

Transforming Children's Behavioral Health





UNLOCKING *Lifelong* POTENTIAL



State Department of Education

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UNLOCKING *Lifelong* POTENTIAL

CT's Education Landscape

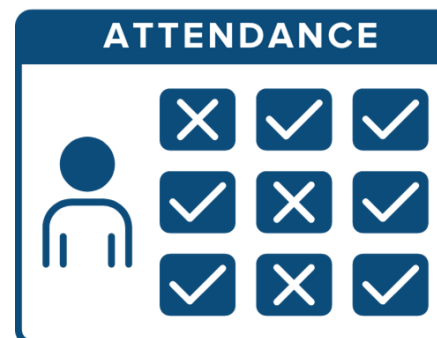
508,402 Students

- 54.9% Students of Color
- 45.1% White Students
- 44.8% Eligible for Free/Reduced-Price Meals
- 18.5% with Disabilities
- 11.3% English Learners



202 School Districts

- 1,544 Schools/Programs
- 53,372 Certified Staff
- ~49,736 Non-certified Staff
- 12.1% Teachers of Color



Chronic Absenteeism Rates

- 2014-15: 10.6%
- 2015-16: 9.6%
- 2016-17: 9.9%
- 2017-18: 10.7%
- **2018-19: 10.4%**
- 2019-20: 12.2%*
- 2020-21: 19.0%
- 2021-22: 23.7%
- 2022-23: 20.0%
- 2023-2024: 17.7%
- **2024-25: 17.2%**

In Connecticut, our goal for the national “50% Challenge Network” is to reduce chronic absence from 23.7% in SY 2022 to 11.9% in SY 2027.



[Source: EdSight](#)


**Chronic absenteeism calculations are based only on in-person school days until mid-March 2020*



State Department of Education

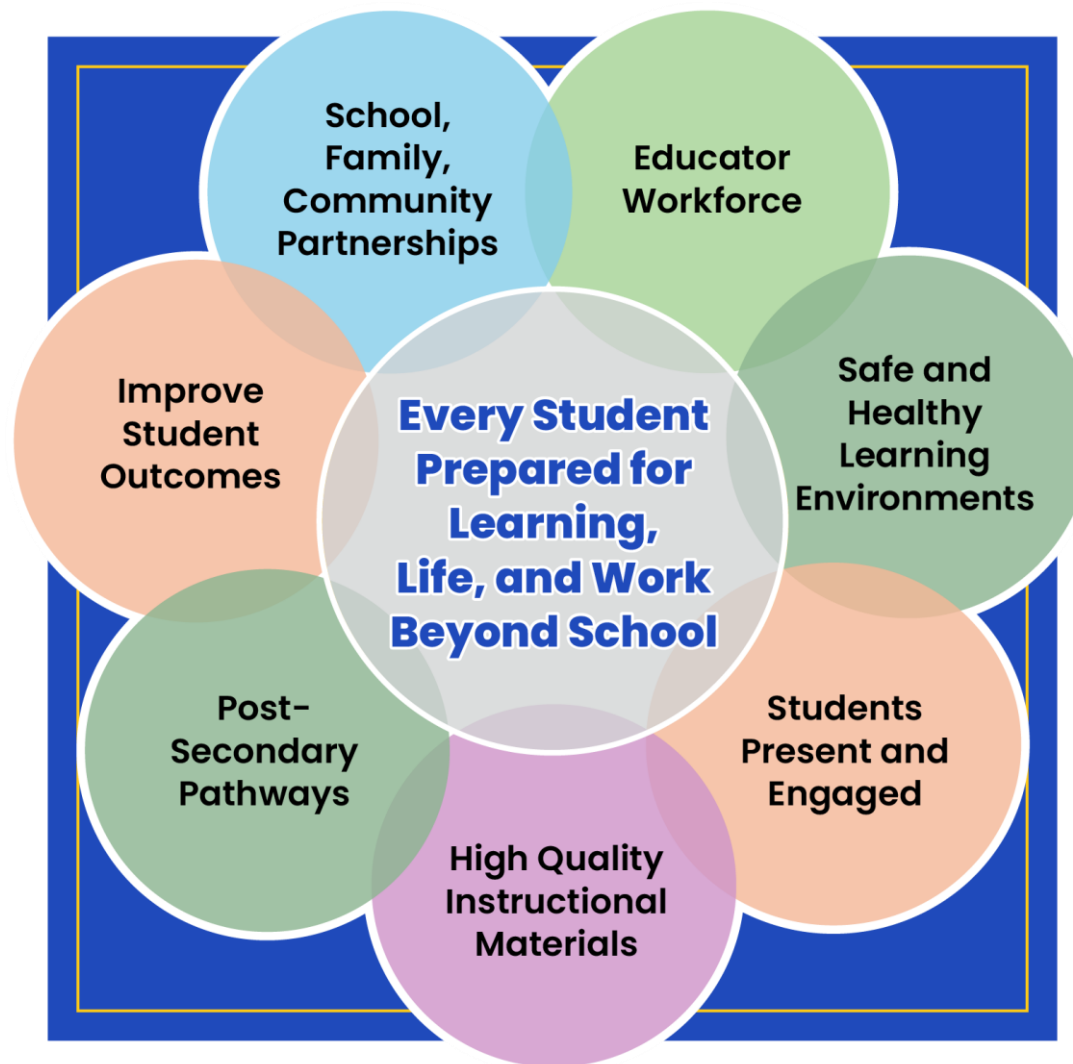






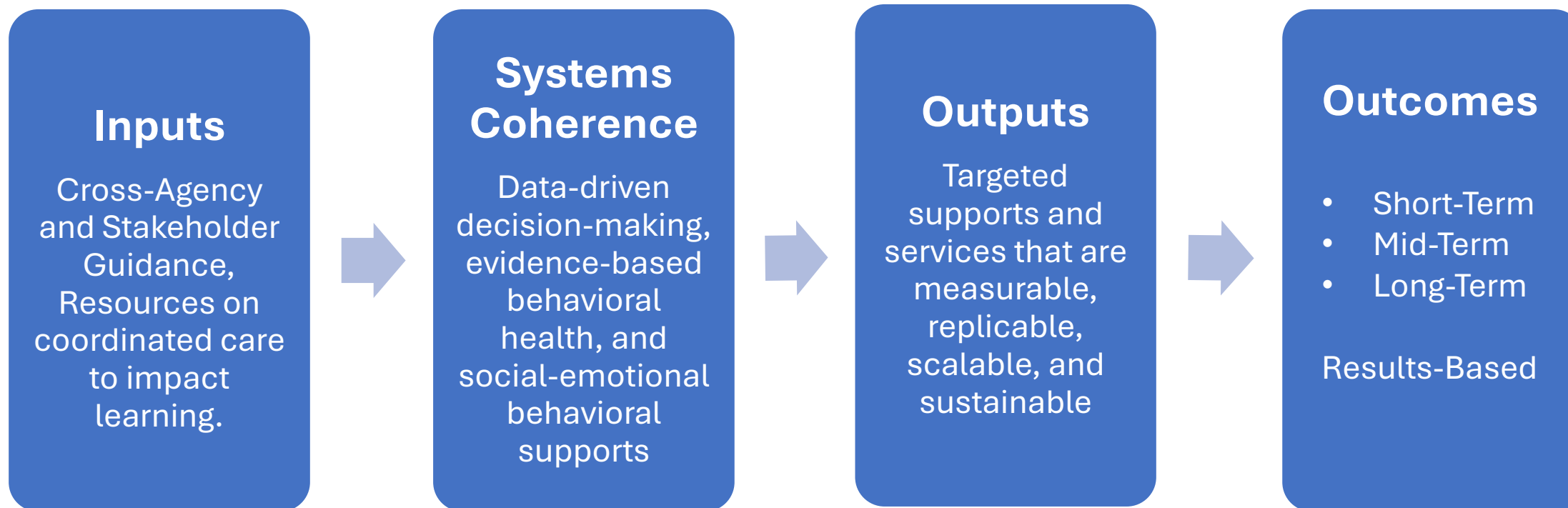
Every Student Prepared for
**Learning, Life, and
Work Beyond School**

The Comprehensive Plan for Education 2023–2028





Whole Agency Cross Divisional Work





Multi-disciplinary Approach to Behavioral & Mental Health



- 1 **A Statewide Behavioral Health Landscape Scan & Focus Group** conducted in Summer 2021, provided CSDE with a snapshot of emerging trends, concerns, and work taking place in schools regarding mental health services. Afterwards, select districts representing various demographics joined a focus group discussion, where CSDE discussed and documented collective challenges regarding building or scaling up behavioral and mental health support systems; long-term financial support; technical assistance and coaching on evidence-based practices for behavioral health; and coordinated referral systems.
- 2 **The Behavioral Health Pilot** currently underway in 6 districts aims to create a scalable and sustainable system of coordinated care for all K-12 schools to provide comprehensive behavioral and mental health supports and services to students and staff. CSDE identified districts of various demographics to participate in a pilot program to implement targeted supports based on needs identified from the 2021 landscape survey and focus group discussions.
- 3 **A Statewide Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Landscape Scan** conducted in September 2020 provided insight into the great work already taking place in districts, plus emerging concerns and trends related to SEL for K-12 schools across CT. This was the [first step in providing a systematic collection of data](#) to supplement, rather than replace, existing efforts.
- 4 **The Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) System** is a strength-based social-emotional observation tool that teachers use to capture how frequently they have observed a student demonstrating positive behaviors (e.g., get along with others) rather than inappropriate ones (e.g., annoy others). A focus on strengths can build students' self-efficacy and help them persevere when they face difficulties. This helps teachers better support their student in feeling connected to school, confident, successful, and engaged in learning, and it is [available to all districts at no cost](#).
- 5 **The Components of Social, Emotional, and Intellectual Habits (SEIH)** represents the knowledge, skills, and habits that form an essential blueprint for students' well-being and equip every student with the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in college, careers, and civic life. While attention to core academic subjects remains important, social, emotional, and intellectual habits set the stage for all future learning, promoting intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cognitive competence. CSDE is also developing the SEIH for Grades 4-12, which will be made available in the Fall of 2022.
- 6 **The social, emotional, and mental health of students and school staff** is one of CSDE's required state-level priorities for investing the more than \$1.5 billion in federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Funds allocated to Connecticut districts. To date, districts plan to invest over \$183 million in this priority area. Highlights include contracting with local health providers to expand mental, physical, and behavioral services; professional development and staff training; and implementation of SEL practices in schools.
- 7 **The Learner Engagement and Attendance Program (LEAP)** is providing [targeted supports to 15 districts through home visits](#) in order to improve student attendance and engagement and address chronic absenteeism. This program has provided students and families with resources, such as backpacks, access to technology, and connections to health and social services.

16 Ways CSDE is Supporting Social-Emotional Learning and Behavioral & Mental Health

- 8 **The School-Based Diversion Initiative (SBDI)** is a school-level initiative that engages teachers, staff, administrators, and school resource officers through consultation, expert training, and capacity building activities to reduce school-based arrests. SBDI [helps keep kids in school](#), by increasing access for students and families to mental health prevention supports and treatment services in the school and local community as an alternative to suspension, expulsion and arrest. SBDI reduces the rate of in-school arrests, expulsions, and out-of-school suspensions, expands access to supports and ultimately improves student social and academic success.
- 9 **Advancing Wellness and Resiliency in Education (Project AWARE)** is funded through a federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration grant to use trauma-informed, multi-tiered systems of supports to address mental health and prevent violence among school-age youth. It is currently being [piloted in 3 districts in Connecticut](#), targeting more than 650 school staff and 12,000 students.
- 10 **The Connecticut Comprehensive School Counseling Framework** delivers a range of evidence-based supports, programs, and practices to address student needs. [The Framework](#) provides a proactive, preventative, and early intervention model for school counselors to support all students in reaching their full potential and acquire critical skills in the areas of academics, career, and SEL.
- 11 **Efforts to Reduce Disproportionate Exclusionary School Discipline** have been driven by collaboration with the CSDE convened Connecticut School Discipline Collaborative. CSDE works closely with districts to operationalize the [State Board of Education Position Statement](#), to support collaboration among various stakeholders to build systems of support and learning environments that explicitly promote positive, preventive, and restorative school discipline philosophies and practices and support the reduction of disproportionality in suspensions and expulsions.
- 12 **The CT Learning Hub** features the [Social-Emotional Learning Hub with](#) on-demand educational resources for educators, students, families, and communities to embed social and emotional well-being practices into each aspect of teaching and learning spaces in order to create compassionate learning environments.
- 13 **The 2021 Healthy and Balanced Living Curriculum Framework** provides districts with standards to implement a planned, ongoing, and sequential pre-K-12 health education and physical education curriculum. This framework helps students to acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.
- 14 **Initiatives Aimed at Boosting Student & Teacher Engagement** include [TEACH CT](#) to support aspiring educators and connect them to current educators, as well as [Voice4Change](#) to honor and elevate student ideas regarding Connecticut's investments of federal COVID-19 relief funding for education. Over 71% of proposals received from students through the Voice4Change initiative focused on addressing the social-emotional well-being and mental health of students and staff.
- 15 **Community Webinars** hosted by CSDE engage attendees in social-emotional and mental health discussions. In addition to the [Spark Innovation Series](#), CSDE offers professional support webinars for both [districts](#) and [families](#) and features experts in special populations, developmental pediatrics and child behavior. Topics include helping families navigate remote learning, assisting students with special needs, ensuring meaningful early childhood experiences, and supporting student and family emotional well-being.
- 16 **Support for Youth in the Criminal Justice System** is being provided in partnership with programs and agencies serving and providing education to students involved with the juvenile justice system. Investments include: high-quality instructional staff and resources, technology and access to digital curricula, and seamless student transitions, including the timely transfer of educational records of justice-involved students to and from juvenile justice agencies and facilities to ensure no loss or delay in learning.



RESC Trauma Coordinators

- **Regional Trauma Coordinators**

- Appointed by the RESCs provide training, technical assistance, and consultation to public school districts at no cost
- Partnerships with 23 public school districts
- Collaborative relationships with community-based social service organizations, medical organizations and community members/caregivers.
- UPLIFT: train-the-trainer program that is trauma-informed, resilience-focused, and individualized to meet the unique systemic needs of a school or district.
- \$1.2 Million in 2023-24, \$500,000 in 2024-25



ARPA Mental Health Grant Programs

ARPA School Mental Health Workers Grant – \$5M

- Awarded to 20 districts (2023–2025)
- Annual awards: \$37,768–\$120,000
- 21 new positions hired
- Concluded June 30, 2025

ARPA School Mental Health Specialist Grant – \$15M

- Awarded to 71 districts (2024–2026)
- Annual awards: \$25,150–\$120,000
- 83 new positions hired
- Concludes June 30, 2026

ARPA Summer Mental Health Supports Grant – \$6.5M

- Awarded to 85 districts and summer camps (2023–2025)
- Annual awards: \$5,160–\$50,000
- 96 new positions hired
- Concludes June 30, 2026

Staffing Ratios

How many mental health professionals are serving Connecticut's students in 2024-25?

There is one full-time¹ mental health professional for every 72 students (PK-12).

There is one full-time¹
**Certified School
Counselor**
for every **322**
PK-12 students

There is one full-time¹
**Certified School
Counselor**
for every **174**
Grade 9-12 students

There is one full-time¹
**Certified School
Psychologist**
for every **474**
PK-12 students

There is one full-time¹
**Certified
Social Worker**
for every **367**
PK-12 students

There is one full-time¹
**School
Nurse**
for every **354**
PK-12 students

Explore the data

Use the filters below to customize the table.

EXPORT TO EXCEL

Selected Filters: State/District/School - [State, Year(s) - 2024-25, Job Classification(s) - <No item selected>, District(s) - <No item selected>, School(s) - <No item selected>, Organization Type(s) - <No item selected>, Support Designation(s) - <No item selected>, Low Grade(s) - <No item selected>, High Grade(s) - <No item selected>

Basic Filters		School Year	District	School/Program	Job Classification	Low Grade	High Grade	Student Count*	Full Time Equivalent (FTE)*	Ratio ² (Students per FTE)*
State/District/School		2024-25	State Total	State Total	All Mental Health Staff	PK	12	508,402	7,058.1	72
School Year		2024-25	State Total	State Total	Behavior Technician	PK	12	508,402	1,200.2	424
Job Classification		2024-25	State Total	State Total	Board Certified Behavior Analyst	PK	12	508,402	297.0	1,712
District		2024-25	State Total	State Total	Certified Marriage and Family Therapist	PK	12	508,402	5.0	101,680
School/Program		2024-25	State Total	State Total	Certified School Counselor	PK	12	508,402	1,580.2	322
Advanced Filters		2024-25	State Total	State Total	Certified School Psychologist	PK	12	508,402	1,073.3	474
Organization Type		2024-25	State Total	State Total	Certified Social Worker	PK	12	508,402	1,383.9	367
Support Designation		2024-25	State Total	State Total	Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist...	PK	12	508,402	1.0	508,402
Low Grade		2024-25	State Total	State Total	Licensed Professional Counselor (Non-c...	PK	12	508,402	28.3	17,965
High Grade		2024-25	State Total	State Total	Psychological Examiner	PK	12	508,402	5.0	101,680
		2024-25	State Total	State Total	School Nurse	PK	12	508,402	1,438.2	354
		2024-25	State Total	State Total	Social Worker (Non-certified)	PK	12	508,402	44.0	11,568
		2024-25	State Total	State Total	Trauma Specialist	PK	12	508,402	2.1	245,605

[Mental Health Staff Ratios \(ct.gov\)](#)



Suicide Prevention Work

- Virtual House Calls: Protecting Our Youth: A Community Approach to Suicide Prevention (November 7, 2024)
- Youth Suicide Prevention, Intervention, and Postvention for Schools webinar (February 27, 2025)
- Webinar Follow-up Sessions (March/April 2025)
- Preventing Youth Suicide in Connecticut Guidance (May 8, 2025)

STUDENT SUPPORT SERIES

Professional Learning for Youth Mental and Behavioral Health

The Connecticut State Department of Education, in collaboration with our partners at the Department of Children and Families, is excited to offer a free, monthly, professional learning series for schools on youth mental and behavioral health.

Participants will gain practical tools and strategies, explore new resources, and engage in meaningful discussions on how best to support the success and well-being of all students.

Winter and spring topics will be revealed later this year!
Please contact Kate Bohannon at kate.bohannon@ct.gov with questions.

Pending approval, programs will be eligible for Continuing Education Credit hours by NASW/CT and will meet the continuing education criteria for licensure renewal for social work, professional counselors, and licensed psychologists. Live virtual attendance is required to earn 1.5 continuing education credits per session.

Supporting Students Together




CONNECTICUT
Education
Children and Families

Register for this session

Every Day Counts: Improving Attendance Through Connection and Care
September 25, 2025, 9:00–10:30 a.m.

During the 2024–2025 school year, 83,405 Connecticut students were chronically absent, representing 17.2% of all students. While attendance is trending upwards, chronic absence remains a significant challenge. In this session, moderated by CSDE's Kari Sullivan-Custer, Dr. Elliott Attisha and Dr. Emma Herdean, senior fellows at Attendance Works, will review the underlying causes of why students miss school, while providing attendees with evidence-based interventions, tools and resources that can improve attendance and help create healthy and supportive learning environments.

Register for this session

Insights into Our Youth Mental Health Landscape
October 16, 2025, 9:00–10:30 a.m.

Join us as we review the most recent results from the Connecticut Youth Risk Behavior Survey, share mobile crisis and Urgent Crisis Center (UCC) utilization, and discuss other relevant data points to better understand the trends in Connecticut youth mental and behavioral health. Participants will have the opportunity to connect with colleagues to reflect on what they are experiencing in their own school, share strategies, and explore available resources.

Register for this session

Strengthening School Climate to Support Student Well-Being
November 20, 2025, 9:00–10:30 a.m.

Amanda Pickett, Education Consultant for School Culture and Climate at the Connecticut State Department of Education, will lead this professional learning session on the key elements of school climate and their connection to comprehensive school mental health. Amanda will highlight the importance of using data to guide decisions, applying practices systemically, and building in continuous improvement. Participants will gain practical tools and resources to strengthen supportive, positive environments for students and staff and will leave with actionable strategies to enhance school climate and mental health systems.



Interagency Collaboration

Topic	Agencies	Initiatives
School Security and Safety Plans	DEMHS/DESPP DESPP	All Hazards School Security and Safety Plans
	DEMHS OEC	Handle with Care
Suicide Prevention	DCF DMHAS	Connecticut Suicide Advisory Board Board member Postvention subcommittee
	DCF	Suicide Prevention, Intervention and Postvention for Schools Webinar (February 2025) Regional follow-up sessions (Spring 2025)
Youth Mental and Behavioral Health	DCF	Mental Health Resource Kits Hand delivered to all K-12 public, magnet, charter, and technical schools (976 schools)
		Student Support Series: Professional Learning for Youth Mental and Behavioral Health Free, monthly webinars for school mental health staff
	DMHAS	Mental Health First Aid Training In accordance with Connecticut General Statutes Sec. 17a-453h, the CSDE will support DMHAS in providing Mental Health First Aid Training to all district school climate coordinators
Crisis Response	DCF DMHAS OCA	Coordinate mental health supports, provide guidance, and connection to resources following a crisis or tragedy (untimely death/suicide) impacting a school community



Mental Health First Aid

Youth Mental Health First Aid teaches caring adults how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental health and substance use challenges among children and adolescents ages 12-18

CSDE and DMHAS plan to offer free trainings throughout the state utilizing a network of certified Youth Mental Health First Aid trainers from:

- Regional Behavioral Health Action Organizations (RBHAOs)
- The Connecticut Clearinghouse

DMHAS Disaster Behavioral Health Response Network (DBHRN) team will be available to supplement regional Youth Mental Health First Aid offerings with Psychologist First Aid training if needed

District Safe School Climate Coordinators (approximately 200) will be notified of these available trainings and encouraged to attend.

Utilizing the RBHAOs and the Connecticut Clearinghouse has the added benefit of connecting districts to valuable community resources.



Keeping Students Connected:

Learner Engagement and Attendance Program (LEAP)

- Visits that were made **in-person** had more **impact** than virtual visits or phone calls
 - 1 month after the initial home visit = **4%** point increase in attendance
 - 6 months after the initial home visit = **10%** point increase PreK to Grade 5
 - 6 months after the initial home visit = **20%** point increase for Grade 6-12
- 92% of districts reduced chronic absenteeism
 - **71,000** home visits conducted
 - **42,000** students impacted
 - **3,450** visitors trained
- *Improved Family-School Relationships*
- *Better Understanding of the Home*
- *More Supportive vs. Punitive Relationships*
- *Increased Student Attendance*
- *Increased Student Engagement*
- *Increased Student Achievement*
- *Increased Feelings of Belonging*
- *Increased Access to Resources for Families*
- *Increased Expectations of Accountability*
- *Greater Gratitude and Appreciation*



School Climate & Culture

- [Connecticut School Climate Guidance](#) is designed to outline the new legislative requirements pursuant to Public Act 23-167, and to provide resources to districts to support their implementation of building welcoming and supportive school environments.
- Professional Learning Opportunities for school/districts:
 - Essential components of a systemic approach to enhancing school climate, including opportunities to evaluate their current Tier 1 initiatives and gain access to resources that support evidence-based and best practice strategies;
 - Assessing and enhancing their behavioral response systems by reviewing current data trends and practices, and reflecting on considerations for effective implementation;



Behavioral Health Pilot

Highlights from the Pilot

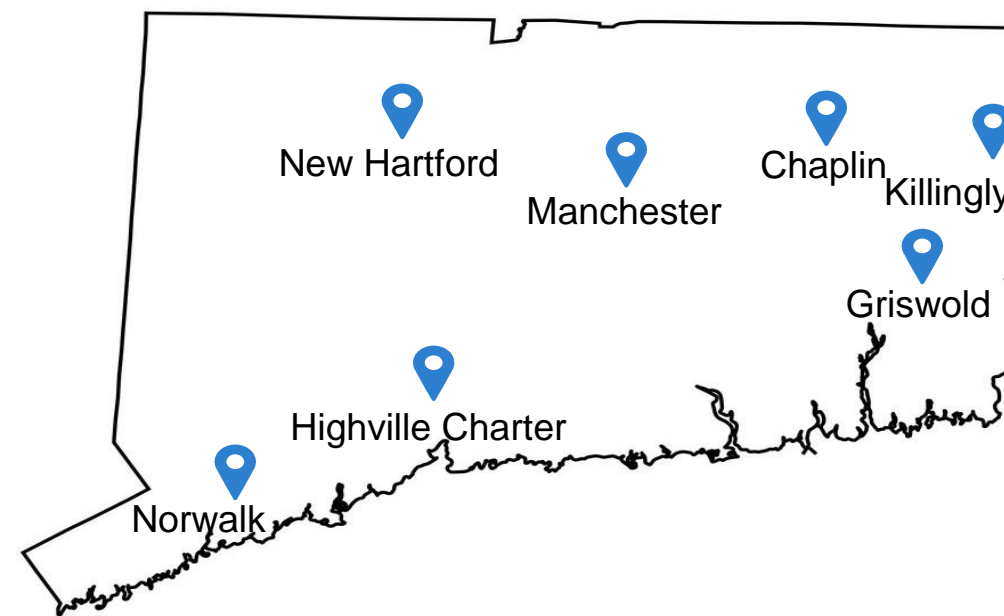
- Over 23,000 students impacted, 48 schools participated in 6 different counties.
- Systematic, scalable, and sustainable coordinated care.
- Partnership with community providers.
- Ensure staff training and resources with TA and coaching.
- Improvements in student and staff well-being.



90% of all staff
are trained in QPR,
a suicide
prevention training



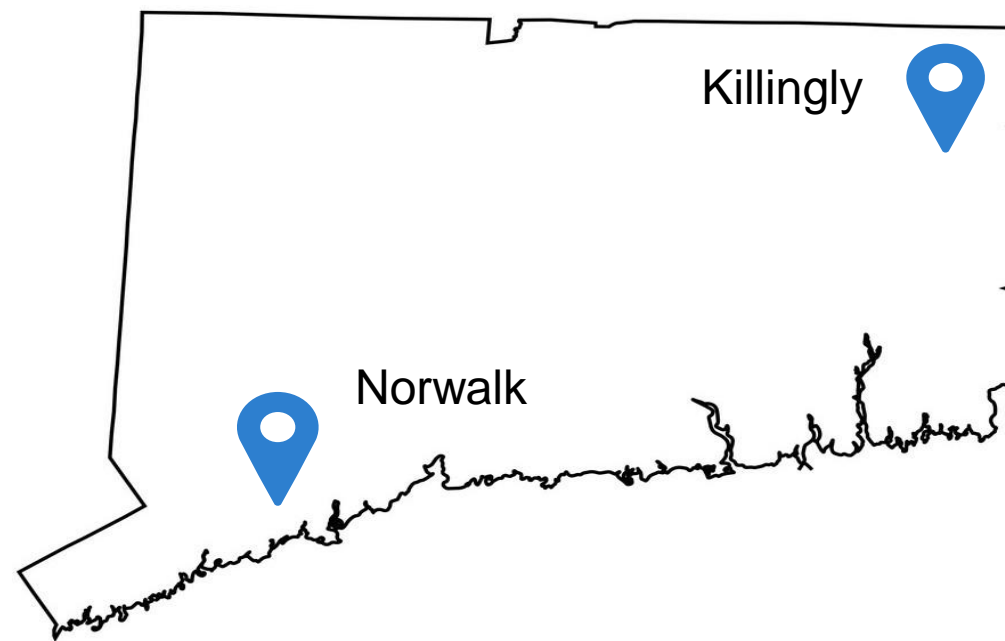
31 service areas
identified to support
Norwalk student and
families connection
to resources





Behavioral Health Pilot

- Killingly Public Schools
 - Susan Nash-Ditzel - Superintendent
 - Meredith Tukey - Director of Mental Health and Family Engagement
- Norwalk Public Schools
 - Dr. Alexandra Estrella – Superintendent
 - Robert Pennington – Assistant Superintendent





Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) System



**71% OF STUDENTS HAVE SEEN
AT LEAST ONE TIER OF GROWTH**

Statewide Participation:

86 Districts

Over 180,000 Students and 11,000 Educators

**Up to 88% leaders agreed that the DESSA
positively impacts students.**



Leadership Comments:

- Improvements in district and school culture
- Helps identify focus areas and guide instruction.
- Helps inform training for staff.