

Recommendations of Task Force to Study Special Education Services and Funding

January 29, 2025

The Task Force to Study Special Education Services and Funding

- 22 Members: Teachers, Administrators, Parent Advocates, CSDE.
- Operated by Consensus: Recommendations were unanimous.
- Three subcommittees:
 - Finance – Chaired by Patrice McCarthy
 - Eligibility – Chaired by Aimee Turner
 - Services – Chaired by Alicia Bowman
- Three tri-chairs
 - Fran Rabinowitz
 - Michelle Laubin
 - Andrew Feinstein
- Met at least monthly from April 2023 to January 2025

Four Major Issues

- Severe Staff Shortage
- Lack of Resources
- Lack of Equity Across the State
- Failure to Close Achievement Gap

Finance Recommendations

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

Finance Recommendations (cont.)

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

Eligibility Recommendations

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

Services Recommendations

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

Service Recommendations (cont.)

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