

**Report of Findings of the Task Force
To Study Special Education Services and Funding
June 3, 2024**

I. Background, history, and composition of Task Force

The current Task Force was originally established in section 3 of the Education Committee's Reported bill HB 6621 in 2021. That legislation established a 14-member Task Force to study issues relating to special education, including providing special education, the cost of special education and the annual percentage increase or decrease per school district, how special education costs affect a district's minimum budget requirement, and state special education reimbursement to boards of education. The scope of the Task Force was expanded with a floor amendment to include overidentification and underidentification of students for special education services and the Task Force membership was expanded to 15. The legislation passed and was signed as P.A. 21-95. However, appointments were not made to the Task Force at that time.

The legislation creating the Task Force was reenacted in section 5 of HB 5466 in 2022, with the reporting deadline extended from January 1, 2022, to January 1, 2023, and enacted as P.A. 22-116. Again, no appointments were made pursuant to the legislation.

Section 13 of P.A. 23-150 in 2023 again recreated the Task Force. The scope of the Task Force's work was expanded to include a study of in-school observations by independent evaluators, delaying the age at which a Developmental Delay category could be used for eligibility, caseloads of special education teachers, and "any other issues or topics relating to special education that the Task Force deems necessary." The deadline for reporting was extended to February 1, 2024. The bill reported to the floor expanded the scope further to include services provided to gifted and talented students. Membership was expanded to include the chairperson of the Advisory Council for Special Education and a representative of the Connecticut Association of Private Special Education Facilities.

Section 14 of P.A. 24-93 again reestablished the Task Force, specifically adding a representative of the Connecticut Council of Administrators of Special Education and making that representative a third cochair of the Task Force. A copy of the authorizing statute is appended hereto.

The membership of the Task Force was specified as follows:

(1) Three appointed by the speaker of the House of Representatives, one of whom is a representative of the Special Education Equity for Kids of Connecticut, one of whom is a

representative of the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education and one of whom is the parent or guardian of a student who is enrolled in a public school and receiving special education services.

Filling these slots are:

Andrew A. Feinstein, the Legislative Chair of Special Education Equity for Kids of Connecticut (SEEK).

Patrice McCarthy, Executive Director and General Counsel of the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE).

Tara Flaherty, Parent and Secretary of Connecticut Education Association (CEA).

(2) Three appointed by the president pro tempore of the Senate, one of whom is a representative of the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents, one of whom is a representative of the Connecticut Education Association and one of whom is the parent or guardian of a student who is enrolled in a public school and receiving special education services.

Filling these slots are:

Fran Rabinowitz, Executive Director, Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS).

Stephanie Wanzer, Treasurer of the Connecticut Education Association (CEA).

Sariel Alessi, Parent and Ridge Hill Elementary School PTA President (resigned).

(3) Two appointed by the majority leader of the House of Representatives, one of whom is a representative of the American Federation of Teachers-Connecticut and one of whom is a representative of the Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center.

Filling these slots are:

Jason Adler, Treasurer, American Federation of Teachers-Connecticut Local 2038.

Jennifer Lussier, CT Parent Training and Information Center Special Education Advisory Council Program Coordinator, Family Engagement Coordinator and Parent Consultant, Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center (CPAC).

(4) Two appointed by the majority leader of the Senate, one of whom is a representative of the Connecticut Council of Administrators of Special Education and one of whom is a representative of the RESC Alliance.

Filling these slots are:

Aimee Turner, Assistant Superintendent for Special Education, Wallingford Public Schools, and President of the Connecticut Council of Administrators of Special Education (ConnCASE).

Heather Tartaglia, Chief Program Officer, Capitol Region Education Center (CREC).

(5) Three appointed by the minority leader of the House of Representatives, one of whom is a representative of the Connecticut Association of School Administrators, one of whom is a representative of the School and State Finance Project and one of whom is a representative from an educator preparation program offered at a public institution of higher education in the state.

Filling these slots are:

Anthony Ditrio, Principal, Norwalk Public Schools.

Lisa Hammersley, Executive Director, School and State Finance Project.

The position of representative from an educator preparation program at a public institution of higher education has not yet been filled.

(6) Three appointed by the minority leader of the Senate, one of whom is a representative of the Connecticut Association of Schools, one of whom is a representative of the Connecticut Association of School Business Officials and one of whom is a representative from an educator preparation program offered at an independent institution of higher education in the state.

Alicia Bowman, Associate Executive Director, Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS).

Michael Grove, Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations, Meriden Public Schools.

Sally Drew, Associate Professor and Program Director, Special Education, Sacred Heart University.

(7) The Commissioner of Education, or the commissioner's designee.

Bryan Klimkiewicz, Special Education Division Director, Connecticut State Department of Education.

(8) The chairpersons and ranking members of the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to education, or their designees.

Kathryn Scheinberg Meyer, Director, Educational Success Project & Speak Up, Center for Children's Advocacy

Typhanie Jackson, Executive Director of Student Services, New Haven Public Schools.

Leslie Torres-Rodriguez, Superintendent of Schools, Hartford Public Schools.

(9) The chairperson of the Advisory Council for Special Education, established pursuant to section 10-76i of the general statutes.

Susan Yankee, Chair, Connecticut State Advisory Council for Special Education.

(10) A representative of the Connecticut Association of Private Special Education Facilities, designated by the association.

Karen Helene, Director of Benhaven School and President, Connecticut Association of Private Special Education Facilities (CAPSEF).

The Task Force divided into three working groups: Eligibility, chaired by Aimee Turner, Finance, chaired by Patrice McCarthy, and Services, chaired by Alicia Bowman. Each of these working groups developed priority issue areas that were then considered by the entire Task Force.

The Task Force met on a monthly basis, generally at the CAPSS headquarters in West Hartford with various members participating remotely.

II. Description of Special Education in Connecticut

Connecticut led the nation in mandating special education services for students with disabilities. Long before the federal Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) in 1975, P.L. 94-142, Connecticut passed P.A. 627 in 1967, establishing the duty to provide an equal educational opportunity to students with disabilities in public schools. While Connecticut has passed numerous laws bringing Connecticut's system into compliance with federal law, the fundamental mandate has remained unchanged since 1968.

There are two essential bases for Connecticut's commitment to provide excellent education to students with disabilities. One is the implicit contract, known in the courts as the Spending Clause, that Connecticut has with the federal government, whereby the State takes federal funds and, in return, commits the State to complying with the requirements of federal special education law. The other – and perhaps the more important basis – is that Connecticut recognizes that providing equal educational opportunity to students with disabilities is a basic civil right.

The founding impetus for the federal statute was that students with disabilities should be educated side-by-side with their typical peers to the greatest extent practicable. A shocking documentary on Willowbrook in New York and major class action lawsuits in Pennsylvania and the District of Columbia resulted in public support for and judicial decisions mandating the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting to the fullest extent possible. Segregation of students with disabilities into separate schools and residential institutions became politically unpalatable, except in the most extreme cases.

Yet both the original Connecticut statute and the federal EAHCA went beyond inclusion. The federal statute, soon paralleled in Connecticut, guaranteed students with disabilities a free appropriate public education (FAPE). Discussing the term “appropriate”, the Supreme Court, in its seminal decision in *Rowley v. Board of Education of Hendrick Hudson School District*, 458 U.S. 176 (1982), admitted the term “tends toward the cryptic, rather than the comprehensive,” *Id.* at 188. The Supreme Court provided slightly more explanation of the term in *Andrew F v. Douglas County*, 580 U.S. 386 (2017) holding that, “[t]o meet its substantive obligation under the IDEA [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the successor to the EAHCA], a school must offer an IEP [individualized education program] that is reasonably calculated to enable a child to make progress appropriate in light of the child's circumstances.” The Court additionally emphasized the requirement that “every child should have the chance to meet challenging objectives.” 580 U.S. at 402.

Connecticut is bound, at a minimum, to comply with federal law. Yet, Connecticut can enact laws which provide greater rights for students with disabilities. *Town of Burlington v. Department of Education*, 736 F.2d 773, 780 (1st Cir. 1984), *affirmed*, 471 U.S. 359 (1985). There exist a number of instances in which Connecticut law departs from the federal IDEA. Thus, any proposals considered by the Task Force have to meet the minimum standards set forth by the federal IDEA.

The Task Force faced another constraint: money. The Conference Committee report of the Education of All Handicapped Children Act, Senate Report 94-455 (November 14, 1975) made clear that “The maximum amount of the grant which a State is entitled to receive in any fiscal year is equal to the number of handicapped children aged three to twenty-one, inclusive, in such State who are receiving special education and related services multiplied by a specified

percentage of the average per pupil expenditure in public elementary and secondary schools in the United States and such percentage is: 5 percent for fiscal year 1978; 10 percent for fiscal year 1979; 20 percent for fiscal year 1980; 30 percent for fiscal year 1981; and 40 percent for fiscal year 1982 and for each fiscal year thereafter.” S.Rpt. 94-455 at p. 33. Simply put, the federal government committed to pay 40 percent of the average per pupil expenditure for special education. However, that pledge has never been met, and current funding is at less than 13 percent. <https://www.vanhollen.senate.gov/news/press-releases/van-hollen-huffman-introduce-bill-to-fully-fund-special-education> (Retrieved April 12, 2024). President Gerald R. Ford warned of the shortfall in his signing statement of December 2, 1975, stating:

Unfortunately, this bill promises more than the Federal Government can deliver, and its good intentions could be thwarted by the many unwise provisions it contains. Everyone can agree with the objective stated in the title of this bill -- educating all handicapped children in our Nation. The key question is whether the bill will really accomplish that objective.

Even the strongest supporters of this measure know as well as I that they are falsely raising the expectations of the groups affected by claiming authorization levels which are excessive and unrealistic.

Despite my strong support for full educational opportunities for our handicapped children, the funding levels proposed in this bill will simply not be possible if Federal expenditures are to be brought under control and a balanced budget achieved over the next few years.

There are other features in the bill which I believe to be objectionable and which should be changed. It contains a vast array of detailed, complex, and costly administrative requirements which would unnecessarily assert Federal control over traditional State and local government functions. It establishes complex requirements under which tax dollars would be used to support administrative paperwork and not educational programs. Unfortunately, these requirements will remain in effect even though the Congress appropriates far less than the amounts contemplated in S. 6.

Other than small and time-limited grants, Connecticut’s only direct funding for special education at the school district level is a catastrophic insurance program for very expensive special education placements, called excess cost reimbursement.

More than 85% of students with disabilities are educated in their own local schools, <https://edsight.ct.gov/relatedreports/PlacedOutsideOfDistrict.pdf> (retrieved December 20, 2023),

and have educational programs which do not have costs meeting the threshold for excess cost reimbursement. Funding for those programs come from a combination of federal grants, state education cost sharing (ECS) grants, and local property taxes. The state distributed approximately \$2.2 billion in 2022-23 in ECS grants under a needs-based formula. No part of the ECS grant is specifically designated for special education. The mix of federal, state and local funding varies widely by school district. New Canaan, for example, receives 96.2% of its education resources from local property taxes, while New Britain receives 24.4% from local sources and 57.4% from state funds. Similarly, per pupil expenditures vary widely from low in Danbury of \$16,742 in 2022-23 to a high of \$51,470 in Sharon. <https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Fiscal-Services/Net-Current-Expenditures-per-Pupil-used-for-Excess-Cost-Grant-Basic-Contributions/Documents> (retrieved April 12, 2024). (This does not include a number of charter schools with far lower per pupil expenditures or RESCs with far higher ones.) The amount spent per special education student also varies widely, from a low of \$16,626 in Litchfield to a high of \$69,443 in Franklin. https://public-edsight.ct.gov/Overview/Per-Pupil-Expenditures-by-Function---District/Special-Education-Expenditures?language=en_US (retrieved December 20, 2023 and calculated from special education population at https://public-edsight.ct.gov/students/primary-disability?language=en_US.) The 21 charter schools spend an average of \$9,133 on each special education student, while the six Regional Education Service Centers spend an average of \$52,902 on each special education student.

Students become eligible for special education if they have one of the disabilities set forth in the statute – “intellectual disabilities, hearing impairments (including deafness), speech or language impairments, visual impairments (including blindness), serious emotional disturbance (referred to in this chapter as “emotional disturbance”), orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, or specific learning disabilities,”—and, by reason of that disability requires special education and related services. 20 U.S.C. §1401(3)(a). There exist other interventions to provide support to students with academic or social emotional needs, including Response to Intervention, known as Scientific, Research-Based Initiatives (SRBI) in Connecticut, and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS). Yet, those interventions lack the critical features of special education, including evaluations, annual goals and assessment of progress against those goals, dedicated staff and budget, and the right of parents to use legal means to compel compliance.

To be sure, there is nothing in the law to prevent schools from making the type of diagnoses necessary for a student to be eligible for special education services. Still, the misperception exists among some that eligibility requires a medical diagnosis. The perceived need for a diagnosed disability could be a barrier to eligibility, particularly among lower income families which may lack doctors, medical insurance, and the means to pay for professional medical attention. School staff members have the obligation to refer struggling students to evaluations for special education eligibility.

Special education is provided when a student has a disability and by virtue of that disability requires specialized instruction and related services. Sometimes this means that interventions come too late to be fully effective. Brain science studies tell us that ideally literacy skills need to be taught before the third grade to produce a fluent reader. Yet, a young student may be delayed and may show all the signs of dyslexia but not be far enough behind to be eligible for special education. By the time the student qualifies for an IEP, the window for effective remediation may be closing. A robust SRBI system could ameliorate this lost opportunity.

Special education is designed to follow a specific protocol. A student is referred for evaluation by a teacher, a parent, or other school staff. If the student shows indication of a disability impacting the student's learning (defined broadly to include social and emotional competence), the school district is obliged to conduct a comprehensive evaluation. If that evaluation demonstrates that the student has a disability that requires specialized instruction, the student is found eligible under one of the thirteen eligibility categories. The eligibility determination, like every other major step in the process, is made by a team, called a Planning and Placement Team (PPT) in Connecticut. Once eligible, the PPT surveys the student's competency in literacy, numeracy, social emotional, fine and gross motor, communication, activities of daily living and other areas. For each area in which the student exhibits a deficit, the PPT writes challenging, measurable goals and objectives to be accomplished within the following year. The PPT also specifies accommodations that the student may need, and addresses numerous other questions, including transportation, extended school year, testing, and transition to adulthood beginning in the IEP that is in place when the student turns 14.

At its core, special education is a remedial program, intended to provide individualized support to individuals with disabilities to permit them to access the general education curriculum. As a remedial program, special education should, over time and on an aggregate basis, tend to close the gap in performance between students with disabilities and typically achieving students. There are students with more complex and challenging needs who are unlikely to ever close the gap entirely. Yet, even for those students, specialized instruction should result in some reduction of the gap. Connecticut performance data, between 2018-19 and 2022-23 shows that the gap has remained relatively constant, with students with IEPs performing at 66.8% of the level of students without IEPs in Language, up from 66.4% 4 years earlier and students with IEPs performing at 62.95% of the level of students without IEPs in Math, up from 62.24% 4 years earlier. https://public-edsight.ct.gov/performance/performance-index?language=en_US (Retrieved December 20, 2023). This is a change from a heightening gap reported by the Connecticut Voices for Children in its November 2021 report, "Reimagining Connecticut's Special Education Systems for a Post-Pandemic Future at p. 22. ("The student performance index, a metric that combines outcomes across the various state assessments, shows that between

2014 and 2018—the first and most recent years for which data are available, respectively—the achievement gap between SPED and non-SPED students grew by three points in math and 0.8 points in English language arts (ELA).”) What is clear is that special education has not had a significant impact on reducing the performance gap between students with disabilities and those without.

The “soft bigotry of low expectations”, a phrase often used by President George W. Bush, remains alive in some places. High expectations for all students are critical. Sometimes, educators have difficulty finding the right balance between challenge and support. For some students, too much pressure will result in troubling behavior or shutdown. Rather than reducing the academic demands of these students, we need to find evidence-based interventions to reduce the incidence of such behavior. It is possible that alternative pedagogical approaches, such a play-based learning, could produce achievement gains without the adverse effects that traditional teaching elicits.

Special education is unique because it is an entitlement. Non-disabled students have no right to use legal fora to guarantee a right to a good education. Students with disabilities have the right to use the due process and the court system to safeguard their right to a free appropriate public education. This entitlement means that school districts must fund educational programs for students with disabilities, even if that means increasing local education funding or making cuts in other programs. Surely, efficiencies are possible in special education, as well as in general education. But a district may not reduce special education services to an individual student below the level needed to provide a free appropriate public education.

For all its problems, the special education system established in Connecticut in 1968 and federally in 1975 has had successes. No longer are children with serious disabilities institutionalized and not educated. Thousands of Connecticut students have received specialized instruction and related services permitting them to live and work independently and productively. Special education expenditures totaled \$2.7 billion in 2021-22, or about 24% of the \$10.7 billion spent on education in Connecticut. https://public-edsight.ct.gov/Overview/Per-Pupil-Expenditures-by-Function---District/Special-Education-Expenditures?language=en_US (Retrieved December 20, 2023). During that school year, 16.3% of Connecticut students had IEPs. Of the 81,000 students with IEPs in kindergarten through grade 12, 30,000 were eligible due to a specific learning disability, 11,000 due to autism, and 17,000 due to other health impairment. https://public-edsight.ct.gov/students/primary-disability?language=en_US (Retrieved December 20, 2023).

After a yearlong study of the special education system in Connecticut, the Task Force finds that Connecticut’s special education system, while fundamentally sound, faces challenges. The range of possible remedies is limited by the strictures of federal law on one side and the

scarcity of state budgetary resources on the other. So cabined, the Task Force will develop specific legislative recommendations over the next year to address the deficits in the current system.

III. Current Issues

A. Funding

As noted above, about 24% of Connecticut's education spending is for special education services. About 21% of that total is for tuition at out-of-district placements, including placement at RESCs and Approved Private Special Education Placements (APSEPs). Of the \$719 million spent in 2021-22 for outplaced students, \$358 million, or around 50%, was spent on tuition for private, residential or out-of-state facilities. https://public-edsight.ct.gov/students/primary-disability?language=en_US (Retrieved December 20, 2023). Another 8% is spent on transportation. Much of that money is spent on transporting students to out-of-district placements. The amount spent for in-district special education programs may be 18% of total education spending, or roughly the same percentage as the percentage of students eligible for special education. This level of funding is typically too low. Districts place students out-of-district because they lack the resources, especially specialists, within the district to program for the student. More robust funding of in-district specialized instruction, including structured literacy and therapeutic settings, would reduce the need for out-of-district placements and result in substantial savings in the long term. One of the distinct advantages of out-of-district placements is smaller class sizes. The ability of districts to develop more in-house capacity is reliant on obtaining sufficient funding to provide the sort of small, structured, supportive environment that is available at the RESCs and at the APSEPs.

1. Excess Cost Reimbursement

Under the Excess Cost Reimbursement Program, local school districts submit applications for reimbursement for expenditures on a single child (whether the student is educated in district or out-of-district) that exceed 4.5 times the average per pupil costs for all students in the district. The State Department of Education then sums up all the requests and divides that sum into the total amount appropriated for the program to arrive at a reimbursement level. From 2011 to 2022, the total appropriation remained constant at around \$140 million, while the total excess costs exceeded \$210 million, meaning the percentage of reimbursement to districts dropped to a level below 70%. For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024, the Legislature appropriated \$181 million and established a three-tiered structure, whereby lower wealth districts would receive 91% of excess costs, medium wealth districts would receive 88%, and the wealthiest districts would receive 85%. The total claims submitted by districts now total \$260 million for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024, leaving a shortfall of \$79 million.

In practice, the Planning and Placement Team (PPT) for a student may determine that, due to the severe nature of a student's disability, the student needs to be placed at a particular Approved Private Special Education Placement (APSEP). The district provides the IEP to the APSEP and the APSEP provides its price for tuition and related services. The district also ascertains the cost of home to school transportation. By way of example, the overall cost of a placement, inclusive of transportation, might be \$131,000. If the district's general education per pupil expenditure was \$18,000, the district is responsible for paying the first 4.5 times that amount, or \$81,000. The district then submits an excess cost grant application for the difference between \$131,000 and \$81,000, or \$50,000. Based on the appropriation level and the tier in which the district falls, the reimbursement level could be 70%. So, in two installments during the school year, the municipality (not necessarily the school district) would receive a check for \$35,000.

In order to fully fund excess cost reimbursements, the legislature would have needed to appropriate another \$79 million for this past fiscal year. Changing the threshold from 4.5 times per pupil cost to 3.0 times, as some legislators have proposed, would merely lead to some minor redistribution of the existing appropriation. Fully funding an excess cost grant program with a threshold of 3.0 times per pupil cost would add a significant, but unknown, amount to the budget. The figure is unknown because there is no data on the number of programs costing between 3.0 and 4.5 times per pupil costs. Legislation was considered during the 2022 session tasking CSDE with gathering such information, but the bill did not become law.

The Task Force finds that the cap on excess cost reimbursement undermines local education programs and fails to provide the sort of catastrophic coverage that the program is intended to provide.

2. Other state funding for special education

Every state has a different method of funding local education. See, <https://www.ecs.org/50-state-comparison-k-12-and-special-education-funding/>. Of all the states, only Connecticut just funds high-cost services, through the excess cost reimbursement system. Connecticut does appropriate more than \$2.2 billion for Education Cost Sharing (ECS), under a formula that provides added weight for low-income students, concentrated poverty, and multilingual learners. Local school districts are free to use the money as they see fit. The largest exception is for the 33 Alliance Districts, which need to submit plans for use of the funds before they receive such funds. It is clear that special education is a large driver of costs for school districts.

The Education Cost Sharing (ECS) grant is Connecticut's primary form of state funding for K-12 education. The grant provides approximately \$2.2 billion annually to local and regional public schools and is based on the ECS formula, which is made up of several different components. One of these components is need-based weights.

The ECS formula contains three need-based weights that provide greater funding to districts for students with specific learning needs: learning needs that require greater resources. Below is a description of each of these weights.

- **Low-Income Students:** increases formula's foundation amount by 30% for students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.
- **Multilingual Learners:** increases formula's foundation amount by 25% for students who are identified as needing additional English-language skills.
- **Concentrated Poverty:** increases formula's foundation amount an additional 15% for low-income students residing in districts where 60% or more of the enrollment is considered low-income. This weight applies only to a district's low-income students above the 60% level.

However, one learning need that is not weighted for in the ECS formula is special education. Adding a weight to the formula for students with disabilities (SWD) would provide a means for the State to better serve these students, their special education services, and the costs associated with those services. Currently, the State does not provide districts with any specific funding for special education unless the cost of a student's services exceeds 4.5 times the district's per-pupil expenditure (the Excess Cost grant).

While all districts would benefit from the inclusion of a SWD weight, an additional weight for this student population would particularly support municipalities that have less of a means to adequately fund special education services through local property tax revenue alone. This is particularly true for Connecticut's largest cities, which have the highest number of students with disabilities, as well as smaller, rural districts that, in many cases, have higher percentages of students with an IEP.

The School and State Finance Project has estimated the impact of a SWD weight ranging from 10% to 25% with estimated changes from current law. In FY 2025, the impact ranges from \$16.5 million to \$41.5 million, respectively. For every five percentage points added to the SWD weight, the total State cost increases by approximately \$8 million.

The ECS formula is currently being phased in over time with the phase-in schedule differing between towns receiving an increase in funding and those receiving a decrease. The phase-in began in fiscal year 2019 and, for towns receiving increases, will be complete in FY 2026.

In FY 2026, when the ECS formula is fully funded for towns considered underfunded by the formula, the estimated costs of adding a weight for students with a disability range from an increase of \$29.6 million (using a 10% weight) to \$74.5 million (using a 25% weight). For every five percentage points added to the SWD weight, the total State cost would increase by approximately \$15 million. The Task Force finds that consideration should be given to amending the ECS formula to add a 25% weight for the number of special education students educated in the school district.

3. Funding of Charter, Magnet, CTECS, Agri-Science Schools

Connecticut has a broad range of funding mechanisms for schools of choice. For a charter school, C.G.S. §10-66ee provides that the student's town of residence pay "on a quarterly basis, an amount equal to the difference between the reasonable cost of educating such student and the sum of the amount received by the state charter school for such student pursuant to subdivision (1) of this subsection and amounts received from other state, federal, local or private sources calculated on a per pupil basis." The term, "reasonable cost" however, is not statutorily defined, however, the State Board of Education recently issued an Advisory Opinion holding that reasonable cost means the same thing as actual cost. The Task Force finds that the current array of statutory provisions on how schools of choice are paid for the costs of special education services to students living in various districts is confusing.

4. The cost of providing special education

The Legislature directed the Task Force to investigate "the cost of providing special education and related services, including gifted and talented services, the total aggregate amount per school district per year and the annual percentage increase or decrease per school district of such cost." EdSight, the data arm of the State Department of Education, tracks the cost of providing special education and related services, both for the current year and historically. Because there is no entitlement to gifted and talented educational services, there is no separate accounting of those figures. The data for special education figures show that special education costs account for about one-quarter of education spending in Connecticut. The proportion varies widely between districts, from \$19,880 per special education student in Litchfield to \$68,933 in Redding for 2022-23. (Figures retrieved from EdSight on April 14, 2024). The difference certainly is largely attributable to the severity of the disability of individual students. Many of the districts with high special education costs per student are small districts that may not have enough students to justify development of a specific program, and therefore rely more heavily on outplacements to meet student needs

The fact that higher costs are associated with outplacements is not a criticism of outplacements. Districts do not lightly place students out of district. They do so because the district lacks the resources to meet the needs of the individual student. The Task Force believes it is critical that school districts devote the resources and have available the trained personnel necessary to provide an appropriate education to most students in the district. With annual budgets and competing demands, it is unrealistic to expect district administrators to devote sizable amounts of money to build up a program that will only produce cost savings in the future. In some cases, the needs of the student are so unique that the district cannot develop a program that will adequately meet the needs of that one student, but an appropriate program is available in another district, RESC, or private school setting. The Task Force will, therefore, work on recommendations to create incentives to build special education capacity in districts and between districts.

5. Approved Private Special Education Placements

The Connecticut State Auditors of Public Accounts issued a series of reports in February 2018 highlighting areas for improvement in private special education programs in the state. APSEP's are regulated by the CT State Department of Education and must meet Principles, Policies and Standards, most recently updated in 2021 <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/special-education/pps.pdf>. While APSEPs are required to follow virtually the same requirements as to personnel and evaluations as public schools, placing districts often lack the time and personnel to closely oversee the education provided to students placed at APSEPs. The Office of the Child Advocate and Disability Rights CT recently released a joint report on an investigation into an approved private special education program. <https://portal.ct.gov/oca/reports-and-investigations/system-investigations/links-to-system-and-facility-investigations>. While local districts are now obligated to enter into contracts with private providers, there is no model contract that eases the process. The Task Force will explore the feasibility of a model contract being developed between representatives of school districts and representatives of private placements, with input from the State Department of Education.

B. Eligibility

1. Identification

Between the 2006-07 school year, when enrollment in Connecticut public schools peaked at 578,527, and the 2023-24 school year, when enrollment declined to 512,652, the population in Connecticut schools fell over 11%. During the same time frame, the number of students eligible for special education rose from 68,480 to 82,659, an increase of nearly 21%. The proportion of the student body eligible for special education rose from 11.84% to 15.7%. https://public-sight.ct.gov/students/enrollment-dashboard?language=en_US

(Retrieved April 12, 2024). By disability category, we have data from the 2018-19 school year to the 2022-23 school year. During that five-year period, Autism classifications rose from 12.5% of the special education population to 14.3%. Specific Learning Disability rose from 36.5% to 37.6%. On the other hand, the number of students diagnosed with an Emotional Disability dropped from 5,715 to 5,091. The proportion with Other Health Impaired eligibility dropped slightly from 21% to 20.2%. https://public-edsight.ct.gov/students/primary-disability?language=en_US (Retrieved April 12, 2024). These figures are surprising because so much attention was paid to the anxiety, depression and school avoidance that followed in the wake of COVID.

None of these figures, in and of themselves, indicate that there is overidentification of students with disabilities. Connecticut's 15.7% eligibility rate is higher than the national average, but lower than all other New England states, New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cgg/students-with-disabilities> (Retrieved December 20, 2023).

Eligibility determinations are made by Planning and Placement Teams at the local level after comprehensive evaluations. The test is whether the student has one of thirteen specified disabilities and whether, as a result of that disability, the student needs specially designed instruction and related services. Specially designed instruction is broadly defined in the federal regulations to mean:

adapting, as appropriate to the needs of an eligible child under this part, the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction—

- (i) To address the unique needs of the child that result from the child's disability; and
- (ii) To ensure access of the child to the general curriculum, so that the child can meet the educational standards within the jurisdiction of the public agency that apply to all children.

34 CFR 300.39(b)(3).

Chief Justice Roberts, in *Andrew F.*, discussed this standard in a way that makes clear that the unique needs of the child extend far beyond academic accomplishment. Ensuring access to the general curriculum imports social, emotional, and behavioral competence as well.

The Task Force agrees that proactive, general education interventions through robust Response to Intervention (RtI, known in Connecticut as Scientific Research Based Initiative, also

known as SRBI) as part of a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) may reduce the need for special education referrals. MTSS is a comprehensive framework schools can use to provide targeted support to students across levels of intensity. SRBI fits within MTSS as it provides a pathway for three tiers of intervention in applying evidence-based instruction--universal (core), targeted or strategic, and intensive. MTSS combines academic and social emotional pathways and plans for meaningfully engaging the adults to more effectively implement interventions. This includes collaboration with community and family assets and needs as well as aligning evidence-based curricular and professional learning efforts. MTSS provides broad-based support at the lowest tier and individual support at the highest tier. Federal law is clear that these cannot be used as a precondition to qualify for special education. Because these programs are not entitlements, as special education is, tight budgets can result and have resulted in the loss of critical interventionists in many districts.

Greater use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in the general education curriculum could provide instruction to students with learning difficulties in a way that would not require specialized instruction. UDL provides the student with information in more than one format, provides students with the opportunity to interact with the material in a variety of ways and to demonstrate mastery, and seeks to motivate students with multiple paths.

Educators also can gain the attention and interest of students through culturally responsive pedagogy. Culturally responsive teaching is a research-based approach that uses the student's backgrounds to make learning more relevant. It is a pedagogy that uses students' experiences, perspectives, customs, and characteristics to improve classroom instruction.

Many students identified as requiring specialized instruction through special education demonstrate gaps in reading development. Over the past couple of decades, researchers have developed a science of reading, which can and should be used at the early grades to reduce as far as possible the number of third graders who struggle with reading. The Right to Read legislation, which is that all students should be able to read competently by third grade, addresses the need for research-based quality Tier 1 reading instruction.

The literature is clear that a class of over fifteen students provides a weaker education. Brookings, "Class Size: What Research Says and What it Means for State Policy," May 2011. Chalkbeat, "Does Class Size Really Matter? A Chalkbeat Look at the Research", June 2022. Yet, in some urban areas in Connecticut, we have elementary school classes of nearly double that number. Smaller classes provide opportunity for more individual attention which is conducive to learning. The Task Force is aware of both the cost and the logistic issues of mandating reduced class sizes. More work needs to be done on how to reduce large class sizes over time, consistent with the resources available.

2. Age limit for Development Delay Category

Federal law provides that children between initial eligibility at age 3 and age 9 can be identified as eligible for special education services under a Developmental Delay category, permitting a later identification of a specific disability. Under Connecticut law, however, the Developmental Delay classification can only be used until age 5. C.G.S. §10-76a(5)(c). The Task Force finds the age 5 cut-off to be too restrictive. Young students can be difficult to diagnose. The age 5 cut-off may lead to some students losing the protections of the special education system because no specific diagnosis can be made. It may also lead to other students improperly diagnosed due to the need to make the diagnosis prematurely. The Task Force, therefore, will further explore the Developmental Delay exceptionality remaining available through age 7, except in the case where there is a clear educational classification earlier.

3. Behavior

Students with disabilities face challenges that impact their ability to learn and be present and engaged in what school has to offer. If a student is unable to learn side-by-side with typical peers, the student may experience frustration, anger, or alienation, which can lead to dysregulated behavior.

Addressing dysregulated behavior in the educational environment is critical. Educators, behaviorists, psychologists and academics have offered a variety of approaches. Some of these approaches are easily implemented while others require more training to acquire the necessary skills. All team members can contribute to the process of improving adaptive behavior. One of the early steps is determining how to prevent the dysregulated behavior from occurring in the first place. That may involve ecological and antecedent manipulation, identifying the student's learning style and matching teaching strategies, addressing skill deficits, teaching alternative behaviors and coping and communication skills. A plan needs to be developed and, often, all staff involved with the student needs to be trained in the plan. It is critical that, where feasible, the student should be involved in the development of the plan. Even with the best plan, however, dysregulated behavior can occur. In those instances, well-trained and compassionate staff need to take steps to deescalate the behavior. Effective de-escalation is highly dependent on an understanding of the typical course and topography of the behavior of the student, understanding how the student regulates and what strategies will help to bring the student back to a regulated state. Such an understanding also allows for early intervention.

Learning alternative skills and how to self-regulate takes time. Many times, dysregulated behavior has been demonstrated for years. Change will not happen overnight. Some students may still exhibit dangerous behavior (to themselves and/or others). When violent behavior occurs, seclusion and/or physical restraint is sometimes used to keep students and others safe. Currently, Connecticut law strictly limits the use of seclusion and restraint to: "...emergency

responses to prevent immediate or imminent injury to the person at risk or to others, provided the emergency seclusion/restraint is not used for discipline or convenience and is not used as a substitute for a less restrictive alternative.” All incidents of seclusion and restraint need to be reported to the State Department of Education and CSDE annually reports on their use. A number of the APSEPs report the highest level of restraint, which is not surprising given the fact that the most severely impaired students are often the ones who are outplaced. The State needs to do more than collect and report on the data. It needs to have resources and personnel to work with districts having high levels of restraint and seclusion to develop alternative approaches.

There is considerable controversy about the use of restraint and seclusion in schools. Some find it dehumanizing and counterproductive to teaching appropriate behavior. Others do not necessarily disagree but see it as a last resort and an essential tool to maintain safety when students become highly dysregulated and dangerous to themselves and/or others. In light of the serious disagreement about the appropriateness of the use of restraint and seclusion, the Task Force finds that the current Connecticut law, which is among the more restrictive in the nation, strikes as reasonable a balance as can be expected in the current climate.

Current reporting to the State Department of Education manifests a wide spectrum in the use of restraint and seclusion. The Task Force is concerned that this spectrum reflects differing understandings of what needs to be reported more than differing uses of restraint and seclusion. CSDE should review its training reporting material to ensure that each school is reporting using the same definitions. Further, the Department of Education needs to more closely monitor and review school reports of restraint and seclusion. Where there are high levels of restraint and seclusion, the Department needs to ensure that these interventions are not being used inappropriately.

Under current law, “Each local or regional board of education shall notify a parent or guardian of a student who is placed in physical restraint or seclusion no later than twenty-four hours after the student was placed in physical restraint or seclusion and shall make a reasonable effort to provide such notification immediately after such physical restraint or seclusion is initiated.” C.G.S. §10-236b(h). The Task Force finds that timely communication with a parent/guardian in their language after restraint or seclusion occurs is desirable so that they can discuss the matter with the child. Further, the Task Force finds parents need a clear route to raise questions and concerns with school administration. The Challenging Behavior Report Form, developed pursuant to Public Act 23-167, provides a template of the sort of vehicle that parents could use to raise concerns about restraint and seclusion, with the requirement that the school respond to parents within three school days. Every school district needs to be concerned about the proper use of restraint and seclusion. Creating a clear pathway for parents to raise issues will enhance compliance with the legal restrictions. The notice requirement should be expanded to include out of district placements.

The area of exclusionary discipline is far more complicated. The federal Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 imposes a zero-tolerance policy mandating expulsion of students for certain gun or weapons offenses and violent offenses. A local school may expel a student for conduct that violates a publicized policy of the board of education and is seriously disrupting the educational process, or dangerous to people or property. An expulsion is defined as a removal from school for more than ten days. When that happens an array of procedural requirements come into play. If the student has a disability and is covered under IDEA or Section 504, a separate manifestation determination procedure also comes into play. Manifestation determination is a complex process that may not be fully understood by school administrators and parents. The Task Force finds that the Department of Education should, in consultation with Board and parent attorneys, create a clear and readable summary of the process. The current timelines for manifestation determination meetings and for expulsion hearings make it difficult, in many cases, for parents to assemble and present their cases adequately. The Task Force will look into those timelines to see what can be done to ensure that the rights of students with disabilities are protected. Further, a student with an IEP or a 504 plan remains entitled to a free appropriate public education while expelled. Many students with disabilities who are subject to expulsion have goals and objectives in their Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) involving social skills and interpersonal relations. Addressing such goals while the student is expelled is a particular challenge.

The Task Force is concerned about the current treatment of in-school suspensions. The District Tiers Based on Suspension Expulsion Data, which rates districts based on disproportionality, treats in-school suspensions in exactly the same way it treats out-of-school suspensions and expulsions. The Task Force finds that in-school suspensions should involve therapy and counseling outside the general education environment to help the student learn to regulate his or her own behavior. Seen in that light, in-school suspensions should not be seen as the same sort of punitive deprivation of educational services as an out-of-school suspension.

C. Services

1. Staff Shortages

There are persistent shortages of special education teachers, paraprofessionals, related services personnel, and transportation providers. The causes of these shortages differ somewhat between occupational categories and across school districts. Still, without a full complement of well-qualified staff members, special education services cannot be delivered as intended.

The classic microeconomic remedy for worker shortages is higher pay. This is certainly something the Legislature will need to consider. Yet, pay is neither the only problem nor the only solution. There is a general societal lack of respect for teachers. Even within the

educational community, special education teachers reportedly occupy a lower rung on the social hierarchy. While there is no legislative fix for lack of respect, elected public officials can do a great deal to change the climate. After the sacrifices and the challenging adjustments educators endured during the period of COVID, educators should be lauded as great American heroes. It is up to elected officials to champion respect for teachers. The lower respect for special education teachers is especially perplexing. Special education teachers, paraprofessionals, related service personnel, and other school staff in direct contact with students with disabilities face a particularly challenging task. They need to be recognized for doing so.

One challenge that school staff directly serving students with special needs face is physical safety. Some behaviorally dysregulated students engage in significant physical behavior for a variety of reasons. The State Department of Education does not collect data on workplace injuries among school staff, but anecdotal evidence suggests it is all too common among those who work with students with disabilities. This added burden of the job should be recognized. Further, steps need to be taken to widen the pipeline for future special education professions.

Another challenge to special education teachers is the tremendous paperwork burden the job entails. Special education teachers are responsible for drafting goals and objectives on IEPs, for tracking progress on a daily basis, for writing reports each grading period on each student, all in addition to providing direct and indirect educational services to students. Some districts have trained individual paraprofessionals to assume some of this paperwork burden. The Task Force plans to research ways to reduce this burden.

Special education teachers may also face unreasonably large caseloads. Twenty states have some form of caseload limitations, either by statute or by regulation. Establishing such limits on a statewide basis is challenging because the needs of each individual child vary. Factors such as time in a special education setting, severity of disability, the assignment of paraprofessionals, and the responsibility for paperwork all play into various state's formulations. The Task Force is committed to tackling the issue of studying caseloads of special education teachers over the coming year.

The paraprofessional shortage is particularly acute. The variability of experience, knowledge, and competence of paraprofessionals is wide. The Task Force will examine proposals for modules, micro-credentialing and badging. The Task Force will also look at what sort of professional development needs to be created and offered, as well as looking at what training needs to be mandated for all paraprofessionals.

The State Department of Education has taken a variety of steps, within the confines of its legal authority and budget, to address the staff shortages in Connecticut schools. Those actions,

together with a changing national economy, have improved the employment picture during 2023. Sadly, the areas of greatest needs remain in the areas of special education: teachers, paraprofessionals, bus drivers, occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech and language pathologists, and administrators. More needs to be done. The Task Force will focus on this need over the coming year. Managing the caseloads of related service staff is also essential.

Insufficient racial, ethnic and economic diversity in Connecticut's education workforce impacts special education as well. Many students with disabilities, particularly in urban areas, have the need for counseling and therapeutic support. These students need someone they can relate to, someone who looks like them, who comes from a similar background, who is from their community. The Legislature has placed considerable attention on the need to diversify the education workforce. There are other Task Forces working on this issue. This Task Force endorses their efforts.

2. Pre-Kindergarten

From birth to age six, a child with a disability can go through three different educational systems. From birth to the child's third birthday, Part C of the IDEA provides for early intervention services. In Connecticut, those programs are under the jurisdiction of the Office of Early Childhood. Parents, guardians, pediatricians or others can refer a child who appears to have needs to 211 Child Development for an evaluation. The evaluation is comprehensive. If the child qualifies for Birth to Three supports, an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) will be developed. Such a plan will offer developmental services and prepare the child for transition to the school-based special education system at age three.

In the months before the child turns three, the school district where the child resides will hold a PPT meeting to conduct further evaluation and to plan an IEP for the child. Birth to Three providers have historically been reluctant to make specific recommendations to the PPT. The Legislature has taken steps to enhance the coordination between the Birth to Three program and the special education system, but the transition is often not as seamless as it should be.

From age three to entry into kindergarten, school districts are obligated to provide programs and services to meet the IEPs of eligible students. Many districts run preschool programs which are open to both students with IEPs and to those without IEPs. Often these programs run half-days and only three days a week. The result is that many families opt to place their children in full day private preschool programs and opt out of special education services due to family obligations and logistics.

The situation was exacerbated by Legislative action in the last session, by moving the mandated starting age for Kindergarten from prior law requiring children to be at least five years

old on or before January 1 of the school year in order to enroll in Kindergarten to requiring that children turn five years old on or before September 1 of the school year in order to enroll in kindergarten, effective for the 2024-25 school year. This change brings Connecticut into conformity with the vast majority of the states. What it does mean is that one-third of all children in that age cohort will spend another year in preschool programs. Children born in the months of September, October, November, and December of 2019 will, absent a waiver provided by the local Superintendent, continue to receive PPT recommended special education services for one additional year in preschool.

The Task Force is exploring the feasibility of mandating universal pre-kindergarten in Connecticut, following the lead of Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Oklahoma, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wisconsin, as twenty or more developed countries around the world. Studies have indicated that students who participate in such programs not only perform better academically when they reach kindergarten but continue to achieve greater academic success throughout their schooling. For students with disabilities, universal pre-K provides the opportunity to have robust IEPs delivered during their critical early developmental years.

3. Transition to Adulthood

The IDEA entitles a student with a disability to a free appropriate public education until the student reaches the state-determined age limit if such student does not graduate with a regular diploma earlier. Connecticut has now set that age limit as June 30 of the school year in which the student turns 22. The educational program for the period between when the student's age cohort graduates high school and the age-out time consists of a results-oriented curriculum in four domains: academic, vocational, community participation and activities of daily living. School districts have responded by hiring vocational counselors and by establishing transition programs.

The more serious problem is the profound weakness of postsecondary adult programs in Connecticut and the lack of them. There is limited continuity moving from a school-based transition program to the adult world. There are few programs and services that are available to our most vulnerable special education population. Connecticut has a weak infrastructure to serve students as they age out of special education which is why so many adult day programs have closed or have long wait lists. More and more families are being encouraged to plan and manage their child's own individualized programming with resources they find after they graduate. Ideally, transition to adulthood programs in schools would dovetail into adult services that build on the school-based services. For students with profound needs, there are far too few residential placements available.

The Task Force believes that schools need to prepare students with disabilities to live and work as productively and independently as possible. This means individualized transition programs and far better coordination between school-based programs and adult services are needed.

4. Artificial Intelligence

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has burst on the educational scene over the last year. While the Task Force does not yet understand how AI can be used to improve special education, the Task Force recognizes the value in examining the potential role of AI in special education.

5. Gifted and Talented

The definition of Gifted and Talented in C.G.S. §10-76a-2 offers the following three important definitions that serve as the foundation for the identification of students as gifted and/or talented:

(1) “Extraordinary learning ability” means a child identified by the planning and placement team as gifted and talented on the basis of either performance on relevant standardized measuring instruments, or demonstrated or potential achievement or intellectual creativity, or both.

(2) “Gifted and talented” means a child identified by the planning and placement team as (A) possessing demonstrated or potential abilities that give evidence of very superior intellectual, creative or specific academic capability and (B) needing differentiated instruction or services beyond those being provided in the general education program in order to realize the child’s intellectual, creative or specific academic potential. The term shall include children with extraordinary learning ability and children with outstanding talent in the creative arts.

(3) “Outstanding talent in the creative arts” means a child identified by the planning and placement team as gifted and talented on the basis of demonstrated or potential achievement in music, the visual arts or the performing arts.

The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) makes no mention of gifted and talented students. All laws and regulations relating to evaluation of and services for gifted and talented students are Connecticut-based. Federal IDEA funds may not be used to identify and/or provide gifted and talented services.

The referral, eligibility and identification of students who are gifted and talented are the responsibility of individual school districts. The district choice in the process may lead to discrepancies in the identification of students between districts within the state.

Some students who are identified as eligible for special education also demonstrate extraordinary talent or intellectual ability. Such students are identified as gifted or talented in the same manner as typical students. Students who have special needs and are identified as gifted and talented are determined twice exceptional. Special education teams should consider the need to meet the unique intellectual needs of twice exceptional students. The unique intellectual needs of twice exceptional students are not always considered.

IV. Conclusion

The Task Force has the responsibility of issuing a report with recommendations by January 1, 2025. The Task Force will continue to gather relevant information and develop specific recommendations.

Sec. 14 of Public Act 24-93

(a) There is established a task force to study issues relating to the provision and funding of special education in the state during the school years commencing July 1, 2016, to July 1, 2020, inclusive. Such study shall focus on funding, eligibility and delivery of special education services and include, but need not be limited to, an examination of

(1) the provision of special education and related services, including the provision of services to students identified as gifted and talented, and services or accommodations for a student as part of a plan pursuant to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended from time to time, and whether local and regional boards of education are providing such services directly or partnering with regional educational service centers, contracting with a private provider of special education services, as defined in section 10-91g of the general statutes, or as part of a cooperative arrangement pursuant to section 10-158a of the general statutes,

(2) the cost of providing special education and related services, including gifted and talented services, the total aggregate amount per school district per year and the annual percentage increase or decrease per school district of such cost,

(3) the effect that the cost of special education and gifted and talented services has on a board of education's minimum budget requirement,

(4) the level of state reimbursement to boards of education for special education and gifted and talented services, including the total amount for reimbursement submitted by each school district per year and the total amount received by such school district per year, and the percentage increase or decrease per year of the difference of the total amount submitted and the total amount received for each school district,

(5) the criteria and manner by which school districts are identifying students who require special education and related services or as gifted and talented, including whether school districts are overidentifying or underidentifying such students and the causes and reasons for such overidentification and underidentification,

(6) the feasibility of authorizing independent evaluators from the Department of Education or hired by the parents and guardians of students receiving special education and related services to observe the provision of such services in the classroom,

(7) delaying the age in which a classification category of special education services shall be made for a child requiring special education and related services,

(8) special education student-to-teacher ratios prescribed by case load policies, regulations and formulas in effect in other states, with a focus on provisions regarding the numbers of special education students and intensity of services required for such students,

(9) the prohibition of the use of seclusion under section 10-236b of the general statutes and the implementation of alternative methods in lieu of seclusion for certain student behavior, and

(10) any other issues or topics relating to special education that the task force deems necessary.

(b) The task force shall consist of the following members:

(1) Three appointed by the speaker of the House of Representatives, one of whom is a representative of the Special Education Equity for Kids of Connecticut, one of whom is a representative of the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education and one of whom is the parent or guardian of a student who is enrolled in a public school and receiving special education services;

(2) Three appointed by the president pro tempore of the Senate, one of whom is a representative of the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents, one of whom is a representative of the Connecticut Education Association and one of whom is the parent or guardian of a student who is enrolled in a public school and receiving special education services;

(3) Two appointed by the majority leader of the House of Representatives, one of whom is a representative of the American Federation of Teachers-Connecticut and one of whom is a representative of the Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center;

(4) Two appointed by the majority leader of the Senate, one of whom is a representative of the Connecticut Council of Administrators of Special Education and one of whom is a representative of the RESC Alliance;

(5) Three appointed by the minority leader of the House of Representatives, one of whom is a representative of the Connecticut Association of School Administrators, one of whom is a representative of the School and State Finance Project and one of whom is a representative from an educator preparation program offered at a public institution of higher education in the state;

(6) Three appointed by the minority leader of the Senate, one of whom is a representative of the Connecticut Association of Schools, one of whom is a representative of the Connecticut Association of School Business Officials and one of whom is a representative from an educator preparation program offered at an independent institution of higher education in the state;

(7) The Commissioner of Education, or the commissioner's designee;

(8) The chairpersons and ranking members of the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to education, or their designees;

(9) The chairperson of the Advisory Council for Special Education, established pursuant to section 10-76i of the general statutes;

(10) A representative of the Connecticut Association of Private Special Education Facilities, designated by the association; and

(11) A representative of the Connecticut Council of Administrators of Special Education, designated by the council.

(c) All appointments to the task force shall be made not later than thirty days after the effective date of this section. Any vacancy shall be filled by the appointing authority.

(d) The speaker of the House of Representatives and the president pro tempore of the Senate shall select the cochairpersons of the task force from among the members of the task force. Such cochairpersons shall schedule the first meeting of the task force, which shall be held not later than sixty days after the effective date of this section. On and after the effective date of this section, the representative designated pursuant to subdivision (11) of subsection (b) of this section shall serve as the third cochairperson of the task force.

(e) The administrative staff of the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to education shall serve as administrative staff of the task force.

(f)

(1) Not later than January 1, 2024, the task force shall submit an interim report on its findings to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to education, in accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a of the general statutes.

(2) Not later than January 1, 2025, the task force shall submit a final report on its findings and recommendations to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to education, in accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a of the general statutes.

(3) The task force shall terminate on the date that it submits such report or July 1, 2025, whichever is later.