STATE OF CONNECTICUT
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

TO: Clerk of the Senate
Clerk of the House of Representatives

FROM: Charlene M. Russell-Tucker
Commissioner of Education

DATE: February 20, 2026

SUBJECT: Report on the Effectiveness of the Alliance District Program

In accordance with Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-262w, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) submits this *Report on the Effectiveness of the Alliance District Program* to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to children and education.

If you have any questions, please contact Laura Stefon, Chief of Staff at (860) 713-6493.

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CONNECTICUT Education

Report on the Effectiveness of the Alliance District Program

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Executive Summary

Section 10-262w of the Connecticut General Statutes charges the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) to develop a report of the effectiveness of the Alliance District program, along with recommendations for reforming such program. The Alliance District program was established originally in 2012-13 with 30 districts; this was subsequently increased to 33 districts effective 2017-18, and 36 districts effective 2022-23. Under this program, districts apply to the CSDE and upon CSDE approval, can receive a portion of their education cost-sharing (ECS) entitlement as a grant.

The CSDE Performance Office conducted a comprehensive study that analyzed quantitative data sources (e.g., fiscal, student enrollment, accountability), interviewed agency colleagues who have historically implemented the Alliance District program, examined policy and procedural documents, and conducted focus groups with Alliance District superintendents, school business officials, and municipal leaders.

Essential Fiscal Facts

- ECS is state aid to municipalities to support them in implementing their state statutory obligations around public education. Towns with lower wealth receive more state aid, while towns with greater wealth receive less state aid.
- ECS is an entitlement, not a grant. Entitlement funding and grant funding are paid for and monitored in very different ways by the CSDE. Entitlements are paid typically on a set schedule; there is no application or budget required. Grants on the other hand require recipients to submit an application with a detailed budget for CSDE approval ***prior*** to receiving any payment.
- The Alliance District grant funds are NOT additional funds but a portion of ECS. Alliance District funds are paid like a grant, not an entitlement.
- The Minimum Budget Requirement (MBR) prohibits districts from budgeting less for education than in the previous year. There are exceptions but districts designated as an Alliance district cannot decrease their local contribution – which is a combination of ECS non-alliance funds and local taxes – though flat funding of that local contribution is permissible to satisfy MBR.

Summary of Findings

- Direct ECS funding to BOEs prioritizes proven educational strategies. A dedicated Alliance District grant provides the school district with flexibility and stability for long-term planning.
- Alliance Districts have achieved many demonstrable successes.

    - Several accountability indicators such as student achievement, chronic absenteeism, and high school graduation rates show improved outcomes in a majority of Alliance Districts during both pre- and post-pandemic periods.
    - Annually around 30-40 schools in Alliance Districts are designated as Schools of Distinction.
    - Since 2015, 14 out of 38 National Blue Ribbon Schools have come from Alliance Districts.
    - Since 2015-16, 31 Alliance District schools that were identified for state support as Turnaround or Focus schools have exited those statuses due to improved outcomes.
- Alliance District grant amounts as a proportion of ECS vary greatly among towns. In 2012-13, the percentage of ECS allocated for the Alliance District grant ranged from 2.1% to 10.3%; by 2025-26, the range had increased greatly from 2.1% to 63.7%.
- While the Alliance portion of ECS increased, the non-alliance portion has remained flat. Additionally, in some communities, local municipal funding may not have increased adequately. Therefore, Alliance District grant funds are increasingly being used for core operational expenditures.
- Expenditure data reveal that schools in Alliance Districts spend about 10% less per pupil than other schools in the state. Flat funding of the local contribution – which is a combination of ECS non-alliance funds and local taxes – is permissible to satisfy the minimum budget requirement (MBR). Additionally, ECS entitlements are calculated annually for each town based on student enrollment, student need, and community wealth indicators. Therefore, a statewide increase in ECS does not mean that every district will also see an increase. The gap in per-pupil spending between Alliance and non-Alliance schools has only reduced in recent years due to the large infusion of pandemic-relief federal funding.
- Alliance Districts serve approximately 40% of all students, those students have disproportionately high needs[i], but that disproportionality is reducing. In 2012-13, 69.6% of all students eligible for free- or reduced-price meals (FRPM) were educated in Alliance Districts; by 2024-25, that had reduced to 60.1% because students eligible for FRPM are increasingly prevalent in non-alliance districts. Similarly with respect to English learners (ELs), 78.5% of all ELs statewide in 2012-13 were educated in the original 30 Alliance Districts but by 2024-25, that had reduced to 73.5%.
- Certified staffing levels have increased in both Alliance Districts and statewide over the past 12 years despite a decline in enrollment. This is primarily because a greater proportion of students today present with high needs than a decade ago. Specifically in the original 30 Alliance Districts, the total number of full-time equivalent (FTE) certified staff increased by nearly 1,000 FTEs or 4.7% from 2012-13 to 2024-25. During the same period, total student enrollment in these 30 districts declined by 5.6%.
- CSDE implements a comprehensive system of oversight and support. This includes a *Comprehensive Framework for District Improvement,* a detailed Alliance District Plan, a

CSDE Cross-Divisional Team (CDT) of subject matter experts, a differentiated monitoring and support system, and Symposiums that are available to all Alliance Districts. Districts view the CSDE monitoring and support as overall beneficial, but sometimes burdensome.

- The Alliance District designation offers many ancillary benefits with about 30 statutory references. The vast majority of these sections are in the education statutes (Chapter 10). They reference initiatives that include early literacy interventions, teacher residency program partnerships, reemployment of retired teachers, priority in school nutrition state grants, and facilities improvement grants. Two statutory references in higher education (Chapter 10a) include interest rate subsidies to teachers, paraeducators, and school counselors in Alliance Districts to refinance non-federal loans, while other non-education statutes offer benefits such as greater reimbursement of certain municipal grants , including designation as a Tier 1 in the state's Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) formula, inclusion in development projects authorized with bond funds, and consideration for the establishment of truancy clinics by the Probate Court.
- Multiple systems for district identification and support cause redundancy and burden. The Priority School District (PSD) program and the Alliance District program employ separate funding processes and rules that result in significant redundancy and burden for both districts and the CSDE.

Recommendations

#1: Reimagine the Alliance District Program as the Opportunity Network

Implementing the Alliance District program over the past 13 years has illuminated both positives and areas for improvement. On the one hand, sending a portion of ECS funding directly to BOEs has prioritized proven educational strategies and resulted in demonstrable improvements in accountability indicators. On the other hand, the approach in state law to determining the funding amount has stifled innovation as these grant funds have increasingly come to support core operations. Moreover, several superintendents remarked that the local contribution from the municipality – which is a combination of ECS non-alliance funds and local taxes – toward the core operational budget has remained unchanged or seen very minimal increase for years.

Enrollment trends show that students with high needs, who historically evidence lower school outcomes, are increasingly prevalent in more districts across the state, not only in the currently identified 36 Alliance Districts. For example, in 2024-25, in 53 local or regional school districts statewide, at least 50% of their students were from high need backgrounds. This is more than double the number of local or regional school districts in 2012-13 (N=24) at the start of the Alliance District program that had at least 50% of students from high needs backgrounds.

The current methodology for Alliance District identification does not identify some small districts in Eastern and Northwest Connecticut. These districts tend to have high proportions of students with

high needs and low overall performance that otherwise would have led to their identification, except that they enroll fewer than 1,000 students, many even fewer than 500 students.

Therefore, the CSDE recommends that the Alliance District Program be reimagined as the Opportunity Network. Specifically, the following recommendations are offered:

- Rebrand the program as the Opportunity Network;
- Identify districts based on a combination of district performance and student need (e.g., districts in bottom 30 in terms of Accountability Index performance (or) bottom 40 in terms of proportion of high need students); and
- Continue directing a portion of ECS to the BOE through the Opportunity Network grant.

#2: CSDE to Limit Supports to a Subset of Districts

The CSDE's current differentiated monitoring and support plan is a step in the right direction but may need to be streamlined further. Of the current 36 Alliance Districts, 19 still receive three individual monitoring meetings each (total of 57 meetings) and 17 receive two monitoring meetings (34 meetings) every year, resulting in a total of 91 monitoring meetings annually. While most superintendents found the support provided by the CSDE staff to be beneficial, some expressed concerns about the undue burden caused by certain aspects of the process (e.g., number and preparation for monitoring meetings, tracker data submissions).

Therefore, the CSDE proposes the following:

- Limit intensive CSDE supports such as monitoring meetings and site visits to a subset of districts in the Opportunity Network;
- Conduct primarily desk monitoring for all remaining districts; and
- Utilize existing data collection systems such as the CSDE's monthly attendance dashboard and interim assessment secure reporting portal for oversight during the year.

> **NOTE**: Based on recommendations #1 and #2, approximately 46 districts including all 36 currently identified Alliance Districts will be part of the Opportunity Network, but only around 12-15 districts that exhibit a combination of the greatest student need and the lowest overall performance will receive intensive supports from the CSDE. The remaining 31-34 districts will primarily receive desk monitoring and ability to participate in professional learning opportunities for Opportunity Network districts. The approximately 10 new districts are expected to be small districts from eastern or northwestern Connecticut.

#3: Consolidate Priority School Districts into the Opportunity Network

Implementing separate funding processes and rules for the PSD grant, the Extended School Hours Program, the Summer School grant, and the Alliance District grant results in significant redundancy and burden for both districts and the CSDE. It requires every PSD to submit a separate program design and detailed budget for each of the four grants and then submit separate fund requests within each grant for reimbursement of related expenses. It should be noted that the PSD Grant, the Extended School Hours Grant, and the Summer School Grant, are not portions of the ECS Grant, but separate general fund appropriations totaling $30.8 million, $2.9 million and $3.4 million respectively, in FY 2026.

An added source of confusion is the fact that the PSD program and the Alliance District program are identified for different time periods, permit funds to be used for very similar but slightly different purposes, and employ different business rules for identification and exit. For example, PSDs are identified every two years while Alliance Districts are identified every five years. Also, while PSDs have a process for exit, there is currently no mechanism for a district to exit Alliance District status. The two times when some districts could have exited, the statute was modified; while new districts could be added, previously identified districts could not be exited..

Therefore, the CSDE recommends that the Priority School District program and related grant funds be consolidated, outside the ECS formula, but within the new Opportunity Network construct. Specifically, the following recommendations are offered:

- Designate a subset of districts within the Opportunity Network that exhibit a combination of the greatest student need and the lowest overall performance as the Priority School Districts (e.g., these could be the same 12-15 districts mentioned under recommendation #2 that are identified for intensive CSDE supports);
- Establish a single, logical set of rules and time periods for identification (e.g., every four years) and phased exit of all districts in the Opportunity Network (including PSDs);
- Consolidate disparate grant funds to increase alignment and reduce redundancy;
- Allow CSDE to retain up to 10 percent of the non-ECS funds appropriated for the Opportunity Network for oversight, evaluation, technical assistance, and grants administration; and
- Retain a portion of the PSD funds (e.g., 20 percent) to implement an incentive grant program for districts that show among the greatest overall improvement in the prior year, and expect leaders of improving districts/schools to serve as mentors for other Opportunity Network districts.

#4: Incentivize districts in the Opportunity Network to use a portion of their grant for state-directed evidence-based programs

In education research, several strategies demonstrate strong evidence. However, to achieve their desired effects, such strategies must be implemented with fidelity to the model that produced the observed effects in the research.

CSDE has implemented several initiatives grounded in such research (e.g., the Learner Engagement and Attendance Program – LEAP - home visits to improve student attendance, high dosage tutoring in middle school mathematics, dual credit expansion, K-3 approved curricula aligned to the Science of Reading). These types of state-directed initiatives are often associated with grant funding where the CSDE incorporates requirements for grantee districts that ensure fidelity of implementation. The early evidence is strong. For example, LEAP home visits produce double-digit improvement in student attendance, and high dosage tutoring in mathematics showed an effect of 10-scale score point growth on the Smarter Balanced mathematics assessment.

Therefore, the CSDE recommends that:

- all districts in the Opportunity Network are incentivized to dedicate a portion of their grant toward one or more evidence-based activities implemented by the CSDE.

#5: Stage the Implementation to Give Planning Time for Local/State Staff

In the long run, the proposed recommendations will increase efficiencies and focus efforts on activities that improve student outcomes. However, implementing this new model will require significant planning and preparation at both the local and state levels. Districts and municipalities will need time to collaborate and adjust budgetary processes, while CSDE will need time to modify electronic grant systems, revise calculations, and amend its approved federal education plan.

Therefore, the CSDE recommends that:

- implementation of the new framework and all the above recommendation be staged by 1-2 years to give ample planning time for all involved at both the local and state levels.

Introduction

Section 10-262w of the Connecticut General Statutes charges the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) to develop a report of the effectiveness of the Alliance District program, along with recommendations for reforming such program. The statute also requires the report to include:

(A) an analysis of the effectiveness of the alliance district program for improving student academic achievement and school district performance,
(B) the oversight and accountability metrics and standards used to measure such student academic achievement and school district performance, as well as the metrics and standards used to conduct such analysis of the program,
(C) a financial accounting of the program that examines the amount of funding provided to each alliance district during the existence of the program, how such funds have been expended, and whether (i) such funds have been expended in accordance with the Alliance District improvement plans, and (ii) there is a causal link between the expenditure of such funds in accordance with such improvement plans and an improvement of student academic achievement and school district performance.

The recommendations must include an implementation plan, developed in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, for decreasing the total number of alliance districts that will receive oversight and assistance from the CSDE under the program, and how resources and funding may best be expended to assist alliance districts in improving student academic achievement and school district performance.

Identification and Program Description

The Alliance District program was established in Section 38 of Public Act 12-116 – An Act Concerning Educational Reform. This Act called for the CSDE to designate 30 Alliance Districts. This public act was subsequently codified in Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) Section 10-262u. Subsections (d) through (g) of C.G.S. 10-262u bestow specific authority with the Commissioner of Education and the CSDE to establish a process for districts to apply for and receive Alliance District education cost-sharing (ECS) funds. The statute allows the CSDE to expect an improvement plan with strategies focused on specific areas such as K-3 literacy, multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), extended learning time, and professional learning. It also empowers the CSDE to require changes to the plan prior to approval, withhold funds if the district fails to comply with the statute, and renew the funding only if adequate progress is being made.

Per the new law, the CSDE designated the first round of 30 Alliance Districts based on the District Performance Index (DPI) for a period of five years. The DPI was based entirely on the state summative assessments administered pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-14n. In 2015, with the implementation of Connecticut's Next Generation Accountability System, the Accountability Index (i.e., the overall score based on all indicators) was substituted for the DPI. In

2017, when it was evident that three Alliance Districts would exit due to improved performance and three new districts would be identified based on the Accountability Index, the law was amended to increase the number of Alliance Districts to 33 for the new five-year period from 2017-18 to 2021-22. In 2022, when it was again evident that three Alliance Districts would exit due to improved performance and new districts would be identified, the law was amended again to further increase the number of Alliance Districts to 36 for the new five-year period from 2022-23 to 2026-27.

Methodology

This report is informed by an array of quantitative and qualitative data.

Quantitative Data Sources

- The primary measures of academic achievement and school district performance come from the CSDE's Next Generation Accountability System. These quantitative data include the Accountability Index, the Performance Index, Chronic Absenteeism, and Four- and Six-Year Graduation rates.
- The amount of funding provided to Alliance Districts comes from CSDE fiscal administrative records.
- Total expenditures by budget object are gathered from the CSDE's Education Finance System (EFS) data collection.
- EFS data also form the basis for EdSight expenditure reports and per-pupil expenditure (PPE) calculations.
- Student enrollment and staffing data come from respective CSDE data collections that are loaded to the EdSight data warehouse.

Qualitative data were gathered through focus groups and document reviews.

- The CSDE conducted three focus groups with Alliance District superintendents in July 2025. The focus groups were facilitated by a CSDE staff member outside the CSDE Turnaround Office and attended by Performance Office staff. Each superintendent could attend one of the three focus groups. In total, 24 of the 36 Alliance Districts attended at least one focus group. Each focus group centered on the following questions.
    - How has participation in the Alliance District program influenced your district's approach to identifying and addressing performance gaps?
    - What specific supports or interventions provided by the CSDE have had the most positive impact on your district and its schools? What evidence have you observed of this impact?
    - What challenges have you encountered when implementing the recommendations or requirements of the Alliance District Program, and how have you navigated those challenges?

    - How could the program be redesigned or enhanced (both in terms of legislation and CSDE supports) to better address the specific needs of your district's context and student population?
    - What other stakeholder group(s) would you recommend that we speak with about the Alliance District program?
- Based on Superintendent recommendations and to ensure broad stakeholder input, the CSDE conducted two additional focus group sessions. In September, Performance Office staff facilitated a session for school business officials. The discussion focused on the following questions.
    - What about the Alliance District grant has worked well for your district?
    - What challenges have you encountered in working with the Alliance District grant program? How have you navigated those challenges?
    - If the Alliance District program was discontinued, what would be the impact for your district?
    - How could the Alliance District program be redesigned or enhanced to better address the needs of your community?
- In October, with support from the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM), Performance Office staff conducted a session designed for municipal CEOs. The discussion focused on the following questions.
    - How has the Alliance District grant program benefited your community? What about the grant program has worked well?
    - What has been challenging about the Alliance District grant program? How have you navigated those challenges?
    - How could the Alliance District grant program be redesigned or enhanced to better address the needs of your community?
    - If the Alliance District grant program was discontinued, what would be the impact for your community?
- A range of documents were reviewed including:
    - Sample Alliance District plans from CSDE's electronic grants management system (eGMS);
    - Turnaround Office documents such as their Alliance District plan and monitoring process documents, overview presentation to new Alliance Districts, etc.; and
    - Connecticut's approved federal plan for the Every Student Succeeds Act.

Essential Fiscal Facts

ECS is state aid to municipalities

ECS is state aid to municipalities to support them in implementing their state statutory obligations around public education. A research report by the Office of Fiscal Analysis (OFA) and the Office of Legislative Research (OLR) aptly states that, *"The ECS formula is intended to equalize state education funding to towns by considering a town's property wealth and ability to raise property taxes to pay for education. Poor towns receive more aid per student; affluent towns receive less aid per student."*[ii]

Entitlements and grants are paid and monitored in very different ways

ECS is an entitlement, not a grant. When a certain funding is deemed an entitlement, then the recipient is "entitled" to the funds. Entitlement funds are paid typically on a set schedule (e.g., quarterly); there is no application or budget required. The recipient does not have to inform the CSDE how they will spend the funds in advance of receipt of those funds.

However, unlike entitlements, grants require recipients to submit a grant application with a detailed budget to the CSDE for CSDE approval ***prior*** to receiving any payment. CSDE confirms that the proposed grant activities and the planned expenditures are in line with the requirements of the grant. Only then is the grant approved, and the recipient can start requesting and receiving funds from the CSDE.[iii]

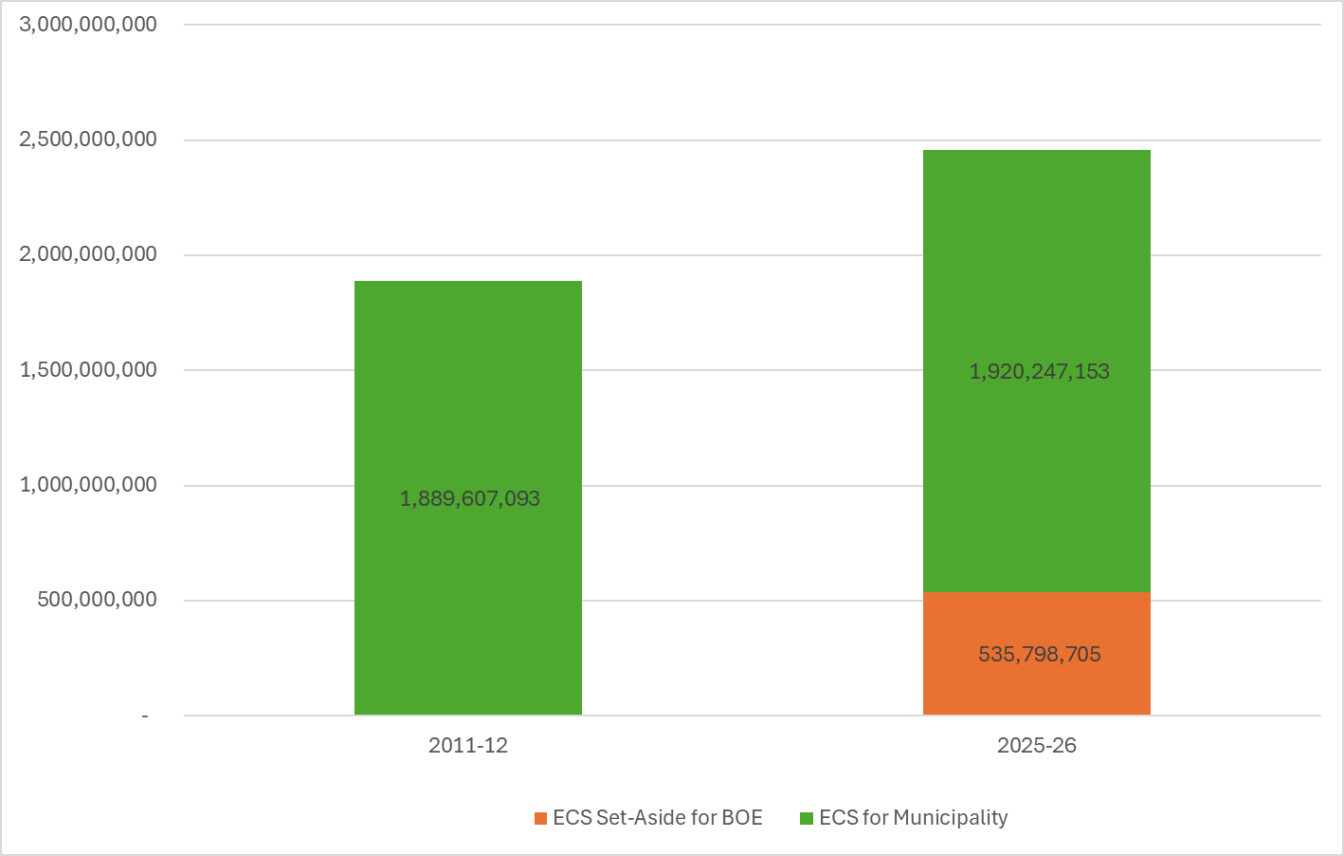
The Alliance District grant funds are NOT additional funds but a portion of ECS

The Alliance District Grant does not represent *additional* state or federal funds. It is a portion of the education cost sharing (ECS) funding. Before the establishment of the Alliance District program in 2012-13, the entirety of ECS funds were an entitlement and paid directly to the municipality. Effective 2012-13, a portion of ECS funds began to be set-aside as an Alliance District Grant for the local Board of Education (BOE). Several superintendents noted this point that the Alliance District grant is not extra money or additional funding, but money that is coming to the town through ECS anyway.

The figure below illustrates the change in how ECS funds are allocated with the creation of the Alliance District program. Prior to the Alliance District program in 2011-12, the total ECS funds of nearly $1.9 billion were allocated to the municipalities as an entitlement. Effective 2012-13, a portion of the ECS funds began to be set-aside for local BOEs such that in 2025-26, about $536

million of ECS funds were set-aside for the local BOE for the Alliance District grant program. An additional $1.92 billion continued to be allocated to the municipality.

ECS Funding: Before and After Alliance District Program



Alliance District funds are paid like a grant, not an entitlement

The Alliance District grant – though a portion of the ECS funding – is required by law to be distributed as a grant and not as an entitlement. Therefore, to receive Alliance District funds, the district is required to submit an application to the CSDE, and receive CSDE approval *before* the activities, expenditures, and request for funds can commence.

IMPORTANT: A local/regional BOE is *not* a "payee" in the State of Connecticut's financial payment system known as CORE-CT. Therefore, all payments made by the CSDE, whether as an entitlement or for an approved grant, are made to the municipality and cannot be made to the BOE. Because grants have specific associated requirements, municipal accounting systems typically maintain every grant in a separate account for proper tracking and auditing. It is unclear how entitlement payments from the CSDE are handled in municipal accounts.

The Minimum Budget Requirement (MBR) prohibits districts from budgeting less for education than in the previous year. There are exceptions but districts designated as an Alliance district cannot decrease their local contribution – which is a combination of ECS non-alliance funds and local taxes – though flat funding of that local contribution is permissible to satisfy MBR.

Findings

Direct ECS funding to BOEs prioritizes proven educational strategies

Though the Alliance District grant funds are not new funds but a portion of ECS, superintendents unanimously spoke to the important benefits of the local BOEs receiving those ECS funds directly from the State. This was a resounding point made by all superintendents who joined the focus groups.

Several superintendents and school business officials felt that if there were no Alliance District grant and all ECS funds were given to the municipality, the district may not realize the full benefit of the State's ECS allocation.

Many superintendents spoke about how they have used the Alliance District grant funds to preserve critical services for students and staff and invest in proven educational priorities which they felt would otherwise not have happened. They spoke of investments in academic coaches and interventionists, tutors, social-emotional learning screeners, social workers and school safety staff, expanded career pathways, full day kindergarten, expanded pre-K, an ROTC program, after school clubs, etc. – all of which together have led to improvements in student engagement and academic outcomes.

Alliance District grant provides flexibility and stability for long-term planning

Having the assurance that they will directly receive dedicated state funding has provided stability to districts and enabled long-term planning. These state entitlement funds provided as part of the CSDE's four-part school improvement framework (i.e., Academics, Talent, Climate and Culture, Operations) have also given districts sufficient flexibility to fund initiatives that may not be easily accommodated within another funding source.

School business officials repeatedly referenced these perspectives. They indicated that it was invaluable to have sustained, multi-year funding which allowed them to ensure continuity of critical organizational capacity such as coaches, and attendance staff. They also provided examples of new programs in areas such as welding, kitchen and culinary, and aerospace, as well as facility

upgrades and establishment of in-district alternative and special education programming to reduce the cost of outplacements.

Alliance Districts have achieved many demonstrable successes

Accountability indicators show improved outcomes prior to the pandemic

Connecticut's Next Generation Accountability System takes a holistic perspective of school and district performance by incorporating a broad set of 12 indicators including student achievement, academic growth, attendance, college and career readiness, high school graduation, postsecondary entrance, fitness, and the arts.

The overall score from all indicators is the Accountability Index. This index ranges from 0-100. The ultimate goal is to achieve an index of 85 or higher. Prior to the pandemic, 19 of the 33 Alliance Districts improved their overall Accountability Index scores from 2015-16 to 2018-19 (shaded in green in Table below).

Accountability Index Scores Pre-Pandemic

Alliance Districts	2015-16	2018-19
Ansonia School District	65.7	66.8
Bloomfield School District	73.6	71.9
Bridgeport School District	56.4	61.2
Bristol School District	72.8	72.7
Danbury School District	72.6	72.6
Derby School District	63.0	68.9
East Hartford School District	64.9	68.5
East Haven School District	64.2	69.7
East Windsor School District	70.3	66.7
Enfield School District	74.4	72.4
Groton School District	73.2	77.0
Hamden School District	70.2	71.1
Hartford School District	59.9	59.9
Killingly School District	71.1	69.9
Manchester School District	65.8	64.9
Meriden School District	66.6	69.4
Middletown School District	71.2	73.1
Naugatuck School District	68.1	71.3
New Britain School District	57.9	55.5
New Haven School District	64.3	64.7

Alliance Districts	2015-16	2018-19
New London School District	58.0	63.2
Norwalk School District	72.7	75.6
Norwich School District	62.3	59.3
Putnam School District	70.0	70.6
Stamford School District	73.0	71.3
Torrington School District	69.4	68.0
Vernon School District	72.4	74.5
Waterbury School District	57.8	64.6
West Haven School District	69.4	71.4
Winchester School District	66.4	79.3
Windham School District	67.6	65.0
Windsor Locks School District	74.1	71.7
Windsor School District	71.4	75.9

From 2015-16 to 2018-19, 14 of 33 Alliance Districts improved ELA achievement.

ELA Achievement/Performance Index Scores Pre-Pandemic

Alliance Districts	2015-16	2018-19
Ansonia School District	57.9	59.0
Bloomfield School District	62.5	59.5
Bridgeport School District	51.6	54.3
Bristol School District	66.4	64.3
Danbury School District	64.6	64.3
Derby School District	59.0	57.3
East Hartford School District	56.4	58.1
East Haven School District	63.4	62.2
East Windsor School District	64.1	60.5
Enfield School District	67.7	64.6
Groton School District	67.2	68.9
Hamden School District	65.8	64.9
Hartford School District	53.8	52.7
Killingly School District	68.1	67.9
Manchester School District	59.9	58.0
Meriden School District	60.0	63.1
Middletown School District	65.3	65.2
Naugatuck School District	63.8	66.1
New Britain School District	51.7	50.6
New Haven School District	57.3	57.8
New London School District	55.4	55.7

Alliance Districts	2015-16	2018-19
Norwalk School District	64.7	65.0
Norwich School District	58.4	58.3
Putnam School District	64.8	65.2
Stamford School District	65.2	65.0
Torrington School District	63.5	62.4
Vernon School District	63.3	66.6
Waterbury School District	54.3	55.6
West Haven School District	63.3	64.4
Winchester School District	64.8	67.8
Windham School District	59.5	59.5
Windsor Locks School District	65.1	63.2
Windsor School District	62.9	62.5

From 2015-16 to 2018-19, 26 of 33 improved mathematics achievement.

Mathematics Achievement/Performance Index Scores Pre-Pandemic

Alliance Districts	2015-16	2018-19
Ansonia School District	53.0	53.6
Bloomfield School District	54.1	54.1
Bridgeport School District	42.7	46.4
Bristol School District	59.5	58.7
Danbury School District	57.9	58.8
Derby School District	51.1	52.4
East Hartford School District	48.3	50.0
East Haven School District	55.1	55.8
East Windsor School District	56.6	52.8
Enfield School District	60.7	59.3
Groton School District	62.2	63.8
Hamden School District	59.2	61.8
Hartford School District	46.7	47.3
Killingly School District	58.4	60.8
Manchester School District	54.0	53.5
Meriden School District	51.9	57.9
Middletown School District	58.3	59.4
Naugatuck School District	55.6	61.9
New Britain School District	44.5	42.8
New Haven School District	49.4	50.6
New London School District	49.1	49.7
Norwalk School District	57.4	60.7

Alliance Districts	2015-16	2018-19
Norwich School District	51.6	53.1
Putnam School District	58.2	58.0
Stamford School District	59.8	61.1
Torrington School District	55.1	55.8
Vernon School District	57.7	62.1
Waterbury School District	46.2	48.6
West Haven School District	58.4	60.2
Winchester School District	57.2	68.8
Windham School District	52.6	55.3
Windsor Locks School District	58.8	59.3
Windsor School District	58.6	60.2

From 2012-13 to 2018-19, chronic absenteeism rates declined in 24 of 33 Alliance Districts.

Chronic Absenteeism Pre-Pandemic

Alliance Districts	2012-13	2018-19
Ansonia School District	14.3	14.5
Bloomfield School District	7.9	8.1
Bridgeport School District	24.5	18.8
Bristol School District	10.2	9.6
Danbury School District	11.4	7.1
Derby School District	14.3	11.3
East Hartford School District	19.0	14.2
East Haven School District	16.1	14.2
East Windsor School District	10.4	14.6
Enfield School District	11.4	10.0
Groton School District	12.4	12.2
Hamden School District	15.1	14.7
Hartford School District	25.5	25.4
Killingly School District	16.2	13.2
Manchester School District	13.3	17.8
Meriden School District	16.2	14.8
Middletown School District	11.2	10.6
Naugatuck School District	13.9	14.5
New Britain School District	24.6	24.2
New Haven School District	16.3	19.3
New London School District	19.6	15.1
Norwalk School District	11.4	10.3
Norwich School District	13.5	12.0

Alliance Districts	2012-13	2018-19
Putnam School District	14.3	11.0
Stamford School District	14.3	11.1
Torrington School District	13.9	11.5
Vernon School District	8.1	8.7
Waterbury School District	19.4	15.6
West Haven School District	16.6	13.6
Winchester School District	64.6	6.4
Windham School District	18.7	17.9
Windsor Locks School District	10.4	12.6
Windsor School District	8.8	9.7

Improvements were also occurring in the 4-year adjusted cohort graduation rate. From the 2012-13 cohort to the 2019-20 cohort, 4-year graduation rates increased in 26 of the 31 Alliance Districts by an average of nearly 7 percentage points, more than twice the state average increase of 3 percentage points.

Four-year Graduation Rate Pre-Pandemic

Alliance Districts	2012-13	2018-19
Ansonia School District	75.5	86.7
Bloomfield School District	88.5	87.0
Bridgeport School District	67.3	76.0
Bristol School District	79.8	86.2
Danbury School District	75.5	79.4
Derby School District	64.8	75.0
East Hartford School District	77.7	88.2
East Haven School District	74.0	77.9
East Windsor School District	82.3	87.0
Enfield School District	87.4	87.8
Groton School District	82.3	86.1
Hamden School District	85.3	84.8
Hartford School District	71.2	72.5
Killingly School District	74.9	83.2
Manchester School District	74.7	82.2
Meriden School District	70.1	80.1
Middletown School District	81.0	91.8
Naugatuck School District	77.9	85.7
New Britain School District	60.9	77.8
New Haven School District	71.4	80.9
New London School District	64.2	79.4

Alliance Districts	2012-13	2018-19
Norwalk School District	84.7	90.4
Putnam School District	77.1	91.3
Stamford School District	88.9	86.8
Torrington School District	84.5	81.5
Vernon School District	81.4	85.2
Waterbury School District	66.5	82.1
West Haven School District	69.7	83.1
Windham School District	75.3	75.4
Windsor Locks School District	90.7	91.0
Windsor School District	81.4	87.2

The 6-year graduation rate for students with high needs is accountability indicator #9. From the 2010-11 cohort (which includes graduations till Summer 2013) to the 2017-18 cohort (which includes graduations till Summer 2020), the 6-year graduation rates for students with high needs increased in 29 of 31 Alliance Districts by an average of over 12 percentage points.

Six-Year Graduation Cohort Rate Pre-Pandemic

Alliance Districts	2010-11 Cohort (Graduate by Summer 2013)	2017-18 Cohort (Graduate by Summer 2020)
Ansonia School District	68.9	87.8
Bloomfield School District	80.5	87.6
Bridgeport School District	66.7	78.6
Bristol School District	73.6	84.5
Danbury School District	74.8	82.2
Derby School District	74.1	74.2
East Hartford School District	83.9	90.5
East Haven School District	74.2	83.8
East Windsor School District	91.2	90.7
Enfield School District	75.8	86.4
Groton School District	66.4	80.1
Hamden School District	79.4	87.0
Hartford School District	68.5	74.2
Killingly School District	60.6	85.3
Manchester School District	64.5	84.8
Meriden School District	67.5	80.6
Middletown School District	68.1	86.6
Naugatuck School District	75.7	85.2
New Britain School District	58.2	79.0

Alliance Districts	2010-11 Cohort (Graduate by Summer 2013)	2017-18 Cohort (Graduate by Summer 2020)
New Haven School District	67.5	82.6
New London School District	65.8	86.4
Norwalk School District	82.7	91.8
Putnam School District	81.1	83.9
Stamford School District	84.5	85.9
Torrington School District	68.8	82.4
Vernon School District	72.4	70.9
Waterbury School District	65.9	82.4
West Haven School District	63.0	83.3
Windham School District	60.2	83.5
Windsor Locks School District	75.0	91.0
Windsor School District	80.3	88.3

Accountability indicators continue to improve after the pandemic

The disruptions caused by the pandemic negatively affected all accountability indicators including academic achievement, academic growth, chronic absenteeism, and high school graduation. However, since then, many districts have been demonstrating improvements.

After the pandemic, 27 Alliance Districts improved on their Accountability Index from 2021-22 to 2024-25; nine have exceeded their pre-pandemic levels (e.g., East Hartford, East Haven, East Windsor), and others have sustained a higher level of performance (e.g., Bristol, Vernon, Winchester).

In terms of overall improvement based on the accountability index, 27 of 36 Alliance Districts improved from 2021-22 to 2024-25 (shown in green below). The nine districts followed by an asterisk earned a higher accountability index in 2024-25 compared to 2018-19.

Accountability Index Scores Post-Pandemic

Alliance Districts	2018-19		2021-22	2024-25
Ansonia School District	66.8		61.4	65.2
Bloomfield School District	71.9		66.4	67.6
Bridgeport School District	61.2		59.8	59.0
Bristol School District	72.7		72.7	70.7
Danbury School District	72.6		66.8	68.7
Derby School District	68.9		64.7	64.8
East Hartford School District	68.5		66.7	67.2
East Haven School District*	69.7		68.3	70.6

Alliance Districts	2018-19		2021-22	2024-25
East Windsor School District*	66.7		68.3	71.6
Enfield School District	72.4		69.6	69.9
Groton School District	77.0		70.4	70.2
Hamden School District	71.1		67.3	67.3
Hartford School District	59.9		56.8	59.0
Killingly School District*	69.9		68.3	70.1
Manchester School District*	64.9		60.5	66.2
Meriden School District*	69.4		65.7	69.6
Middletown School District	73.1		66.1	63.8
Naugatuck School District	71.3		63.2	68.6
New Britain School District*	55.5		56.4	57.2
New Haven School District	64.7		60.9	59.4
New London School District	63.2		57.3	58.6
Norwalk School District	75.6		69.2	73.9
Norwich School District	59.3		50.7	56.5
Plainfield School District	71.0		66.4	66.4
Putnam School District	70.6		64.3	67.0
Stamford School District	71.3		64.8	65.9
Stratford School District	73.3		69.0	70.1
Thompson School District*	66.6		65.4	71.0
Torrington School District*	68.0		66.5	68.7
Vernon School District*	74.5		73.7	76.3
Waterbury School District	64.6		59.9	62.7
West Haven School District	71.4		65.7	69.3
Winchester School District	79.3		70.4	64.6
Windham School District	65.0		60.7	62.8
Windsor Locks School District	71.7		70.7	67.5
Windsor School District	75.9		68.9	72.1

In terms of ELA achievement, 19 of 36 Alliance Districts improved from 2021-22 to 2024-25.

English Language Arts District Performance Index Since 2021-22

Alliance Districts	2021-22	2024-25
Ansonia School District	51.7	52.6
Bloomfield School District	57	56.3
Bridgeport School District	50.1	49.4
Bristol School District	63.3	63.2
Danbury School District	57.9	57.2
Derby School District	57.5	57.3

Alliance Districts	2021-22	2024-25
East Hartford School District	56.4	58.4
East Haven School District	60.1	59.7
East Windsor School District	60.3	65
Enfield School District	60.6	61.5
Groton School District	66.1	63.7
Hamden School District	61.8	60
Hartford School District	48.3	48.4
Killingly School District	61.9	62.7
Manchester School District	53.5	56.5
Meriden School District	60.8	62.5
Middletown School District	62.3	58.9
Naugatuck School District	60	60.1
New Britain School District	47.1	46.9
New Haven School District	51.3	50.9
New London School District	49	49.6
Norwalk School District	60.3	62.2
Norwich School District	53.4	54.2
Plainfield School District	62.1	61.4
Putnam School District	58.2	60.1
Stamford School District	60.4	58.8
Stratford School District	59.6	58.1
Thompson School District	61.7	66.1
Torrington School District	61.3	60.5
Vernon School District	64.4	66.9
Waterbury School District	51.3	53.2
West Haven School District	59.5	61.2
Winchester School District	66.5	64.3
Windham School District	52.5	55.1
Windsor Locks School District	63	60.8
Windsor School District	59.3	61.3

In terms of Mathematics achievement, 30 of 36 Alliance Districts improved from 2021-22 to 2024-25.

Mathematics District Performance Index Since 2021-22

Alliance Districts	2021-22	2024-25
Ansonia School District	44.8	48.3
Bloomfield School District	48.5	50.1
Bridgeport School District	42.1	44.9

Alliance Districts	2021-22	2024-25
Bristol School District	56.6	58.6
Danbury School District	51.6	53.6
Derby School District	51	50.6
East Hartford School District	49	54.4
East Haven School District	54	54
East Windsor School District	55.7	61
Enfield School District	54.8	57.7
Groton School District	59.4	59.9
Hamden School District	55.9	55.4
Hartford School District	41.5	44.5
Killingly School District	54	54.2
Manchester School District	47.7	52
Meriden School District	53.3	59.2
Middletown School District	52.7	52.8
Naugatuck School District	55	53.9
New Britain School District	37.6	41.6
New Haven School District	42	44.8
New London School District	41.1	42.4
Norwalk School District	54.9	58.6
Norwich School District	45.5	48
Plainfield School District	54.9	57.2
Putnam School District	53.6	53.8
Stamford School District	54.3	55.3
Stratford School District	51.8	52.9
Thompson School District	56.8	62.5
Torrington School District	52.1	54.6
Vernon School District	60.3	61.6
Waterbury School District	42.3	46.3
West Haven School District	54.3	57.7
Winchester School District	66.8	61
Windham School District	46.9	51.3
Windsor Locks School District	58.1	56.7
Windsor School District	55.1	57.7

In terms of Science achievement, 20 of 36 Alliance Districts improved from 2021-22 to 2024-25.

Science District Performance Index Since 2021-22

Alliance Districts	2021-22	2024-25
Ansonia School District	51.1	48.3

Alliance Districts	2021-22	2024-25
Bloomfield School District	53	52.2
Bridgeport School District	45.5	46.7
Bristol School District	60.3	63.9
Danbury School District	54.2	53.6
Derby School District	51.2	49.9
East Hartford School District	54.1	57.9
East Haven School District	56.2	60.8
East Windsor School District	58	63.9
Enfield School District	60	62.2
Groton School District	61.3	60.9
Hamden School District	57.8	53.9
Hartford School District	46.9	46.2
Killingly School District	59	55.9
Manchester School District	49.9	53.2
Meriden School District	54	56.6
Middletown School District	56.1	56.6
Naugatuck School District	56.4	55.1
New Britain School District	46.6	43.9
New Haven School District	46.7	47.8
New London School District	48.4	47.8
Norwalk School District	56.4	57.3
Norwich School District	52.3	51.7
Plainfield School District	58.8	59.9
Putnam School District	55.1	55.3
Stamford School District	57.3	55.9
Stratford School District	56.7	55.2
Thompson School District	58	59.8
Torrington School District	59.1	58.8
Vernon School District	63	60.7
Waterbury School District	47.1	48
West Haven School District	57.2	61.3
Winchester School District	69.4	72.8
Windham School District	53.4	57.3
Windsor Locks School District	58.5	60.1
Windsor School District	58.5	59.6

Almost all Alliance Districts (34 out of 36) have improved on their chronic absenteeism rates from 2021-22 to 2024-25.

Chronic Absenteeism Rates Since 2021-22

Alliance Districts	**2021-22**	**2024-25**
Ansonia School District	25.1	23.1
Bloomfield School District	20.4	17.9
Bridgeport School District	27.8	33.1
Bristol School District	19.3	18.4
Danbury School District	23.5	15.2
Derby School District	29.9	19.2
East Hartford School District	26.6	23.5
East Haven School District	22	17.2
East Windsor School District	36.6	16.3
Enfield School District	21	18
Groton School District	28.4	20.1
Hamden School District	34.9	20.8
Hartford School District	46	36.2
Killingly School District	26.7	20.4
Manchester School District	35.7	21.5
Meriden School District	29.1	21.6
Middletown School District	29	25
Naugatuck School District	26.6	19.3
New Britain School District	41.2	32.2
New Haven School District	58.1	32.1
New London School District	34.8	28.9
Norwalk School District	26.8	17.9
Norwich School District	22.1	21
Plainfield School District	23.6	20.1
Putnam School District	36.8	19.8
Stamford School District	24.4	19.4
Stratford School District	25.9	16.6
Thompson School District	39.5	14
Torrington School District	23.7	17.8
Vernon School District	14.9	13.2
Waterbury School District	39.5	25.8
West Haven School District	29.9	25.5
Winchester School District	23.3	25.5
Windham School District	46	31.6
Windsor Locks School District	22.2	22
Windsor School District	27.9	18.2

In terms of high school graduation, 18 out of 34 districts improved on the four-year graduation rate and 19 out of 34 districts improved on the six-year graduation rate for students with high needs.

Four-Year Graduation Rates Since 2020-21

Alliance Districts	**2020-21**	**2023-24**
Ansonia School District	74	85.7
Bloomfield School District	88.5	83.3
Bridgeport School District	76	75.1
Bristol School District	89.2	90.9
Danbury School District	82.5	76
Derby School District	76.3	77.7
East Hartford School District	91.3	84.6
East Haven School District	81.3	82.6
East Windsor School District	83.1	86.4
Enfield School District	91.1	89.8
Groton School District	85.6	88
Hamden School District	87.6	84.5
Hartford School District	72.3	78.6
Killingly School District	87.6	85.4
Manchester School District	81.1	83.8
Meriden School District	85.3	85.6
Middletown School District	93.3	90
Naugatuck School District	88.9	87.5
New Britain School District	78.7	71
New Haven School District	78.6	72.5
New London School District	86.9	78.5
Norwalk School District	87.8	92.6
Plainfield School District	88.2	80.9
Putnam School District	85.5	93.1
Stamford School District	85.4	79.5
Stratford School District	92.7	90.9
Thompson School District	78.6	90
Torrington School District	78.5	76.4
Vernon School District	77.5	88.9
Waterbury School District	83.6	85.7
West Haven School District	80.6	88.6
Windham School District	78.4	79.8
Windsor Locks School District	82.1	88.7
Windsor School District	84.2	85.2

Six-Year Graduation Rates for Students with High Needs Since 2020-21

Alliance Districts	**2018-19 Cohort** (Graduate by Summer 2021)	**2021-22 Cohort** (Graduate by Summer 2024)
Ansonia School District	88.4	82.9
Bloomfield School District	90.4	91.1
Bridgeport School District	79.9	78.6
Bristol School District	86.3	88.7
Danbury School District	83.6	82.6
Derby School District	82.5	73.3
East Hartford School District	89.5	89.4
East Haven School District	77.7	75.6
East Windsor School District	93.3	87
Enfield School District	85	88
Groton School District	80	88.4
Hamden School District	84.8	88.7
Hartford School District	77	78.7
Killingly School District	85	80.7
Manchester School District	81.6	87.8
Meriden School District	83.1	88.1
Middletown School District	92	94.7
Naugatuck School District	84.2	90.7
New Britain School District	84.2	85.8
New Haven School District	83.6	80.7
New London School District	80.4	81.3
Norwalk School District	90.9	91.5
Plainfield School District	75	83.3
Putnam School District	89.2	92.7
Stamford School District	85	82.6
Stratford School District	92.8	95.3
Thompson School District	81.5	76.3
Torrington School District	82.8	82.8
Vernon School District	76.8	82.1
Waterbury School District	85.2	90.8
West Haven School District	84.4	84.3
Windham School District	76.8	71.1
Windsor Locks School District	91.4	87.3
Windsor School District	83.9	94.8

Other Notable Accomplishments

- Connecticut's Next General Accountability System which recognizes academic growth has identified many high-growth schools in Alliance Districts. Over the past several accountability cycles, around 25 percent of schools identified (i.e., around 30-40 schools) annually as Schools of Distinction have been in Alliance Districts.
- Even more notably, 14 out of 38 National Blue Ribbon Schools since 2015 have come from Alliance Districts.
- Since 2015-16, 23 Alliance District schools that were identified for state support as Turnaround or Focus schools have exited those statuses due to improved outcomes.

Alliance District grant amounts as a proportion of ECS vary greatly among towns

Until the 2011-12 school year, ***all*** ECS funds were sent directly from the State to the municipalities. Effective 2012-13, pursuant to subsection (c) of Connecticut General Statutes 10-262u, any ***increase*** in ECS funds from the 2011-12 school year for the towns identified as Alliance Districts in 2012-13[iv] and again in 2017-18[v] that would typically have gone to the municipality were set aside for the CSDE to distribute as a grant to the local boards of education of those Alliance Districts. For Alliance Districts that were newly identified in the 2022-23 school year[vi], any increase in ECS funds over the 2021-22 school year would be set aside and distributed as an Alliance District grant to their local board of education.

Since its inception in 1989-90, the ECS formula has undergone several changes that are discussed in greater detail in the aforementioned OFA/OLR report. Discussing the intricacies of those changes is beyond the scope of this report. Since the establishment of Alliance Districts starting in 2012-13, the annual ECS formula has seen several changes such as student weights and the minimum state aid percentage. Additionally, in some years, the legislature simply listed the ECS aid amounts in statute in lieu of applying the formula.

Starting in 2018-19, the legislature established a phase-in schedule to fully fund all districts based on the ECS formula. This schedule also called for decreases to the ECS allocations for towns that were "over-funded" when comparing their actual entitlements to their formula driven entitlements. The implementation of the phase-down provision has been delayed by the legislature since FY 2021. Moreover, Alliance Districts that are considered "over-funded" are "held harmless" so that their ECS allocations cannot be reduced. This protection for alliance districts is a permanent feature of the ECS statute, unlike the general hold harmless that has been in place since FY 2021.

In light of such conjunctive and interrelated factors, establishing the Alliance District grant amount as an increase in ECS from a varying base years (i.e., either 2011-12 or 2021-22 based on when the district was identified) has resulted in increasing variations among districts with respect to the proportion of the ECS allocation that is set aside for the Alliance District grant.

Let's look at an example. Ansonia was identified as an Alliance Districts in 2012-13. Their ECS allocation in the base-year of 2011-12 was approximately $15.1 million. In 2025-26, their ECS allocation is approximately $21.3 million. Therefore, their Alliance District grant in 2025-26 is approximately $6.3 million (or 29.5% of ECS). In 2024-25, Ansonia's total student enrollment was 2,404 of whom 1,708 (71%) were identified as being high needs. By contrast, East Haven was also identified as an Alliance District in 2012-13. Their ECS allocation in the base year of 2011-12 was $18.8 million. In 2025-26, their ECS allocation is around $20 million. Therefore, East Haven's Alliance District grant in 2025-26 is approximately $1.2 million (or 6.2% of ECS). In 2024-25, East Haven's total student enrollment was 2,857 students of whom 2,000 (70%) were identified as high needs. Though on measures of town wealth, the towns of Ansonia and East Haven may be different, their school populations are similar with respect to student need. Yet, given the methodology for determining the Alliance District grant amount, one district (Ansonia) gets 29.5% of their ECS as the Alliance District grant while another (East Haven) gets 6.2% of their ECS as the Alliance District grant.

This variation among districts in the proportion of ECS allocation set aside for the Alliance District grant has grown over the past 13 years since the program's inception. For the 30 Alliance Districts identified initially in 2012-13, this percentage ranged from 2.1% to 10.3% in the first year of the program i.e., 2012-13. In 2025-26, however, the variation has increased considerably such that the percentages now range from 2.1% to 63.7% of the total ECS allocation across the Alliance Districts.

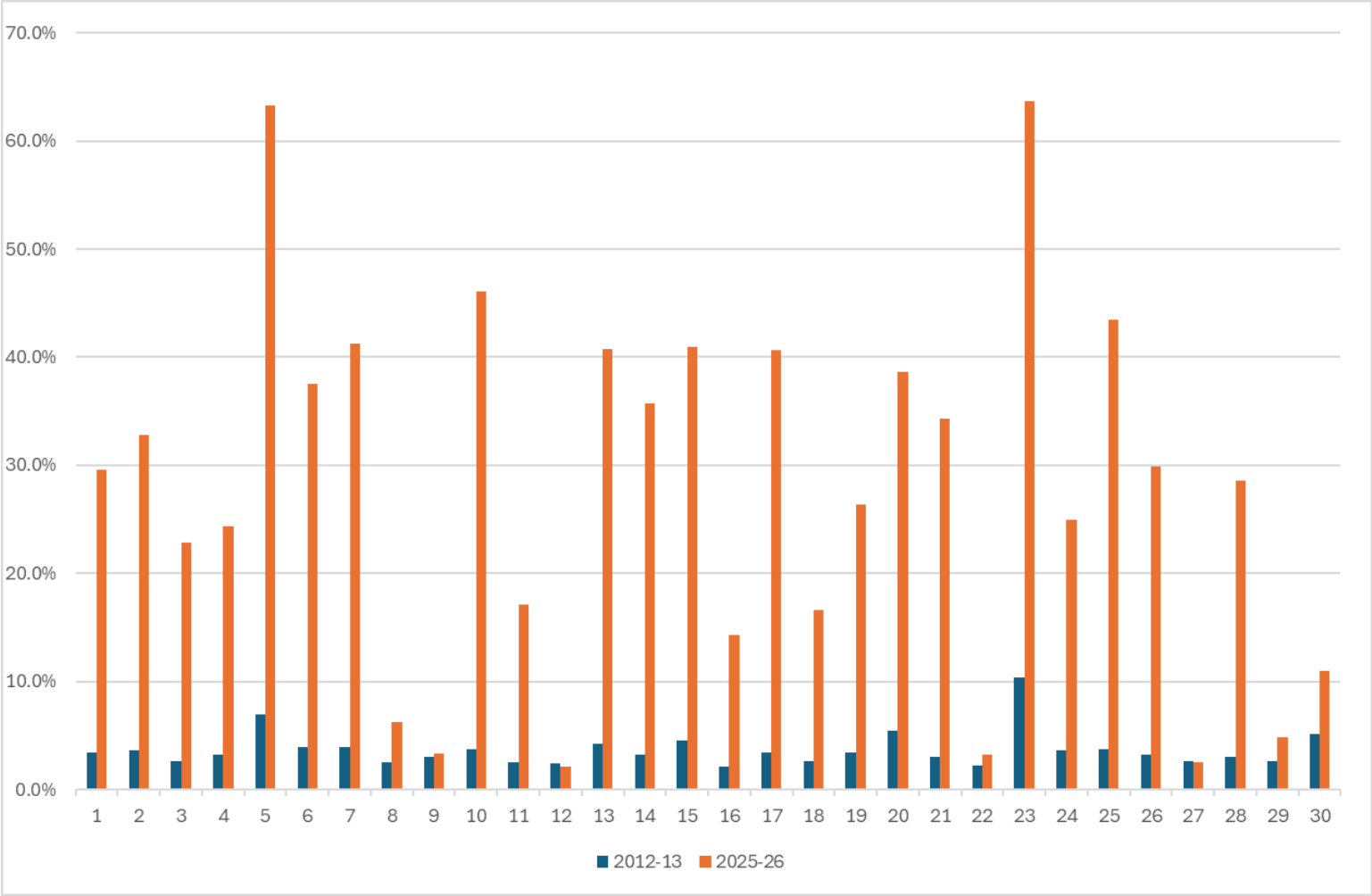
Alliance District Grant Amount as a Percentage of Total ECS for 30 Original Alliance Districts

Town Code	Town Name	2012-13	2025-26
2	Ansonia	3.5%	29.5%
11	Bloomfield	3.6%	32.8%
15	Bridgeport	2.6%	22.8%
17	Bristol	3.2%	24.4%
34	Danbury	6.9%	63.3%
37	Derby	3.9%	37.5%
43	East Hartford	3.9%	41.2%
44	East Haven	2.5%	6.2%
47	East Windsor	3.0%	3.3%
62	Hamden	3.7%	46.1%
64	Hartford	2.5%	17.1%
69	Killingly	2.4%	2.1%
77	Manchester	4.2%	40.8%
80	Meriden	3.2%	35.7%
83	Middletown	4.6%	40.9%
88	Naugatuck	2.1%	14.3%
89	New Britain	3.5%	40.6%
93	New Haven	2.6%	16.6%
95	New London	3.4%	26.4%

Town Code	Town Name	2012-13	2025-26
103	Norwalk	5.4%	38.6%
104	Norwich	3.1%	34.4%
116	Putnam	2.2%	3.2%
135	Stamford	10.3%	63.7%
146	Vernon	3.7%	25.0%
151	Waterbury	3.7%	43.5%
156	West Haven	3.2%	29.8%
162	Winchester	2.6%	2.5%
163	Windham	3.1%	28.6%
164	Windsor	2.6%	4.8%
165	Windsor Locks	5.1%	11.0%

The data in above table is represented visually in the figure below to illustrate the magnitude of the change in the Alliance District grant as a proportion of ECS across the original 30 Alliance Districts from the first year of 2012-13 to the current year of 2025-26.

Alliance District Grant Amount as a Percentage of Total ECS for 30 Original Alliance Districts – 2012-13 vs 2025-26

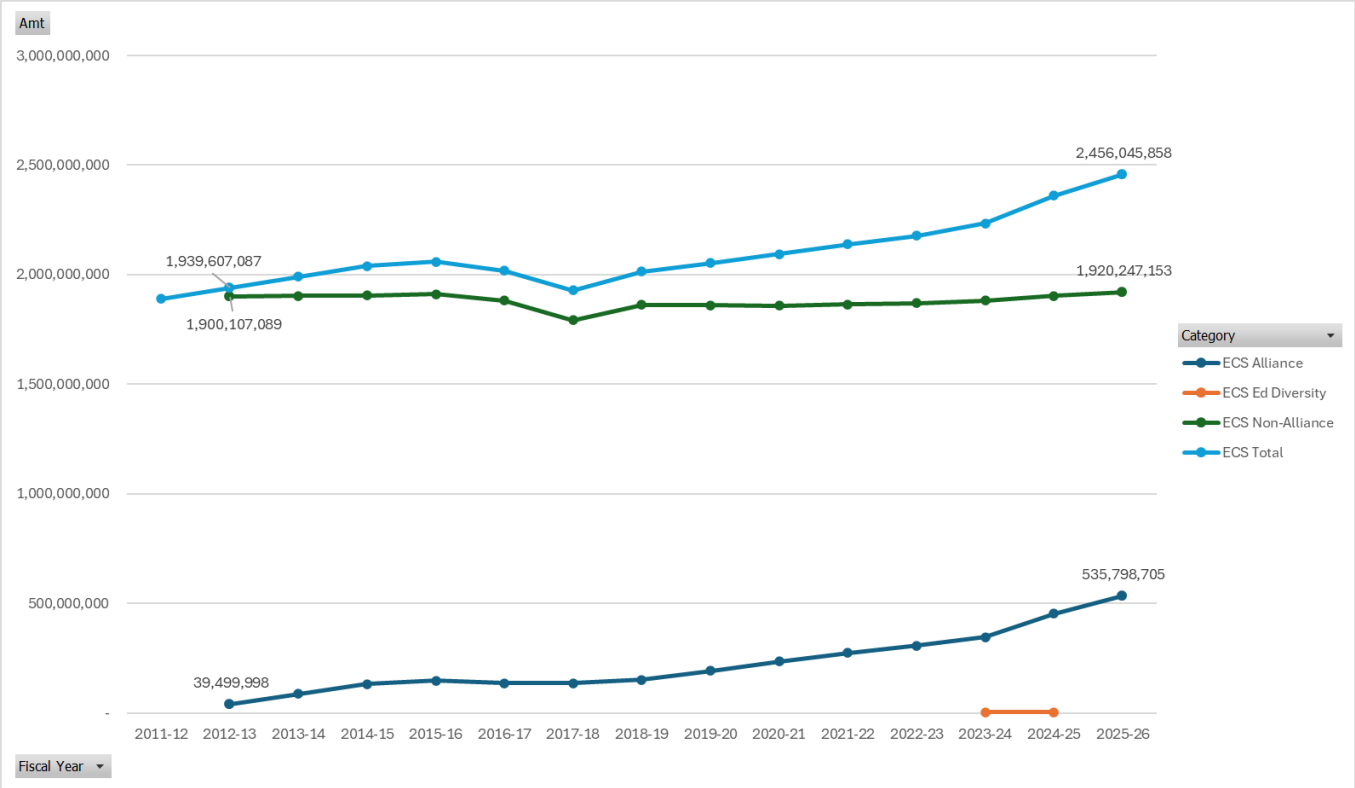


Several towns have seen a significant increase in the percentage of ECS that is designated for the Alliance District grant (Table 1). For example, East Hartford, Meriden, Norwich, and Waterbury have seen more than a 10-fold increase in the percentage of ECS designated for the Alliance District grant. On the other end, districts like East Windsor, Killingly, Putnam, Winchester, and Windsor have seen less than a two-fold increase in this percentage over the 13-year period. Since the Alliance District grant amount is the increase in ECS from a fixed base year and not a percentage of ECS, it is not surprising that over an extended period, there is significantly greater variability in the percentage of ECS designated for the Alliance District grant. Essentially, towns with larger increases in ECS will end up with an increasingly greater portion of their ECS dedicated toward the Alliance District grant.

While the Alliance portion of ECS increased, the non-alliance portion remained flat

Over the past 13 years from 2012-13 to 2025-26, all increases in ECS allocations for the 34 Alliance Districts have been assigned to the Alliance District grant. Consequently, the total Alliance District grant amount statewide has increased 13 times or 1,300% from around $39.5 million in 2012-13 to $535.8 million in 2025-26 (see figure below). During the same period, the non-Alliance portion of ECS that continues to be sent to the municipality has remained relatively flat, increasing by only $20 million (less than 1%) from $1.90 billion to $1.92 billion.

ECS Funding: Total and Alliance Breakout



The slope of the increase in ECS Alliance District grant amounts over this period has noticeable inflection points in 2018-19 and again in 2023-24. When the program first started in 2012-13, the Alliance District total of $39.5 million was 2.0% of the total ECS entitlement of $1.94 billion; by 2018-19 the Alliance District total had grown to $151.5 million and represented 7.5% or of the total ECS entitlement of $2.01 billion. Over the next four years from 2019-20 to 2023-24 with the phase-in to fully fund ECS per the formula, the Alliance District grant grew faster such that the grant as a percentage of the total ECS entitlement increased from $193.5 million out of $2.09 billion or 9.4% in 2019-20 to $347.3 million out of $2.23 billion or 15.6% in 2023-24. In 2024-25 and 2025-26, the ECS Alliance District grant grew in each of those years to comprise 19.2% and 21.8% of the total ECS entitlement (see table below). This increase in proportion of ECS aligns with the Governor's efforts to accelerate the timeline for phasing in the fully funding of ECS, wherein the increases are particularly being directed to some of our largest and highest need communities which historically have also been our Alliance Districts since inception.

ECS Funding: Total and Alliance Breakout

Fiscal Year	ECS Alliance	ECS Ed Diversity	ECS Non-Alliance	ECS Total	ECS Alliance District Grant as a Percentage of ECS Total
2011-12				1,889,607,093	
2012-13	39,499,998		1,900,107,089	1,939,607,087	2.0%
2013-14	87,442,021		1,902,899,581	1,990,341,602	4.4%
2014-15	132,901,813		1,905,938,801	2,038,840,614	6.5%
2015-16	147,287,883		1,910,927,925	2,058,215,808	7.2%
2016-17	135,271,086		1,882,316,012	2,017,587,098	6.7%
2017-18	135,820,608		1,792,267,284	1,928,087,892	7.0%
2018-19	151,466,166		1,862,362,453	2,013,828,619	7.5%
2019-20	193,505,078		1,860,531,277	2,054,036,355	9.4%
2020-21	235,146,599		1,858,440,534	2,093,587,133	11.2%
2021-22	274,179,135		1,865,009,030	2,139,188,165	12.8%
2022-23	307,499,540		1,871,066,455	2,178,565,995	14.1%
2023-24	347,303,824	4,281,133	1,881,835,279	2,233,420,236	15.6%
2024-25	453,019,437	4,281,133	1,904,268,287	2,361,568,857	19.2%
2025-26	535,798,705		1,920,247,153	2,456,045,858	21.8%

Alliance District funds are increasingly used for core operational expenditures

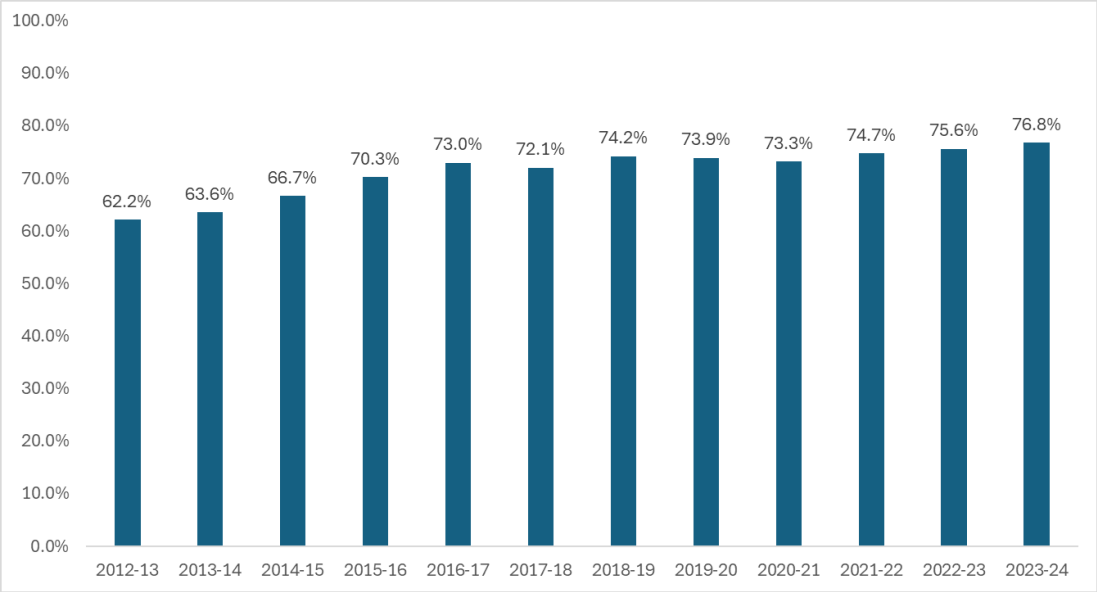
In the first three years of the Alliance District grant program, when the ECS set-aside amount was less than 7% of overall ECS, many districts were able to cover their core operational costs using non-Alliance funds. This allowed them to use their Alliance grant funds in more innovative ways.

However, as the Alliance share continued to increase but the non-Alliance share remained flat, superintendents have been under increasing pressure to incorporate their core staff salaries into their Alliance District grant. Moreover, several superintendents remarked that the local contribution from the municipality – which is a combination of ECS non-alliance funds and local taxes – toward the core operational budget has remained unchanged or seen very minimal increase for years. Flat funding of the local contribution is permissible to satisfy the minimum budget requirement (MBR) but is not recommended because it minimizes the impact of the Alliance District program funds.

Superintendents mentioned how Alliance funds are now part of the general budget because they are not seeing an increase from their local municipalities to address increasing costs. Core staff (e.g., general education teachers) are being included in their Alliance District grant, thus hampering their ability to be innovative with the grant funds.

This pressure to fund core operational expenses within the Alliance District grant is also seen in the percentage of grant funds being dedicated to employee salaries. In the early years of the grant, it was less than 70% but as the non-Alliance funds have remained flat and local towns have not increased their education budget from local property taxes, this percentage has increased to over 75%.

Percentage of Alliance District Grant Funds Spent on District Employee Salaries



Core local operational budgets may now display two sources of funds

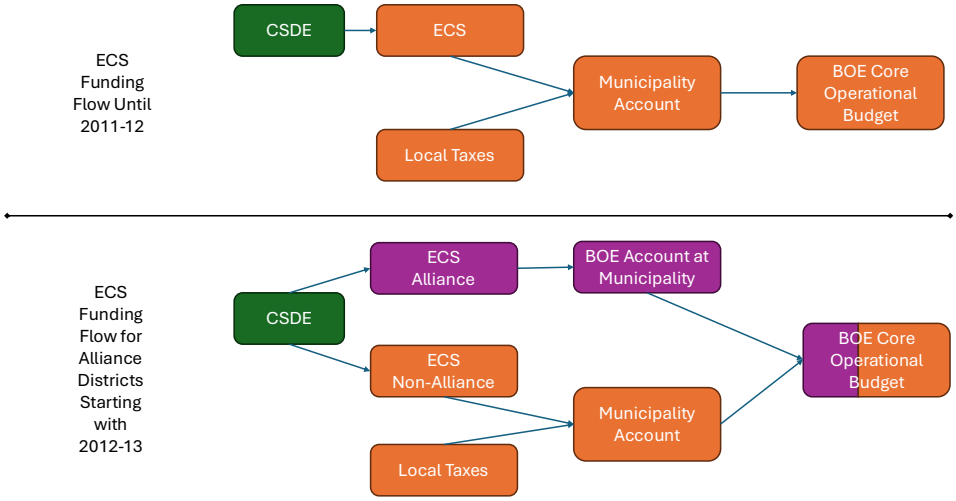
The November 2024 OLR report provides an excellent summary of the fiscal relationship between the local BOE and the municipality.

> *"In Connecticut, local BOEs do not have the authority to levy local property taxes on their own. Instead, state law requires a board to work within the limits of the appropriations the town has set for it… When a BOE determines it has not received sufficient funds to operate its schools, the law allows it to seek additional appropriations from the town."*

Prior to the establishment of the Alliance District grant program, the municipality would utilize a combination of the state's ECS entitlement and its local tax contribution to provide the local BOE with a total appropriation for the town's education system. This single appropriation formed the basis of the core local operational budget of the local school district.

When the Alliance District grant was established in 2012-13, it split the single appropriation into two parts: a state-aid entitlement for the municipality and an Alliance District grant for the local BOE. Consequently, the core local operational budget may now display two funding streams which according to a municipal CEO, makes budgeting tricky, confusing, and difficult for people to understand.

ECS Funding Flow Before and After Establishment of Alliance District Grant



Note: This figure does not include other funds the school district may receive in federal grants (e.g., Title I, III, IV, IDEA) or other state grants (e.g., After School Grant, Commissioner's Network, State Bilingual Grant) which are generally viewed as "supplemental" to the core operational budget.

IMPORTANT: State ECS and local tax contributions together represent the core operational budget of a local school district. Other federal and state grants (e.g., IDEA, Title I) may be received by the local BOE but are typically not considered as part of the core operating budget.

Statewide ECS increase does not mean that every district will increase

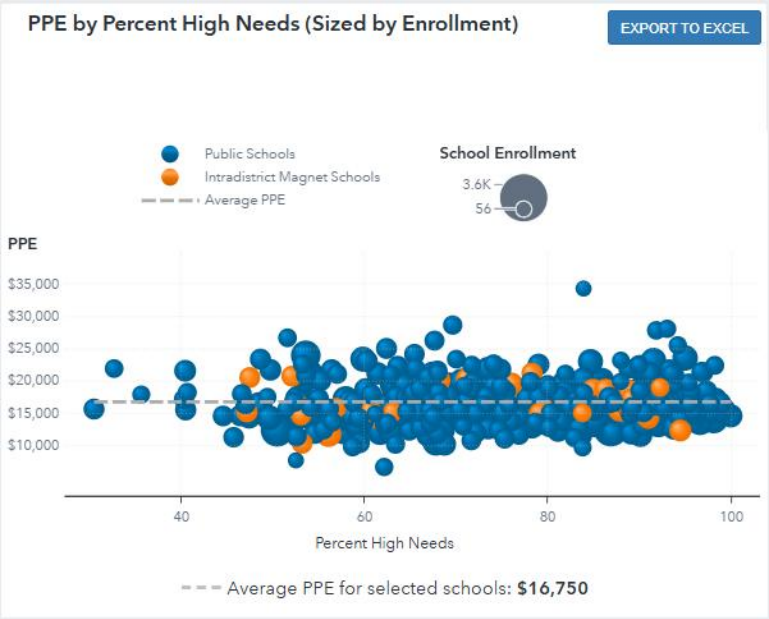
In 2018-19, the total ECS entitlement was $ 2.01 billion. This increased to $2.45 billion in 2025-26, an increase of 21.6% over seven years or an average increase of over 3% annually. However, because ECS grant amounts are calculated annually based on student enrollment and town wealth factors, this state-level annual increase does not automatically translate into an increase for every district. For example, in 2025-26, despite a 3.7% increase in ECS from 2024-25, eight (8) Alliance Districts did not see any increase in their ECS and consequently their Alliance District grant. The hold-harmless provision in state law ensures that an Alliance District does not receive less than it did in the prior year. However, with rising core operational costs due to inflation, no guaranteed cost-of-living increase in the Alliance District grant for each district, and sometimes no increase in local contribution, several superintendents spoke about how it becomes challenging for them to sustain the same level of services, let alone experiment and innovate.

Schools in Alliance District spend about 10% less per pupil than other schools

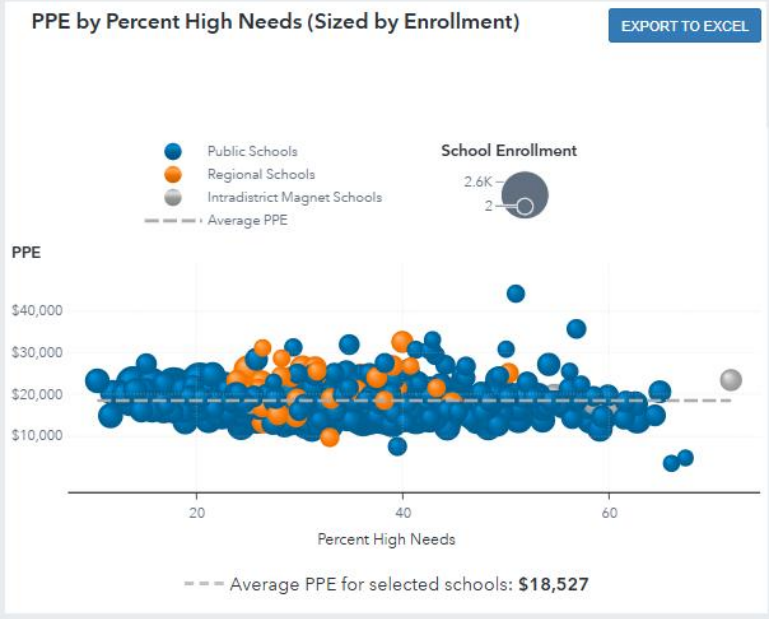
The Resource Allocation Review dashboard on EdSight provides an easy way to compare the average per pupil expenditures (PPE) among schools in the Alliance Districts versus other public schools. To ensure more equitable comparisons, this analysis excludes regional education service centers schools, public charter schools, endowed academy schools, and other schools operated by the Connecticut Technical Education and Career System (CTECS) or college-affiliated districts; it also excludes interdistrict magnet schools. As shown in figures below, in 2023-24, the average PPE among schools in Alliance districts of $16,750 was 9.6 percent lower than the average PPE among schools in non-Alliance local and regional school districts of $18,527 (see figure below).

Average PPE of Schools

Alliance District Schools



Non-Alliance District Schools



Prior to the pandemic in 2018-19, the difference in spending was greater where Alliance District schools reflect a PPE of $12,855 which was 15% less than non-Alliance District schools PPE of $15,095. It appears that the large infusion of pandemic-relief federal funding that was distributed primarily based on student need (i.e., Title I) played a critical role in reducing the expenditure gap per student. Note that these PPEs exclude the share of central office district expenditures that are allocated to schools in the district on a per pupil basis.

Alliance Districts serve 40% of all students, those students have disproportionately high needs, but that disproportionality is reducing

In 2012-13, the first year of the Alliance District program, the 30 districts served 215,697 students or 38.9% of the total student population. By 2024-25, the same 30 districts served 203,633 students or 40.1% of the total student population. The slight increase in the proportion of students served in Alliance Districts occurred because student enrollment declined less in Alliance Districts than the state. Student enrollment in Alliance Districts declined by 12,064 students or 5.6% from 2012-13 to 2022-23. During the same period, the statewide enrollment declined by 46,402 students or 8.4%.

The Alliance District students have disproportionately higher needs than the state as whole, but that disproportionality is reducing. This is occurring because students with higher needs are increasingly prevalent in non-alliance districts. For example, in 2012-13, 66% of students in the

original 30 Alliance Districts were eligible for free- or reduced-price meals (FRPM) compared to 36.8% statewide; 69.6% of all students eligible for FRPM were educated in Alliance Districts. In 2024-25, 67.2% of students in the same 30 Alliance Districts were eligible for FRPM compared to 44.8% statewide; however, now 60.1% of FRPM eligible students statewide were educated in the 30 districts, down from 69.6% 12 years ago. Similarly, while English learners are prevalent in Alliance Districts at twice the statewide rate (20.8% compared to 11.3% in 2024-25), in 2012-13, 78.5% of all ELs statewide were educated in the 30 Alliance Districts but by 2024-25, that had reduced to 73.5%. Among students with disabilities, the proportion served in the 30 original Alliance Districts has remained relatively unchanged from 42.9% in 2012-13 to 43.1% in 2024-25.

These broad trends illustrate that the Alliance Districts continue to serve students with disproportionately higher needs than the rest of the state, but that student needs are increasing in non-alliance districts across the state.

There is significant variability among Alliance Districts with respect to these population shifts. For example, while the statewide percentage for FRPM eligibility increased by 8% from 36.8% to 44.8%, districts like East Windsor, East Haven, Bristol, Vernon, Windsor, and Windsor Locks saw greater increases, while others saw smaller or even negative increases.

Change in FRPM Eligibility Among Alliance Districts

Alliance Districts	% FRPM 2012-13	% FRPM 2024-25	Change
Ansonia School District	66.8%	63.6%	-3.2%
Bloomfield School District	47.9%	54.1%	6.2%
Bridgeport School District	100.0%	87.5%	-12.5%
Bristol School District	42.5%	55.3%	12.8%
Danbury School District	50.1%	56.5%	6.4%
Derby School District	52.9%	56.0%	3.1%
East Hartford School District	60.8%	61.1%	0.3%
East Haven School District	43.8%	58.8%	15.0%
East Windsor School District	36.7%	58.2%	21.5%
Enfield School District*	35.4%	50.8%	15.4%
Groton School District*	42.4%	67.6%	25.2%
Hamden School District	39.7%	45.6%	5.9%
Hartford School District	85.6%	76.7%	-8.9%
Killingly School District	42.4%	51.1%	8.7%
Manchester School District	54.0%	61.7%	7.7%
Meriden School District	69.6%	77.8%	8.2%
Middletown School District	43.6%	51.9%	8.3%
Naugatuck School District	46.0%	58.2%	12.2%
New Britain School District	80.6%	75.8%	-4.8%
New Haven School District	78.0%	75.5%	-2.5%
New London School District	79.0%	84.4%	5.4%

Alliance Districts	% FRPM 2012-13	% FRPM 2024-25	Change
Norwalk School District	47.1%	51.5%	4.4%
Norwich School District	68.4%	76.9%	8.5%
Plainfield School District*	44.7%	57.2%	12.5%
Putnam School District	56.6%	58.2%	1.6%
Stamford School District	49.8%	54.2%	4.4%
Stratford School District*	42.6%	50.2%	7.6%
Thompson School District*	33.8%	46.1%	12.3%
Torrington School District*	46.3%	66.0%	19.7%
Vernon School District	36.6%	56.0%	19.4%
Waterbury School District	81.0%	79.4%	-1.6%
West Haven School District	51.3%	57.2%	5.9%
Winchester School District	60.0%	58.4%	-1.6%
Windham School District	75.5%	72.7%	-2.8%
Windsor Locks School District	35.8%	48.7%	12.9%
Windsor School District	34.0%	50.2%	16.2%
State	**36.8%**	**44.8%**	**8.0%**

**Identified after 2016-17*

Similarly, when it comes to English learners, several Alliance districts showed significantly greater increases than the state. Some like Bridgeport, Danbury, East Hartford, Norwalk, and Norwich doubled their prevalence of English learners, while some others saw much smaller increases.

Change in English Learner Prevalence Among Alliance Districts

Alliance Districts	% EL 2012-13	% EL 2024-25	Change
Ansonia School District	2.8%	7.8%	5.0%
Bloomfield School District	1.2%	5.0%	3.8%
Bridgeport School District	13.1%	31.1%	18.0%
Bristol School District	3.9%	7.3%	3.4%
Danbury School District	19.2%	37.6%	18.4%
Derby School District	6.4%	6.3%	-0.1%
East Hartford School District	8.0%	19.7%	11.7%
East Haven School District	6.3%	13.7%	7.4%
East Windsor School District	4.5%	5.7%	1.2%
Enfield School District*	1.8%	4.1%	2.3%
Groton School District*	2.2%	4.3%	2.1%
Hamden School District	4.3%	8.7%	4.4%
Hartford School District	17.2%	26.2%	9.0%
Killingly School District	2.2%	2.7%	0.5%
Manchester School District	5.2%	9.0%	3.8%

Alliance Districts	% EL 2012-13	% EL 2024-25	Change
Meriden School District	12.1%	20.0%	7.9%
Middletown School District	3.3%	6.7%	3.4%
Naugatuck School District	4.1%	13.7%	9.6%
New Britain School District	16.6%	20.3%	3.7%
New Haven School District	12.6%	24.1%	11.5%
New London School District	20.3%	32.4%	12.1%
Norwalk School District	11.7%	23.4%	11.7%
Norwich School District	11.5%	24.5%	13.0%
Plainfield School District*	0.9%	1.1%	0.2%
Putnam School District	2.4%	5.2%	2.8%
Stamford School District	12.7%	19.3%	6.6%
Stratford School District*	3.9%	11.6%	7.7%
Thompson School District*	0.0%	2.3%	2.3%
Torrington School District*	7.1%	16.6%	9.5%
Vernon School District	2.0%	4.0%	2.0%
Waterbury School District	11.1%	21.0%	9.9%
West Haven School District	10.9%	23.0%	12.1%
Winchester School District	2.6%	5.7%	3.1%
Windham School District	24.0%	32.0%	8.0%
Windsor Locks School District	3.1%	7.9%	4.8%
Windsor School District	3.5%	3.8%	0.3%
State	5.6%	11.3%	5.7%

**Identified after 2016-17*

Similarly, when it comes to students with disabilities (SWD) receiving special education services, several Alliance districts showed significantly greater increases than the state.

Change in Special Education Prevalence Among Alliance Districts

Alliance Districts	% SWD 2012-13	% SWD 2024-25	Change
Ansonia School District	12.1%	18.0%	5.9%
Bloomfield School District	10.9%	21.8%	10.9%
Bridgeport School District	13.4%	20.7%	7.4%
Bristol School District	15.5%	21.9%	6.4%
Danbury School District	11.1%	14.6%	3.5%
Derby School District	12.3%	24.5%	12.1%
East Hartford School District	15.9%	23.8%	7.9%
East Haven School District	13.2%	19.7%	6.5%
East Windsor School District	15.8%	19.6%	3.8%
Enfield School District*	13.6%	21.5%	7.9%
Groton School District*	14.8%	20.6%	5.7%

Alliance Districts	% SWD 2012-13	% SWD 2024-25	Change
Hamden School District	12.6%	20.5%	7.9%
Hartford School District	15.9%	20.7%	4.8%
Killingly School District	14.1%	21.4%	7.3%
Manchester School District	14.4%	20.8%	6.4%
Meriden School District	15.8%	21.6%	5.8%
Middletown School District	12.4%	18.6%	6.2%
Naugatuck School District	13.4%	20.0%	6.6%
New Britain School District	16.0%	24.5%	8.5%
New Haven School District	11.6%	16.3%	4.7%
New London School District	18.1%	23.1%	5.0%
Norwalk School District	11.0%	18.6%	7.6%
Norwich School District	17.3%	23.3%	6.0%
Plainfield School District*	12.9%	20.2%	7.3%
Putnam School District	15.2%	19.6%	4.5%
Stamford School District	9.8%	17.5%	7.7%
Stratford School District*	9.9%	19.3%	9.4%
Thompson School District*	11.0%	21.5%	10.6%
Torrington School District*	16.9%	20.0%	3.1%
Vernon School District	12.8%	19.9%	7.1%
Waterbury School District	16.5%	20.9%	4.5%
West Haven School District	13.4%	20.0%	6.6%
Winchester School District	22.3%	19.7%	-2.7%
Windham School District	15.9%	20.7%	4.9%
Windsor Locks School District	11.8%	20.8%	9.0%
Windsor School District	16.2%	22.1%	5.9%
State	**12.5%**	**18.5%**	**6.0%**

**Identified after 2016-17*

Certified staffing levels have increased over the past 12 years due to higher student need

Among the 30 Alliance Districts originally designated in 2012-13, the total number of full-time equivalent (FTE) certified staff increased from 18,917.9 in 2012-13 to 19,801.1 in 2024-25, a 4.7% increase over a 12-year period. The largest percentage increase (38.6%) was among district central office administrators. During the same period from 2012-13 to 2024-25, while total student enrollment in these 30 districts declined by 5.6%, the prevalence of students with high needs had increased. The number of English learners in the 30 Alliance Districts increased from 24,461 (11.3%) in 2012-13 to 42,296 (20.8%) in 2024-25. The number of students receiving special education increased from 29,783 (13.8%) to 40,619 (19.9%). While the number of general education classroom teachers remained the same, the number of special education teachers, and

support personnel (i.e., counselors, social workers, school psychologists) had increased significantly to support the increasingly higher need student population.

Certified Staffing Levels (Full Time Equivalents or FTEs) in 30 Originally Identified Alliance Districts

Assignment Category	2012-13	2024-25	Change
Administrators Coordinators and Department Chairs - District Central Office	319.9	443.3	38.6%
Administrators Coordinators and Department Chairs - School Level	854.2	947.4	10.9%
Counselors Social Workers and School Psychologists	1,191.6	1,495.5	25.5%
General Education - Teachers and Instructors	13,256.8	13,194.5	-0.5%
Instructional Specialists Who Support Teachers	877.8	1,090.8	24.3%
Library/Media - Specialists (Certified)	225	190.1	-15.5%
Special Education - Teachers and Instructors	2,192.6	2,439.5	11.3%
Grand Total	**18,917.9**	**19,801.1**	**4.7%**

These trends are similar to statewide trends where total certified staffing levels increased by 3.9% from 51,366.2 FTEs in 2012-13 to 53,371.7 FTEs in 2024-25 and the largest increases were observed among special education teachers and support personnel.

Alliance Districts	Certified Staff FTE 2012-13	Certified Staff FTE 2024-25
Ansonia School District	198.2	226.4
Bloomfield School District	258.7	230.1
Bridgeport School District	1,583.5	1,617.4
Bristol School District	662.3	711.4
Danbury School District	846.8	1,039.7
Derby School District	120.8	151.5
East Hartford School District	641.7	668.8
East Haven School District	286.4	295.6
East Windsor School District	135.7	127.2
Hamden School District	579.8	580.9
Hartford School District	1,939.5	1,522.8
Killingly School District	246.1	245.1
Manchester School District	656.0	729.2
Meriden School District	678.3	725.2
Middletown School District	432.3	479.1
Naugatuck School District	362.5	384.3
New Britain School District	773.4	888.6
New Haven School District	1,977.9	1,843.0
New London School District	246.2	352.9
Norwalk School District	909.6	1,247.0
Norwich School District	287.0	361.7
Putnam School District	127.2	122.5
Stamford School District	1,438.2	1,594.3

Alliance Districts	Certified Staff FTE 2012-13	Certified Staff FTE 2024-25
Vernon School District	354.3	359.6
Waterbury School District	1,644.4	1,667.5
West Haven School District	560.8	592.6
Winchester School District	66.6	75.0
Windham School District	322.1	370.1
Windsor Locks School District	179.7	193.0
Windsor School District	401.9	398.6
Alliance District Total	18,917.9	19,801.1
State Total	51366.2	53371.7

CSDE implements a comprehensive system of oversight and support

Subsections (d) through (g) of C.G.S. 10-262u bestow specific authority with the Commissioner of Education and the CSDE to establish a process for districts to apply for and receive Alliance District grant ECS funds. The statute allows the CSDE to expect an improvement plan with strategies focused on specific areas (e.g., K-3 literacy, multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), extended learning time, professional learning). It also empowers the CSDE to require changes to the plan prior to approval, withhold funds if the district fails to comply with the statute, and renew the funding if adequate progress is being made.

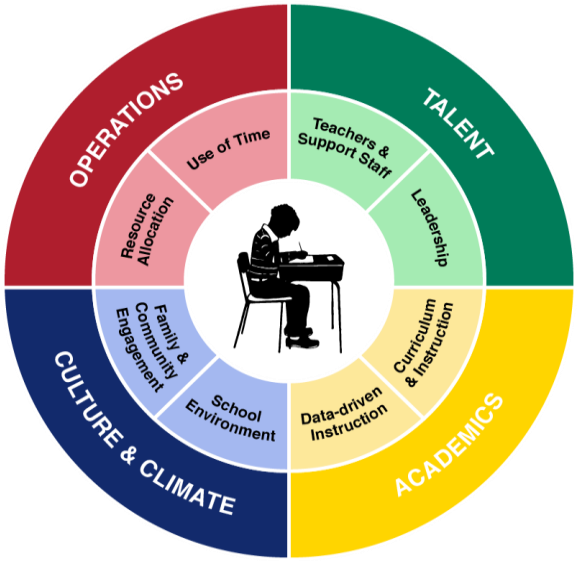
In alignment with these requirements, the CSDE has established a comprehensive process of oversight and support for Alliance Districts. This process includes several critical components:

Comprehensive Framework for District Improvement

The CSDE established a comprehensive framework for district improvement that encompasses four critical elements of organizations. They are:

1. **Academics:** Rigorous, aligned, and engaging academic program that allows all students to achieve at high levels, including aligned curricula, instruction, and assessments.
2. **Talent:** Systems and strategies to recruit, hire, develop, evaluate, and retain excellent school leaders, teachers, and support staff.
3. **Culture and Climate:** Positive learning environment that supports high-quality teaching and learning, and engages families and the community as partners in the educational process.
4. **Operations:** Systems and processes that promote organizational efficiency and effectiveness, including through the use of time and financial resources.

CSDE Framework for School and District Improvement



The theory of change that undergirds this framework is that if targeted strategies and investments are made in all four areas, then student outcomes will improve.

Each of the four elements includes critical subcomponents (see Figure 2). For example:

- Academics includes rigor, student engagement, differentiation, and assessment system and data culture.
- Talent includes instructional practices, recruitment and retention strategies, and leadership effectiveness.
- Culture and Climate includes school environment, student behavior, and family engagement.
- Operations includes use of instructional time, routines and transitions, and financial management.

CSDE Improvement Framework Elements and their Subcomponents

Academics

- Academic rigor
- Student engagement
- Differentiation
- Curriculum and instruction aligned to CCS
- Supports for special populations
- Assessment system and data culture

Talent

- Instructional practice
- Evaluation and professional culture
- Recruitment and retention strategies
- Professional learning
- Leadership effectiveness
- Instructional leadership

Culture and Climate

- School environment
- Student attendance
- Student behavior
- Interpersonal interactions
- Family engagement
- Community partners/Wraparound strategy
- Restorative Practices

Operations

- Adequate instructional time
- Use of instructional time
- Use of staff time
- Routines and transitions
- Financial management

Alliance District Plan

Every Alliance District must submit an annual plan to the CSDE that is grounded in this four-part framework. Since 2019-20, these plans are submitted through the CSDE's electronic grants management system or eGMS. Below is a screenshot of one district's plan for the Academics component of the framework. For each priority, the plan requires districts to describe the strategy and rationale in great detail, and also list the relevant, measurable "SMART" goal. Similar detailed strategy, rationale, and SMART goals are included for each area of the four-part framework.

Sample Academic Priority from an Alliance District plan

Academics

Vernon School District (0000000146-00) Public School District - FY 2025 - Alliance and Priority School District Grants (17041, 17043, 17108, 17109) - Rev 2 - Focus Areas - Alliance District and Priority School District Grants

Go To

Click here to view the district's most recent data in Connecticut Report Card:

* Please indicate if this focus area is part of the Alliance District/Priority School District plan:

- This focus area **IS** part of the Alliance District/Priority School District plan
- This focus area **IS NOT** part of the Alliance District/Priority School District plan

1. Alliance Districts may choose, but are not required, to pursue additional strategies to strengthen district and school academic systems. Place a check beside the district's 2024-25 academic-related reform priorities. Please note that PSDs must spend all of their PSD funding on allowable PSD reform areas and at least 20 percent of PSD funds promoting early literacy.

☑ Common Core-aligned curriculum	☐ Full-day kindergarten
☑ Assessment systems	☑ Pre-Kindergarten
☑ Supports for special populations (eg., EL, SPED)	☑ Pre-K - Grade 3 literacy
☑ SRBI and academic interventions	☐ Instructional technology
☑ College and career access	☐ Alternative/transitional programs
☐ Other	

2. Identify a core set of no more than three strategies to advance the district's academic-related reform priorities (identified in 1). Following the sample below, summarize each district academic strategy using a number (eg. 2.1), a headline phrase, and a separate paragraph that provides a brief rationale for incorporating that strategy. Identify a S.M.A.R.T. goal (ie., specific, measurable, actionable, realistic, and time-bound) that is aligned to each strategy and is, at minimum, tied to district ESSA Milestone metrics. If Smarter Balanced scores are relevant to the strategy, this assessment must be used for goal-setting purposes. S.M.A.R.T. goals will be central to quarterly progress monitoring.

Academic Priorities:	Aligned SMART Goals:
Sample: ***2.1 Pre-K Grade 3 Literacy*** *- Academic interventionists will provide direct instruction and monitor student progress using research based interventions in reading. Staff will provide this support using the following tools: Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI), Lexia Core 5 Reading, and Wilson Reading Fundations. Additionally, the district will offer a full day kindergarten program district-wide for all kindergarten students. As part of this program, and in alignment with the Reading Foundations Common Core State Standards, teachers will implement Fundations (Wilson Language), a structured, sequential and cumulative phonics/spelling program using multi-sensory teaching techniques.* *Rationale: All of the components of this strategy are grounded in clear research on foundational literacy skills and are supported by research outlined in the CSDE Evidence-Based Practice Guide for Reading. To become successful readers, young students require targeted and purposeful instruction in the core elements of literacy foundations with focused and explicit phonemic awareness instruction and systemic phonics instruction.*	***Sample: 2.1*** *In alignment with ESSA goal targets, increase the District Performance Index (DPI) for English Language Arts (ELA) from 66.1 in 2023-24 to 67.6 in 2024-25.*
For Opportunity Districts, if the priority is one of its three identified need areas supported by the CSDE cross-functional team, it would instead be identified in the example above as follows: "**2.1 CORE DISTRICT PRIORITY #1 (or #2 or #3) - PreK Grade 3 Literacy**" ...	
2.1 SRBI and Academic Interventions-Fund 6.0 FTE Mathematics Interventionist positions to appropriately intervene with "high risk" students as identified by standardized assessment results. Math interventionists will provide a combination of push-in and pull-out support services for students during math instruction and intervention blocks at Rockville High School (RHS), Vernon Center Middle School (VCMS), Center Road School (CRS), Lake Street School (LSS), Northeast School (NES), Skinner Rd School (SRS). In addition provide extended school day interventions for students in need.	2.1 In alignment with ESSA milestones, Vernon Public Schools will increase the District Performance Index (DPI) for English Language Arts(ELA)-All Students, from 66.5 in 2023-24 to 71.3 in 24-25 and for Mathematics-All Students, from 62.1 in 2023-24 to 69.6 in 2024-25. Increase Smarter Balanced Avg. Percentage of Growth Achieved in ELA-All Students, from 64.8 % in 2023-24 to 84.8% in 2024-25 and for Mathematics-All Students from 66.4 % in 2023-24 to 87.1% in 2024-25. Increase % of students at/above benchmark (composite score) on DIBELS 8th Edition from BOY to EOY: Kindergarten: 29% to 69%, Grade 1: 52% to 72%, Grade 2: 50% to 70%, Grade 3: 59% to
2.2 K-Grade 5 Literacy-Fund 9.5 Reading Interventionists to support the literacy needs of students at Center Road School (CRS), Lake Street School (LSS), Northeast School (NES), Maple Street School (MSS). Reading support specialists will provide a combination of push-in and pull-out support services during scheduled grade level intervention blocks. Also, adding (2) Univ. Of St. Joseph's Literacy Fellows who will act as Reading Interventionists. Additional PreK teachers, 2.0FTE at Northeast Elementary School (NES) will increase the number of	2.2 In alignment with ESSA milestones, Vernon Public Schools will increase the District Performance Index (DPI) for English Language Arts(ELA)-All Students, from 66.5 in 2023-24 to 71.3 in 24-25 and for Mathematics-All Students, from 62.1 in 2023-24 to 69.6 in 2024-25. Increase Smarter Balanced Avg. Percentage of Growth Achieved in ELA-All Students, from 64.8 % in 2023-24 to 84.8% in 2024-25 and for Mathematics-All Students from 66.4 % in 2023-24 to 87.1% in 2024-25. Increase % of students at/above benchmark (composite score) on DIBELS 8th Edition from BOY to EOY: Kindergarten: 29% to 69%, Grade 1: 52% to 72%, Grade 2: 50% to 70%, Grade 3: 59% to
2.3 Common Core-aligned curriculum - Fund instructional supplies for classrooms, supplies for summer learning programs and cover in house field trip costs for summer school. Additional funding for summer school instruction (July 2024 and June 2025), curriculum revision Boot Camp for June 2025, ECE course fees and subscriptions Rationale -The additional funds will support curriculum revisions and instructional supplies in the K-12 classrooms and will contribute to improvements in Tier I and SRBI supports, resulting in improvements in district interim assessments in each school.	2.3 In alignment with ESSA milestones, Vernon Public Schools will increase the District Performance Index (DPI) for English Language Arts(ELA)-All Students, from 66.5 in 2023-24 to 71.3 in 24-25 and for Mathematics-All Students, from 62.1 in 2023-24 to 69.6 in 2024-25. Increase Smarter Balanced Avg. Percentage of Growth Achieved in ELA-All Students, from 64.8 % in 2023-24 to 84.8% in 2024-25 and for Mathematics-All Students from 66.4 % in 2023-24 to 87.1% in 2024-25. Increase % of students at/above benchmark (composite score) on DIBELS 8th Edition from BOY to EOY: Kindergarten: 29% to 69%, Grade 1: 52% to 72%, Grade 2: 50% to 70%, Grade 3: 59% to

Additionally, every application must be accompanied by a detailed budget that clearly specifies how the funds will be expended.

Sample Budget Detail for Line 100

<< First | < Previous | 1 | 2 | 3 | Next > | Last >> Items 1-10 out of 24 — Items/Page: 10

Budget Detail	Narrative Description
Object: 100 - Personal Services > Salaries **Purpose:** 01 - Public School Activities **Focus Area:** Academics Goal 2.1 Academics Goal 2.2 Climate Goal 3.1 **LEA / School:** Center Road School (146-1411) **Quantity:** 1.00 **Cost:** $388,144.00 **Line Item Total:** $388,144.00	Center Road School: 1.0 FTE Math interventionist = $70,815 1.0 FTE Reading interventionist = $74,678 1.0 FTE reading interventionist = $ 95,845 1.0 FTE Reading interventionist = $82,651 0.5 FTE Assistant Principal/ K-8 Math Coordinator = $ 64,155
Object: 100 - Personal Services > Salaries **Purpose:** 01 - Public School Activities **Focus Area:** Academics Goal 2.1 Academics Goal 2.2 **LEA / School:** Lake Street School (146-0111) **Quantity:** 1.00 **Cost:** $177,705.00 **Line Item Total:** $177,705.00	Lake Street School 1.0 Math Interventionist $ 82,860 1.0 Reading Interventionist $ 94,845
Object: 100 - Personal Services > Salaries **Purpose:** 01 - Public School Activities **Focus Area:** Academics Goal 2.1 Academics Goal 2.2 **LEA / School:** Maple Street School (146-0211) **Quantity:** 1.00 **Cost:** $212,355.00 **Line Item Total:** $212,355.00	Maple Street School .50 FTE Reading interventionist = $ 50,099 1.0 FTE Reading interventionist = $ 100,198 1.0 Social Worker = $ 60,522 REVISION 04/30/25 INCREASE $ 1536 Degree change increase in salary
Object: 100 - Personal Services > Salaries **Purpose:** 01 - Public School Activities **Focus Area:** Academics Goal 2.1 Academics Goal 2.2 **LEA / School:** Northeast School (146-0311) **Quantity:** 1.00 **Cost:** $389,241.00 **Line Item Total:** $389,241.00	Northeast School 1.0 FTE Reading Interventionist $ 97,345 1.0 FTE Reading Interventionist $ 95,845 0.5 FTE Math Interventionist $46,197 1.0 FTE Pre-School Teacher $ 82,651 1.0 FTE Pre-School Teacher $ 67,203

The district's planned priorities and budget are first reviewed by a staff member from the CSDE's Turnaround Office; any changes that are requested must be addressed by the district before the plan is approved. Districts are unable to draw down any grant funds until the plan and budget are fully approved by the CSDE. Additionally, any draw-down request for reimbursement of expenses must align with the approved budget and include relevant backup detail. This tightly controlled process ensures that Alliance Districts funds are expended in accordance with the CSDE-approved Alliance District plans.

The Cross Divisional Team

Pursuant to the CSDE's plan with the U.S. Department of Education for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the CSDE implements a differentiated support strategy for Alliance Districts. Core support is provided by the CSDE's Cross-Divisional Team (CDT). The CDT is comprised of CSDE staff whose expertise span the four critical elements of the district improvement framework: Academics, Talent, Culture & Climate, and Operations. The CDT advances the goals of Connecticut's ESSA plan by providing coordinated, coherent support to schools and districts by ensuring that school improvement strategies are evidence-based, aligned with long-term state goals, and monitored for impact. Through collaboration, reflection, coaching, inquiry, and shared accountability, CDT members help districts and schools make measurable progress toward improved student outcomes.

The work of the CDT is grounded in a continuous improvement cycle that supports districts and schools in using data, reflection, and evidence-based practices to drive better outcomes for students. This Cycle for Continuous Improvement (CCI) provides a consistent structure for how the CSDE approaches support: starting with evidence, analyzing data, implementing strategies, monitoring progress, and reflecting on results. By using this cycle, technical assistance is not a one-time event but part of an ongoing process that drives lasting improvement.

Continuous Improvement Cycle

Differentiated Support Aligned to Connecticut's ESSA Plan

The 10 lowest performing Alliance Districts are referred to in C.G.S. 10-262u as the Educational Reform Districts; in the ESSA plan, they are called Opportunity Districts. CDT members support Alliance and Opportunity Districts through a differentiated monitoring system that is designed for internal planning and coordination purposes. This approach ensures that each district receives the type and level of engagement that best matches its needs, priorities, and context. Rather than a one-size-fits-all model, districts are placed into one of four monitoring categories. These categories determine how often the CDT meets with the district, whether meetings are conducted in person or virtually, and the extent of CDT participation required.

The four monitoring categories along with the Alliance Districts in each category, the level of CDT support, along with a detailed description of the CSDE support and district expectations are described in the following table.

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Differentiated Monitoring and Support Levels

Monitoring Category	Extent of CDT Support	Description of Support/Expectations
Comprehensive Monitoring 6 Opportunity Districts: Bridgeport, Hartford, New Britain, New Haven, New London, and Norwich	Full CDT Support	Three Monitoring Meetings (BOY, MOY, EOY) with full CDT. o BOY: Learning and Monitoring Site Visit at a Turnaround school within the district o MOY: Virtual Monitoring Meeting o EOY: Summative Monitoring Meeting at CSDE Additional Site Visit once per year for SIG/Turnaround schools (limited CDT participation) District Deliverables: Three PPTs (one per meeting) and two tracker[vii] submissions. CSDE Deliverables: A Monitoring Brief will be produced after monitoring meeting that highlights district strengths, priority challenges, agreed-upon next steps, and the supports CSDE will provide to ensure progress.
Enhanced Monitoring 4 Opportunity Districts: Manchester, Thompson, Waterbury, Windham	Targeted CDT Support	Three Monitoring Meetings (BOY, MOY, EOY) with a targeted CDT team, drawn from the larger matrix. Data huddles help identify the district's priority needs, which in turn determine which CDT members participate, ensuring the expertise at the table aligns to the focus of each meeting or visit. o BOY: Learning and Monitoring Site Visit at a Turnaround/Focus school within the district o MOY: Virtual Monitoring Meeting (CDT as needed) o EOY: Summative Monitoring Meeting at CSDE (CDT as needed) District Deliverables: Three PPTs (one per meeting) and two tracker submissions. CSDE Deliverables: A Monitoring Brief will be produced after monitoring meeting that highlights district strengths, priority challenges, agreed-upon next steps, and the supports CSDE will provide to ensure progress.

Monitoring Category	Extent of CDT Support	Description of Support/Expectations
Standard Monitoring 9 Alliance Districts: Ansonia, Derby, Enfield, Hamden, Killingly, Middletown, Stamford, Stratford, West Haven	Conditional CDT Support	For districts where an emerging need has been identified, the CDT remains "on call" to provide targeted expertise as challenges arise, rather than engaging on a regular schedule. The CDT may be engaged to address an emerging challenge, provide technical assistance in a targeted area, or help problem-solve around a new initiative. This flexible approach ensures that districts can access expertise without the expectation of a standing CDT presence. Three Monitoring Meetings (BOY, MOY, EOY) with the Turnaround Office. o BOY: Learning and Monitoring Site Visit at a school within the district; priority given to Turnaround/Focus schools. o MOY: Virtual Monitoring Meeting o EOY: Virtual Monitoring Meeting District Deliverables: Three PPTs (one per meeting) and two tracker submissions. CSDE Deliverables: A Monitoring Brief will be produced after monitoring meeting that highlights district strengths, priority challenges, agreed-upon next steps, and the supports CSDE will provide to ensure progress.
Streamlined Monitoring 17 Alliance Districts: Bloomfield, Bristol, Danbury, East Hartford, East Haven, East Windsor, Groton, Meriden, Naugatuck, Norwalk, Plainfield, Putnam, Torrington, Vernon, Winchester, Windsor, Windsor Locks	No CDT Assigned	Two Monitoring Meetings: o One meeting will be a Learning and Monitoring Site Visit held at a district school o One additional meeting will be held virtually District Deliverables: Two PPTs (one per meeting) and two tracker submissions. CSDE Deliverables: A Monitoring Brief will be produced after monitoring meeting that highlights district strengths, priority challenges, agreed-upon next steps, and the supports CSDE will provide to ensure progress.

Alliance District Symposium

Every year, the CSDE Turnaround Office hosts at least one symposium for all Alliance Districts. In some years, multiple symposiums were offered. These symposiums provide professional learning to support the Alliance District leadership teams. Sessions at these symposiums focus on systematic and innovative practices to improve outcomes for all students. Presenters include private expert consultants, CSDE staff, and Alliance District educators. For example, the May 2014 symposium included sessions on the K-3 initiative by CSDE staff, 21st century learning environment and blended instruction by Hartford Public Schools, and Common Core implementation by Bristol Public Schools. The Oct 2016 symposium was geared toward student support and wellness; it included sessions by the Choose Love Movement, the Yale Child Study Center, the Child Health and Development Institute, and several Alliance Districts. The April 2025 symposium was focused on Advancing Equity in Secondary Mathematics and included sessions by Dr. Ted Coe of Coequal Mathematics, the University of Connecticut, and NOYCE fellowship teachers.

CSDE monitoring and support overall beneficial, but sometimes burdensome

Superintendents and district leaders overwhelmingly found the support provided by the CSDE staff to be beneficial.

Many superintendents spoke to the benefits of having the CSDE as a "thought partner" who could provide an external perspective. They appreciated the outside perspective, and the "balcony view" provided by the CSDE, and acknowledged that it caused them to build systems around data and change their practices.

Many superintendents described how the CSDE Turnaround staff consultant connected them to resources and effective strategies that worked in other similar districts. Several superintendents also spoke about the benefits of the Alliance District plan submissions and the data monitoring through the tracker. They discussed how the interactions and supports provided by CSDE pushed them to seek more actionable data, utilize data in different ways, remain equity-focused, review resource allocations more closely, and utilize the CSDE's school improvement framework more strategically.

Some superintendents expressed that while having the CSDE staff as a thought partner was helpful, the plan and associated monitoring requirements were burdensome. Some noted that the "tracker" was a big lift, putting reports together for the monitoring meetings was time consuming, and the required paperwork was onerous. One Superintendent compared the Alliance District requirements to the paperwork that districts require families to complete to certify their financial need for free/reduced price meal and other in-school benefits.

School business officials spoke about some of the challenges with the timing of the funding becoming available at the start of the school year. Not receiving the funding early could present a serious cash flow issue at the start of the school year.

Others referenced the challenges with expending increasing funds within a single year. Though the CSDE already offers a carry-forward option for one additional year if Alliance District grant funds are not expended, districts may need support with exercising that option.

Alliance District designation offers many ancillary benefits in law

A search for the term "Alliance District" on the Connecticut General Assembly's website results in 30 different statutory sections where this term is listed. The vast majority of sections (N=23) are in the education statutes (Chapter 10), two are in higher education (Chapter 10a), and the remaining are in various other sections.

In addition to the core statute (C.G.S. 10-262u) that establishes the Alliance District construct, the related education statutes that reference Alliance Districts provide for some of the following:

- intensive early literacy intervention for students in kindergarten through Grade 3;
- membership representation in the Early Childhood cabinet;
- teacher residency program partnerships;
- reemployment of retired teachers;
- priority in school nutrition state grants;
- "hold harmless" provision for ECS funds;
- facilities improvement grants; and
- grant for costs associated with classroom start-up and new spaces in certain school readiness programs.

The higher education statutes that reference Alliance Districts enable the Alliance District Loan Subsidy Program. This program which is established by the Connecticut Higher Education Supplemental Loan Authority (CHESLA) in partnership with the CSDE, offers an interest rate subsidy on Alliance District Educator and Counselor Refinance Loans (to refinance existing private student loan debt, also known as non-federal loans) to teachers, paraeducators, and school counselors in any of Connecticut's Alliance Districts. The program is designed to attract, support, and retain high quality educators and counselors. Rates on Alliance District Educator and Counselor Refinance Loans, including the 3% subsidy, range from 0.75% to 2.49%, with terms of 5, 10, or 15 years.

Other Connecticut statutes not related to education also offer benefits such as:

- greater reimbursement of certain municipal grants, including designation as a Tier 1 in the state's PILOT formula;

- inclusion in economic and community development projects authorized with bond funds; and
- consideration for the establishment of truancy clinics by the Probate Court within the district.

Multiple systems for district identification and support cause redundancy and burden

In addition to the Alliance District program, the state also implements the Priority School District (PSD) program. The PSD precedes the Alliance District program. Both programs identify a subset of districts for state support and funding that are designed to improve educational opportunities and student achievement. Both programs list a similar array of potential interventions. All PSDs are also Alliance Districts.

There are however important differences between the two programs.

- They utilize different criteria for identification. While the Alliance District identification is based on the comprehensive, multi-factor Accountability Index, the PSD identification is based on a combination of town population, a simplistic binary proficiency measure from the state assessments, and the town's welfare recipient counts.
- PSDs are identified bi-annually while Alliance Districts are identified every five years. Some districts learn late in the academic year after their local budget process that they will no longer be a PSD in the subsequent year, thus resulting in local turmoil. Unlike AD funding, the PSD funding is not consistent or predictable.
- The PSD program and the accompanying Extended School Hours Program and Summer School grant are state appropriations that are made possibly indirectly by the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Block Grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance. Unlike the PSD program which represents additional funds, the Alliance District program is a set-aside to the BOE from the annual ECS entitlement amount.
- The PSD program includes provisions for a phase-out grant and a "Transitional" grant for districts exiting the program. No such exit process exists in the Alliance District program.

Employing two different programs for very similar purposes, i.e., identifying and supporting low performing/high need districts, causes unnecessary redundancy in grant application and funding processes and undue burdens on districts and CSDE. Since grant funding and expenditures need to be tracked separately for audit purposes, the same district ends up submitting separate budgets with highly overlapping but slightly different rules for the use of funds, all toward the same local goals. CSDE staff in both the fiscal and programmatic offices must then review and monitor multiple budgets and process duplicative requests for draw-down of funds.

An additional burdensome carve out was the more recent ECS set-aside for Increasing Educator Diversity. Though the goal is laudable, this set-aside represents only $4.3 million combined for all 36 Alliance Districts. This is just 0.2% of the total ECS allocation in 2025-26. Disseminating this new grant to districts has required the districts to submit on an annual basis, a grant application, budget, and numerous fund requests to draw down the funds. CSDE staff have also had to review and approve each of these applications, budgets, and fund requests. As one superintendent aptly said, *"We have always recruited for diversity in our district, but the AD plan made that very difficult."* It should be noted that pursuant to C.G.S. Section 10-156jj, all school districts are required to submit plans for increasing educator diversity to the CSDE for review and approval. CSDE's efforts in this area are available at Increasing Educator Diversity Plan. This grant has since ended.

Recommendations

#1: Reimagine the Alliance District Program as the Opportunity Network

Implementing the Alliance District program over the past 13 years has illuminated both positives and areas for improvement. On the one hand, sending a portion of ECS funding directly to BOEs has prioritized proven educational strategies and resulted in demonstrable improvements in accountability indicators. On the other hand, the approach in state law to determining the funding amount has stifled innovation as these grant funds have increasingly come to support core operations. Moreover, several superintendents remarked that the local contribution from the municipality – which is a combination of ECS non-alliance funds and local taxes – toward the core operational budget has remained unchanged or seen very minimal increase for years.

Enrollment trends show that students with high needs, who historically evidence lower school outcomes, are increasingly prevalent in more districts across the state, not only in the currently identified 36 Alliance Districts. For example, in 2024-25, in 53 local or regional school districts statewide, at least 50% of their students were from high need backgrounds. This is more than double the number of local or regional school districts in 2012-13 (N=24) at the start of the Alliance District program that had at least 50% of students from high needs backgrounds.

The current methodology for Alliance District identification does not identify some small districts in Eastern and Northwest Connecticut. These districts tend to have high proportions of students with high needs and low overall performance that otherwise would have led to their identification, except that they enroll fewer than 1,000 students, many even fewer than 500 students.

Therefore, the CSDE recommends that the Alliance District Program be reimagined as the Opportunity Network. Specifically, the following recommendations are offered:

- Rebrand the program as the Opportunity Network;
- Identify districts based on a combination of district performance and student need (e.g., districts in bottom 30 in terms of Accountability Index performance (or) bottom 40 in terms of proportion of high need students); and
- Continue directing a portion of ECS to the BOE through the Opportunity Network grant.

#2: CSDE to Limit Supports to a Subset of Districts

The CSDE's current differentiated monitoring and support plan is a step in the right direction but may need to be streamlined further. Of the current 36 Alliance Districts, 19 still receive three individual monitoring meetings each (total of 57 meetings) and 17 receive two monitoring meetings (34 meetings) every year, resulting in a total of 91 monitoring meetings annually. While most superintendents found the support provided by the CSDE staff to be beneficial, some expressed concerns about the undue burden caused by certain aspects of the process (e.g., number and preparation for monitoring meetings, tracker data submissions).

Therefore, the CSDE proposes the following:

- Limit intensive CSDE supports such as monitoring meetings and site visits to a subset of districts in the Opportunity Network;
- Conduct primarily desk monitoring for all remaining districts; and
- Utilize existing data collection systems such as the CSDE's monthly attendance dashboard and interim assessment secure reporting portal for oversight during the year.

> **NOTE**: Based on recommendations #1 and #2, approximately 46 districts including all 36 currently identified Alliance Districts will be part of the Opportunity Network, but only around 12-15 districts that exhibit a combination of the greatest student need and the lowest overall performance will receive intensive supports from the CSDE. The remaining 31-34 districts will primarily receive desk monitoring and ability to participate in professional learning opportunities for Opportunity Network districts. The approximately 10 new districts are expected to be small districts from eastern or northwestern Connecticut.

#3: Consolidate Priority School Districts into the Opportunity Network

Implementing separate funding processes and rules for the PSD grant, the Extended School Hours Program, the Summer School grant, and the Alliance District grant results in significant redundancy

and burden for both districts and the CSDE. It requires every PSD to submit a separate program design and detailed budget for each of the four grants and then submit separate fund requests within each grant for reimbursement of related expenses. It should be noted that the PSD Grant, the Extended School Hours Grant, and the Summer School Grant, are not portions of the ECS Grant, but separate general fund appropriations totaling $30.8 million, $2.9 million and $3.4 million respectively, in FY 2026.

An added source of confusion is the fact that the PSD program and the Alliance District program are identified for different time periods, permit funds to be used for very similar but slightly different purposes, and employ different business rules for identification and exit. For example, PSDs are identified every two years while Alliance Districts are identified every five years. Also, while PSDs have a process for exit, there is currently no mechanism for a district to exit Alliance District status. The two times when some districts could have exited, the statute was modified; while new districts could be added, previously identified districts could not be exited.

Therefore, the CSDE recommends that the Priority School District program and related grant funds be consolidated, outside the ECS formula, but within the new Opportunity Network construct. Specifically, the following recommendations are offered:

- Designate a subset of districts within the Opportunity Network that exhibit a combination of the greatest student need and the lowest overall performance as the Priority School Districts (e.g., these could be the same 12-15 districts mentioned under recommendation #2 that are identified for intensive CSDE supports);
- Establish a single, logical set of rules and time periods for identification (e.g., every four years) and phased exit of all districts in the Opportunity Network (including PSDs);
- Consolidate disparate grant funds into a single grant to increase alignment and reduce redundancy;
- Allow CSDE to retain up to 10 percent of the non-ECS funds appropriated for the Opportunity Network for oversight, evaluation, technical assistance, and grants administration; and
- Retain a portion of the PSD funds (e.g., 20 percent) to implement an incentive grant program for districts that show among the greatest overall improvement in the prior year, and expect leaders of improving districts/schools to serve as mentors for other Opportunity Network districts.

#4: Incentivize districts in the Opportunity Network to use a portion of their grant for state-directed evidence-based programs

In education research, several strategies demonstrate strong evidence. These include:

- specific and systematic phonemic awareness and phonics instruction to develop early reading skills;
- monitoring and reflecting on problem-solving process for learning mathematics;
- high dosage tutoring to increase student achievement;
- formative assessment practices to accelerate student learning;
- connecting schoolwork to students' options after high school; and
- monitoring attendance, behavior and academic progress of all students and proactively intervening.

However, to achieve their desired effects, such strategies must be implemented with fidelity to the model that produced the observed effects in the research.

CSDE has implemented several initiatives grounded in such research (e.g., the Learner Engagement and Attendance Program – LEAP - home visits to improve student attendance, high dosage tutoring in middle school mathematics, dual credit expansion, K-3 approved curricula aligned to the Science of Reading). These types of state-directed initiatives are often associated with grant funding where the CSDE incorporates requirements for grantee districts that ensure fidelity of implementation, and the early evidence on their effects is strong. For example, LEAP home visits produce double-digit improvement in student attendance, and high dosage tutoring in mathematics evidence an effect of 10-scale score point growth on the Smarter Balanced mathematics assessment.

Therefore, the CSDE recommends that:

- all districts in the Opportunity Network are incentivized to dedicate a portion of their grant toward one or more evidence-based activities implemented by the CSDE.

#5: Stage the Implementation to Give Planning Time for Local/State Staff

In the long run, the proposed recommendations will increase efficiencies and focus efforts on activities that improve student outcomes. However, implementing this new model will require significant planning and preparation at both the local and state levels. Districts and municipalities will need time to collaborate and adjust budgetary processes, while CSDE will need time to modify electronic grant systems, revise calculations, and amend its approved federal education plan.

Therefore, the CSDE recommends that:

- implementation of the new framework and all the above recommendation be staged by 1-2 years to give ample planning time for all involved at both the local and state levels.

Conclusion

This comprehensive report on the effectiveness of the Alliance District program, along with recommendations for reforming such program was prepared in response to Section 10-262w of the Connecticut General Statutes. The CSDE Performance Office analyzed quantitative data, conducted detailed interviews and focus groups, and reviewed extensive documentation.

Implementing the Alliance District program over the past 13 years has illuminated both positives and areas for improvement. Sending a portion of ECS funding directly to BOEs has prioritized proven educational strategies and resulted in demonstrable improvements in accountability indicators.

A rebranded Opportunity Network program that identifies districts based on student need and performance, continues directing a portion of ECS to the BOE, but determines the grant amount based on the degree of student need can support both BOEs and municipalities.

Additionally, establishing a single statewide system for district support by integrating the Priority School District program within the new Opportunity Network, establishing coherent and logical rules for identification and exit for all districts in the Opportunity Network, consolidating grants to reduce redundancy, and streamlining CSDE support to the 15 PSDs can reduce burden, increase efficiency, and lead to greater student outcomes.

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[i] A student is considered as high needs if they are either an English learner/multilingual learner, a student with a disability, or a student from a low-income family.

[ii] EDUCATION COST SHARING GRANTS

[iii] The Special Education and Expansion Development Grant (SEED) grant established in Section 7 of Public Act 25-67 is an anomaly because the law expects this new *grant* to be paid like an *entitlement* but monitored like a *grant*.

[iv] The 30 Alliance Districts identified in 2012-13 were Ansonia, Bloomfield, Bridgeport, Bristol, Danbury, Derby, East Hartford, East Haven, East Windsor, Hamden, Hartford, Killingly, Manchester, Meriden, Middletown, Naugatuck, New Britain, New Haven, New London, Norwalk, Norwich, Putnam, Stamford, Vernon, Waterbury, West Haven, Winchester, Windham, Windsor, and Windsor Locks.

[v] Three districts were newly identified as Alliance Districts in 2017-18. They are Groton, Thompson, and Torrington.

[vi] Three districts were newly identified as Alliance Districts in 2022-23. They are Enfield, Plainfield, and Stratford.

[vii] All Alliance Districts are expected to complete a data tracker that provides current year attendance, discipline, academic progress, and any other relevant data that can serve as evidence of their progress during the year. The CDT and Turnaround Office staff utilize the data in the tracker to assist districts with making any necessary adjustments during the year in order to achieve better outcomes by year's end.