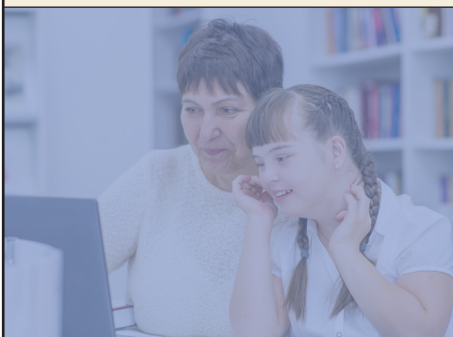


Connecticut's Priority: Our Public Schools



JANUARY 2026

INTRODUCTION

In 2021, the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS) published a Blueprint to Transform Connecticut Public Schools – a vision of continuous improvement coupled with a comprehensive, long-term set of recommendations for addressing the educational and fiscal needs of Connecticut’s school districts. Each year since 2021, CAPSS has updated the Blueprint, reported on progress and amended the recommendations to reflect the most current needs and direction for our schools.

This document represents the 2026 update and revisions to the original Blueprint- and suggests that Connecticut’s public elementary and secondary schools should become a much greater priority for both local and state policy makers and education practitioners.

CONNECTICUT’S PRIORITY: OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

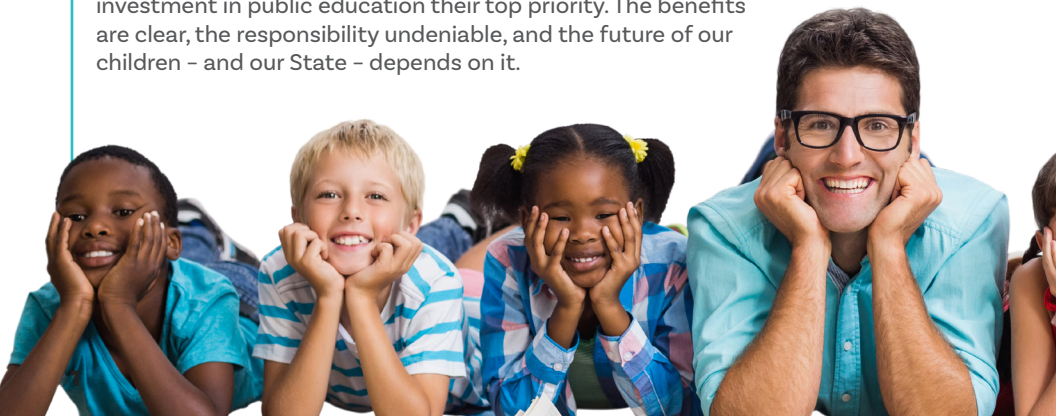
No investment yields greater rewards than public education. CAPSS firmly believes that no other public expenditure drives social and economic progress as powerfully as sustained investment in high-quality public schools.

Education delivers the highest return on every dollar. Every dollar spent on preschool, elementary, and secondary education generates exponential benefits – nurturing young minds early, empowering individuals for life, and dramatically reducing future social and economic costs.

Public education is America’s greatest success story. For nearly 200 years, our public schools have been a cornerstone of opportunity and growth. Compulsory, publicly funded education has propelled millions into better lives, strengthened communities, and fueled the nation’s prosperity. No other institution in history has achieved such transformative impact.

The State’s duty is clear and nonnegotiable. Our Constitution guarantees free public education for every child. Temporary revenue shortfalls or competing budget priorities cannot erase this legal and moral obligation. The State must continue to lead and partner with all 169 towns to uphold this essential commitment.

Invest in the future consistently and courageously. CAPSS urges policymakers to make continuous, sustainable investment in public education their top priority. The benefits are clear, the responsibility undeniable, and the future of our children – and our State – depends on it.



THE ESSENTIAL QUESTION THAT HAS GUIDED CAPSS IN DEFINING ITS PRIORITIES GOING FORWARD IS:

What changes in CT Public Schools are imperative over the next 10 years that will result in greater success for every student?

CAPSS has chosen to focus on five essential areas for the next few years.

- 1 Elevate the Stature of Connecticut's Public Schools and the Education Profession
- 2 Increase the State's Share of Education Funding
- 3 Optimize Special Education
- 4 Invest Early in All Children
- 5 Pathways to Possibilities

The rationale for each of these priorities follows ...

In order to sustain the quality of Connecticut Public Education, we know that equal access to high quality instruction and to successful outcomes for all students requires teachers to develop a personal relationship with each student, differentiate instruction to meet individual student's needs and maintain continuous communication with parents and families. Moreover, we know that additional supports are needed for students with special needs, students living in poverty, students whose home and first language is other than English and students who are disengaged from school. Finally, it is essential that towns be able to provide sufficient budgets to enable high-quality professional development and support for staff, both professional and non-certified, and to have the necessary tools and supports to fulfill their assigned roles.

Today's students need to acquire the skills to read, write, speak, compute, innovate, engage in scientific inquiry, and work together to solve complex/real-life problems, but they also must develop a love of learning, an appreciation for the history of this country, a respect for others and the importance of contributing to the betterment of our society. **All those involved in leading public education must stay focused on continuously improving students' learning and achievement, and ensuring that all students are treated equitably and with dignity.**

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MOVING FORWARD IN 2026

CAPSS envisions local and state leaders working together to achieve the following goals that elevate Connecticut's public schools and ensure every child benefits from a world-class education.

1

Elevate the Stature of Connecticut's Public Schools and the Education Profession

A. Public Schools

Public education is Connecticut's greatest public asset – and it must be recognized, celebrated, and prioritized. The value, impact, and return on investment of our schools must be publicized and championed.

CAPSS advocates for a multi-year public information initiative to emphasize:

- The critical importance of public education in all aspects of human life and the future;
- The historical success of compulsory schooling with public funding and accountability;
- The need for a strong, equitable and successful system that serves all children with free and appropriate education;
- A continuous reporting of “success stories”, progress, and innovations from Connecticut schools;

There is, presently, no true counter-balance to the daily onslaught of negative information on the problems of schools and young people. All media prefers stories of failure to those of success. The fact is that the vast majority of students are succeeding, every day, in many different ways and are the backbone of the Connecticut and USA success of continuous progress in the social and economic growth.

All schools, institutions, organizations and individuals have a role to play in presenting the facts on Connecticut public schools' success. This will require a renewed focus on engaging families and community leaders and partner organizations in documenting these successes.



B. Education Profession

While all educators face real challenges, they also experience profound joy and meaning in shaping children's lives. That joy deserves equal visibility and must be included in the public information initiative suggested above.

At the heart of any educational enterprise is the continuous, daily teacher-student interaction. Nothing is more important to the future success of public education in Connecticut than the quality of its teaching force. The need for a more diverse workforce is absolutely essential, as is listening to the voices of educators on how to improve and grow the profession.

However, physical and psychological conditions that teachers are often experiencing in our schools is of serious concern.

The salaries of Connecticut public school educators should be increased. The pandemic of 2020-22 helped prove how much education is harmed when there is no continuous, demanding and supportive teaching provided to each student. We are facing a crisis. There is a present shortage of teacher candidates, a projection of even greater shortages over the next 10 years, and a negative salary differentiation between the teaching profession and other bachelor's degree occupations.

Raising total compensation, particularly for starting teachers in every town, must be considered. Connecticut must also address the issues of certification, professional development, student teaching, teacher shortages, teacher evaluation, appropriate use of non-certified staff, the work hours of the day and year, advancement, mentoring, diversity and more. These factors are all part of the "total condition" of the education profession, and every one of them needs clarification and greater expectations.

"Nothing will advance Connecticut public education more than elevating the entire education profession."

A HISTORICAL LENS

Connecticut led the nation in 1986 with a Teacher Salary Enhancement Act (TSEA) that elevated all starting salaries and increased compensation to all teachers. It was also equity-based with greater state funds provided to school districts with the greatest need and the least local capacity to pay. For at least 20 years thereafter, the TSEA helped bring more highly-qualified young people into the public schools as teachers.

After the increase in teacher salaries, college students choosing education as their major had higher SAT scores than previously, and student achievement in Connecticut in the later 1990's, when compared to other states and the nation, was at an all-time high level.

It has been 40 years since the leaders of this state have taken the bold step to demonstrate "We want the best for our children". Today's students can and will do better than we have done if we invest more in their future NOW.

Connecticut must rebalance the partnership of state and local education funding to ensure long-term adequacy, equity, and sustainability.

A. ECS

A revised ECS formula is needed with a ten-year plan, with an annual increasing foundation level, with an equal focus on town capacity and need, and a commitment to fund the costs of inflation as well as providing greater equity, and with no reductions for any town.

In order to keep pace with inflation, and continue to reduce spending inequities among towns, the State must be prepared to appropriate roughly \$100 million additional, each year, not the recent historical average of merely \$50 million on the \$2.5 billion ECS appropriation.

The State of Connecticut has made very little progress in the last 20 years in increasing the state's share of the total revenue for public elementary and secondary education. Hovering around 40%, annual increases from the State have barely kept pace with inflation and certainly have not provided for more equalized expenditures among school districts. While a good deal of more equity/fairness exists today than before Horton vs. Meskill (in 1975), the total State funds (from all grants and State funded programs) are not sufficient to accomplish the task of helping the poorest communities, with the most challenged students, to close the expenditure and achievement gaps. (Local funds support roughly 54% and federal funds 6%).

With the full funding of the current Education Cost Sharing (ECS) formula and grant to take place in 2025-26, it is time to fix a new target that would move the State's total share of the enterprise to be equal to that paid by the 169 towns of CT. Of course, the annual increase in the ECS grant (or its successor) should be reasonable, sustainable, and of a size in each community so that it will be used appropriately on educational opportunities and NOT on property tax relief.



B. Excess Costs and SEED grant

1. The State must commit to 100% funding of the Special Education Excess Cost grant over the next 2 to 3 years; paying the first payment of the grant – earlier in the school year (no later than October); and expecting an annual increase in this grant, after achieving 100% funding, in the tens of millions.

The single greatest failure of the last 25 years has been the inability or unwillingness to fund the promise of State support for the excess costs of special education students needing significant intervention. Virtually all of the additional costs of special education for the last two-plus decades have been covered by funds from 169 towns. Sufficient funding for special education has been a very broken promise by both the State and Federal governments. This failure has harmed both special and regular education and has eroded the public confidence in the total public education enterprise.

2. The State must make permanent the new SEED grant, and provide the inclusion of regional school districts (who were erroneously omitted).



The State of Connecticut has a legal and moral obligation to appropriately fund its public schools.

The State will reduce inequities in its school funding system and increase student achievement only if it genuinely commits to significantly increasing state aid as a percentage of all revenues for public schools. It is essential to the future of Connecticut Public Education.

“Only the State can counteract the influence of local wealth on education disparities among towns.”

CONNECTICUT CONTINUES TO RANK IN THE BOTTOM QUARTILE OF ALL STATES, IN THE PERCENTAGE OF SCHOOL REVENUES PROVIDED BY STATE GOVERNMENT.

3 Optimize Special Education

The growth, over the last two decades, of students needing special education services and the growth in total district expenditures attributed to special education – requires a major study of the causes and impact of that growth.

The Connecticut General Assembly has recognized this need by establishing a new sub-committee, solely dedicated to special education; and the Connecticut State Department of Education has undertaken several initiatives and actions to improve the operation of special education.

Every district must have the conditions necessary to deliver excellent, inclusive instruction for every child.

High-quality classroom instruction must be the norm statewide, supported by consistent and effective interventions for students who need additional support.

Restructuring should emphasize early intervention, capacity building, and accountability, and ensuring that resources drive measurable student success.

There is an urgent need to address: the identification of students for Special Education; the options or choices when students are not identified; the role of outplacements; the need for documenting achievement; the inequities among districts; the growth of costs in Special Education including transportation; the issues of appropriate staffing; the need for standards and controls on private providers; reasonable and necessary limits on unilateral placements by parents; and the long overdue restructuring of the “burden of proof” to achieve balance and fairness to all.



Connecticut's future depends on its commitment to every learner, beginning at the earliest ages.

A. Early Childhood

The State's new and significant transformative investment of \$300 million in an endowment for preschool quality and access – provides opportunities for School Readiness Councils, providers and school districts to grow and improve in every aspect of serving three- and four-year-olds.

CAPSS has supported the growth and integration of programs for three- and four-year-olds for over 60 years, since the beginnings of Head Start in 1965. Moreover, CAPSS agrees with the long-range plan and recommendations of the Connecticut Commissioner of Early Childhood and the Governor's Blue Ribbon Panel, and supports the equitable compensation of early childhood workers as a number one priority. This will necessitate a major infusion of State funds. The state funding of pre-school began in 1997 as one response to Sheff vs. O'Neill, and funding grew for approximately 10 years. Unfortunately, but for federal funds, the State financial commitment to three- and four-year-olds has been relatively frozen for the last 20 years.

CAPSS believes in the continued use of many providers: private and public, Head Start, school systems, etc., but with greater clarity around the role of local leaders, the capacity of local district leadership and greater use of the resources of school districts. In most communities, the "coordinating" role for serving three- and four-year-olds has been the School Readiness Council.

The content of the curricular programs for three- and four-year-olds should be clearly defined by the State in both the outcomes and the experiences for children. CAPSS also believes strongly in serving the whole child and the whole family, and advocates for wraparound programs and year-round approaches that often include Family Resource Centers, School Based Health Clinics and before and after school childcare services.

While Connecticut has been a leader, nationally, in serving an increasing percentage of three- and four-year-olds, it is imperative that the preschool experience be a quality one for every child in Connecticut.

“State policy and leadership should focus its resources on the communities and families with the greatest need for preschool programs.”

CONNECTICUT'S EXPERIENCE AND SIGNIFICANT NATIONAL RESEARCH HAVE ESTABLISHED A DIRECT AND CAUSAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A QUALITY PRE-SCHOOL EXPERIENCE AND LATER STUDENT SUCCESS THROUGHOUT SCHOOL, FURTHER EDUCATION AND LIFE.

B. Early Literacy

The statewide effort to improve early reading outcomes – anchored by the Science of Reading MasterClass – must continue with stronger support for teacher training, evidence-based materials and progress monitoring.

Countless research studies have established the importance of early reading success for every child – at the earliest age possible. This requires: focused instruction, often one-on-one work between a well-trained teacher and student; the use of “Science of Reading” materials; and the partnership of a school and home environment -- with student-chosen reading materials that motivate the child to continue their reading on their own and for pleasure.

Many reading education experts have criticized the fact that those students struggling to acquire these basic reading skills – are not provided the extra time, focus and tutoring needed to succeed. There must be a more relentless pursuit of reading success for each and every student by the end of first grade.



5 Pathways to Possibilities

Connecticut has an opportunity to build a coordinated, statewide **COLLEGE AND CAREER PATHWAYS (CCP)** system that ensures every student, regardless of zip code, has access to high-quality pathways leading to postsecondary success and meaningful employment. Right now, the state's pathways landscape is dependent on individual districts, institutions, and nonprofit partners, resulting in uneven access and inconsistent alignment. CAPSS is calling for a unified, statewide structure that connects PK-12 education, higher education, industry, labor, and government so that pathways are coherent, sustained, equitable, and responsive to Connecticut's workforce needs. Importantly, by taking this step, Connecticut will also remain competitive with other states that have already built robust, statewide pathway systems and are rapidly expanding opportunities for their students and employers.

To support this effort, CAPSS proposes leading the creation and rollout of a comprehensive Statewide CCP Plan whose early work will be grounded in five strategic pillars: broad stakeholder alignment, development of a statewide pathways framework, a clear policy and legislative strategy, full integration of industry and labor, and a robust two-year communications campaign. This work would build a common Connecticut CCP Framework aligned with federal and state priorities, strengthen credit transfer and funding policies, expand work-based learning and apprenticeship opportunities, and elevate public understanding through the "Pathways to Possibility" campaign.

By investing in a coordinated statewide structure, rather than relying on fragmented, local efforts, Connecticut can ensure that all students benefit from seamless, high-quality pathways that connect learning to real opportunity. This approach positions the state to meet current and future workforce demands, remain competitive with states that are moving quickly in this space, deepen partnerships across sectors, and strengthen Connecticut's commitment to preparing every young person for college, careers, and life.



LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS

The following recommendations are specific legislative proposals for consideration during the 2026 legislative session.

These proposals serve as an important first step in the longer-range plan for improving public education: **CONNECTICUT'S PRIORITY: OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS.**

ELEVATE THE EDUCATION PROFESSION

Connecticut's public education system depends on the ability to attract and retain highly qualified and passionate educators. A statewide effort to elevate the profession, improve working conditions, and rebuild public respect for educators is essential to ensuring every student has access to excellent teachers, leaders and student support staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Launch a statewide public awareness campaign to elevate the image of the profession and encourage new entrants into teaching, administration, and support roles.
- Direct CSDE to develop model policies and communications guidance that protect and support educators and board members from harassment and promote respectful public discourse.
- Place a moratorium on new curricular and professional development mandates and review existing requirements for impact, redundancy, and funding alignment.
- Restore support to educators by reducing legislative decisions (to include universal professional development and curricular mandates) that deprofessionalize the profession while preserving the autonomy of the CSDE.



LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS

FUNDING: ECS & SPECIAL EDUCATION

Equitable, timely and predictable funding is essential to ensuring that every child in Connecticut has access to a high-quality education. Funding must reflect true costs of education, fully reimburse special education expenses, and support high-need districts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Revise the ECS foundation rate (unchanged since 2013 at \$11,525) to reflect current costs of education and inflation.
- Fully fund the Special Education Excess Cost Grant and provide earlier disbursements to districts. Promote in-district programs and regional inter-district cooperation by adjusting the Excess Cost Threshold to 2.5x for in-district programs, 3.5x for RESC programs, and retaining the 4.5x threshold for external placements.
- Review and Revise SEED Grant (Special Education Expansion & Development), positioning it as a long-term, flexible funding mechanism for high-need students.
- Monitor impacts of grant consolidation and magnet tuition caps to ensure that funding changes do not unintentionally disadvantage Alliance and high-need districts.
- Incentivize sustainable and scalable programs designed to include multiple LEAS in regional activities and specialized in-house programs.



LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS

PROVIDE MANDATE RELIEF

Connecticut's districts and municipalities face a growing number of state requirements without corresponding financial support. Each new mandate diverts resources from classrooms and undermines local decision-making. CAPSS advocates for open collaboration, full funding, and practitioner review of all legislative proposals affecting districts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Improve collaboration among the State, districts, and municipalities to ensure that new education mandates are co-designed with practitioners, focused on student outcomes.
- Place a 2-year moratorium on any new unfunded mandates to allow the Education Mandate Review Advisory Council to make recommendations.
- Require that all new state mandates include full funding for implementation and be vetted by practitioner panels prior to legislative action.
- Consolidate and align existing state training requirements to restore educator time for instruction, collaboration, and student support.
- Provide state funding for electric school bus conversion mandates for districts and municipalities, recognizing the significant fiscal and logistical challenges they face in meeting 2030-2040 compliance goals.

NEW PROCEDURE FOR HOME SCHOOLING

To comply with the statutory requirement for the compulsory schooling for each child, Connecticut should consider new statewide standards and procedures for homeschooling, managed by the Connecticut State Department of Education, with regional follow-up by the RESCs and appropriate state funding and staff.

CAPSS 2026 Legislative Priorities: Strengthening Connecticut's Public Schools

ELEVATE THE EDUCATION PROFESSION



Launch a Statewide Public Awareness Campaign
Aim to improve the profession's image and attract new, qualified educators.



Place a Moratorium on New Mandates
Halt new curricular and professional development requirements to reduce educator burdens.



Protect Educators from Harassment
Develop model policies to ensure respectful discourse and a safe working environment.



Enact a 2-Year Moratorium on Unfunded Mandates
Pause new requirements to allow for review and analysis of their impact.

SECURE FAIR & PREDICTABLE FUNDING

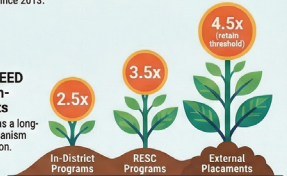


Update the Base Education Funding Rate
Revise the ECS foundation rate of \$11,525, which has been unchanged since 2013.



Fully Fund Special Education Costs
Ensure 100% reimbursement for the Special Education Excess Cost Grant.

Sustain the SEED Grant for High-Need Students
Solidify this grant as a long-term funding mechanism for special education.



Require Full Funding for All New Mandates
Ensure state requirements include the financial support necessary for implementation.



Fund the Electric School Bus Conversion
Provide state aid to help districts meet the expensive 2030-2040 compliance goals.

ADDRESS UNFUNDED MANDATES



CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Connecticut stands at a critical juncture in public education. The challenges ahead demand bold action, thoughtful policy reform and sustained financial commitment to ensure every student has the opportunity to thrive. These priorities are not just about improving educational outcomes; they are also about creating a more equitable, supportive and sustainable system that prepares all students for the future. Thus, CAPSS is recommending:

- Sustainably and annually increasing state funding for public schools,
- Supporting an appropriately compensated teaching profession with working conditions that re-ignite the joy of teaching,
- Serving better all three- and four-year olds through higher quality and more stable pre-school programs, followed by early reading success,
- Strongly supporting the powerful recommendations of Young People First (Dalio Foundation's and CCM's report), particularly improvement in ECS funding, more community schools, and greater coordination among youth services' agencies,
- Supporting a statewide initiative on the broader and deeper dissemination of fact-based information concerning the many successes of Connecticut public schools,
- Supporting a statewide system of Career Pathways that lead students to more successful further education and employment, and
- Ensuring leadership, at every level, is committed to: knowing every student; setting clear and high expectations; assuring accountability for improving achievement; and working passionately to provide fairness for every child.

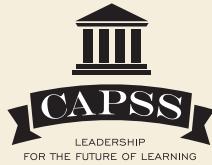


THE TIME TO ACT IS NOW.

By making Connecticut public schools the priority for additional state resources, Connecticut can build on its legacy of excellence and lead the nation in providing a high-quality education for every child.

CAPSS is ever mindful that the decisions we make in the coming years will shape the future of our State, and it is deeply committed to ensuring that the future is one in which every student can succeed, every educator is valued, and every community can flourish.

Let us work together to make this vision a reality, because the success of our public schools will, ultimately, determine the future success of Connecticut itself.



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