

The Education Cost Sharing (ECS) grant is Connecticut's primary form of state funding for K-12 education. The grant provides approximately \$2.36 billion annually to local and regional public schools and is based on the ECS formula, which has several different components. One of these components is need-based weights.

## Current ECS Formula Weights

Weights are used in education funding formulas to drive more funds to students who research has found typically require additional resources and educational supports to achieve at the same levels as their non-need peers. The ECS formula contains three need-based weights that provide greater funding to districts for students with specific learning needs. Below is a description of each of the weights currently in the ECS formula.

- **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.

## Absence of Weight for Students with Disabilities

However, one learning need that is not weighted for in the ECS formula is special education. Adding a weight to the ECS formula for students with disabilities (SWD) would provide a means for the State to better support students who receive special education services and the costs associated with their education.

Currently, Connecticut is one of only two states that provides state funding for special education services through a high-cost services model. 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, the additional weight would particularly support under-resourced municipalities that have less means to adequately fund special education services through local property tax revenue alone. This is especially true for Connecticut's largest cities, which have the highest number of students with disabilities, as well as smaller, rural districts that have the highest percentages of students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

## Students with Disabilities Formula Weights in the U.S.

Thirty-nine states and the District of Columbia currently use a need-based formula weight in some capacity to provide funding to their school districts for special education services. Some states provide funds using a flat weight while others use multiple weights or a hybrid approach. Table 1 below provides a breakdown of different types of formula weights states use for students with disabilities, as well as a brief description for each type.

**Table 1: Formula Weights (by Category) for Students with Disabilities<sup>1</sup>**

Weight Type	Description	States Using Weight Type
Flat Weight	A single weight or dollar amount used to provide aid for students based on certain factors or student needs.	Louisiana, Maryland, Missouri
Multiple Weights	States that utilize more than one weight or dollar amount to provide aid for students based on certain factors or student needs.	Alaska, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Nevada, New Mexico, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, Washington
Hybrid Weights	States use a flat weight or multiple weights in concert with another mechanism.	Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Vermont, Wisconsin

<sup>1</sup> Education Commission of the States. (2021, October). 50-state Comparison: K-12 and Special Education Funding. Retrieved from <https://reports.ecs.org/comparisons/k-12-and-special-education-funding-04>.

## Cost of Weight for Students with Disabilities

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 fiscal year 2025, the impact ranges from \$16.9 million to \$42.8 million, respectively. For every five percentage points added to the SWD weight, the total State cost increases by approximately \$8.5 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 FY 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 SWD weight range from an increase of \$30.4 million (using a 10% weight) to \$76.9 million (using a 25% weight). For every five percentage points added to the SWD weight, the total state cost increases by approximately \$15 million.