

Introduction

In the United States, public education has been determined to be a state function rather than a responsibility of the federal government.¹ While the U.S. Department of Education plays an important oversight role, public schools fall under the authority of each individual state government. As a result, the State of Connecticut has a constitutional responsibility to provide public elementary and secondary education in the state. In charge of carrying out this responsibility and ensuring the State's educational interests are met are the Connecticut State Board of Education and Connecticut State Department of Education, along with local education agencies² — including local and regional boards of education — that directly provide educational services to the state's elementary and secondary students.

Q: Who is responsible for educating elementary and secondary students in Connecticut?

A: The State of Connecticut has the constitutional responsibility for ensuring free public elementary and secondary education in the state.³ The State has established educational interests and has imposed the responsibility of fulfilling these interests onto local and regional boards of education.⁴ In addition to implementing the educational interests of the State, Connecticut requires each local and regional board of education to provide an appropriate learning environment for all of its students, which includes:

1. Adequate instructional books, supplies, materials, equipment, staffing, facilities, and technology;
2. Equitable allocation of resources among its schools;
3. Proper maintenance of facilities; and
4. Safe school settings.⁵

Q: What are the educational interests of the State of Connecticut?

A: Connecticut's educational interests are defined in state statute and include, but are not limited to:

- Each child shall have equal opportunity to receive a suitable program of educational experiences;
- Each school district shall finance at a level at least equal to the Minimum Budget Requirement;
- Each school district shall provide educational opportunities for its students to interact with students and teachers from other racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds; and
- Mandates in the General Statutes pertaining to education within the jurisdiction of the Connecticut State Board of Education to be implemented.⁶

¹ *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez*, 411 U.S. 1 (1973).

² Connecticut's local education agencies include: local and regional boards of education, state and local charter schools, Regional Education Service Centers, and the Connecticut Technical Education and Career System.

³ Conn. Const. art. Eighth, § 1.

⁴ Conn. Gen. Statutes ch. 170, § 10-220.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Conn. Gen. Statutes ch. 163, § 10-4a.

Q: What is the Connecticut State Board of Education, and what is its role?

A: The State Board of Education (SBOE) is a 14-member board that has a number of wide-ranging responsibilities as it relates to elementary and secondary education, special education, vocational education, and adult education in Connecticut.⁷ These responsibilities include:

- General supervision and control of the educational interests of the State;
- Providing leadership in educational interests and promoting the improvement of education in Connecticut;
- Conducting research, planning, and evaluation of services related to the use of educational technology by school districts;
- Keeping informed on the condition, progress, and needs of the schools in the state;
- Developing evaluation and assessment programs designed to objectively measure the adequacy and efficacy of the educational programs offered by public schools; and
- Preparing a 5-year comprehensive plan, which is required to consist of a policy statement of the Board's long-term and short-term objectives.⁸

Q: What is the Connecticut State Department of Education and what is its role?

A: The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) serves as the administrative arm of the SBOE.⁹ The CSDE is under the direction of the commissioner of education. The commissioner is charged with administering, coordinating, and supervising the activities of the CSDE in accordance with the policies established by the SBOE.¹⁰ This includes, but is not limited to, providing leadership, guidance, and supervision for the education of elementary and secondary students in the state.¹¹

Q: What oversight does the SBOE and CSDE have over local school districts?

A: The SBOE and the CSDE have statutory authority to intervene in the education of students and the operation of local boards of education if the educational interests of the State are not being met in the respective local school district. This authority is wide-ranging and varies from intensive intervention in the lowest-performing school districts, to imposing restrictions on the utilization of state resources by the local board of education, to reviewing strategic school profile reports.^{12,13}

Q: Are local and regional boards of education municipal entities?

A: No, local and regional boards of education are creatures of the State as reinforced in the 1964 Connecticut Superior Court decision of *Derfall v. West Hartford*.¹⁴ As such, local and regional boards of education function as agencies of the State in charge of implementing the State's educational interests within a specific town or, in the case of regional boards of education, a group of towns.¹⁵

⁷ Conn. Gen. Statutes ch. 163, § 10-1.

⁸ Conn. Gen. Statutes ch. 163, § 10-4.

⁹ Conn. Gen. Statutes ch. 163, § 10-3a.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Conn. Gen. Statutes ch. 163, § 10-4.

¹² Conn. Gen. Statutes ch. 170, §§ 10-220, 10-233e.

¹³ Conn. Gen. Statutes ch. 172, § 10-262u.

¹⁴ *Derfall v. West Hartford*, 203 A.2d 152 (Conn. Super. Ct. 1964).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*