at this time.
- b) The consideration of a new factor in student need (achievement) offers only a few choices of variables (test scores and/or accountability index), and the apparent problems in free and reduced lunch data (poverty) make any simulations suspect until those issues are resolved.
- c) The data on school expenditures for 2019–20 and 2020–21 have become useless due to COVID-19 and school closings; therefore, the calculations of a Foundation level must rely on 2018–19 data (still under review by the Connecticut State Department of Education – CSDE), and possibly the two prior years.
- d) Any grant simulation requires a calculation of both a fully funded formula and a phase-in (by year). For example, a formula using a \$14,000 - \$15,000 Foundation level (all other data and variables being held constant) could yield a \$4B cost. This proposal includes an

annual appropriation of 2.5% more than the previous year, resulting in a \$3B+ appropriation in 2035–36. There are several methods for reducing the \$4B cost to \$3B - pro-rata, equity weighted, and equity prioritization, but there are questions of fairness, practicality, and relative harm.

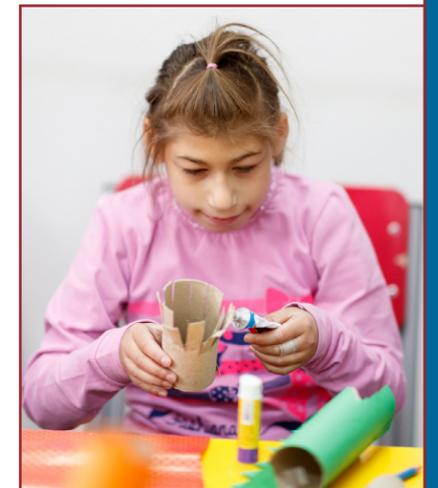
- e) Any focus on the splitting up of the pie, as opposed to the pie’s size, is a serious policy mistake of emphasis at this time in the process. Simulations of the impact of these recommendations and other choices can be completed by the CSDE, Office of Policy and Management (OPM), Office of Fiscal Analysis (OFA), and the Office of Legislative Research (OLR) at the appropriate time, i.e., when all data and choices are clearer. CAPSS stands ready to assist in that work.

4 Special Education

- Phasing-in a significantly funded (**\$70M more than the current \$140M**) Excess Cost Grant; ensuring that it is more timely paid; and supporting an incentive system for students to be educated in town, in the region, and in the state.

Note: The State’s Special Education Excess Cost Grant has been frozen for nearly two decades because of the pressure on the state budget, leaving all cost increases to come from local sources.

- Improving the ID rates, and assisting in developing/improving closer-to-home programs coupled with ensuring greater state scrutiny of private placements and facilities.
- Re-balancing the burden of proof legislation



5 School Construction

- Implementing a revised scale of 10% to 80%, up from 10% to 70%, and greater state requirements on need and justification, with efficiency and compliance with state timeliness; supporting the ability of the state to intervene in cases of facility neglect.

6 Adult Education

- Transferring the mandate from local/regional boards of education for high school completion, adult basic education, and citizenship education to the six Regional Educational Service Centers (RESCs).
- Retaining, at the local level, enrichment programs.
- Phasing-in this transfer over two years and increasing the current Adult Education State Grant from **\$20M to \$22M**; using existing staff and continuation of successful regional and urban programs, whenever possible.

7

English Language Learning

- Developing a more rigorous plan for each EL with accountability for documenting progress in academic growth and English acquisition; encouraging the use of Bilingual Education along with Dual Language and immersion whenever appropriate.
- Adding \$6M more for a total of \$9M in the state grant to be shared among the districts with the greatest EL need.
- Requiring the use of translation technology so that no student is unable to understand the instruction and adding more rigor and support for middle and high school students.

8

Early Childhood

- Adopting a goal of 100% pre-school experience free for all 3 and 4-year-olds in the neediest towns and for all those below the poverty level.
- Encouraging local and regional boards and RESCs to be more active conveners of all providers.
- Adding \$1M to enhance the necessary partnerships between pre-school teachers and kindergarten teachers, including the sharing of data and best practices.
- Adding \$1M to purchase an accurate census of 3 and 4-year-olds served and unserved in the 30 to 40 Alliance school districts.
- Standardizing and prioritizing all pre-school programs, e.g., standards, funding, and instructional goals and objectives
- Developing a plan to support renovation/construction of space within existing schools to enable additional pre-school classrooms; beginning with the neediest towns



9

Transportation

- Phasing-in over two years a transportation overburden grant to towns with greater than 4% of total expenses spent on transportation, and greater than the median town transportation cost per pupil (approximately 65 towns) to support total, unreimbursed, transportation costs on a scale of 10-80% – based on town wealth – and capped at **\$20M with annual growth thereafter**, pro-rated as necessary.

10

Attacking Structural Racism & Discrimination

- Directly address the needs of Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, ELs, LGBTQ students, students with disabilities, and those affected by poverty and trauma through:
- Developing an “accelerated” learning culture – not based on student deficits, gaps, and remediation, but one based on strengths and abilities, higher content learning, and greater expectations.
 - Providing enhanced pre-service and in-service professional development for teachers and administrators on setting higher expectations for all students, including the examination within each person of unintentional and unconscious bias as it yields lower expectations for students of color and others.
 - Examining disparities in: student enrollments in higher-level classes and equitable opportunities for success; identification rates for special education; school discipline; promotion and graduation rates; and data on early reading success.
 - Plans to remedy the disparities and inequities identified above must be developed, implemented, and evaluated with a goal of “continuous improvement.” The state and each local school district must develop plans and regularly report on progress. The CSDE should provide a template for both data analyses and improvement plans.
 - Increasing Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino educator and leader recruitment and retention, e.g., expand using the model of growing one’s own diverse teacher force taking local paraprofessionals through a program of teacher preparation with a guaranteed job upon completion (for example, see Capitol Region Education Council, CREC). A new state appropriation of \$8M per year would support approximately 12 such programs throughout the state, but predominantly in the neediest urban areas.
 - Using state provided model curriculum as well as local materials, districts must ensure that the historical, scientific, and cultural accomplishments of Black and Hispanic individuals are appropriately included in the locally-adopted, written curriculum as now required by state statute; see State Education Resource Center (SERC) developed materials of 2019.
 - Supporting Educators Rising and similar programs that interest high school students in teaching, particularly in Priority Districts; provide **\$500,000 annually to assist start-up, cross-town collaboration, diversity, and program evaluation.**
 - The state and each local district should convene a diverse Advisory Committee to help guide a 10-year effort to dramatically reduce racism and discrimination by implementing no less than the strategies above coupled with more targeted local actions that bring long-lasting change.

11

Improving Virtual Learning

- COVID-19 has pushed schools to be able to provide some or all instruction while students are at home.
- Supporting technology hardware and systems, including more than one working device at home and high-speed Internet. Also needed are proven platforms, software, classroom cameras enabling synchronous instruction, teacher training, family support including home visits by staff to help families navigate the virtual learning process, and programs to meet the needs of the students.

- Requiring that every district have the ability to keep high-quality distance learning modules by grade, subject, and skill level accessible year-round to supplement actual classroom learning.
- Improving technology and resources accessed at home will also provide new opportunities for enrichment, advancement, exploration, and independent learning.
- The future will also require increased, purposeful, and sustained school-family communication. Technology will help achieve this goal.
- The CSDE will need \$2.5M annually to help accomplish the above, set statewide standards, and report on progress.

12 Student Assessment

- Moving towards fewer hours of state assessment and fewer grades to be tested, with the piloting of assessments that include higher order/21st century and portrait of a graduate skills.
- Eliminating the requirement for testing in grades 4, 6, and 8, but providing for those districts that wish to test those grades annually, to do so, resulting in a focus and reporting on grades 3, 5, 7, 9, 11.
- Adding PSAT statewide in Grade 9, at state expense.
- Articulating more discretely the Smarter Balance/PSAT/SAT continuum of skills.
- Providing more detailed feedback to school districts on the need for focused instruction in specific skills.
- Focusing on: specific language and math skills most often not successfully achieved on state assessments; preparing and disseminating instructional materials for teachers; offering model professional development; giving a laser focus to early reading success.

13 State Leadership in Curriculum & Instruction

- Providing model curriculum materials that make the best use of national, state, and local curricula for all those districts without a coherent, articulated course of study aligned with state assessments and beyond.
- Recognizing 21st-century skills of collaborating, innovating, flexibility, and solution-based problem-solving; in addition to core knowledge, develop a portrait of a graduate that includes self-confidence, connections to others, social/emotional competence, communication, responsible citizenry.
- Elevating expectations for all students by:
 - a) Relentlessly pursuing competent literacy by third grade – for each student,
 - b) Adding greater rigor at each grade and demanding both collaborative and independent student work.

- Utilizing the most evidence-based school improvement strategies for all students – including more instructional time (with differing methods of instruction), more student-centered teaching and learning, greater teacher collaboration, targeted interventions, use of student data, and use of various technologies.
- Providing the CSDE with \$2M to implement these strategies.

14 Student Well Being

- Developing a state, regional, and local support network for social and emotional learning, mental health and trauma support services, including interagency agreements (particularly with the Department of Children and Families – DCF), local action plans, and model programs.
- Adding \$10M per year in new state grants to expand school level mental health and behavioral support programs and services, as well as school safety measures through a mixture of grants by RFP, model-developed and need-based.
- Acknowledging the dramatic impact of COVID-19 on students' learning loss and mental health.

15 Disengaged and Disenfranchised Youth

- Supporting the multi-agency partnerships that provide career and college pathways for middle and highschool students to get the skills necessary for success in work, further education, and life.
- Encouraging school districts to maintain active communication with families of all disenfranchised students under the age of 18 to facilitate referral to local and regional re-engagement programs culminating in high school completion through credit programs, GED, or other alternate programs.

16 Teacher Certification, Development, Evaluation

- Eliminating statutory and regulatory barriers to a world-class, diverse, and committed education profession, particularly those requirements that are without evidence of impact on teacher quality and student learning.
- Accepting out-of-state credentials wherever possible.
- Creating more local and regional programs for aspiring teachers and administrators, and closing the divide between schools of education and local school practice.
- Focusing on the “student-teacher experience” as the core preparation program and requiring a range of urban and diverse experiences.
- Reviewing and clarifying the state statutory provisions and state regulations (no later than 6/30/22) and/or guidance on: **a)** teacher certification, **b)** local professional development, and **c)** teacher/administrator evaluation programs.

- Non-tenured teachers should not be automatically renewed and must receive an affirmation letter from their principal before each school year and before being granted tenure.
- Addressing the longer-term issue of teacher shortages, particularly in the neediest districts, and clarifying the effective use of substitutes, paraprofessionals, student teachers and temporary permittees.

The State of the Teacher in Connecticut

“In sum, even though Connecticut has expanded its teacher workforce in recent years and provided appropriately qualified teachers in nearly all of its districts, recent trends suggest a potential shortage of teachers in the future, driven in part by the drop in graduates from teacher education programs and the increasing number of exits by Connecticut teachers. In addition, Connecticut has a distributional problem. The demand for more teachers, for certain specializations, and for increasing diversity in the teacher workforce is concentrated in a few urban, high poverty districts that are already challenged in recruiting and retaining teachers.”

Rockefeller Institute – August 2019

17 Federal Funds

- Requesting the United States Department of Education (USDE) to approve a block grant of all federal funds for education and a waiver of unique federal program requirements.
- Or, in lieu thereof, at least allowing the concepts of efficiency and simplicity by utilizing one, unified application and the ability of the state to target the use of funds.
- Soliciting congressional support for:
 - a) Federal aid equal to 40% – 50% of the total costs of special education vs. 6% today.
 - b) New federal aid for technology and virtual learning, as well as student health and safety related to pandemics.
 - c) Flexibility in statewide testing and accountability mandated by federal law.

18 Municipal/Non-Education Grants

- Merging all non-education town aid into a single formula grant using the same measures as ECS. (Payment in lieu of taxes, town roads, and gambling revenue sharing).
- Acknowledging that any reduction in state aid to towns is generally an indirect but real harm to the budgets of local public schools.

19 Debt and Obligations

- Requiring the state and each town to publish annual statements of indebtedness and unmet obligations with mandated public hearings and greater transparency.
- Requiring the state and each town to develop and publish a plan for the continuous reduction of debt and obligation with specific targets by year.
- Acknowledging that a growing, or even stable, level of debt and obligations are sure to reduce funds available to support the operating and capital needs of local public schools.

20 Teacher Retirement System

CAPSS embraces the new statutory changes that stretch out the Teacher Retirement Board (TRB) payments over a longer period of time and provide greater stability to the system.

- After appropriate actuarial analysis:
 - a) Exploring options for providing new hires with choices of retirement plans that may also help reduce costs to the state.
 - b) Changing the TRB cost-of-living provision and eliminating the reality of zero %increases in any one year.

Note: The state’s annual contributions to TRB have more than doubled in the last decade, putting increased pressure on the overall state budget. This has also inflated the state’s share of educational expenditures while not simultaneously improving educational opportunities.

21 State Grant Eliminations

- Eliminating state grants that are too small and/or represent a single constituency or a single town and are without expectation of replication/value elsewhere.

Approximately \$2.7M could be saved by eliminating eight existing grants funded in 2020-21.

22 Minimum Expenditure Requirements (MER)

- Developing a revised statutory mechanism to ensure that state education funds are spent on education by using an MER per pupil; and ensuring that, in total, the necessary and sufficient funds are provided to the school board. This may also require the publication of an equalized minimum school tax rate for each of 169 towns to ensure a minimum local contribution.
- Calculating and publishing the MER in January of the coming school year; allowing for local enrollment shifts and local decision making and expenditures beyond the minimum.

23 Regional Efficiencies

- Supporting an ongoing state task force on improved state, municipal, and regional collaboration.
- Reinstating the former operating/sustaining grant to the six **RESCs to respond to districts’ needs (add \$5M)** especially in the area of special education; additionally, support more innovative and efficient regional program options.

- Urging support for a structure of one board of education and one superintendent for all towns choosing to be part of a regional school district.
- Modifying any state legislation that inhibits or limits regional approaches and explore ideas that stimulate and reward new, efficient, higher-quality regional programs and services.

24 Mandate Waivers

- Adopting a new and more flexible process (or clarifying an existing statutory process) in which the Commissioner of Education has the authority to waive certain (not all) statutory and regulatory requirements; consider high achieving or high growth school districts and/or schools that have also been successful in reducing the achievement gaps among sub-groups.

25 School District Improvement Grant

- Merging several (five) state grants into one, new, simplified process for School Improvement to enhance student achievement. The Commissioner's Network (schools), Priority School District, After School, Extended School Hours, and School Accountability grants total roughly \$53M; these should be expanded to \$56M using funds from eliminating several other state grants. (\$3M)
- Ensuring no current Alliance town would receive less than their 2020-21 total of these five grants.
- Re-upping the most challenged school districts – with greater than 60% of students not proficient – into the Priority District group; and the next most challenged districts – with greater than 50% not proficient–into the Alliance District group.
- Roughly 40 school districts (about 20 and 20) would be invited into this grant for a three-year period.
- The size of grants for the most challenged districts should be considerably larger than for the second group, roughly 90% going to Priority Districts and 10% to Alliance Districts.
- The actual grant amounts for each district should be based on relative wealth, education need, and pupil count.
- Districts moving in or out of the qualifications would be phased-in or out over a two-year period.
- Eliminating the annual, separate application for new ECS dollars by Alliance Districts; but these funds will still be sent directly to districts as opposed to towns.
- Requiring a grant application process that demonstrates thoughtful, data-driven allocation of these extra funds to improve student achievement and close achievement gaps.
- Failing to demonstrate continuous progress would require greater state intervention in the use of the funds, and could ultimately lead to a period of state take-over. The CSDE should receive \$1M for state intervention.
- Requiring that students not achieving the proficiency level on the state's assessments, barring other local data to the contrary, receive a sound and appropriate intervention including, but not limited to, one-on-one tutoring, sufficient to raise their achievement.

- Encouraging the use of local non-profits for after-school, summer school, and other appropriate services—but funds to be awarded locally (not by the state legislature).
- Encouraging the use of the community school concept with a family resource center, health clinic, 6 a.m.– 6 p.m. childcare, and 24/7/365 use of school facility.

26 Governance

- Providing greater stability and state statutory clarity to the roles of the superintendent, school board and the Connecticut State Board of Education with the goal of greater acceptance of the value of continuity of leadership in service to children and the community.
- Developing joint policy statements and statutory clarification, where needed, including a Code of Conduct for board of education members, the ability to remove individuals from office, and a re-clarification of the statutory process for a state-appointed local school board and state take-over of a district.
- Requiring a regularly updated local policy manual.

27 Public School Choice

- Eliminating all admissions barriers for all public school choice programs and using random lottery drawings where demand exceeds the supply of seats.
- Student populations in each public school choice program should mirror the population of the town of location/or region as appropriate including students with disabilities, ELs, and students receiving free and reduced priced meals.
- Implementing a reasonable limit on per student transportation costs for all choice programs.
- Requiring funding for charter schools to be based on the ECS Foundation level with a percentage reduction based on the school's lower administrative, regulatory, special education, and transportation costs and with an expectation of private support.
- Supporting the recent Sheff Agreement in Greater Hartford and supporting the expansion of its key provisions to other areas of the state. Acknowledging that CREC and others are working on an updated Sheff region solution and plan.
- Magnet schools, both regional and host magnets, should have a student population that is “more diverse than the host district, and/or more reflective of the region as a whole.” Each magnet school would provide the Commissioner of Education with annual enrollment information that evidences diversity by race, ethnicity (separated from race), the town of residence, FRPL, EL and Students with Disabilities (SWD). Regional magnets should expect to have greater diversity than host magnets, but in addition to the state required 75/25% racial/ethnic quota of students, an alternate standard could be available for host magnets based on a holistic view of the “totality of diversity” within the school as acceptable to the Commissioner, and as driven by local/regional demographics.
- Ensuring the state increases magnet, Open Choice and charter (per student) funding annually, equal to the growth in ECS and the Foundation level, without adding magnets and charters to the ECS.

- Acknowledging and addressing that current magnet school funding is inequitable. Though the present system of funding both regional and host magnets will not be easily transformed, it is imperative that a new funding system be created where state and local funds share the burden of educating each student. Too many individual statutory schemes have been established for individual magnet schools or single school districts, leaving an indefensible and irrational system. Legislate that the state will not plan or fund additional magnet schools until such time as equitable funding is achieved across those magnet schools in existence.
- Developing separate rationales for host magnets and regional magnets statewide.
- Continuing the present funding for Open Choice – but with a reconsideration of funding for special education costs and transportation.
- Continuing to fund with 100% state funds the Connecticut Technical and Career (CTC) Schools as has been done for nearly 100 years, an expenditure level which is roughly comparable to the mean public high school expenditure. The CTC Schools are undergoing a governance shift from the CSDE to a new independent board. Consider other after-school and part-time programs to meet employment needs and student needs.
- Continuing the present funding for Regional Agriculture Science Centers – which are most often a part of a traditional high school – through a combination of a state categorical grant and tuitions received from the towns of non-resident students. This model comes close, in design and dollars, to that desired for all magnet schools.
- *Please Note: There is still significant disagreement among the partners (local, regional, state) on the issues of magnet tuition setting, funding of special education, and support for Open Choice. These must be addressed by State legislation in a way that represents compromise and financial contributions by all parties.*

28 Measuring Success

- Committing to an annual state report, with required public hearing, on progress in reducing expenditure and resources' inequity among and within school districts.
- Reducing achievement gaps – at both the statewide and local level – using sub-group data, national data, and longitudinal trends as a part of the analyses.

29 Student and Staff Health & Safety

- Future-focused education leaders recognize that the COVID-19 pandemic has also created the space for innovation. Leaders recognize the definition and models of public education may change dramatically as a result of the pandemic. As our models are reimagined, equitable support must be part of any equation. Experts caution that schools should expect more frequent global interruptions, whether it be through other pandemics, climate change, etc. The current pandemic has also provided an additional and compelling argument for education funding reform in Connecticut.
- In addition to the improvements needed in virtual learning identified elsewhere, each district must conduct a regular audit of health and safety conditions in all schools, followed by an implementation plan for annual improvements and readiness.

30 More Research Needed

- The CSDE, in partnership with other agencies, should prepare a template for the Health & Safety audit and provide access to technical support in the area of school construction, ventilation, transportation, health professionals, and school scheduling. Additionally, help is needed with effectively delivering classroom and home virtual learning, addressing student behavior, acquiring necessary materials, referring students and staff for diagnosis and treatment, and managing extra-curricular activities in new and alternative ways.

Per Pupil Expenditures

- The 2018–19 reporting of district expenditures and the apparent disparities by district and by building within districts have raised a number of difficult questions, including the most basic issue of understanding the reasons for Connecticut's highest and lowest spending communities which range from \$13,000 to \$36,000 per pupil.
- Both 2019–20 and 2020–21 will have irregular expenditures due to COVID-19 closings and re-openings, and due to extra expenditures related to the health and safety of students and staff.
- The CSDE should commission a separate study of expenditures with key questions and subsequently be able to provide state and local officials with an explanation and plans for seeking efficiencies (particularly in transportation, maintenance, nutrition, administration, and special education).

Growth in Special Education

- Both the statewide identification rate – from roughly 11% in 2010 to 15% in 2020 – and the special education expenditure rate – from roughly 20% to 25% of total expenditures – have grown considerably over the last decade.
- The CSDE should conduct a study to explain this growth and its impact on the total education system and provide projections for the future.

Data & Programs for English Language Learners

- The CSDE should secure from local school districts a more accurate number of children served in bilingual programs, tutoring programs, immersion programs, etc., and report on the record of annual progress of these students in terms of overall academic growth, acquisition of English, and social/emotional growth.
- There is a perception, statewide, of not knowing what is being provided to English Learners and what level of success the programs have achieved. The lack of information on dropout rates and graduation rates and the percentage of graduates pursuing higher education is unacceptable and must be addressed.
- **Add a total of \$1.5M per year to the CSDE** for data collection and research described above.



In Closing: What are the most important messages here?



- A. The State of Connecticut has a legal and moral obligation to lead, appropriately fund, and support public schools. Only the state can counteract the influence of local wealth on determining educational expenditures and opportunities.
- B. Connecticut's inequities and achievement gaps are well documented. Furthermore, COVID-19 has exacerbated the learning gaps and the digital divide, thereby putting Connecticut's neediest students in an even more precarious position.
- C. Other states have recently surpassed Connecticut in the quest for continuous improvement of schools.
- D. The most important lessons of the last 50 years of public policy related to equal educational opportunity are:
 - 1) the failure to take a comprehensive approach and too much reliance on a single equalization formula; and
 - 2) the failure to focus on the size and totality of the state contribution, and the concurrent failure to stick to a multi-year plan, instead of allowing the 169 town distribution to be the focus of debate.
- E. This comprehensive and long-term package of recommendations has a first-year cost of approximately \$78M in additional state funding, beyond what has already been planned. This represents only a 2.5% increase over the \$3.070B CSDE's general fund operating and grant budget for 2020–21, not including school construction and teacher retirement costs. Yes, the second year of the biennium would require an equal increase to that of year one, and the 15-year plan for ECS represents the promise of hundreds of millions in additional state aid. These hundreds of millions are deliberately phased-in over a 15-year period allowing for efficient use locally. The dollars represent only \$12M to \$20 M more per year than what has been planned for ECS through 2027–28. This is an important, reasonable, and responsible plan in light of all the educational needs of the state. Appendix C summarizes the new costs of this plan.

F. ***"Despite multiple court cases and repeated efforts at reform, there are still significant concerns about the equity and adequacy of Connecticut's K-12 education funding. The state (should) consider adopting a new, scientifically grounded, equitable, and adequate formula that allocates more state aid to districts with higher costs... in the last year analyzed an additional \$940 million... would have been needed to fully fund the predicted costs required to achieve the average student test performance in every district."***

Note: The estimated costs of an additional \$940 million were based on 2013 data analyses.

"Measuring Disparities in Cost and Spending Across Connecticut School Districts," Bo Zhao and Nicholas Chiumenti, September 2020, Federal Reserve Bank of Boston

- G. While some of the recommendations will require state legislation and funding, and some require actions by the CSDE, several of the most important recommendations include steps that every school board, superintendent, principal, and teacher can begin to address right now, for example, attacking structural racism and discrimination.

The continuous improvement of the educational experiences for each student in Connecticut's public schools begins with a commitment to action by all of us.



Innovation to Fundamentally Transform Schools



The absence of significant innovation in public education since the 19th century is well documented. The reasons why both elementary and secondary education, as well as higher education, have been resistant to change run the gamut of people's comfort with what they know and fear of change, to low expectations, and to a failure to understand the need for ever-greater expectations for each ensuing generation.

CAPSS has decided to do battle with the status quo and with many of the structures of public schools that have had a nearly 200-year life. The superintendents' association wishes to eliminate barriers in the education system that inhibit improving learning. In addition to working to see the recommendations of this report become state law, funded, and implemented, CAPSS will undertake a major campaign and study to ignite innovation in Connecticut Public Schools.

Innovations in education are needed for a fundamental transformation of schools. The goal is to identify, adopt, adapt, and implement innovations that result in achieving for each graduate a higher level of learning and capacity for further learning while visibly reducing some of Connecticut's achievement gaps.

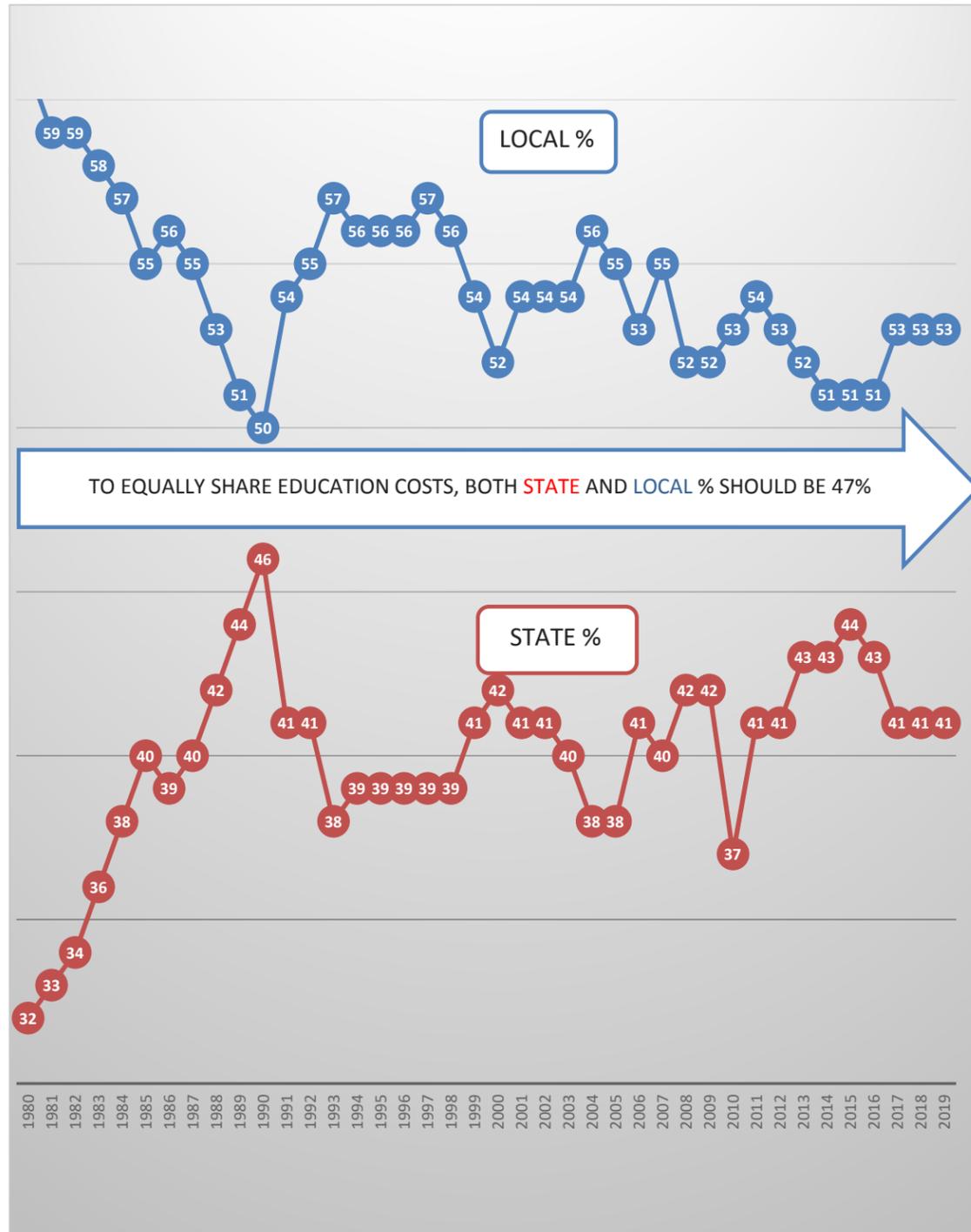
CAPSS envisions Connecticut Public Schools as centers of innovation aimed at bettering the future of public school students. The organization expects to dedicate the 2021, 2022, and 2023 calendar years to: identifying examples of flexibility and choice with how, when, and where learning takes place; developing alternatives to today's structures for teaching and learning; and supporting classroom, building and district efforts to implement creative solutions to present and future challenges.

A study group will be formed, and while convened by CAPSS, will be open to other organizations to join in this quest. As a controlling condition, the study will only undertake ideas and pilot programs that DO NOT require legislation and/or new funding. The purpose of this condition is to drive real change that reallocates resources, people, and things to new systems, methods, and practices, and not merely adding on to the current system.

The Study Group will have no constraints on the range or breadth of its investigations and may choose to establish its own parameters as needed. Individual CAPSS members have suggested several areas for study, such as: school calendar, attendance, uses of school facilities, curriculum and instruction, meaningful pathways, cross-disciplinary and other approaches to assessing learning, the intersection of schools and health, the school as a community and family resource, extra-curricular activities, out-of-school learning, the use of social media in learning, technology, globalization, and student-centered and personalized learning systems. The Study Group will be most interested in helping individual teachers, school principals, and central office staff that are engaged in transformational efforts toward growing student outcomes with the hope of validating them as successful and possibly replicating them elsewhere.

****Some elements from CAPSS' Innovation in Education Committee and Next Ed: Next Steps, A Vision and a Plan for Transforming Connecticut's Education System are reflected in the above.***

APPENDIX A: COMPARING % OF LOCAL AND STATE EDUCATION REVENUES FROM FY 1980 TO FY 2019



Sources: Annual SDE calculations, the latest of which can be found here: <https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Fiscal-Services/Grant-Calculations-and-Payments/Documents>

APPENDIX B: COMPARISON OF ECS ESTIMATED CURRENT LAW AND CAPSS ESTIMATED FULL FORMULA FUNDING

Fiscal Year	Current Law ECS (in \$ Millions)	Current Law Est. Change Year to Year (in \$ Millions)	CAPSS Est. ECS (in \$ Millions)	CAPSS Est. Change Year to Year (in Millions)	Difference Between Current Law and CAPSS Increases
2022	2,132.0	40.5	2,144.3	52.3	11.8
2023	2,171.5	39.5	2,197.9	53.6	14.1
2024	2,211.5	40	2,252.9	54.9	14.9
2025	2,251.5	40	2,309.2	56.3	16.3
2026	2,291.5	40	2,366.9	57.7	17.7
2027	2,331.5	40	2,426.1	59.2	19.2
2028	2,371.5	40	2,486.7	60.7	20.7
2029			2,548.9	62.2	
2030			2,612.6	63.7	
2031			2,677.9	65.3	
2032			2,744.9	66.9	
2033			2,813.5	68.6	
2034			2,883.8	70.3	
2035			2,955.9	72.1	
2036			3,029.8	73.9	

SUMMARY OF CHANGE IN ECS ENTITLEMENTS FROM FY 2020 TO FY 2021

CHANGE FROM FY 2020 TO 2021	# OF TOWNS	FY 2020 ECS	\$ CHANGE FROM FY 2020 TO FY 2021	TOTAL FY 2021 ECS
INCREASE	67	1,608,148,340	46,360,654	1,654,508,994
HOLD HARMLESS	7	82,313,904	11,689,732	82,313,904
LOSE	95	364,175,788	(7,411,553)	356,764,235
TOTAL	169	2,054,638,032	38,949,101	2,093,587,133
The change for Hold Harmless is \$0 but the value of the Hold Harmless is \$11.7 million from the formula.				

APPENDIX C: SUMMARY OF NEW COSTS

ESTIMATE OF NEW COSTS Program	Change Over FY 2020-21 Est.	
	FY 2021-22	FY 2022-23
Changes to Grant Programs:		
Phase in, Fully Fund, and Recalibrate Excess Cost (Special Education) Grant (#4)	33,000,000	70,000,000
Increase ECS (Funds shown are the difference between current law of about \$40 million/year and CAPSS plan of 2.5%/year) (#3)	11,800,000	25,900,000
Phase in and Reinstate Public Transportation Grant (#9)	10,000,000	20,000,000
Expand Specific School Based Mental Health Programs (#14)	5,000,000	10,000,000
Create Individual Programs for EL Students (#7)	3,000,000	6,000,000
Promote Regionalization with RESC financial support (#23)	2,500,000	5,000,000
Significantly Improve Home Based Virtual Learning (#11)	2,500,000	2,500,000
Transfer Most Adult Education to RESCs, provide for enhancements. (#6)	1,000,000	2,000,000
Changes to SDE Administrative Budget:		
Increase SDE Data Collection and Research (#30)	1,500,000	1,500,000
Improve State Intervention and Support (SDE) (#25)	1,000,000	1,000,000
Improve & Formalize Early Childhood and Kindergarten Teacher Connections (#8)	1,000,000	2,000,000
Enhance Curricula and Skills for 21st Century (#13)	1,000,000	2,000,000
Address Structural Racism and Discrimination (#10)	4,500,000	8,500,000
New (Except School Improvement Grant – See Below)	77,800,000	156,400,000
Grants To Be Reallocated to School Improvement Grant (#25)		
Commissioner's Network	10,009,398	10,009,398
Priority School Districts	30,818,778	30,818,778
After School Program	5,750,695	5,750,695
Extended School Hours	2,919,883	2,919,883
School Accountability	3,412,207	3,412,207
Sub-Total Reallocated Grants into School Improvement	52,910,961	52,910,961
Lower Priority Accounts To Be Reallocated to School Improvement (#21)		
Primary Mental Health	345,288	345,288
Leadership, Education, Athletics in Partnership (LEAP)	312,211	312,211
Adult Education Action	194,534	194,534
Connecticut Writing Project	20,250	20,250
Neighborhood Youth Centers	613,866	613,866
Parent Trust Fund Program	267,193	267,193
Bridges to Success	27,000	27,000
School-Based Diversion Initiative	900,000	900,000
Sub-Total Lower Priority Grants into School Improvement	2,680,342	2,680,342
School Improvement Grant Total	55,591,303	55,591,303

APPENDIX D – CAPSS Blueprint to Transform Connecticut's Public Schools

PROGRAM	RECOMMENDATIONS
1. State Share	The State must spend considerably more to meet a goal that the State and towns will equally share K-12 spending.
2. ECS Predictability	Prohibit the Governor from making mid-year changes to ECS. The General Assembly will have a May 1 deadline for setting ECS final grant awards for the year beginning next July 1 st .
3. ECS Improvements	In a fifteen-year plan, ECS will grow by about 2.5% annually. The Foundation will grow each year; annual ECS losses for 95 towns will be eliminated. There will be equity driven phase-in of distributions and hold harmless provisions when appropriate.
4. Special Education	Support a two-year phase-in of Excess Cost grant full funding with State scrutiny of growing identification rates and rising costs. The Grant will be paid on a more timely basis with incentives to keep students in district/state.
5. School Const.	Increase reimbursement (for most) to 10%-80% with stricter State project requirements.
6. Adult Ed.	Mandate services be transferred to RESCs; enrichment classes remain where they are.
7. Engl. Lang. Learners	Require schools to develop plans for ELLs; significant new State funding will be phased in to help pay for programming. Greater use of technology required.
8. Early Childhood	Adopt a goal of universal early childhood access for all underserved 3 and 4-year-olds with a first task of determining total level of need in each town. Strengthen the bonds of these early childhood programs with public kindergarten programs.
9. Transportation	Reinstitute over two years a wealth-based reimbursement grant for towns with the greatest (%) public transportation costs.

EDUCATIONAL EQUITY, ACHIEVEMENT, AND INNOVATION

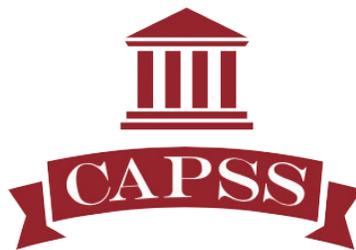
PROGRAM	RECOMMENDATIONS
10. Structural Racism	Directly address structural racism and other forms of discrimination within classrooms, schools and districts and adopt practices that promote diversity. Examine and act upon data on enrollment in higher level courses, Special Education identification rates, discipline patterns, retentions, graduation rates, board and school policies and more with the goal of reducing/eliminating discriminatory practices toward students of color. Use new State funds for minority teacher recruitment, teacher training in and access to proven bias-free curriculum and materials. Importantly, the State and Local governments should convene an advisory committee and agree to a ten-year effort to reduce structural racism.
11. Virtual Learning	Rethink virtual learning by radically improving the technology, content, and the use of virtual learning. Assist teachers and families. Expect that some amount of virtual learning will be needed going forward.
12. Student Assessment	Seek federal waivers (if required) to drop the grades 4, 6, and 8 assessments; add State paid PSATs. Make statewide Smarter Balance/PSAT/SAT materials available at school and at home.
13. SDE Leadership	State Department of Education must lead in advancing 21 st century learning skills (such as collaboration, problem solving, and nimblity), portrait of the graduate (with independent learning skills) with suggested, easily available, and aligned curricula and materials.
14. Student Well Being	Provide new State aid for student safety, trauma, mental health and wellbeing, and improved networks of providers and services.
15. Disengaged Youth	The State must support schools in their outreach to disengaged/disenfranchised youth aimed at high school completion and career pathway programs.
16. Teacher Certification	Eliminate barriers to teacher certification (including a review and updating of legal and regulatory requirements), creating new regional preparation programs for teachers and leaders with a renewed focus on quality preservice (student teaching) experiences. Clarify current requirements for evaluation and professional development.

IMPROVING INTERGOVERNMENTAL MATTERS

<u>PROGRAM</u>	<u>RECOMMENDATIONS</u>
17. Federal Funds	Coordinate an effort to require the federal Department of Education to meet its fiscal promises, such as financing at least 40% of CT's \$2 billion annual Special Education bill.
18. Municipal Overburden	Merge, simplify, and financially hold harmless non-State aid to towns.
19. State and Local Debt	Require an <u>annual</u> accounting of all State and Local debt along with plans to pay off these debts (capital, pension, and non-pension retirement benefit debts).
20. Teacher Retirement System (TRB)	Support continued changes that provide financial relief to the TRB, and consider the possibility of options for a choice of retirement plan for new hires.
21. State Grant Elimination	Eliminate eight small grants and re-purpose the funding to new School Improvement Grant (see budget at end of this).
22. MER (MBR)	Reinstate a minimum expenditure requirement and faithfully execute its implementation.
23. Regionalism	Encourage and provide funding to assist the Regional Educational Service Centers (RESCs) to facilitate the regionalization of services, especially for Students with Disabilities.
24. Waivers	Adopt a process for the Department of Education to waive certain non-health/safety mandates for districts demonstrating high growth, high achieving, and gap closing.

ACCOUNTABILITY FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

<u>PROGRAM</u>	<u>RECOMMENDATIONS</u>
25. School Improvement Grant	With the merger of five mostly Priority School District grants, (and the repurposing of eight smaller grants), these funds will financially hold harmless approximately half of the Alliance Districts that currently benefit from the PSD grants, and expand to <u>all</u> of the Alliance Districts programs to improve student achievement. (Roughly 30 to 40 districts total)
26. Governance	Clarify State laws and regulations about the roles/responsibilities of superintendents, and local boards of education, as well as the State Board of Education in the takeover process.
27. Public School Choice	Financially maintain high quality schools of choice with possible matching of the ECS Foundation level; acknowledge and address the inequities and long-term funding problems of magnet schools with goal driven solutions.
28. Measuring Success	Commit an annual report on progress reducing inequalities and disparities in expenditures, programs, and achievements.
29. Health and Safety	Related to COVID-19, but also to potential future pandemics, require districts to conduct health and safety audits based on an SDE template and prepare comprehensive plans that show continuous readiness for future pandemics and other interruptions.
30. More Research Needed	The State Department of Education should extensively research pupil expenditures related to Special Education and programs for English Learners.



Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents
Leadership for the Future of Learning

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