CAPSS/CABE Conference --- Special Education Reform Legislation, One Year Later: Where Are We Now?







Presenters

Special Education Task Force

- 22 Members: Teachers, Administrators, Parent Advocates, CSDE.
- Operated by Consensus: Recommendations were unanimous.
- Three subcommittees:
  - Finance – Chaired by Patrice McCarthy
  - Eligibility – Chaired by Aimee Turner
  - Services – Chaired by Alicia Bowman
- Three tri-chairs
  - Fran Rabinowitz
  - Michelle Laubin
  - Andrew Feinstein

Four Major Issues- Explored

- Recruitment/Retention (Staff Shortages)
- Funding/Resources
- Equity Across the State
- Achievement Gap

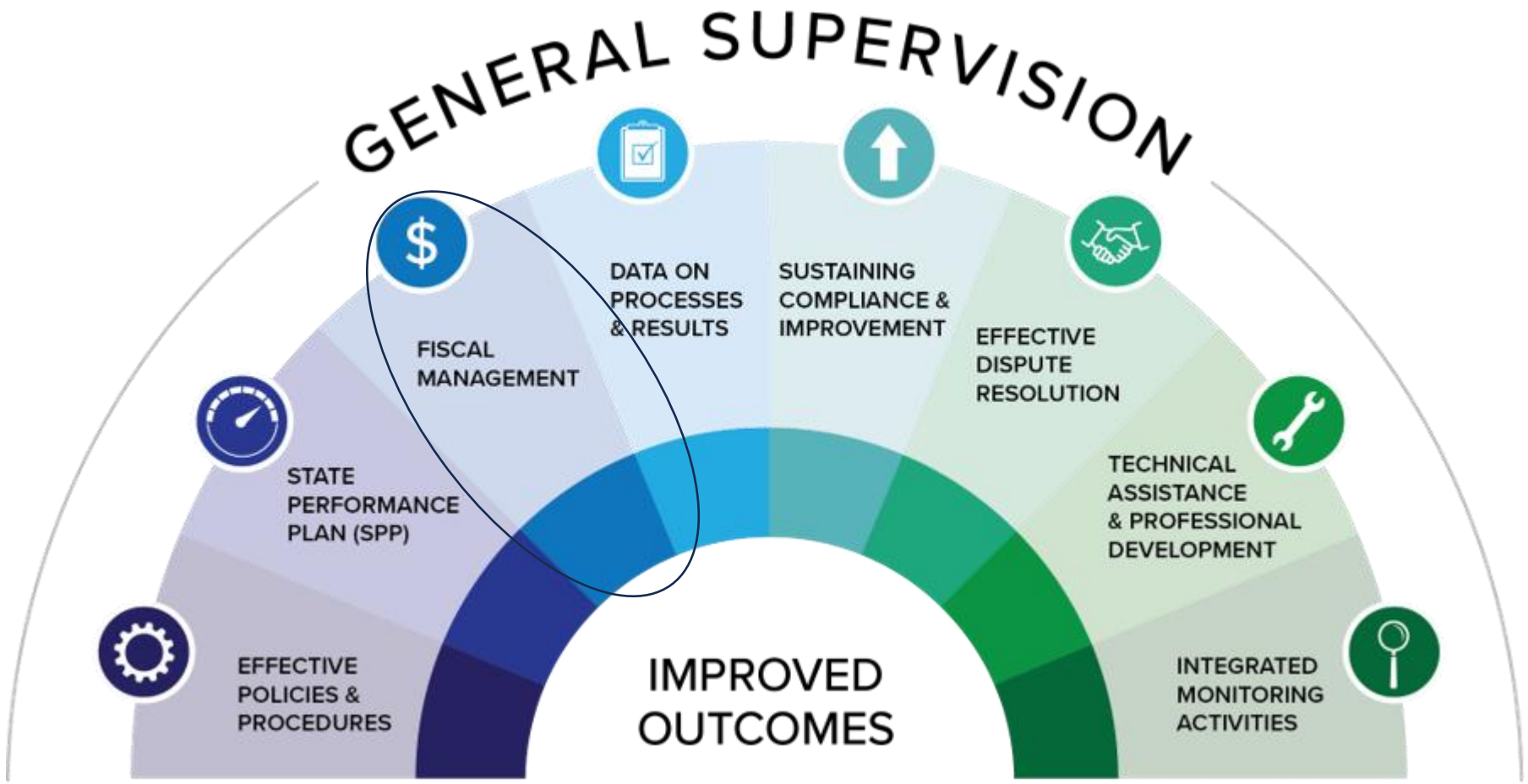
Funding Recommendations

- Add 50% Weight for Number of Eligible Special Education Students to ECS Formula.
- Adjust Foundation Amount in ECS Formula to account for inflation since 2012.
- Leave allocation of additional ECS funds to districts.
- Fully fund excess cost reimbursement.
- Eliminate tiers in excess cost formula.
- Continue to reimburse out-of-district placements above 4.5 times per pupil cost.
- Reimburse in-district placements above 3 times per pupil cost.
- Pursue policies to maximize the number of students educated with typical peers.

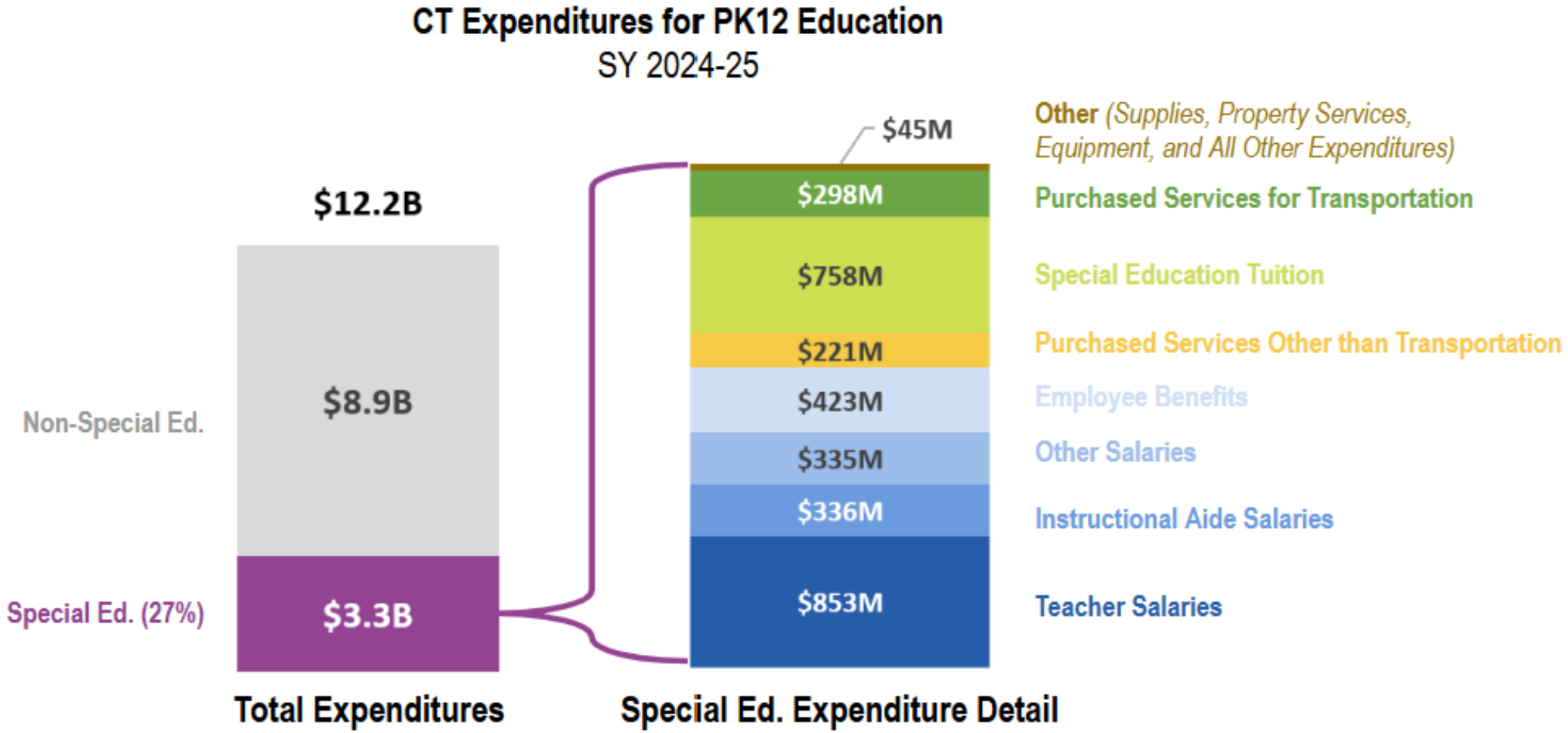
Funding Recommendations (continued)

- Create a $20 million pilot grant program to develop programs in-district to reduce the need for out-of-district placements.
- 15% increase in state reimbursement for school construction to build such in-district programs.
- Create model contract between Approved Private Special Education Placements (APSEPs) and school districts.
- If the cost of APSEP services for the same services to the same student goes up by more than CPI, State Department of Education (CSDE) needs to investigate.
- Ensure that any rate setting formula considered will save more than it will cost.
- CSDE to collate and make available to districts information on the tuition rate of each APSEP and each Regional Education Service Center (RESC) program.

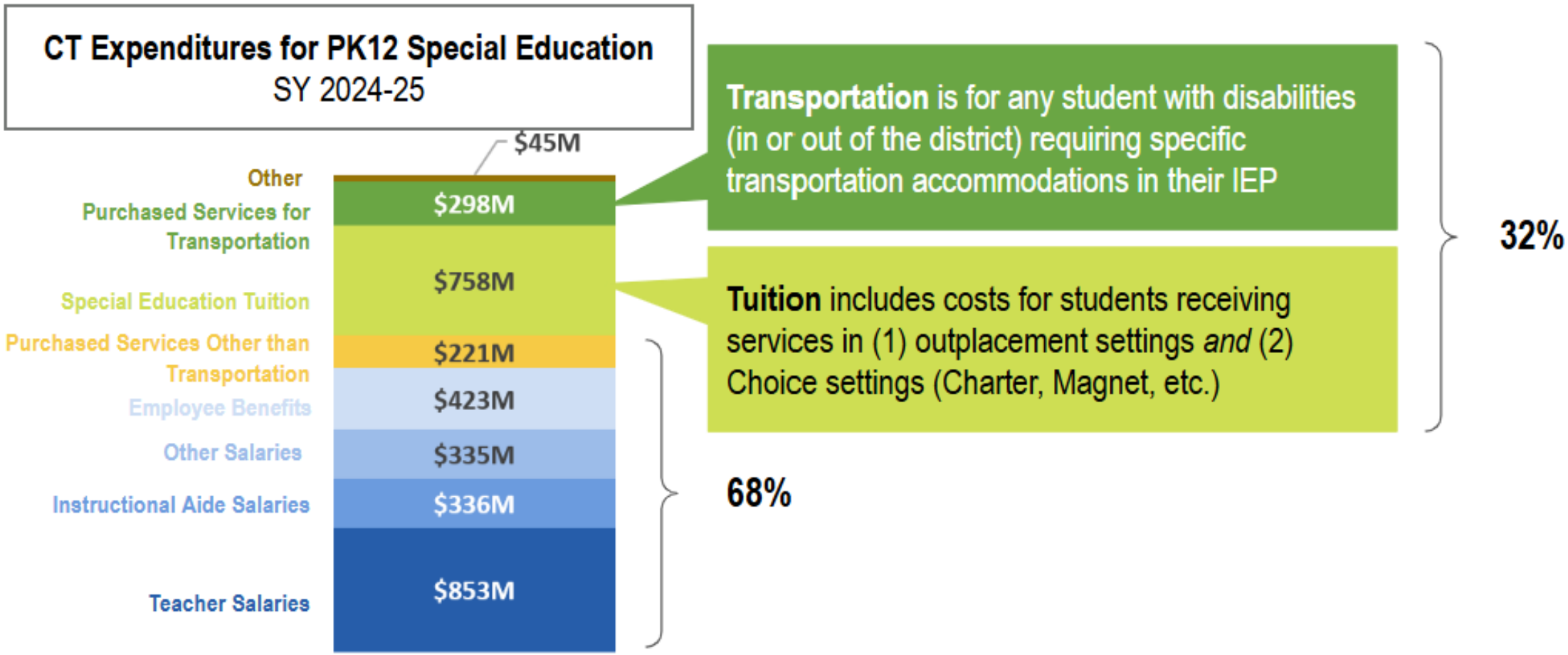
CSDE General Supervision & Monitoring Framework



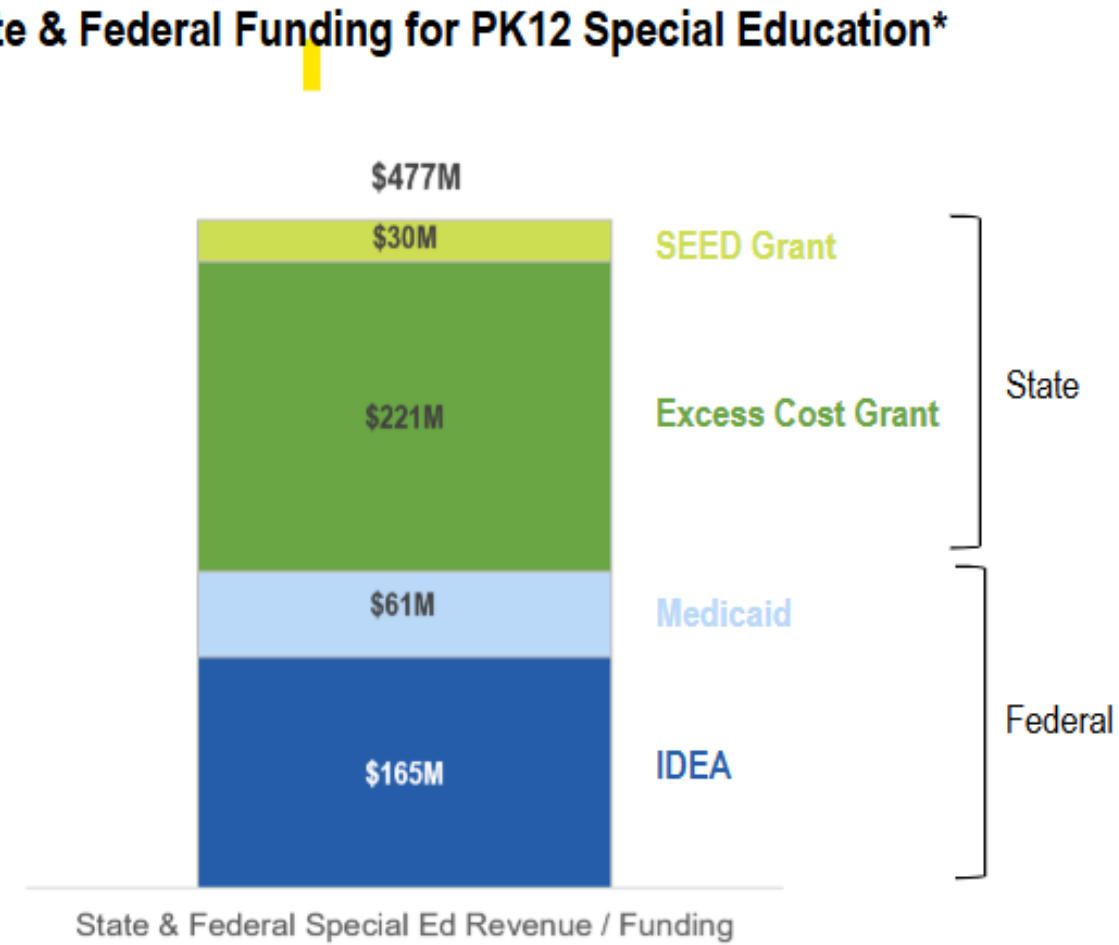
Special education expenditures make up 27% of all PK12 education expenditures in Connecticut



Tuition and transportation costs make up about one-third of all special education spending



Dedicated state and federal funding for special education in CT totals $477M



Summary Insights on Special Education Funding & Spending in Connecticut

- Special education spending accounts for 27% of total PK12 education spending in Connecticut
- Special education costs are a function of the share of students receiving special education services, the intensity of student need, and delivery model costs
- Dedicated state revenue - primarily Excess Cost grants - covers a portion of costs for students requiring high-cost services
- Special education costs across districts vary, and are not fully explained by any one district characteristic (district size, poverty level, etc.)

A note on state comparisons

State context varies - law, governance structures, student population, geography

Comparison is useful for: (1) Identifying areas for further inquiry on CT's practice, and (2) Surfacing ideas to test/evolve/apply in CT's context

Recent changes to Special Education funding in CT

Recent changes	Related Recommendations from the 2023-25 Task Force To Study Special Education Services and Funding
Additional $40 million was appropriated to the Excess Cost Grant (2025), which continued for FY26 and FY27	Fully fund the Excess Cost Grant; lower the threshold to 3x average PPE for in-district programs
Special Education Expansion and Development (SEED) grant (2025): $30 million appropriated in both FY 2026 and FY 2027 to further support special education and Tiered interventions via an adapted ECS formula*; requires expenditure reporting	Include a 50% weight for special ed in the ECS formula; update ECS to account for inflation
High-Quality Special Education Incentive Grant (2025): $8.9 million for programming / $10 million for capital improvement starting in FY27 for school districts to develop or expand in-district or multi-district special education programs to reduce student outplacements	Create a $20 million pilot grant program for new therapeutic programs
Rate schedule: By FY28, CSDE will establish a rate schedule for providers to use when charging for special education services for outplaced students	Investigate rate increases that exceed the Consumer Price Index; collate information on tuition rates by program

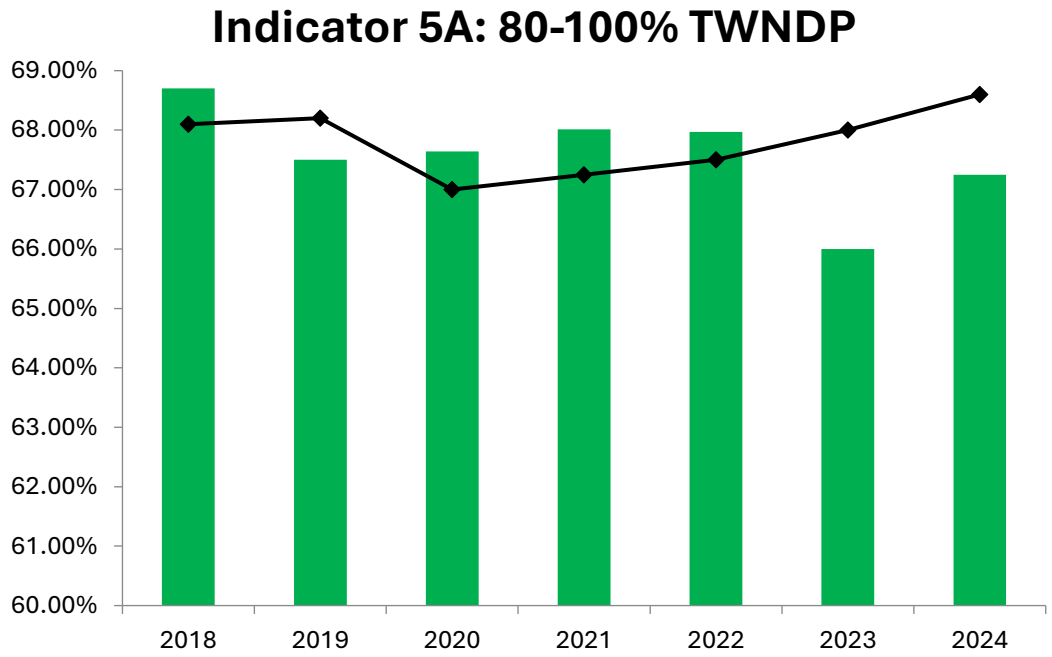
Federal IDEA Grant

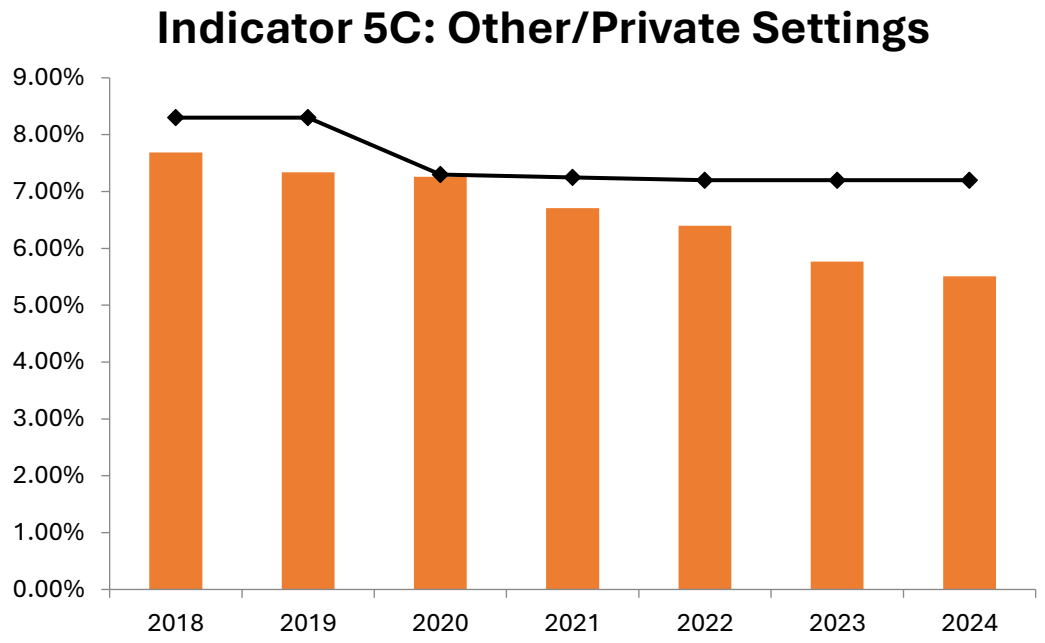
FFY26 IDEA Part B Section 611	Total Award	Max Admin	Max Other Set-Aside	Min Flow-Through to LEAs
Base Award	$159,025,024	$4,133,616	$17,881,532	$137,009,876
2026 Supplement	$1,081,534	$0	$0	$1,081,534
TOTAL	**$160,106,558**	**$4,133,616**	**$17,881,532**	**$138,091,410**

FFY26 IDEA Part B Section 619	Total Award	Max Admin	Max Other Set-Aside	Min Flow-Through to LEAs
Base Award	$5,398,783	$283,673	$1,134,696	$3,980,414
2026 Supplement	$185,851	$0	$0	$185,851
TOTAL	**$5,584,634**	**$283,673**	**$1,134,696**	**$4,166,265**

Out of District Programming

- Rate Setting – December 30, 2027
- Standards Review Process for Program Approval





Transportation Billing Standards

- Alignment with the Individual Student Needs and IEP Requirements
- Contractual Clarity and Communication
- Itemized and Transparent Billing
- Fair, Consistent, and Equitable Cost Application (Duplicate Charges)
- Documentation of Rates, Units of Service, and Additional Charges
- Applicable Funding and Program Requirements

Eligibility Recommendations

- Permit use of Developmental Delay classification until age 8, while ensuring that any child whose diagnosis is clear prior to age 8 is designated under the proper category.
- CSDE to update all eligibility guidelines and tools every three years and provide training both to school officials and to parents.
- Eligibility guidelines and training should have special emphasis on cultural competence.
- CSDE to audit restraint and seclusion incident reports to ensure consistent application of the law.
- Mandate a robust Multitiered System of Support (MTSS) in each school with CSDE responsible to ensure compliance.
- Decouple the gifted and talented identification process from the special education system.
- CSDE to design a standard eligibility process for gifted and talented that ensures the opportunity for identification of students from diverse backgrounds.

Updated Guidance

Special Education Procedures and Practices Manual

Introduction

Definitions And Explanations Of Common Terms Used In This Manual

Chapter 1: Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Chapter 2: Child Find and Referral Process

Chapter 3: Planning and Placement Team (PPT) Members

Chapter 4: Evaluation and Eligibility

Chapter 5: Individualized Education Program (IEP)

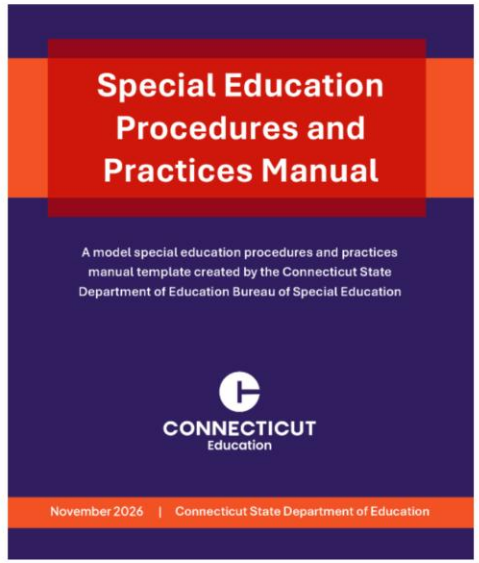
Chapter 6: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) and Placement

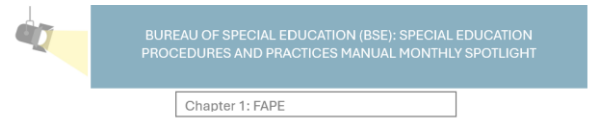
Chapter 7: Students Unable to Attend School for Medical Reasons

Chapter 8: Legal Notices

Chapter 9: Students Parentally-Placed in Private Schools

Chapter 10: Discipline



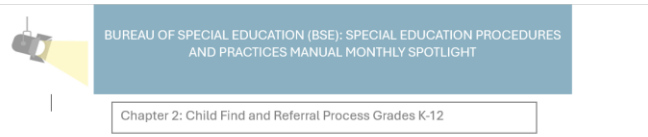


Introduction: This guidance document from the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) is designed to highlight key components in the Connecticut Special Education Procedures and Practices Manual. It is not a comprehensive review of all state and federal requirements.

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) means special education and related services that are provided at public expense, under public supervision and direction, and without charge; meet the standards of the State Department of Education, including the requirements of the IDEA; include an appropriate preschool, elementary school, or secondary school education; and are provided in conformity with an IEP.

Age of Eligibility: Eligible children and youth ages 3 through the end of the school year during which the student turns 22 receive special education and related services under the IDEA Part B.

Entitlement to FAPE: An eligible student is entitled to special education and related services up through the end of the school year during which the student turns age 22, or until the student graduates with a regular high school diploma. Any eligible student who exits the public school as a result of either *completing school with other credentials*, *discontinuing schooling*, *transferring to a GED program*, or *moving/not known to be continuing*, still has an entitlement to FAPE and may be re-admitted to public school if the age eligibility requirements are met.



Introduction: This guidance document from the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) is designed to highlight key components in the Connecticut Special Education Procedures and Practices Manual. It is not a comprehensive review of all state and federal requirements.

Child Find is an IDEA requirement that all children with disabilities who are in need of special education and related services are identified, located, and evaluated; including children who are attending a magnet or charter school, educated at home, homeless children, children who are wards of the state, and children attending private nonprofit schools. The District will meet Child Find obligations for children between the ages of birth to three by referring them to the Birth to Three System.

General Education Interventions

When appropriate, District personnel may explore and implement alternative, multi-tiered instructional and/or behavioral interventions and programs in general education prior to referring a student to special education. A referral to special education may be made at any time regardless of where the student falls within the multi-tiered intervention process.

Referral to Determine Eligibility for Special Education and Related Services

A referral of a child who is suspected of having a disability requires the District to convene a PPT meeting to consider the need for an initial evaluation.

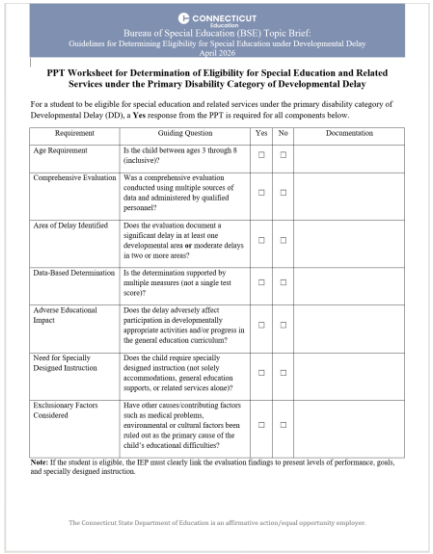
District staff are required to promptly refer students who are suspended repeatedly in or out-of-school, or whose behavior, attendance, or academic progress is considered unsatisfactory and complete the referral form in CT-SEDS.

A parent is not required to submit the standard referral form for an initial evaluation. If the parent does not make the referral using the standard referral form, the District must complete the standard referral form using the CT-SEDS referral process. The date of referral is the date the District first receives the referral from the parent in writing.

If a child is receiving general education interventions and the District receives a referral for an evaluation, the District shall accept the referral and convene a PPT meeting to consider the referral to determine if an evaluation of the child is appropriate. During such time the District shall also continue the general education interventions.

Recent Changes to Eligibility in CT

- Guidelines for Determining Eligibility for Special Education under Developmental Delay



CONNECTICUT Education

Bureau of Special Education (BSE) Topic Brief:
Guidelines for Determining Eligibility for Special Education under Developmental Delay
April 2026

PPT Worksheet for Determination of Eligibility for Special Education and Related Services under the Primary Disability Category of Developmental Delay

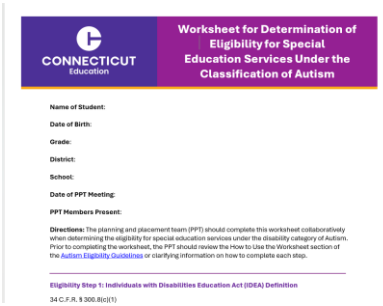
For a student to be eligible for special education and related services under the primary disability category of Developmental Delay (DD), a **Yes** response from the PPT is required for all components below.

Requirement	Guiding Question	Yes	No	Documentation
Age Requirement	Is the child between ages 3 through 8 (inclusive)?	☐	☐	
Comprehensive Evaluation	Was a comprehensive evaluation conducted using multiple sources of data and administered by qualified personnel?	☐	☐	
Area of Delay Identified	Does the evaluation document a significant delay in at least one developmental area **or** moderate delays in two or more areas?	☐	☐	
Data-Based Determination	Is the determination supported by multiple measures (not a single test score)?	☐	☐	
Adverse Educational Impact	Does the delay adversely affect participation in developmentally appropriate activities and/or progress in the general education curriculum?	☐	☐	
Need for Specially Designed Instruction	Does the child require specially designed instruction (not solely accommodations, general education supports, or related services alone)?	☐	☐	
Exclusionary Factors Considered	Have other causes/contributing factors such as medical problems, environmental or cultural factors been ruled out as the primary cause of the child's educational difficulties?	☐	☐	

Note: If the student is eligible, the IEP must clearly link the evaluation findings to present levels of performance, goals, and specially designed instruction.

The Connecticut State Department of Education is an affirmative action/equal opportunity employer.

- Autism Eligibility Guidelines
- Orientation for CT Autism Guidelines Worksheet



CONNECTICUT Education

Worksheet for Determination of Eligibility for Special Education Services Under the Classification of Autism

Name of Student:

Date of Birth:

Grade:

District:

School:

Date of PPT Meeting:

PPT Members Present:

Directions: The planning and placement team (PPT) should complete this worksheet collaboratively when determining the eligibility for special education services under the disability category of Autism. Prior to completing the worksheet, the PPT should review the How to Use the Worksheet section of the Autism Eligibility Guidelines or clarifying information on how to complete each step.

Eligibility Step 1: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Definition

34 C.F.R. § 300.8(c)(1)

CSDE SRBI/MTSS Guidance and Implementation Support

SRBI Framework and Family Guide (English and Spanish) (2008)

State and Regional Training and Technical Assistance (2008-2011)

CSDE/SERC Self-Assessm Certificati Guidance, Pamphlet (2

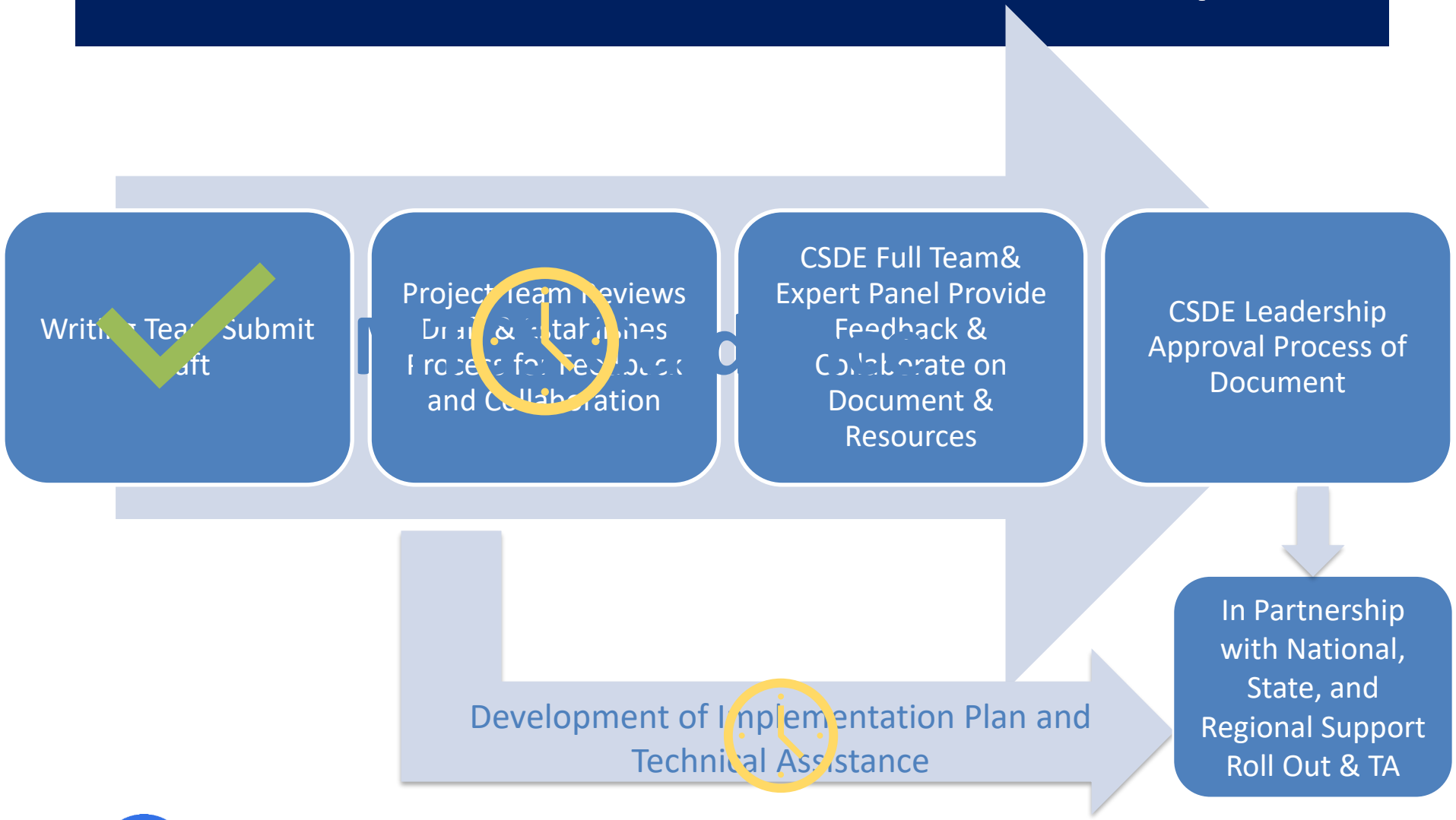


entation (2014) SCTG 2019)

Leveraging MTSS to Enhance Educational Leadership (2021)

CT-SEDS MTSS Module Pilot (2025)

Current Status and Next Steps



Services Recommendations

- Broaden pathways to certification of special educators and paraeducators.
- Connecticut needs a new Enhancement Act, paralleling the 1986 law, to restore the education profession to the level of public esteem it once had.
- The state should fund, upfront, tuition payments for aspiring special educators. Teachers funded would have a service requirement which the state could use to assign new teachers to districts most in need.
- CSDE to set standards for paraeducator eligibility, including the creation of different standards for different paraeducator roles.
- Paraeducators need to be paid a living wage.
- Work with the Connecticut Educator Preparation and Certification Board to update certification standards for special educators.

Services Recommendations (continued)

- Increase state funding for Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center (CPAC) to work with schools to create stronger partnership with parents.
- Task CSDE to research the feasibility of statewide standards for caseloads of special educators.
- Districts should provide clerical support for administrative tasks, relieving special educators of such tasks.
- Explore micro-credentialling and badging of paraprofessionals.
- CSDE to create collaborative to examine role of Generative Artificial Intelligence in special education.

Federal Grant Award CT Special Education– T-RAP

- The CSDE was awarded **$4.7M** through a federal grant called Special Education Teacher Registered Apprenticeship Pathways (T-RAP)
- This **five-year grant** will expand registered apprenticeships for special education teachers, build a new early intervention apprenticeship pathway, and introduce more students to careers serving children with disabilities.

Our work, which began on October 1, 2026, involves three main goals:

- **Goal 1.**: Scale special-education-focused registered apprenticeship programs statewide.
- **Goal 2:** Build Connecticut's first early intervention / early childhood special education registered apprenticeship (OEC).
- **Goal 3.** Expand early awareness of special education and early intervention careers (at the middle/high school level) (Ed Rising).



Paraeducator Preparation Academy

- This program is designed to support aspiring paraeducators in building the knowledge and skills needed to successfully prepare for and pass the ParaPathways assessment, while strengthening their readiness to succeed in today's classrooms. We are excited about your commitment to making a meaningful impact in the lives of students.

Public Transition Program Standards

- **Purpose:** Pursuant to Section 10-74o of the Connecticut General Statutes, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) in collaboration with the Statewide Transition Services Coordinator, shall establish minimum standards for transition programs operated by a local or regional board of education or a regional educational service center (RESC) and metrics for measuring such standards.
- **Program Areas**: Student Focused Planning, Student Development, Family Engagement, Interagency Collaboration, & Program Structure



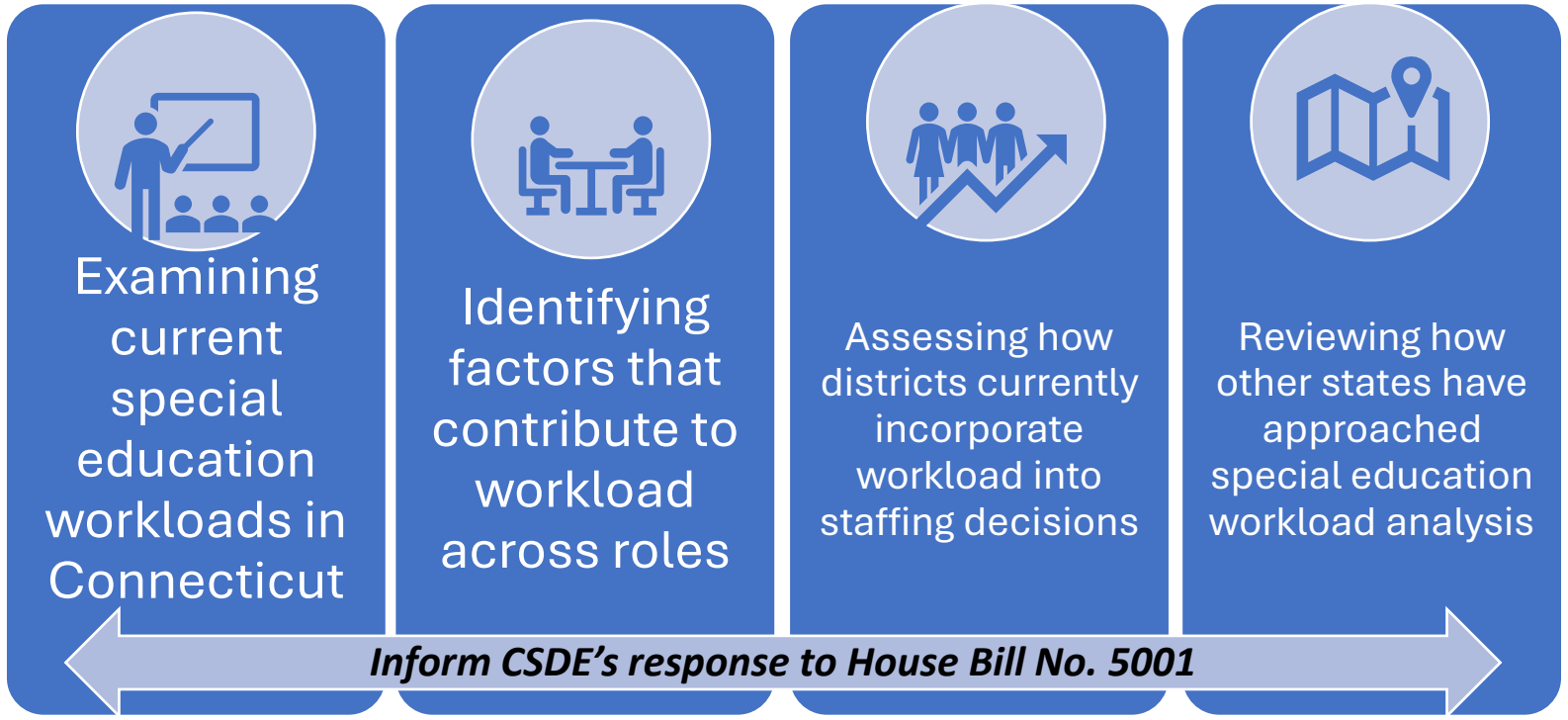
Secondary Transition Training

- **Connecticut General Statutes §§ 10-74q and 10-74r requires the CSDE to develop training programs in the following areas:**
  - Secondary Transition Coordinator Training
  - Secondary Transition Training for Certified Educators
  - Secondary Transition Training for Paraeducators
- The CSDE, in collaboration with the RESC Alliance, developed these trainings for coordinators, certified educators, and paraeducators.

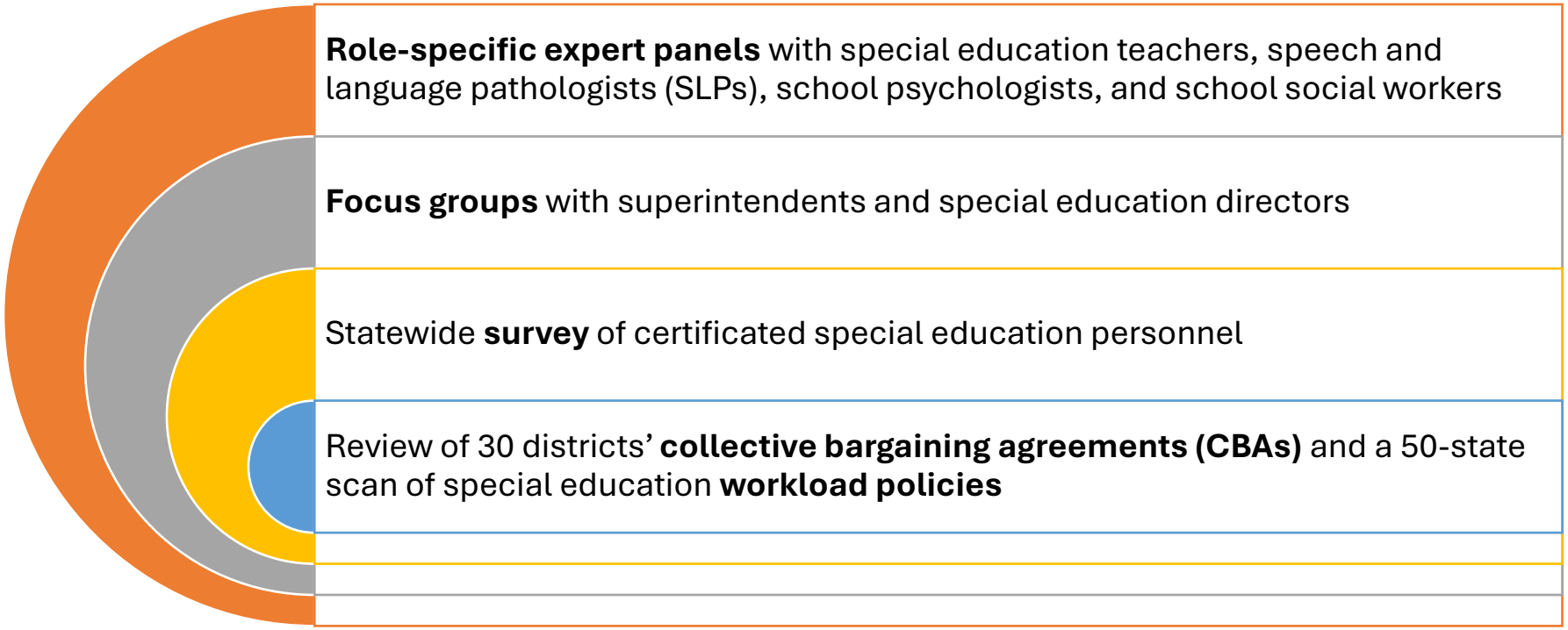
Secondary Transition Training Programs



Special Education Workload Analysis Study
PA 25-67 Sec.16



Study Design



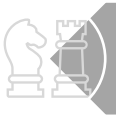
Model vs. Framework

A **statewide special education workload analysis model**	A **statewide framework**
• Establishes a single, standardized methodology and set of assumptions that all districts are expected to use for determining staffing and workload.	• Defines common parameters, guiding principles, and minimum expectations while allowing districts to design and implement their own workload models that reflect local context, student needs, and service delivery structures.

Recommendations for Framework Development and Implementation



District special education workload analysis models to address all job responsibilities.



Allow districts flexibility to design special education workload analysis models that reflect local context while meeting state requirements.



Provide districts with state and national resources to support the development of local special education workload analysis models.



Support district- and school-level actions that address special education workload.



Ensure a sufficient special education workforce to support manageable workloads.

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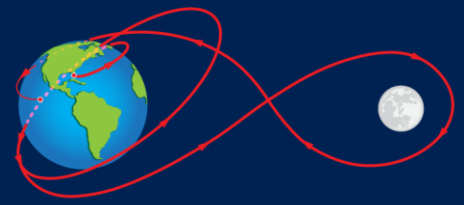
EMPOWER EVERY LEARNER'S JOURNEY



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Education

Thank you!

Michelle Laubin

mlaubin@berchemmoses.com

Bryan Klimkiewicz

Bryan.Klimkiewicz@ct.gov