

CONNECTICUT SCHOOL FINANCE PROJECT



IMPROVING HOW CONNECTICUT FUNDS SPECIAL EDUCATION

An analysis of special education finance systems across the country, and recommendations for implementing best practices

March 2016

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Executive Summary

Each day, more than 68,700 of the students who pass through the doors of Connecticut's public schools require special education services, making up 13 percent of the state's total public school enrollment.ⁱ The individual learning needs of these students are wide-ranging and unique. Their diagnoses vary from autism to speech and language disabilities and learning and intellectual disabilities. As a result of these wide-ranging needs, the resources required to provide students with a "free appropriate public education"ⁱⁱ vary significantly, and often pose difficult planning and financial questions to Connecticut's public schools. The difficulty of answering these questions is compounded by Connecticut's lack of a real special education finance system.

In order to help Connecticut find a better answer to special education funding, this report examines the special education finance systems of all 50 states. While no two state methods are the same, special education finance systems utilized across the country can be categorized into eight classifications:

1. Single Student Weight
2. Multiple Student Weights
3. Resource-Based
4. Census-Based
5. Partial Reimbursement
6. Block Grant
7. Combination
8. No Separate Special Education Funding

Connecticut is one of only four states in the country that falls into the category of having no separate special education funding system. Instead, Connecticut's local public school districts primarily receive funding for special education students from the state's main education equalization aid grant—the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) grantⁱⁱⁱ—and from the state's Excess Cost grant, which reimburses districts for extraordinary special education costs.^{iv} However, both mechanisms have significant limitations, which are explored in detail in this report.

While no state—as case studies presented in this report demonstrate—has implemented a perfect model for funding special education, Connecticut's current special education finance system falls far short of best practices. A comprehensive 50-state survey examining state special education finance models reveals six key principles and practices all special education finance systems should follow. (Note: this is not intended to be a complete or exhaustive list of best practices, but rather, it is a group of identified best practices based on our research.) These best practices are:

1. Differentiates funding based on student learning needs.

State education aid for special education services should be differentiated based on student need. There is tremendous variation in the resources that are required to provide students with different disabilities and needs with a free appropriate public education. A state's special education finance system should recognize this variability in cost and attempt to differentiate the funding

provided for students with disabilities accordingly. In general, as a student's learning needs increase, funding should increase.

2. Distributes state funding for special education equitably.

Whether part of a weighted student funding formula or existing as a separate funding stream, the special education finance system should distribute resources equitably. As a general rule, lower-wealth districts should receive more state resources than higher-wealth districts to enable them to provide appropriate special education services.

3. Provides school districts with state funding that is consistent and makes local expenses predictable.

Currently, one of the most significant challenges faced by school districts is that special education costs are unpredictable from year to year, wreaking havoc on district budgets. The special education finance system should provide a mechanism for smoothing out the inconsistency and variability of special education costs in individual school districts.

4. Controls costs.

The special education finance system should give all districts a stake in controlling total special education costs, without incentivizing the under or misdiagnosis of students with disabilities.

5. Provides school districts with flexibility and encourages innovation.

School districts should be incentivized to experiment with new ways of providing special education services that result in the effective and efficient delivery of high-quality services.

6. Limits local financial responsibility for students with extraordinary needs.

In every state, a small percentage of students with disabilities have extraordinary needs that impose costs well above the average. State funding models must have a method of limiting local financial responsibility for providing students with extraordinary needs with a free appropriate public education.

In evaluating Connecticut's special education finance system, it is clear the state's current mechanisms for funding students with disabilities do not align with these six practices. Below is a full analysis of Connecticut's alignment with each best practice, as well as recommendations for how the state can implement these identified key principles.

1. Differentiates funding based on student learning needs.

Analysis of Connecticut's current alignment with this best practice:

Connecticut has "incorporated" funding for students with disabilities into the foundation amount of the ECS formula. Other than providing partial funding for students with exceptional needs through the Excess Cost grant, Connecticut does not provide differentiated funding for students with disabilities. Instead, districts are expected to cover the costs of educating these students through

general operating funds. Furthermore, Connecticut has stopped using the ECS formula to distribute education equalization aid to districts.^v

How Connecticut can achieve this goal:

Differentiation should tie the funding a special education student receives to the services that student receives through a system that classifies students based on model of service, or as a proxy, based on the hours required by the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP). (This is preferable to tying special education funding to a student's diagnosis, because two students that are diagnosed with the same disability can require very different services, depending on each student's unique needs.) The special education funding system should use weights that increase as the cost of providing services increase. Alternatively, the system could reimburse based on actual costs.

2. Distributes state funding for special education equitably.

Analysis of Connecticut's current alignment with this best practice:

School districts serving higher-need students do not receive more state aid through the ECS formula to provide appropriate services for these students. The ECS formula's Base Aid Ratio is designed to distribute a higher state share percentage to communities with less income and property wealth; however, the state has stopped using the ECS formula to distribute education aid to districts. In addition to the ECS grant, Connecticut has a Special Education Excess Cost grant, which provides reimbursements for extraordinary special education costs (note: although the ECS formula is no longer being used to distribute funding to school districts, the Excess Cost grant continues to be in effect). Eligibility for Excess Cost grant reimbursement is based on a multiple of the district's per pupil spending, and as a result, districts with lower per pupil expenditures have a lower eligibility threshold for reimbursement. However, because there is no correlation between student need and per pupil spending, this does not necessarily result in higher need districts receiving more Excess Cost aid.

How Connecticut can achieve this goal:

Community wealth should explicitly be taken into account in determining the distribution of state special education aid, whether this aid is included in an overall state equalization formula or exists separately.

3. Provides school districts with state funding that is consistent and makes local expenses predictable.

Analysis of Connecticut's current alignment with this best practice:

Connecticut currently does not have any mechanisms in place to ensure district funding is consistent and expenses are predictable. As the ECS formula is not currently being faithfully implemented, and student need varies from year to year, school districts are unable to predict their funding levels or special education costs in advance.

How Connecticut can achieve this goal:

Special education costs should be aggregated, either at the state or regional level, to increase the total pool of students, which will have the effect of

“smoothing out” the inconsistency and variability of special education costs in individual school districts. Alternatively, the state could use an equitable method to establish a ceiling for special education costs, and once a district exceeds its ceiling, the district would be reimbursed for 100 percent of its special education costs above that amount. Additionally, the special education finance system should allow districts to know what their local contribution to special education costs will be by January of the prior school year so they can accurately account for special education costs as part of the open and transparent budgeting process.

4. Controls costs.

Analysis of Connecticut’s current alignment with this best practice:

Since school districts receive no separate special education funds and must draw on general foundation funding to support the provision of special education, they have a very large stake in controlling special education costs. Connecticut’s special education system does not incentivize over-identification or over-classification of students with disabilities.

How Connecticut can achieve this goal:

Connecticut’s current lack of separate special education funding provides a strong incentive to control costs but has other downsides. In any new special education funding system, districts should be allowed to retain in their budgets a portion of savings achieved through more efficient delivery of special education services. Additionally, the special education funding system should disincentivize the over-identification of students as having disabilities, or the over-classification of students with disabilities into a higher need category, by establishing a normal range for identification and classification, and requesting documentation from districts that fall outside of that range to ensure identification and classification rates accurately reflect the students being served.

5. Provides school districts with flexibility and encourages innovation.

Analysis of Connecticut’s current alignment with this best practice:

Connecticut does not currently require specific portions of the ECS grant be spent on special education, allowing flexibility in service delivery. Connecticut does not provide incentives to local districts to partner with additional districts or regional service providers to innovate and reduce costs.

How Connecticut can achieve this goal:

Districts should be provided with a flexible stream of special education funding that is not based on staffing ratios or other fixed models. Districts must also be given the freedom to partner with other local education agencies (LEAs) or service providers of their choosing to reduce costs. Finally, districts should be allowed to retain in their budgets a portion of savings achieved through more efficient delivery of special education services.

6. Limits local financial responsibility for students with extraordinary needs.

Analysis of Connecticut's current alignment with this best practice:

Connecticut's Excess Cost grant currently exists to limit local financial responsibility for students with extraordinary needs. However, the Excess Cost grant is not fully funded, which results in prorated reimbursements to school districts.

How Connecticut can achieve this goal:

In every state, a small percentage of students with disabilities have extraordinary needs, and Connecticut is no exception. Connecticut must have a method of limiting local financial responsibility for providing students with extraordinary needs with a free appropriate public education. In order to achieve this goal, the special education finance system should have a fully funded high-risk pool that reimburses local communities for these costs.

In developing the next generation special education finance system, Connecticut should seek to improve how resources are distributed to students with disabilities by implementing these best practices.

The individual learning needs of Connecticut's special education students are wide-ranging and unique. State funding for special education should seek to reflect this wide variety by providing resources in a consistent, predictable, and equitable fashion that not only incentivizes the efficient and effective delivery of services but also ensures a high-quality education for Connecticut's students with disabilities.

Overview of Connecticut's Special Education Finance System

All of Connecticut's public schools serve students with disabilities. In the 2014-15 school year, Connecticut public schools served over 68,769 students with special education needs.^{vi} Over the past 10 years, the total number of students with disabilities has increased from 68,060 to 68,769, while the percentage of students identified as "students with disabilities" has increased from 12 to 13 percent.^{vii} The individual learning needs of students with disabilities are unique and wide-ranging, and include many different diagnoses. Some of these diagnoses include: learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, autism, speech and language disabilities, emotional disturbances, and other qualifying medical diagnoses. As a result, the resources required to provide students with a "free appropriate public education" vary significantly depending on the needs of each individual child.^{viii}

In fiscal year (FY') 2013, Connecticut public schools spent \$10.1 billion dollars educating students.^{ix} Public education funding comes from local, state, and federal sources. In Connecticut, the primary source of public education funding is local funding, which is derived from local property taxes. According to the United States Census Bureau, in FY' 2013, 57.4 percent of public elementary-secondary school system revenue in Connecticut came from local sources.^x State sources accounted for an additional 38.3 percent of public school revenues, while federal sources accounted for just 4.3 percent of public school funding.^{xi} Because the primary form of education aid to municipalities comes from the State of Connecticut, rather than the federal government, it is important to understand the nationwide context of special education funding at the state level in order to examine current funding models and implement changes if necessary.

While local education agencies in Connecticut receive Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) funding to help offset the cost of educating students with disabilities, the IDEA Part B Section 611 award for all states for FY' 2014 only totaled approximately \$11.5 billion dollars, which, in the context of total public education spending in Connecticut, is not a significant amount of funding.^{xii} Connecticut's IDEA Part B Section 611 award for FY' 2015 was \$131,525,104.^{xiii}

The main education equalization aid grant in Connecticut is the ECS grant. The state began providing education equalization aid to cities and towns as a result of a 1977 Connecticut Supreme Court decision, *Horton v. Meskill*. In *Horton* (1977), the Court ruled an education funding system that allows "property wealthy" towns to spend more on education with less effort, is a system that impedes children's constitutional rights to an equal education.^{xiv} As a result, Connecticut established the ECS formula in 1988.^{xv} The goal of this formula is to distribute state education aid to cities and towns in order to make up the difference between the cost of operating a local public school system and each community's ability to pay those costs through local property tax revenue.^{xvi} Since 1988, the ECS formula has been revised and changed numerous times.

The ECS formula uses three variables to determine how much a community must raise from its property taxes to pay education costs, and how much the state should contribute to offset these costs:^{xvii}

- **The Foundation:** The average estimated cost of educating a child.
- **Need Students:** A calculation that considers the number of students within a town, including groups of students that are typically more costly to educate because they have greater needs.
- **Base Aid Ratio:** Each community's ability to financially support education.

In 1995, P.A. 95-226 added students with disabilities to the ECS resident student count, and increased the foundation by \$911 in an attempt to include special education costs in the main education equalization aid grant to Connecticut municipalities.^{xviii xix} At the same time, Connecticut eliminated its primary special education grant.^{xx} Since then, the majority of state aid for special education has been “incorporated” into the ECS grant. In order to meet IDEA's maintenance of effort requirement, Connecticut assumes 20 percent of the ECS grant is reimbursement for special education expenses.^{xxi}

In FY' 2014, 67 percent of state special education expenditures were from the ECS formula.^{xxii} The impact of incorporating special education funding into the ECS formula's foundation amount is that 67 percent of state special education aid is not distributed based on the needs of the students served or the costs associated with those needs. In addition, Connecticut is no longer using the ECS formula (or any formula) to allocate funding to local public schools. Although the ECS grant amounts to municipalities are based on past ECS grant amounts, the current grant amounts are not determined using a formula.^{xxiii}

In addition to ECS, Connecticut reimburses districts for extraordinary special education costs under the Excess Cost grant. In FY' 2014, 27 percent of the special education funding the state provided to municipalities was provided through the Excess Cost grant.^{xxiv} This grant provides state funding when the cost for educating a special education student exceeds 4.5 times a district's net current expenditures per pupil (NCEP), and the cost above the district's NCEP for state agency placements (e.g., the Department of Children and Families).^{xxv} However, the Excess Cost grant has had a statutory cap, limiting funding to approximately \$140 million.^{xxvi} The effect of this statutory cap has been to decrease the percent level of reimbursement to districts.^{xxvii} It is estimated that in 2015, the Excess Cost grant was funded at 73 percent of total funding.^{xxviii} In addition, district NCEP's vary significantly, with a spending per pupil range of approximately \$18,000 in school year 2014-15.^{xxix} As a result, in FY' 2016, the district with the lowest NCEP, Woodstock, is eligible for reimbursement through the Excess Cost grant at \$56,000 per pupil while the district with the highest NCEP, Cornwall, is eligible for reimbursement through the Excess Cost grant at \$136,539.^{xxx}

Additionally, in Connecticut, it is the responsibility of the local board of education to fund special education costs for all students residing in the local municipality, regardless of where the student attends public school. In the cases of charter schools, interdistrict magnet schools, and regional vocational agricultural centers, “the district shall pay the receiving LEA an amount equal to the difference between the reasonable cost of

special education and related services and the sum of the amount received from federal, state, and local and private sources calculated on a per pupil basis."^{xxxi}

Exceptions exist in students attending Open Choice schools and the CT Technical High Schools. In these cases, students "belong" to the "receiving district." For students attending Open Choice schools, the receiving district will convene a Planning and Placement Team (PPT) and develop the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for the student. The resident school district is invited to attend this process and must pay the receiving district an amount equal to the difference between special education and related service costs and the sum of the amount received by the receiving district for the state Open Choice program.^{xxxii}

If a PPT at one of the CT Technical High Schools determines a student requires special education and related services, which precludes such student's participation in the program offered by a technical high school, the student shall be referred to the resident town board of education for the development of an IEP, and the resident town will be responsible for financing and implementation of the IEP.^{xxxiii}

Special Education Funding Models

While there are many different approaches to categorizing special education funding systems, this report employs a modified version of the classification scheme used by the National Association of State Directors of Special Education,^{xxxiv} which has also been the basis for others' research on this subject.^{xxxv} This system places states' special education funding systems into eight categories, discussed below.

The classification system categorizes states according to their primary means of funding K-12 special education. However, in most states, there are additional funds allocated for specific purposes that are distributed outside the primary special education funding mechanism. For example, there may be specific purpose funding allocated for: special education transportation; particular programs, such as private school scholarships, statewide schools for students with specific impairments, or transitional programs; or, students whose disabilities impose especially high costs. These additional funds are noted in the Appendix but do not affect the classification of a state's primary special education funding system. States also make use of federal funds provided under the IDEA in various ways; the specific use of IDEA funding is not considered in this report. Funding for pre-kindergarten special education is also not discussed.

This section describes each of the eight special education funding approaches and discusses their benefits and challenges. It also lists the states currently employing each type of system. A handful of states use funding systems that combine elements of two funding model categories. These are also noted below.

1. Single Student Weight

In this kind of system, districts receive the same amount of state funding for each student with disabilities, regardless of the severity of those disabilities. This funding is provided in addition to the base allotment (i.e. “foundation amount”) per student and is usually expressed as a weight, or multiplier, of that allotment, though it can also be presented as a fixed amount. This system relies on the assumption that the low-cost and high-cost special education services required by different students will balance each other out, such that a single, mid-level dollar amount per student can reasonably represent the average expense of providing an appropriate education to a student with disabilities.

The primary benefits of Single Student Weight systems are they are simple to administer and provide funding in a timely manner. Students need not be tracked by disability at the state level, and districts do not have to report their actual costs or wait until the following year for reimbursement. They also provide a degree of flexibility for districts, because the funding is not tied to particular resources.

The chief challenge posed by such systems is the allocation is not responsive to actual costs. In the event a district has a disproportionate number of high-cost students, either the district must absorb the difference between funding and cost, or supplemental state funding must be made available on a case-by-case basis—usually in the form of a reimbursement that requires extensive reporting and therefore undermines the primary benefits of the system. It is also possible a district may have a disproportionate number of students requiring very low-intensity services and will receive more state funding than is required to meet its students’ needs.

Table 1: Nine states use a Single Student Weight System.

State	Total Funding Per Special Education Student ^{xxxvi}	Has supplemental high-cost funding
Louisiana	\$10,038	Y
Maryland	\$11,936	N
Missouri ^{xxxvii}	\$10,693	Y
Nevada	Not Yet Set by State ^{xxxviii}	Y
New Hampshire	\$5,477	N
New York	\$15,547	Y
North Carolina	Varies from district to district ^{xxxix}	N
Oregon ^{xl}	\$9,000	Y
Washington	Varies from district to district ^{xli}	Y

2. Multiple Student Weights

The Multiple Student Weights approach is similar to the Single Student Weight model, but instead of providing a single amount of increased funding to districts for every student with disabilities, states provide different levels of funding for different categories of students, divided either by disability (e.g. hearing impairment, emotional disturbance, etc.) or by services provided (e.g. resource room, speech therapy, etc.). Categories are specified at the state level. Systems differ in complexity and range from simple two-level classification schemes, like the one used in Colorado, to Oklahoma's 13-tier system. As with the Single Student Weight model, funding is provided in addition to the base allotment per student and can be expressed either as a weight, or multiplier, of that allotment, or as a fixed amount.

The Multiple Student Weights model's chief benefit is it offers the opportunity to match funding fairly well to costs, as long as states group their students effectively and set funding levels based on strong district expenditure data. It shares with the Single Student Weight system the benefit of providing funding in a timely manner rather than requiring districts to report costs and wait for reimbursement. Compared with the Single Student Weight system, it is less likely to overfund districts with high concentrations of low-cost, disabled students and is less reliant on supplemental high-cost funding to address high concentrations of high-cost, disabled students.

The main challenge posed by the Multiple Student Weights model is it requires districts to provide a fairly detailed report of their students to the state, creating a larger administrative burden than the Single Student Weights model (though a smaller one than a Partial Reimbursement model would require, as described later in this section). It may also create incentives for districts to mis-identify students with more highly funded disabilities in order to generate greater revenue.

Table 2: Twelve states use a Multiple Student Weights system.

State	Total Funding Per Special Education Student (Range)	Has supplemental high-cost funding
Arizona	\$3,980-\$38,876	N
Colorado	\$7,542-\$13,542	Y
Georgia	\$5,870-\$14,195	Y
Indiana	\$5,467-\$13,767	N
Iowa	\$11,087-\$24,108	Y
Kentucky	\$4,850-\$13,102	N
Maine ^{xlii}	\$6,888-\$12,989	Y
New Mexico	\$6,810-\$12,017	N
Ohio	\$7,447-\$31,034	Y
Oklahoma	\$1,703-\$12,489	Federal Only
South Carolina	\$3,863-\$5,705	N
Texas	\$5,654-\$25,700	N

Three other states incorporate Multiple Student Weights into a hybrid system, as discussed later in this section.

3. Resource-Based

In a Resource-Based system, states support special education by funding the resources used to provide it, especially in the form of staff positions. Most often, districts are funded through prescribed ratios of students to units of funding for specific resources. In some states, students are categorized by the levels of resources required to carry out their educational plans, and funding corresponds to those different levels of resources.

The main benefit of the Resource-Based approach is it attempts to address the likely costs districts will incur in the course of educating special-needs students rather than focusing on students' diagnoses, which are not automatically correlated with costs. It can also provide funding in a timely manner, without any need for districts to report expenditures or wait for reimbursement.

The chief challenge of Resource-Based funding systems is they are biased toward rigid, and sometimes outdated, methods of providing special educational services. When the bulk of state special education funding is tied up in staff positions or allocations for specific resources, districts will spend the money for those purposes rather than experimenting with new methods of delivery, and may lack the flexibility to craft the educational plans that are best for their special-needs students. Staff-based funding in particular may be ill-suited to the current preference (embodied in the “least restrictive environment” mandate of the IDEA^{xliii}) for students to be educated in the general education setting wherever possible, because it could direct funding toward teaching positions that might otherwise be spent on accommodations that could help students succeed in the general education classroom.

Table 3: Five states use a Resource-Based system.

State	Has supplemental high-cost funding
Delaware	N
Hawaii ^{xliiv}	N
Mississippi	N
Tennessee	N
Virginia	N

4. Census-Based

Census-Based systems are distinct not for their distribution method but for their way of determining the amount of special education funding required. Census-Based systems calculate their allocations based on each district's full enrollment count rather than on a tally of students identified as disabled. The state assumes a set percentage of students in each district will require special education services and provides funding in accordance with that assumption. The funding can be distributed as a per student dollar amount, expressed as either a multiplier of the base allocation or a fixed amount, as in a student-weight system; it can also be received in the form of staff or other resource units, earned through set student-unit ratios, as in a Resource-Based system.

The chief benefit of Census-Based systems is they are, by far, the easiest and most efficient to administer. States need collect no separate data at all from districts in order to provide their special education funding, and can provide said funding at the same time as all other state education monies, without any delay between district outlays and receipts. The amounts are not affected by changes in students' diagnoses or educational plans, so there is never any mid-year course correction required. Census-Based systems also eliminate the incentive to over-identify students with disabilities, because no additional state funding would come as a result.

The primary challenge posed by Census-Based systems is they bear no necessary relationship to actual costs, so districts risk incurring very large deficits if they have larger-than-average special education populations or students with especially expensive needs. As a result, districts may be incentivized to under-identify students with disabilities so as to avoid being legally required to provide services.

Table 4: Eight states use a Census-Based system.

State ^{xlv}	Has supplemental high-cost funding
Alabama	N
Alaska	Y
California	N
Idaho	Serious Emotional Disturbance Only
Massachusetts	Y
Montana	Y
New Jersey	Y
North Dakota	Y

Three other states incorporate Census-Based calculations into a hybrid system, as discussed later in this section.

5. Partial Reimbursement

In Partial Reimbursement systems, districts report their special education expenses to the state and receive reimbursement for some portion of those expenses. The reimbursement rate may be prescribed in statute, or it may be the result of prorating the amount of money appropriated by the state for this purpose so districts all receive the same percentage reimbursement for their expenses. (In some cases, the size of the appropriation is insufficient to meet the statutory reimbursement percentage, and reimbursements are prorated regardless of the prescribed rate.) Rates may also differ for different kinds of expenses, and there may be a cap on the total amount of outlays eligible for reimbursement. Payments are generally made in the year after the expenses are incurred to allow time for reporting and processing.

The benefits of the Partial Reimbursement model accrue almost entirely to the state rather than to the district. Under this kind of system, states receive exact accounts of special education costs and are able to plan for their outlays. They are generally able to limit the burden on the state education budget through proration. The model also has the benefit of fairness, in that all districts see the same proportion of special education costs covered by the state.

The challenges posed by the Partial Reimbursement model to districts are the administrative burden of reporting all expenses; the delay in receiving state funding; and the unpredictability, in many cases, of the reimbursement rate. In most iterations, the Partial Reimbursement approach also diminishes the incentive for districts to be efficient with state funds: if an individual district is subject to a reimbursement rate of 50 percent regardless of its expenses, reducing expenses by 10 percent will only yield savings of five percent, making it less worthwhile to do the difficult task of cutting costs.

Table 5: Five states use a Partial Reimbursement system.

State
Kansas
Michigan
Nebraska
Wisconsin
Wyoming

Three other states incorporate Partial Reimbursements into a hybrid system, as discussed later in this section.

6. Block Grant

In Block Grant systems, states receive special education funding that is not tied to particular resource costs, in amounts based on allocations from a previous year. Block Grant systems are useful to states in that they are easy to administer and are highly predictable from a budget standpoint. They offer flexibility to districts in using state funds.

The challenge posed by the Block Grant model is it bears no necessary relationship to costs.

Table 6: One state uses a Block Grant model.

State
Utah

Three other states use Block Grants as a major part of a hybrid system, as discussed later in this section.

7. Combination

In some states, the main mechanism for providing state special education funding includes elements from two of the approaches described above. These states' hybrid systems are described in greater detail in Appendix II.

Table 7: Six states use a combination of funding models.

State	Approach 1	Approach 2
Florida	Multiple Student Weights	Block Grant
Illinois	Census	Partial Reimbursement
Minnesota	Partial Reimbursement	Multiple Student Weights
Pennsylvania	Census	Block Grant
South Dakota	Census	Multiple Student Weights
Vermont	Partial Reimbursement	Block Grant

8. No Separate Special Education Funding

In some states, districts are expected to fund the provision of special education primarily out of their regular per student base allocations, and there is no separate allowance for special education generally. In these states, state funds are set aside only for extremely high-cost or atypical special-needs students, such as those in hospital or residential settings.

Such systems provide the greatest incentive for districts to control special education costs, because any money not spent on special education can be used for other district-level expenses. They also require essentially no state bureaucratic attention to administer.

The clear challenge posed by systems in which special education funding is folded into the base allowance is if states have not properly accounted for special education costs in setting their per student allocations, there may not be enough state money for districts to meet students' needs without incurring large costs themselves. Because the education of special-needs students is protected explicitly by federal law, the general education program may be shortchanged as district money is redirected to special education.

Table 8: Four states have no separate special education funding.

State	Has supplemental high-cost funding
Arkansas	Y
Connecticut	Y
Rhode Island	Y
West Virginia	Y

Best Practices for Special Education Finance Systems

States across the country have experimented with different approaches to funding the education of students with disabilities. A review of special education finance systems across all 50 states reveals no two states fund special education in exactly the same way. While we can divide special education finance systems into categories (as explained above), there are significant differences between states' special education finance systems, even within the same group. Furthermore, as the case studies presented later in this report will demonstrate, no state has found a perfect model for funding special education. However, a comprehensive review of states' special education finance systems (see Appendix II) reveals some best practices in special education funding that should serve as key principles when considering the next generation special education finance systems. Please keep in mind there are inherent tradeoffs between these best practices, and special education funding systems should seek to balance each best practice effectively. (Note: this is not intended to be a complete or exhaustive list of best practices, but rather, it is a group of identified best practices based on our research.)

The following best practices for special education finance systems have been identified:

1. Differentiates funding based on student learning needs.

State education aid for special education services should be differentiated based on student need. There is tremendous variation in the resources that are required to provide students with different disabilities and needs with a free appropriate public education. A state's special education finance system should recognize this variability in cost and attempt to differentiate the funding provided for students with disabilities accordingly. In general, as a student's learning needs increase, funding should increase.

2. Distributes state funding for special education equitably.

Whether part of a weighted student funding formula or existing as a separate funding stream, the special education finance system should distribute resources equitably. As a general rule, lower-wealth districts should receive more state resources than higher-wealth districts to enable them to provide appropriate special education services.

3. Provides school districts with state funding that is consistent and makes local expenses predictable.

Currently, one of the most significant challenges faced by school districts is that special education costs are unpredictable from year to year, wreaking havoc on district budgets. The special education finance system should provide a mechanism for smoothing out the inconsistency and variability of special education costs in individual school districts.

4. Controls costs.

The special education finance system should give all districts a stake in controlling total special education costs, without incentivizing the under or misdiagnosis of students with disabilities.

5. Provides school districts with flexibility and encourages innovation.

School districts should be incentivized to experiment with new ways of providing special education services that result in the effective and efficient delivery of high-quality services.

6. Limits local financial responsibility for students with extraordinary needs.

In every state, a small percentage of students with disabilities have extraordinary needs that impose costs well above the average. State funding models must have a method of limiting local financial responsibility for providing students with extraordinary needs with a free appropriate public education.

In the state case studies that follow, we have evaluated five states' models in light of these best practices.¹ (Note: Each of these states' special education finance systems has been analyzed based on the special education finance system as it appears in each state's statutes and public documents. Due to the inherent challenges of assessing implementation, it was not possible to evaluate these systems as they operate in practice or track deviations from their prescribed procedures.) At the end of the report, there are recommendations for how Connecticut could implement these best practices.

¹ Appendix I contains data and analysis on the four states analyzed in this section, as well as Connecticut, to provide context to the special education populations in each state.

Arizona Case Study

Arizona was chosen as a case study state because special education is incorporated into its weighted student funding formula^{2 xlvii} through an extensive Multiple Student Weights system. While other states use multiple weights for students with disabilities, Arizona's model goes further than other states in its specificity, using 11 special education weights to differentiate funding for students with different disability diagnoses. Notably, Arizona's special education weighting system was designed to be paired with a catastrophic funding reimbursement program for excess costs, similar to Connecticut's Excess Cost grant. However, although the catastrophic fund is written into statute in Arizona, it has not been funded during the past seven years, effectively eliminating that portion of Arizona's special education finance system.

Arizona's Funding Model

Arizona funds students with disabilities through a weighted student funding formula that allocates weights in special education based primarily on students' diagnoses. Arizona begins by weighting the base, or foundation, aid amount for district size and isolation. The adjusted base amount is then multiplied by the special education weight that aligns to the student's diagnosis. Currently, this includes 11 different special education student weights.^{xlvii} The diagnoses and their associated weights are listed in the table below.

Table 9: Special Education Weights^{xlviii}

Diagnosis	Weight ^{xlix}
Hearing Impairment	4.771
Multiple disabilities, autism, and severe intellectual disabilities (Resource)	6.024
Multiple disabilities, autism, and severe intellectual disabilities (Self-Contained)	5.833
Multiple Disabilities Severe Sensory Impairment	7.947
Orthopedic Impairment (Resource)	3.158
Orthopedic Impairment (Self-Contained)	6.773
Preschool-Severe Delayed	3.595
Developmental delay, emotional disabilities, mild intellectual disabilities, a specific learning disability, a speech/language impairment or other health impairments	.003
Emotionally Disabled (Private SpEd Program)	4.822
Moderate Intellectual Disability	4.421
Visual Impairment	4.806

² "This method provides for a base funding amount that is multiplied by a weight for each student. The weight factor varies depending on the perceived level of the student's educational needs. For example, higher funding levels are provided to students enrolled in special education, English Language Learner or at-risk programs."

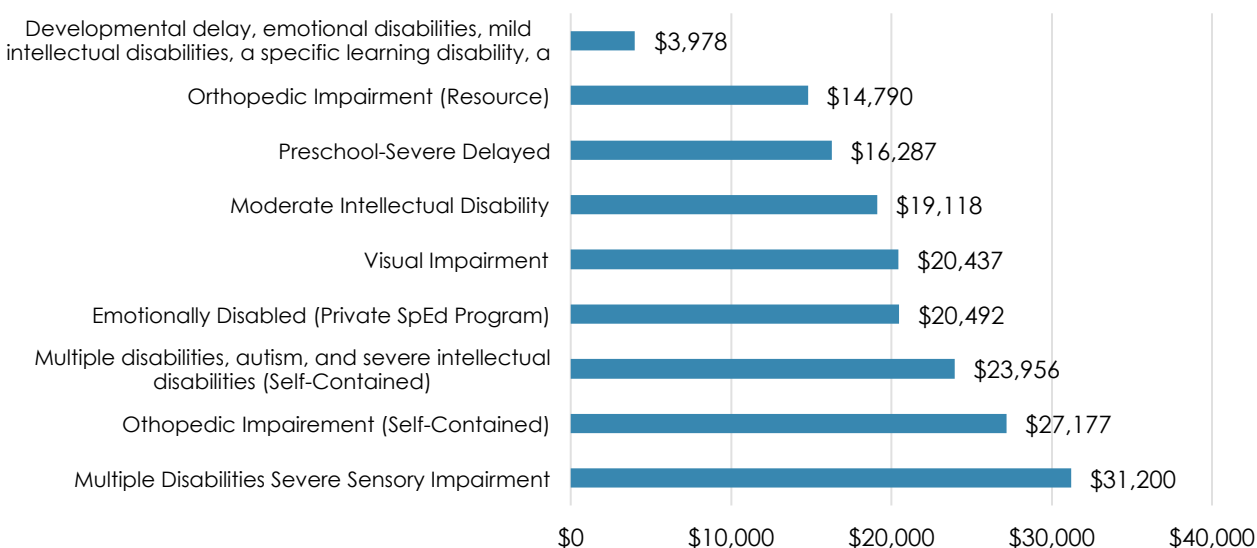
Arizona has attempted to set these weights based on the actual cost of serving students with these diagnoses. These special education weights are derived from the Special Education Cost Study for Fiscal Year 2007, as required by Arizona Revised Statutes (A.R.S.) 15-236, Subsection A.ⁱ According to statute, this Special Education Cost Study is to be completed on a biannual basis, but it does not appear it has been updated since 2007.

Inclusion of Special Education Funding into Arizona's Main Funding Formula

Students with disabilities are included in Arizona's main education equalization aid formula, known as "The Equalization Formula for Funding School Districts and Charters in the State of Arizona," which is intended to provide for the basic instructional and operational functions of schools.ⁱⁱ The amount of funding a school district or charter school receives is based on the district size (small districts may also be weighted for geographic isolation), the grades served, the number of students with special education or language needs, and teacher characteristics (teacher compensation funding only).ⁱⁱⁱ The base support level is determined by multiplying the weighted student count,ⁱⁱⁱⁱ the base level amount, and the teacher experience index. For FY' 15-16, the base level amount (also known as a foundation) was \$3,426.74.^{lv} The following chart details the effective funding per pupil per disability type included in Arizona's state funding formula. Please note the calculations assume a K-8 student in a district with greater than 600 students and a Teacher Experience Index of 1 (which indicates a district where teacher experience levels match the state average).^{3 iv}

Effective Funding Per Pupil in Arizona

Chart 1: Effective Funding Per Pupil



³ Because of these assumptions, the effective funding presented in this chart does not match the effective funding in the Special Education Funding Models section.

Special Education Funding Outside Arizona's Main Formula

In addition to including weights for students with disabilities in the main education equalization aid formula, the State of Arizona also provides the Special Education Fund, which funds students at both state and private placements. These placements include the Arizona Schools for the Deaf and the Blind, the Arizona State Hospital, developmentally disabled programs administered by the Department of Economic Security, and private residential facilities when a student is placed there by a state agency.^{lvi}

Funding for special education transportation is also included as a portion of the regular education Transportation Support Level, which provides equalization aid based on the transportation needs of the school district. This special education aid is intended to cover transportation costs to extended-year programs for children with disabilities.^{lvii} (Note: This additional aid is strictly for extended-year programs for children with disabilities—no additional aid for school-year special education transportation costs exists.) The per-mile factor used in calculating this support is identical to that of the regular education Transportation Support Level.^{lviii}

Arizona statute also contains a provision for a Catastrophic Special Education Fund, which is intended to fund the cost of serving students with extraordinary special education needs. According to statute, schools may apply to an advisory committee to receive funding and must document the services required and provide evidence that the district is not able to absorb the costs of these services.^{lix} Schools must also provide evidence that the additional aid provided through the Catastrophic Special Education Fund will not supplant federal, local, or other state efforts.^{lx} However, Arizona did not fund the Catastrophic Special Education Fund between 2008 and 2015, rendering it non-operational.^{lxi} In addition, this program, when funded, is not available to charter schools in Arizona.^{lxii}

Arizona Best Practices Analysis

This section analyzes Arizona's special education finance system based on the best practices previously outlined.

1. **Differentiates funding based on student learning needs:** Arizona's weighted student funding formula provides funding based on the diagnosis of special education students. The diagnosis-based funding formula weights are determined by a cost study. School districts that serve students with higher need—as measured by special education diagnoses—will receive more state aid to provide appropriate services for these students.
2. **Distributes state funding for special education equitably:** Arizona equalizes all education aid, including special education aid, based on community wealth. To accomplish this, the legislature sets a Qualifying Tax Rate for each district, which, when subtracted from the revenue control limit, results in higher state aid to districts with less property wealth.

- 3. Provides school districts with state funding that is consistent and makes local expenses predictable:** Arizona's weighting system for students with disabilities means Arizona school districts know how much funding they will receive for special education students in their district, based on their diagnoses, as the amount of special education aid a district receives is tied to the number of students with disabilities it serves. However, the cost study that links diagnoses weights to costs has not been updated since 2007. This means the current weights are not reflective of changes that have occurred in the cost of delivering special education services, which may mean school districts need to contribute more local funding to special education costs. However, Arizona's special education finance system does not have a mechanism for making local special education expenses predictable from year to year, or limiting districts' liability for special education costs. This is exacerbated by the fact that Arizona's legislature has not provided any funding for its Catastrophic Special Education Fund since 2008, which means the costs of providing services for students with disabilities with exceptional needs fall to local public school districts.
- 4. Controls costs:** As part of the weighted student funding formula, special education costs are controlled using the same mechanism used to control overall education spending. Namely, all weighted student funding (including special education funding) is subject to the revenue control limit (RCL), which is calculated by multiplying the weighted student count by the base support level amount. The RCL limits the amount a district can budget for non-capital (general operating) expenses, which includes employee salaries and benefits.^{lxiii} Arizona does not take additional steps to limit the over-identification or over-classification of students with disabilities.
- 5. Provides school districts with flexibility and encourages innovation:** Arizona allows districts to spend funding they receive through the weighted student funding formula flexibly, as long as they comply with IDEA's maintenance of effort requirement.^{lxiv} Arizona's special education finance system does not explicitly encourage districts to innovate.
- 6. Limits local financial responsibility for students with extraordinary needs:** Arizona state law provides for a Catastrophic Special Education Fund; however, it has not been funded since 2008, essentially rendering it non-functional.

Florida Case Study

Florida was chosen as a case study state because the state has incorporated special education into its weighted student funding formula using a model-of-service approach. Unlike Arizona, which weights students based on their diagnoses, Florida's model attempts to connect its weighting system to the services a student is actually receiving. Additionally, the Florida model attempts to control costs by only allocating per pupil funding for high-need students rather than for all students with disabilities. Instead of providing specific weights for low-need students with disabilities, the state provides a block grant to districts that is intended to pay for special education services for these lower-need students. Florida also includes a statewide weighted full-time equivalent (FTE) cap for intensive models of service in an attempt to limit over-identification of students.

Florida's Funding Model

Florida funds "Exceptional Student Education (ESE)"—which includes both students with disabilities and gifted students—using a combination of multiple student weights, which are based on model of service, and a block grant. The special education weights are incorporated into the weighted student funding formula used to distribute education equalization aid to schools and districts, while the block grant, intended to fund low-need students with disabilities, is distributed independently of the weighted student funding formula.

In Florida, the support level required for each student identified as having a disability is set by the student's IEP. Each student's "need intensity" is determined based on the services the student receives, rather than the student's specific diagnosis or disability category. Florida has five different need intensity categories, ranging from Level 1 to Level 5. Weights are applied for students who fall within the two highest levels of need intensity (Levels 4 and 5). The weighted FTE student count is calculated by applying the appropriate weight to the number of FTE students within each category before summing the total count. In contrast, services for students who fall in the three lowest levels of need intensity (Levels 1-3) are funded by a separate block grant. Additionally, small school districts are eligible to receive supplemental funding to provide high-cost special education services.^{lxv}

Florida's need support Levels are as follows:

Table 10: Support Levels & Descriptions^{lxvi}

Level (Program Code)	Description
1 (251)	Level 1 indicates the student requires no services or assistance beyond those normally available to all students. "Services or assistance normally available to all students" refers to the education, health, and other services and assistance made available to all students in the educational setting. These include

routine administration of medication, school-wide curricula, an appropriate learning environment with qualified instructional personnel, and standard materials and equipment.

- 2 (252) Level 2 indicates the student is receiving assistance on a periodic basis or receives minor supports, assistance, or services.
- 3 (253) Level 3 indicates the student is receiving accommodations to the learning environment that are more complex, or is receiving services on a more frequent schedule.
- 4 (254) Level 4 indicates for the majority of learning activities, the student is receiving specialized approaches, assistance or equipment, or is receiving more extensive modifications to the learning environment. Services received on a daily basis are generally included at this level.
- 5 (255) Level 5 indicates the student is receiving continuous and intense (one-on-one or very small group) assistance, multiple services, or substantial modifications for the majority of learning activities.

In 2013-14 the distribution of FTE students across the five support Levels was as follows: ^{lxvii}

Table 11: Distribution of FTE Students by Support Level, 2013-14

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
27.9%	42.2%	25.7%	3.5%	0.8%

Inclusion of Special Education Funding into Florida's Main Funding Formula

Florida's education equalization aid weighted student funding formula begins by multiplying the FTE students by the program cost factors to calculate the weighted full-time equivalent students (WFTE) count. A basic FTE student is considered to be a student in grades 4-12 who is in school for 900 hours of instruction. Special education is one of the cost factors used to calculate WFTE, along with English for speakers of other languages and career education. The bulk of the aid for special education comes from the cost factors for support Levels 4 and 5.

To limit incentives to over-identification, Florida sets a statewide FTE cap each year. The FTE cap is based on estimates of FTE students who are known to require what the state calls "Group 2" programs (Support Levels 4 and 5, English for Speakers of Other Languages, and Grades 9-12 Career Education Programs). When a district reports an

actual FTE that exceeds the cap, the district receives only basic funding (with a weight of 1.0) for students over the cap.⁴

In addition, small districts with fewer than 10,000 FTE students, and fewer than three FTE students in ESE support Levels 4 and 5, are eligible to receive supplemental ESE funding.⁵ This supplement is applied only when the commissioner has seen documented evidence of the difference in cost of the service and Florida Educational Finance Program (FEFP) funding.^{lxviii}

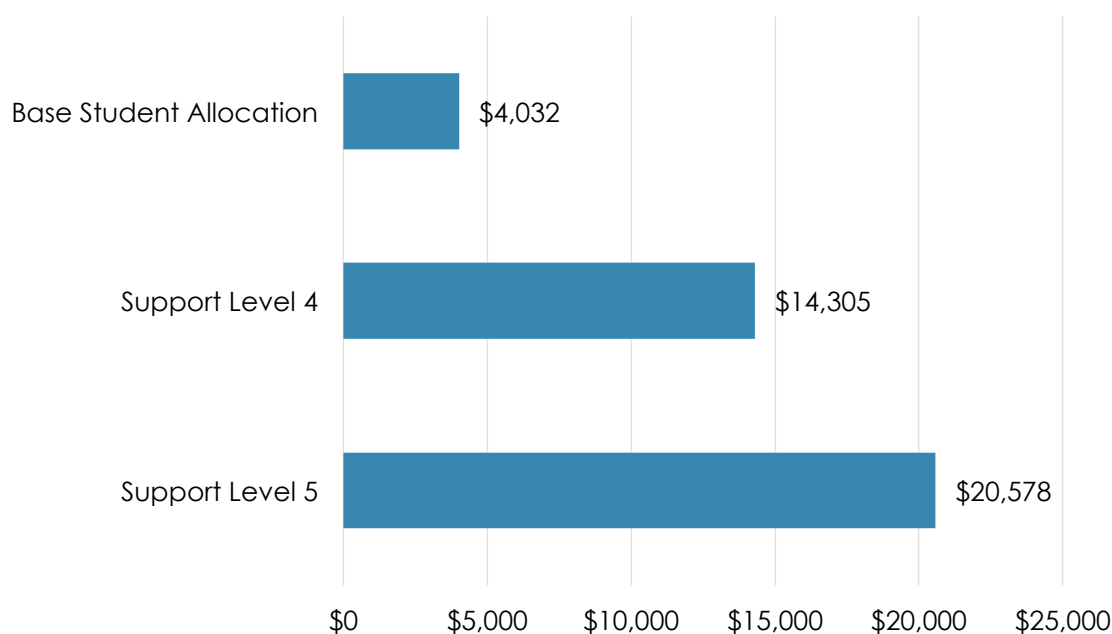
The WFTE is then multiplied by the Base Student Allocation (BSA) and by the District Cost Differential (DCD), an adjustment for regional cost differences, to arrive at the base funding amount.^{lxix}

Florida's Effective Formula Funding Per Student

The following figures do not take into account DCD adjustments:

- The 2014-15 Base Student Allocation (BSA) is \$4,032.
- The 2014-15 amount for a student in support Level 4 (254) is $\$4,032 \times 3.548$, or \$14,305.
- The 2014-15 amount for a student in support Level 5 (255) is $\$4,032 \times 5.104$, or \$20,578.

Chart 2: Funding by Pupil Type, 2014-15



⁴ The statewide WFTE cap for FY' 2014-15 is 336,158.27.

⁵ This supplement is limited to the statewide value of 43.35 WFTE students.

Special Education Funding Outside Florida's Main Formula

In Florida's education finance system, there are many supplements and program funding amounts added to the base funding amount to calculate the final Gross State and Local Funding Amount, known as the Florida Educational Finance Program (FEFP). One of these additions is the block grant known as the Exceptional Student Education (ESE) Guaranteed Allocation.⁶ This supplement funds ESE services for students in support Levels 1-3. These students are already included in the calculation of the basic funding amount using the basic program weight for their grade level, but this supplement provides for the additional services needed by students in these support levels. The total amount of funding in the ESE Guaranteed Allocation is based on the funding levels in 2000-01, when the allocation was created, and adjusted based on the yearly change in the total number of students in support Levels 1, 2, and 3, rather than as separate programs.^{lxx}

Florida Best Practices Analysis

This section analyzes Florida's special education finance system based on the best practices outlined previously.

1. **Differentiates funding based on student learning needs:** Florida's weighted student funding formula provides funding based on the models of special education students, with different models of service resulting in different funding levels. School districts serving students with higher needs—as measured by the distribution of special education models of service—will receive more state aid to provide appropriate services for these students.
2. **Distributes state funding for special education equitably:** Florida's weighted student funding model equalizes state education aid based on a municipality's property wealth by subtracting required local effort (determined by a local millage rate set by the certified tax roll) from the gross FEFP amount.
3. **Provides school districts with state funding that is consistent and makes local expenses predictable:** Florida's weighting system for students with disabilities means Florida school districts know how much funding they will receive for special education students in their district, based on the students' support Levels. The amount of special education aid districts receive is tied to the number of students with disabilities the district serves. In addition, the block grant (the ESE Guaranteed Allocation amount) does not vary based on the number of students receiving services, which means special education funding is only directly tied to students in Levels 4 and 5. However, Florida's special education finance system does not have a mechanism for making special education costs predictable from year to year or limiting districts' liability for special education costs.

⁶ The total appropriation for this supplement was \$950,781,688 for FY' 2014-15.

- 4. Controls costs:** Florida's special education finance system does provide mechanisms to control costs. By funding lower-need special education students through a block grant (the ESE Guaranteed Allocation amount), the state does not incentivize districts to over-identify students as needing special education services. Additionally, annual adjustments to the ESE Guaranteed Allocation amount are small, and are tied to historical precedent rather than actual costs. As a result, the ESE Guaranteed Allocation provides a consistent stream of funding to districts that is not driven by changes in their identification rate. Finally, the statewide FTE cap for students in Group 2 programs (high-need students) discourages districts from classifying students at Levels 4 or 5 in order to receive increased funding.
- 5. Provides school districts with flexibility and encourages innovation:** Other than requiring districts spend 90 percent of special education formula aid on special education costs, Florida allows districts flexibility to spend funding they receive through the weighted student funding formula.^{lxxi} However, Florida's special education finance system does not explicitly encourage districts to innovate.
- 6. Limits local financial responsibility for students with extraordinary needs:** Florida does not have a catastrophic fund or high-risk pool to limit local liability for students whose needs result in extraordinary costs. However, Group 2 program students receive per student weighted funding and do not need to be educated out of the same block grant that funds low-need special education students, so within the context of Florida's system, higher needs do generate higher funding from the state.

Massachusetts Case Study

Massachusetts was studied because of its track record of high student achievement (see Appendix I), its census special education funding model, and its relative geographic and demographic similarity to Connecticut. Massachusetts incorporates special education funding into its education equalization aid formula by using a census model that assumes numbers of students with disabilities rather than counting actual enrollments. Massachusetts also uses an excess cost grant similar to Connecticut's Excess Cost grant to reimburse districts for catastrophic special education expenditures.

Massachusetts' Funding Model

Massachusetts funds students with disabilities at the state level through a census funding model as part of the education equalization aid formula for local education agencies, which is known as "Chapter 70 Aid."^{lxxii} Notably, special education funding is the sole part of the Chapter 70 Aid formula that uses a census counting model. Massachusetts' general weighted student funding formula works a bit differently than funding formulas in the other states discussed in this report. Massachusetts, instead of weighting an overall foundation amount based on the number of students in particular categories, uses a formula that weights the costs of individual resources. Therefore, the per pupil costs associated with teachers, benefits, materials, professional development, etc. (known as "functions") are not constant from student to student. Instead, each input has a different cost for every category of students. Categories of students defined for this purpose include but are not limited to: regular or special education elementary; regular or special education high school; limited English 1-12; and vocational education 9-12. Districts are funded for the line-item costs associated with the makeup of their particular student bodies. Above and beyond these allocations, districts also receive flat amounts (rather than weighted amounts) for students in other categories, such as low-income students and students in certain types of Special Education placements.^{lxxiii}

^{lxxiv}

Massachusetts incorporates funding for students with disabilities into Chapter 70 Aid by assigning greater values to those "functions" in which students with disabilities need additional resources. (For more information on census funding systems, please see the above section, titled "Special Education Funding Models.")

Student Count

The census funding model does not tie funding to the actual number of students within a local education agency, or school, that receive special education services. The Chapter 70 Aid formula assumes that 3.75 percent of non-vocational students in grades 1-12, and 4.75 percent of vocational students, are full-time equivalent special education students for the calculation of local education aid.^{lxxv} Massachusetts determined these percentages in FY' 1994, the first year in which Massachusetts used a foundation formula.^{lxxvi} At that time, the state assumed a special education incidence of 14 percent, with students receiving services 25 percent of the time on average. This resulted in a 3.5 percent full-time equivalent student count, which has since been raised

to 3.75 percent. The vocational full-time equivalent of 4.75 percent is derived from the non-vocational calculation with the assumption that special education incidence in vocational students is higher than in non-vocational students.^{lxxvii} Out-of-district aid for outplaced students is calculated by assuming that one percent of the foundation enrollment is full-time equivalent student counts.^{7 lxxviii} This percentage was determined by the state average percentage of out-of-district placements in the first iteration of the foundation formula in FY' 1994.^{lxxix}

Massachusetts' Effective Funding Per Student

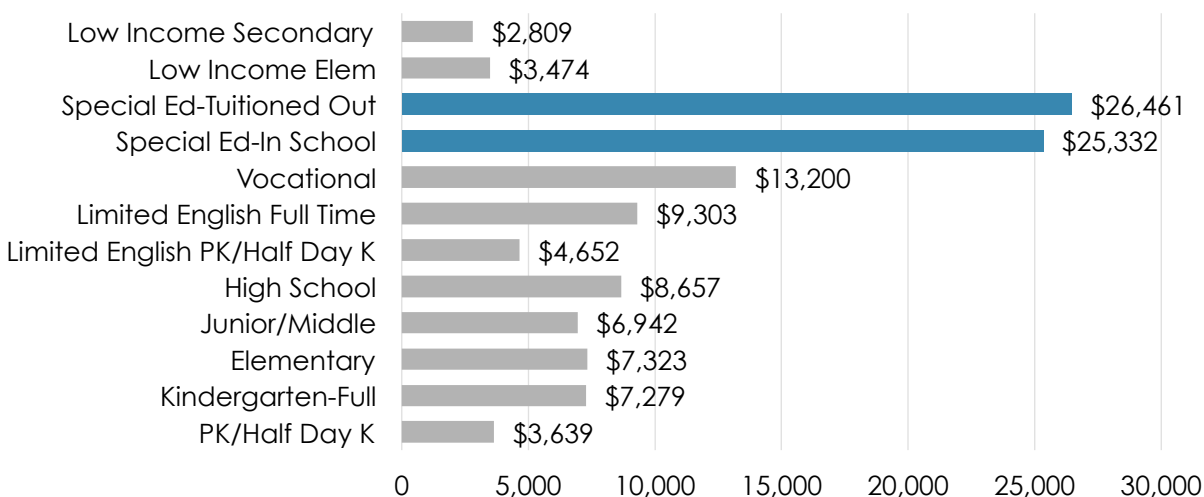
Using the above calculation for special education full-time equivalent students, the effective funding per FTE for FY' 2016 is given below:

In-District Placement (assumed 3.75 percent of non-vocational, 4.75 percent of vocational): \$25,332

Out-of-District Placement (assumed one percent of foundation enrollment): \$26,461

While these amounts appear to be high compared to the other per pupil foundation budget rates, it is important to keep in mind the calculation assumes a relatively low percentage of students are identified as having disabilities, and is calculated at the full-time equivalent, rather than the individual, student level. Below is a chart comparing the additional funding for the different student types included in the Chapter 70 Aid formula.^{lxxx} Please note Massachusetts only uses the census methodology in the calculation of student counts for special education. All amounts for other student types listed below are based on tallies of actual students.

Chart 3: FY' 2016 Foundation Budget Rates



⁷ Full-time equivalent students are not equal to student counts. Full-time equivalent student counts are calculated by summing the time each student spends receiving special education services as a percent of total time spent in school, while special education student counts consider each student receiving special education services as one student, regardless of the amount of services received.

Special Education Funding Outside Massachusetts' Main Formula

Outside of Chapter 70 Aid, Massachusetts reimburses school districts for a portion of the costs of educating extraordinarily high-needs special education pupils. This program, called the Special Education Circuit Breaker, reimburses a portion of local costs above a threshold, with the formula changing each year depending on the state's line item appropriation of funding, as well as the claim level.^{lxxxix} The threshold is created by calculating the average foundation budget per pupil as provided by Chapter 70 and then multiplying that average by four. The state is projected to pay 75 percent of the cost of educating a special education student over this threshold, subject to line-item appropriation and reimbursement need.^{lxxxii}

This program was started in 2004 in recognition of the cost of educating extraordinarily high-needs students with disabilities.^{lxxxiii} While this allocation may be altered in the future due to funding constraints, the reimbursement rate averaged 73 percent between FY' 2011 and FY' 2014.^{lxxxiv} In addition to the Circuit Breaker program, the "extraordinary relief program" assists school districts that experience a significant increase in the costs of educating students with disabilities. This program is funded up to \$5 million.^{lxxxv} The eligibility criterion is a 25 percent or greater increase in special education expenses over the district's prior fiscal year.^{lxxxvi}

Massachusetts Best Practices Analysis

This section analyzes Massachusetts's special education finance system based on the best practices outlined previously.

1. **Differentiates funding based on student learning needs:** Massachusetts assumes a certain FTE percentage in each district is students with disabilities (in-district and outplaced students), and provides additional funding for these two student types. It does not provide additional differentiation, so districts with higher percentages of students with disabilities will not receive greater funding under Chapter 70 due to the census-based methodology for counting funded students.
2. **Distributes state funding for special education equitably:** The Chapter 70 education finance program calculates a target local contribution using local property and income wealth, to which special education funding (which is part of Chapter 70) is subject. The target local contribution results in more state aid for lower-wealth districts.
3. **Provides school districts with state funding that is consistent and makes local expenses predictable:** The census method of providing FTE percentages of school district enrollment allows districts to accurately forecast funding. In addition, the cost factors that provide the total funding amount per student are based on historical amounts and adjusted for inflation, which adds to predictability.
4. **Controls costs:** By using a census method, rather than an actual enrollment count, Massachusetts disincentivizes the over-identification or over-classification

of students with disabilities. Additionally, because the FTE percentages are stable, the State of Massachusetts can accurately forecast the total cost of the program to the state. Finally, the cost factors are linked to inflation, rather than actual costs, which provides a method for ensuring budgets do not outpace inflation.

5. Provides school districts with flexibility and encourages innovation:

Massachusetts allows districts to spend flexibility the funding they receive through the weighted student funding formula. Additionally, there are no specific spending or reporting requirements for the Chapter 70 funding provided for special education.^{lxxxvii} Massachusetts' special education finance system does not explicitly encourage districts to innovate.

6. Limits local financial responsibility for students with extraordinary needs: The Special Education Circuit Breaker program is intended to limit the financial responsibility of local districts in the case of students with extraordinary needs.

New York Case Study

New York was chosen as a case study state due to the state's utilization of a single student weight for funding special education in its main formula aid to local districts, and because it is a regional peer of Connecticut. New York also uses a high-cost formula in the same vein as Connecticut's Excess Cost grant but explicitly includes a wealth measure in determining eligibility levels for reimbursement.

New York's Funding Model

New York uses a single student weight model to allocate funding for special education. Since 2007-08, all students receiving special education services have generated the same level of funding within this formula, regardless of the intensity of service they receive. Currently, students with disabilities are given a funding weight of 1.41 above the foundational amount, or 2.41 times the foundation amount that applies to general education students. In addition, declassified students who received special education during the previous school year but have transitioned to general education, receive an additional weight of .5 above the foundation aid amount.^{lxxxviii} New York provides additional special education funding through the Public High Cost, or Excess Cost Aid for Special Education, grant. This additional funding takes effect when the cost to educate a student with a disability exceeds either one of two criteria: \$10,000 or four times the approved operating expense per pupil from two years prior.^{lxxxix}

New York's Student Counts

New York has relatively broad criteria for determining whether a student qualifies to receive weighted funding for special education in the state's funding formula. To be counted as a weighted foundation pupil with disabilities (WFPWD) a student must require one of the following services from the school district:^{xc}

- A. Placement for 60 percent or more of the school day in a special class, or
- B. Home or hospital instruction for a period of more than 60 days, or
- C. Special services or programs for more than 60 percent of the school day, or
- D. Placement for 20 percent or more of the school week in a resource room or requiring special services or programs including related services for 20 percent or more of the school week; or in the case of pupils in grades 7-12, or a multi-level middle school program as defined by the commissioner, or in the case of pupils in grades 4-6 in an elementary school operating on a period basis, the equivalent of five periods per week, but not less than the equivalent of 180 minutes in a resource room or in other special services or programs including related services, or
- E. At least two hours per week of direct or indirect consultant teacher services

If a student is classified as a WFPWD based on the above criteria, the student will count as one pupil, without regard to full-time equivalent student status. The final WFPWD count used in New York's funding formula for a given year is always based on student counts from two years prior, so in 2014-15, the WFPWD used in calculating the Total

Aidable Foundation Pupil Units (TAFPU) was the number of qualifying special education students from 2012-13.^{xcii}

Inclusion of Special Education Funding into New York's Main Funding Formula

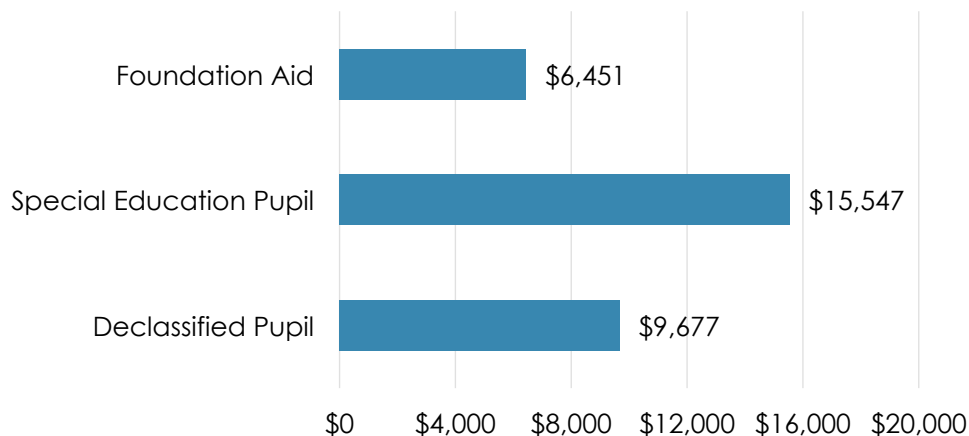
The starting point for New York's education funding formula, known as Foundation Aid, is a foundation amount "based on updated statistical analysis of the costs of general education instruction in successful school districts."^{xcii} This number is then adjusted for inflation; the district's proportions of low-income students and English Language Learners; sparsity; and regional cost differences.^{xciii} The result is called the Adjusted Foundation Amount (AFA).

Once the AFA is established, special education funding is included in the funding formula. The AFA is applied to a student count, known as the Total Aidable Foundation Pupil Units (TAFPU), which incorporates students with disabilities in two ways. First, students with disabilities are included in the Average Daily Membership (ADM) value (with attendance weighted by the fraction of the school day they are enrolled in public school programs). Second, students with disabilities are counted in the Weighted Foundation Pupils with Disabilities (WFPWD) value. Students who meet the qualifying criteria listed above receive a weight of 1.41 for the WFPWD, resulting in a total weight of 2.41 times the foundation amount. In addition, students who are in their first year of a full-time general education program after having been in a special education program (declassified), are given an additional weight of .5 for the WFPWD, resulting in a total weight of 1.5.^{xciv}

Effective Funding Per Student

- The 2014-15 foundation amount for a general education student is \$6,451.
- The 2014-15 amount for a dual enrolled special education student is \$6,451 x 2.41, or \$15,547.
- The 2014-15 amount for a declassified pupil (a pupil in their first year of a full-time general education program after having been in a special education program) is $\$6,451 \times 1.5 = \$9,677$.

(These figures reflect weighting for special education only and do not take into account adjustments for regional cost or proportions of low-income students and English Language Learners.)

Chart 4: Funding by Pupil Type, 2014-15

Special Education Funding Outside New York's Main Formula

There is a separate source of state aid, known as Public High Cost Aid/Excess Cost Aid, which affects special education funding. This aid is intended to provide for extraordinary special education costs, when the cost of educating a student exceeds either \$10,000 or four times the approved operating expense per pupil from two years prior. The Public High Cost Aid formula is as follows:^{xcv}

Public High Cost Aid = [Annualized Educational Cost - (3 X 2012-13 Approved Operating Expense/Total Aidable Pupil Units)] X Excess Cost Aid Ratio X 2013-14 FTE Enrollment of each High Cost Student.

The Excess Cost Ratio is an adjustment based on local wealth levels.

There also exists a Private High Cost Aid, which reimburses school districts for students placed by the district's Committee on Special Education in a private education program or Special Act school district.^{xcvi} The Private High Cost Aid formula is as follows^{xcvii}:

- Approved Tuition Paid - Basic Contribution = Aidable Excess Cost
- Aidable Excess Cost X Private Excess Cost Aid Ratio X FTE of each pupil in the base year = Private Excess Cost Aid per pupil – (Combined Wealth Ratio X 0.15) = Private Excess Cost Ratio (minimum ratio = 0.50)
- Total Aid = the sum of aid for all pupils.

Finally, New York requires districts set aside a portion of their foundation aid, known as the Public Excess Cost Setaside, to fund special education. Although no aid is provided from the state for this purpose, the state requirement ensures districts meet federal maintenance of effort requirements.^{xcviii}

New York Best Practices Analysis

This section analyzes New York's special education finance system based on the best practices outlined previously.

1. **Differentiates funding based on student learning needs:** New York's single special education weight applies to a variety of special education need levels, but it does not provide different weights for different needs. Therefore, districts with higher percentages of students with disabilities will receive greater amounts of funding. However, because New York uses a single weight, it does not differentiate funding based on student learning needs.
2. **Distributes state funding for special education equitably:** New York equalizes education aid by including an Income Wealth Index in the Foundation Aid program to determine an expected minimum local contribution per pupil, which provides higher levels of state funding for lower-wealth districts. In addition, the High Cost Aid program for extraordinary special education needs includes a wealth measure to provide greater support to less wealthy districts.
3. **Provides school districts with state funding that is consistent and makes local expenses predictable:** New York's single special education weight means funding corresponds to the number of students with disabilities in a given district, and districts know how much funding they will receive for each special education student. However, New York's special education finance system does not have a mechanism for making special education costs predictable from year to year. New York does limit districts' liability for special education costs through the High Cost Aid formula.
4. **Controls costs:** By only providing a single special education weight, New York eliminates the incentive for districts to classify students as needing more services than they actually require. Additionally, the inclusion of a weight for declassified students helps to soften the financial impact of declassifying students as requiring special education services. However, New York's system does not disincentivize the over-identification of students with disabilities. The state limits its liability for extraordinary special education costs through the Public Excess Cost Setaside, which requires districts to set aside foundation aid to pay for excess costs.
5. **Provides school districts with flexibility and encourages innovation:** Other than the Public Excess Cost Setaside, which requires districts to put aside a portion of their foundation aid to fund special education, New York does not have any spending or reporting requirements for special education funding within the foundation aid formula.^{xcix}
6. **Limits local financial responsibility for students with extraordinary needs:** The High Cost Aid formula provides additional funds when the cost of educating a pupil exceeds certain thresholds, limiting local liability for extraordinary costs. In addition, this formula includes a wealth adjustment that provides more aid to higher-need school districts.

Analysis of Connecticut's Alignment with Best Practices & Policy Recommendations

Connecticut's special education finance system has been evaluated for alignment with the six best practices highlighted in this report. Additionally, recommendations for policy changes Connecticut can implement to better align the next generation of special education funding to these best practices have been outlined. Please keep in mind there are inherent tradeoffs between these best practices, and special education funding systems should seek to balance each best practice effectively.

1. **Differentiates funding based on student learning needs.**

State education aid for special education services should be differentiated based on student need. There is tremendous variation in the resources required to provide students with different disabilities and needs with a free appropriate public education. A state's special education finance system should recognize this variability in cost and attempt to differentiate the funding provided for students with disabilities accordingly. In general, as a student's learning needs increase, funding should increase.

Analysis of Connecticut's alignment with this best practice: Connecticut has "incorporated" funding for students with disabilities into the foundation amount of the ECS formula. Other than providing partial funding for students with exceptional needs through the Excess Cost grant, Connecticut does not provide differentiated funding for students with disabilities. Instead, districts are expected to cover the costs of educating these students through general operating funds. Furthermore, Connecticut has stopped using the ECS formula to distribute education equalization aid to districts.^c

How Connecticut can achieve this goal: Differentiation should tie the funding a special education student receives to the services that student receives through a system that classifies students based on model of service, or as a proxy, based on the hours required by the student's IEP. (This is preferable to tying special education funding to a student's diagnosis, because two students diagnosed with the same disability can require very different services, depending on each student's unique needs.) The special education funding system should use weights that increase as the cost of providing services increase. Alternatively, the system could reimburse based on actual costs.

2. Distributes state funding for special education equitably.

Whether part of a weighted student funding formula or existing as a separate funding stream, the special education finance system should distribute resources equitably. As a general rule, lower-wealth districts should receive more state resources than higher-wealth districts to enable them to provide appropriate special education services.

Analysis of Connecticut's alignment with this best practice: School districts serving higher-need students do not receive more state aid through the ECS formula to provide appropriate services for these students. The ECS formula's Base Aid Ratio is designed to distribute a higher state share percentage to communities with less income and property wealth; however, the state has stopped using the ECS formula to distribute education aid to districts. In addition to the ECS grant, Connecticut has a Special Education Excess Cost grant, which provides reimbursements for extraordinary special education costs (note: although the ECS formula is no longer being used to distribute funding to school districts, the Excess Cost grant continues to be in effect). Eligibility for Excess Cost grant reimbursement is based on a multiple of the district's per pupil spending, and as a result, districts with lower per pupil expenditures have a lower eligibility threshold for reimbursement. However, because there is no correlation between student need and per pupil spending, this does not necessarily result in higher need districts receiving more Excess Cost aid.

How Connecticut can achieve this goal: Community wealth should explicitly be taken into account in determining the distribution of state special education aid, whether this aid is included in an overall state equalization formula or exists separately.

3. Provides school districts with state funding that is consistent and makes local expenses predictable.

Currently, one of the most significant challenges faced by school districts is that special education costs are unpredictable from year to year, wreaking havoc on district budgets. The special education finance system should provide a mechanism for smoothing out the inconsistency and variability of special education costs in individual school districts.

Analysis of Connecticut's alignment with this best practice: Connecticut currently does not have any mechanisms in place to ensure district funding is consistent and expenses are predictable. As the ECS formula is not currently being faithfully implemented, and student need varies from year to year, school districts are unable to predict their funding levels or special education costs in advance.

How Connecticut can achieve this goal: Special education costs should be aggregated, either at the state or regional level, to increase the total pool of students, which will have the effect of "smoothing out" the inconsistency and variability of special education costs in individual school districts. Alternatively, the state could use an equitable method to establish a ceiling for special

education costs, and once a district exceeds its ceiling, the district would be reimbursed for 100 percent of its special education costs above that amount. Additionally, the special education finance system should allow districts to know what their local contribution to special education costs will be by January of the prior school year so they can accurately account for special education costs as part of the open and transparent budgeting process.

4. Controls costs.

The special education finance system should give all districts a stake in controlling total special education costs, without incentivizing the under or misdiagnosis of students with disabilities.

Analysis of Connecticut's alignment with this best practice: Since school districts receive no separate special education funds and must draw on general foundation funding to support the provision of special education, they have a very large stake in controlling special education costs. Connecticut's special education system does not incentivize over-identification or over-classification of students with disabilities.

How Connecticut can achieve this goal: Connecticut's current lack of separate special education funding provides a strong incentive to control costs but has other downsides. In any new special education funding system, districts should be allowed to retain in their budgets a portion of savings achieved through more efficient delivery of special education services. Additionally, the special education funding system should disincentivize the over-identification of students as having disabilities, or the over-classification of students with disabilities into a higher need category, by establishing a normal range for identification and classification, and requesting documentation from districts that fall outside of that range to ensure identification and classification rates accurately reflect the students being served.

5. Provides school districts with flexibility and encourages innovation.

School districts should be incentivized to experiment with new ways of providing special education services that result in the effective and efficient delivery of high-quality services.

Analysis of Connecticut's alignment with this best practice: Connecticut does not currently require specific portions of the ECS grant be spent on special education, allowing flexibility in service delivery. Connecticut does not provide incentives to local districts to partner with additional districts or regional service providers to innovate and reduce costs.

How Connecticut can achieve this goal: In order to achieve this goal, districts should be provided with a flexible stream of special education funding that is not based on staffing ratios or other fixed models. Districts must also be given the freedom to partner with other LEAs or service providers of their choosing to reduce costs. Finally, districts should be allowed to retain in their budgets a

portion of savings achieved through more efficient delivery of special education services.

6. Limits local financial responsibility for students with extraordinary needs.

In every state, a small percentage of students with disabilities have extraordinary needs that impose costs well above the average. State funding models must have a method of limiting local financial responsibility for providing students with extraordinary needs with a free appropriate public education.

Analysis of Connecticut's alignment with this best practice: Connecticut's Excess Cost grant currently exists to limit local financial responsibility for students with extraordinary needs. However, the Excess Cost grant is not fully funded, which results in prorated reimbursements to school districts.

How Connecticut can achieve this goal: Connecticut must have a method of limiting local financial responsibility for providing students with extraordinary needs with a free appropriate public education. In order to achieve this goal, the special education finance system should have a fully funded high-risk pool that reimburses local communities for these costs.

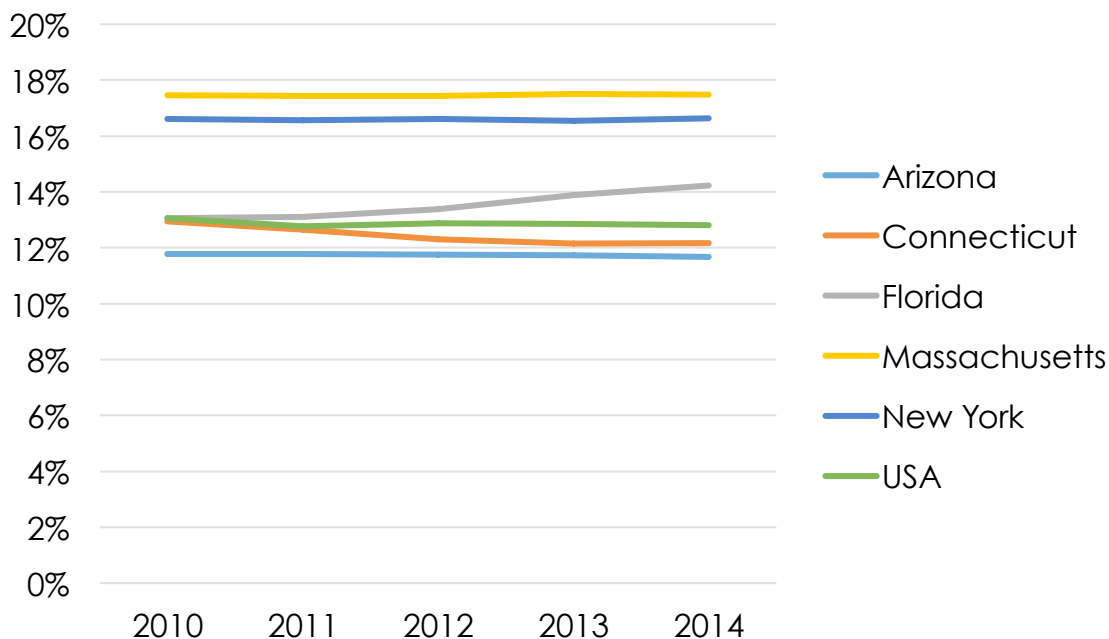
Appendices

Please find in Appendix I data regarding the students with disabilities populations, and associated funding, in the case study states analyzed in this paper. Please also find in Appendix II descriptions of the state special education funding models used in each state in the country for a more descriptive view than described in the special education funding models classification overview.

Appendix I: Case Study State Data

This section is intended to provide context to the special education populations in the case study states analyzed in this work: Arizona, Florida, Massachusetts, and New York. The chart below details the percentage of each state's students that have IEPs, which is how the National Center for Education Statistics measures students with disabilities. New York and Massachusetts have the highest percentages of students with disabilities, while in the past five years, the percent of students with disabilities in Florida has increased the most among the case study states. In 2014, both Connecticut and Arizona were below the national average.

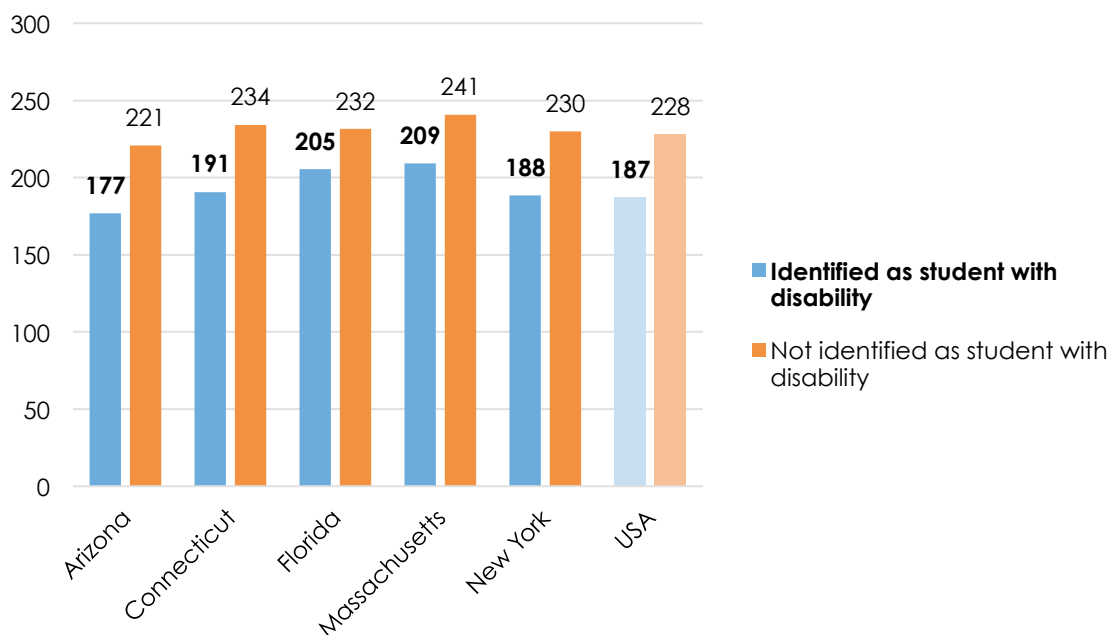
Chart 5: State Percentage of Students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)⁸ ci cii



⁸ This figure includes students with 504 plans.

The chart below details the 2015 NAEP average scale scores for reading in grade 4 by state for students identified with a disability and students not identified with a disability. Connecticut, Florida, Massachusetts, and New York exceeded the national average for both student groups, while Florida and Massachusetts experienced the smallest achievement gap between student groups at 26 and 32 points respectively.

Chart 6: 2015 NAEP Average Scale Scores for Reading, Grade 4^{ciii}



Data on total special education spending per pupil that uses an apples-to-apples comparison is not available at this time as the United States Census Bureau and the National Center for Education Statistics does not collect this information.

Appendix II: Summaries of State Systems

A note regarding weights: In several of the summaries below, there is mention of weighted values assigned to different student categories. This information is based on published materials from the states, and not all states present their weights in the same way. In some states, weights are expressed as multipliers that encompass both the base funding assigned to students generally and the additional funding assigned for special student characteristics; in such a state, if the base amount is \$10,000 and state documents list a single special education weight of 1.5, a special-needs student will be funded at a total level of \$15,000. In other states, weights are expressed as a way of calculating how much *additional* funding a district should receive for its students' special needs once the base funding is distributed; in these states, if the base amount is \$10,000 and the state documents list a special education weight of 1.5, all students will first be funded at \$10,000, and then each special education student will generate an additional \$15,000 for his/her district, for a total funding level of \$25,000. In this report, the formatting of these values has been standardized to avoid confusion, and all weights are expressed in the first manner, as multipliers that encompass both the base funding and the additional funding.

Alabama

Alabama allocates state funding for special education in a Census-Based system. This is done within the framework of Alabama's broader education funding system, which distributes most of the state money in the form of funded teacher units.^{civ} To account for the greater costs associated with educating students with disabilities, Alabama assumes five percent of students in each district will require special education services, and weights that five percent of enrollment at 2.5 in the student count used to generate teacher units.^{cv}

Alaska

Alaska uses a Census-Based system. The state gives Special Needs funding by multiplying a district's actual enrollment by 1.2, and then providing the state's per student funding on the basis of each district's inflated count rather than its actual student population. In order to receive this 20 percent increase, districts must file a plan with the state indicating what special education services will be provided.^{cvi} Districts also receive separate funding for students who require intensive special education services; these students are counted and then weighted at 13 in the overall tally of students, so districts receive 13 times the base amount for each such student.^{cvi}

Arizona

Arizona uses a Multiple Student Weights system. The state's education funds generally are distributed based on two sets of calculations.^{cvi} First, the student count in each district is adjusted with "Group A" weights, which relate to the district's size, enrollment in different grade bands, and degree of geographic isolation. Students with disabilities are included in this first count, and therefore, are funded once at the base level before additional adjustments are made.^{cix} Then, "Group B" weights, including the state's 11 special education weights (assigned according to disability), are applied to the appropriate students to further increase the adjusted student count before base funding is distributed.^{cx} Special education weights range from an additional .003 to an

additional 7.947, depending on the disability.^{cxv,cxvii} The state also provides separate funding for discrete institutions and programs (such as the Arizona School for the Blind)^{cxviii} and for transportation for students with disabilities in extended-year programs.^{cxix}

Arkansas

Arkansas has no separate special education funding. Special education personnel needs are included in the set of cost assumptions factored in when determining the regular, per student foundation amount (districts are expected to require 2.9 special education teachers for every 500 students), and funding is not separated out for special education, except in extreme cases.^{cxv} The state reimburses districts for the costs associated with students in approved residential facilities within their borders, and also provides reimbursement when the costs of educating a particular student with disabilities are greater than or equal to \$15,000.^{cxvi cxvii}

California

California uses a Census-Based system. More than three-quarters of state special education funds are allocated based on the total enrollment of each Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA, a regional conglomeration of districts).^{cxviii} Each SELPA has a unique per pupil special education funding rate consisting of both state and federal funds, based primarily on what the SELPA received before the current funding system was adopted, and the SELPA develops a local plan for how to allocate funds in its region. The remainder of the state money is distributed through specific categorical grants intended for particular services and purposes, such as mental health services for students with disabilities.^{cxix}

Colorado

Colorado uses a simple Multiple Student Weights system. It provides \$1,250 for each child with one or more disabilities. Then, the state provides a second layer of funding, over and above that uniform allocation, of up to \$6,000 per student with specific disabilities—including deaf-blindness, intellectual disabilities, and traumatic brain injury—prorated based on the amount of funding available.^{cxv} The state also allocates money for children in eligible facilities, reimbursement of high costs incurred, and screening and evaluation of young children.^{cxvi}

Connecticut

Connecticut has no separate special education funding. Connecticut provides \$911 for special education in the foundation (base level) of the Education Cost Sharing grant, which provides equalization aid to municipalities.^{cxvii} Connecticut also maintains a catastrophic fund, the Excess Cost grant, to limit districts' liability for the cost of providing services to students with extraordinary needs. The Excess Cost grant provides reimbursement when the cost of educating a student with disabilities exceeds 4.5 times the district's net current expenditure per pupil. The Excess Cost grant also provides funding for the special education costs of state agency placements and "no nexus" children.^{cxviii} However, the Excess Cost grant is subject to appropriation and was funded at 73 percent in 2015.^{cxvix}

Delaware

Delaware uses a Resource-Based system. Students with disabilities are categorized by intensity of service (Basic, Intensive, or Complex), and each category has an assigned ratio of students per unit.^{cxxv} The number of students a district serves in each category determines the number of units the district receives.^{cxxvi} (The rest of the units allocated to the district are based on counts of regular-education students, in ratios that vary for different grade-level categories.^{cxxvii}) Units are amounts of funding used to purchase school resources.^{cxxviii} Some of the unit funding is for employee salaries, and the amount of this funding in each unit is based on the particular staff employed in the district and their pay in accordance with the state salary schedule.^{cxxix} The unit also includes set amounts for energy expenses and other school costs.^{cxxx}

Florida

Florida uses a combination system incorporating Multiple Student Weights and a Block Grant. The state assigns students to five support levels, ranging from students receiving no specialized supports (Level 1) to those receiving continuous and intensive assistance, multiple services, or substantial modifications to learning activities (Level 5).^{cxxxi} Students in Level 4 are weighted at 3.613, and students in Level 5 are weighted at 5.258.^{cxxxii} Students in the first three support levels are not weighted and are funded at the base level.^{cxxxiii} However, a block grant called the Exceptional Student Education (ESE) Guaranteed Allocation is given to all districts; this grant is intended to fund the provision of services to students below Level 4.^{cxxxiv} The ESE Guaranteed Allocation given to each district in FY' 2001, when the program was created, was based upon the amount prior funding programs had generated.^{cxxxv} Since this time, the allocation has been adjusted to reflect changes in the number of students in each district assigned to support Levels 1-3 but has not been fundamentally recalculated.^{cxxxvi}

Georgia

Georgia uses a Multiple Student Weights system. Students are assigned to one of four weighted categories based on their particular disabilities and the proportion of the school day during which they receive services for those disabilities, or to a fifth weighted category for students receiving services in the general education setting.^{cxxxvii} The weights range from 2.3828 to 5.7624, depending on the specifics of the student's diagnosis and education plan.^{cxxxviii} Georgia also provides separate funding for a number of discrete programs, including grants for services for certain students with emotional and behavioral disorders;^{cxxxix} a scholarship program for special-needs students to attend participating private schools;^{cxli} funding for teachers in state-operated facilities;^{cxlii} support for residential placements and for reintegration services after such a placement;^{cxliii} and grant funding for services to students with very high-cost, low-incidence disabilities.^{cxliiii}

Hawaii

Hawaii uses a Resource-Based system. The state operates as a single school district and state funding is provided directly to schools.^{cxliv} Therefore, it is not possible to have a state system that approximates costs or funds only a portion of services, because there is no district to make up the difference. The bulk of state funding to schools for special education is based on set student-to-staff ratios calculated based on the number of

identified students.^{cxlv} There are also separate state funding streams for the Hawaii Schools for the Deaf and Blind; services to special-needs students during school breaks and in extended-year programs; student evaluations; certain intervention and other services; administrative costs; and the training and licensing of special education teachers.^{cxlvi}

Idaho

Idaho uses a Census-Based system. Special education enrollment is assumed to be six percent of K-6 enrollment and 5.5 percent of 7-12 enrollment, excluding students in residential facilities.^{cxlvii} The actual number of students in residential facilities is added to these numbers, producing a total, assumed special education count.^{cxlviii} Then, this figure is divided by 14.5 to determine the number of exceptional child support units generated by the district.^{cxlix} (The amount of money allocated per unit is a consequence of the total amount appropriated and does not correspond to pupil costs directly.^{cl}) There are other state funds available to districts with students educated in residential facilities,^{cli} and for districts that identify and serve an above-average proportion of students with serious emotional disturbances.^{clii}

Illinois

Illinois uses a combination system incorporating Census-Based assumptions and Partial Reimbursements. Special education services are mostly funded through an appropriation equal to the statewide count of special education students times 17.5 percent of the foundation funding level,^{cliii} which was \$6,119 in FY' 2015.^{cliv} This appropriation is distributed to districts according to a calculation based mostly (85 percent) on total student enrollment and to a lesser degree (15 percent) on proportions of students in poverty—not specifically based on their numbers of students with disabilities.^{clv} The state also provides a Personnel Reimbursement, which reimburses districts for a portion of their prior-year staff costs associated with the education of disabled students (rates are specified for different positions).^{clvi} The state also reimburses a maximum of 80 percent of the district's transportation expenditures for students with disabilities, and provides funds for a number of other discrete purposes, including partial reimbursement for private school placements, funding for high-cost students, tuition for students under state guardianship, support for special schools and institutions, and funding for summer school.^{clvii} Chicago, however, receives a separate block grant for its special education services and is not included in any of the above Census-Based allocations or reimbursements.^{clviii}

Indiana

Indiana uses a Multiple Student Weights system. K-12 students with disabilities are assigned to one of four categories (three that relate to the severity of the disability, and a fourth for students in homebound programs), each of which provides a set amount of funding in addition to the base allotment,^{clix} which was \$4,967 per pupil in FY' 2016.^{clx} These additional allocations range from \$500 to \$8,800.^{clxi} There are also state funds available to support the field services provided by the state Division of Special Education;^{clxii} for the Best Buddies Program for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities;^{clxiii clxiv} and to provide for students in, transitioning from, or needing support to remain out of residential treatment.^{clxv}

Iowa

Iowa uses a Multiple Student Weights system. Students are assigned to one of three weighted categories: one for inclusion placements, weighted at 1.72 times the base; one for self-contained placements, weighted at 2.21; and one for students with multiple, severe, or profound disabilities, weighted at 3.74.^{clxvi} (Current weights^{clxvii} differ from those listed in statute;^{clxviii} the School Budget Review Committee meets biannually to modify the special education weighting plan and has the authority to set weights different from those listed in law.^{clxix}) These weights are applied to a district-specific base cost per pupil, which either equals, or slightly exceeds, the state cost per pupil (\$6,446 in FY2016).^{clxx} Some of the funds earned by districts through these weights are redirected to regional agencies for their provision of special education support services.^{clxxi}

Kansas

Kansas uses a Partial Reimbursement system. The state reimburses districts for three types of expenses associated with implementing students' education plans: transportation (reimbursed at a rate of 80 percent), special teachers (reimbursed based on the amount appropriated, distributed in proportion to the percentage of the state's special education teachers employed in each district), and catastrophic costs (reimbursed at a rate of 75 percent of costs above a threshold equal to twice the per teacher entitlement from the prior year).^{clxxii} There is also a small amount of money set aside to compensate districts for losses due to an adjustment in school-based Medicaid payments.^{clxxiii clxxiv} Overall, state reimbursements generally cover about 73 percent of the costs associated with addressing students' special needs, though this figure includes some reimbursements provided through Medicaid.^{clxxv}

Kentucky

Kentucky uses a Multiple Student Weights system. Students are assigned to one of three weighted categories based on their disabilities, with weights ranging from 1.24 to 3.35.^{clxxvi} (The base amount to which these weights are applied was \$3,911 in FY' 2015.)^{clxxvii} The state budget also includes line items for the Kentucky School for the Blind and the Kentucky School for the Deaf.^{clxxviii}

Louisiana

Louisiana uses a Single Student Weight system. Students with disabilities are weighted at 2.5, applied to a base amount that was \$4,015 in FY' 2016.^{clxxix} There is also a High Cost Services Allocation—funded approximately equally out of state and federal monies—available when a student's education plan imposes costs more than three times the average per pupil expenditure (a threshold equal to \$33,831 in FY' 2015).^{clxxx}

Maine

Maine uses a Multiple Student Weights system. However, the weights are related to concentrations of students with disabilities in particular districts rather than to diagnoses or services: the special education students up to 15 percent of resident enrollment in a district are weighted at 1.315; above that threshold, they are weighted at 1.695.^{clxxxi} In districts with fewer than 20 identified students, those students receive an added weight of .29.^{clxxxii} These weights are applied to district-specific base amounts, which ranged

from \$5,238 to \$7,663 in FY' 2016.^{clxxxiii} There are also adjustments made for especially high-cost students, and to ensure maintenance of state effort from year to year.^{clxxxiv}

Maryland

Maryland uses a Single Student Weight system that weights students with disabilities at 1.74 times the base amount.^{clxxxv} (That amount was \$6,860 in FY' 2015.) However, the allocation given to each district based on this weight is adjusted three times: it is divided by the ratio of local wealth per pupil to statewide wealth per pupil; adjusted to ensure the state assumes 50 percent of the overall responsibility statewide for the funding of three designated "at-risk" student groups (students with disabilities, English Language Learners, and low-income pupils); and adjusted further to ensure the state provides at least 40 percent of the special education allocation in each district, regardless of local wealth.^{clxxxvi} The state also provides separate funding for students with disabilities in nonpublic placements and gives \$1,000 per special education student for transportation.^{clxxxvii}

Massachusetts

Massachusetts uses a Census-Based system. The state assumes in-district special education placements will make up 3.75 percent of a district's non-vocational enrollment in grades 1-12, and 4.75 percent of its vocational enrollment.^{clxxxviii} Out-of-district special education placements are assumed to make up one percent of enrollment.^{clxxxix} In FY' 2015, the state provided districts with \$23,332 for each assumed, in-district, special-needs student and \$26,461 for each assumed, out-of-district, special-needs student.^{cxc} The state also provides aid when students impose costs greater than four times the state average foundation budget per pupil, which reimburses 75 percent of costs incurred above that threshold.^{cxc} There is also an "extraordinary relief" program that supports districts whose special education expenses increase by 25 percent or more on a year-to-year basis.^{cxcii}

Michigan

Michigan uses a Partial Reimbursement system. By statute, the state reimburses districts for 28.6138 percent of total approved costs for special education (including salaries for special education personnel) and 70.4165 percent of total approved costs for special education transportation.^{cxciii} If these proportions amount to less than the full per student base amount (which varies somewhat from district to district but was in most cases \$8,169 in FY' 2016^{cxciv}) times the number of students with disabilities, then the state must provide at least the full base amount.^{cxcv} This is because the entire base amount for special education students is covered by the state, with no required contribution from the district.^{cxcvi} However, the reimbursement may not exceed 75 percent of total approved costs.^{cxcvii} There are separate state allocations to cover the base allowance for students receiving special education services in a residential institutional setting^{cxcviii} and to pay tuition for those enrolled at the Michigan School for the Deaf and the Michigan School for the Blind.^{cxcix}

Minnesota

Minnesota's combination system incorporates multiple student weights and partial reimbursements. Once students with disabilities are funded at the same base level as

other students, districts receive Initial Special Education Aid, a partial reimbursement equivalent to the lesser of 50 percent of the district's nonfederal special education expenditures for the prior year, or 56 percent of the result of a pupil-based formula that includes counts of students with disabilities at three different cost levels.^{cc, cci} Students are assigned to the three cost levels based on their diagnoses.^{ccii} The state also provides a second partial reimbursement for nonfederal costs not previously reimbursed and adjusts its aid to meet a hold-harmless guarantee related to changes to the special education funding system that went into effect in FY' 2016.^{cciii}

Mississippi

Mississippi uses a Resource-Based system. The state Office of Special Education provides an estimate of the number of special education teacher units each district will need, while the Office of Technology and Strategic Services calculates the average salary drawn by special education teachers in each district based on personnel reports from the prior year.^{cciv} The Office of School Financial Services then multiplies these numbers to produce the Special Education Add-On Allocation, which districts may use as they see fit.^{ccv} The state also provides funding for sign language interpreters,^{ccvi} positive behavior specialists,^{ccvii} extended-year instruction,^{ccviii} the education of students with disabilities in state-approved private schools and facilities,^{ccix} and partial scholarships for students with disabilities whose parents wish to enroll them in private school.^{ccx}

Missouri

Missouri uses a Single Student Weight system. Students with disabilities are weighted at 1.75,^{ccxi} applied to a base amount that was \$6,110 in FY' 2016.^{ccxii} However, the state only weights students above a certain threshold, as follows. First, the state identifies "performance districts" (those that have met certain performance standards).^{ccxiii} Then, the state calculates the average special education enrollment percentage across these districts, excluding certain outlier districts; this becomes the enrollment threshold above which special education students in each district receive weighted funding.^{ccxiv} For FY' 2016, this threshold was 12.6 percent.^{ccxv} The state also provides reimbursements for the education of high-cost students (those that exceed three times that district's current per pupil expenditure),^{ccxvi} for students placed in a school outside their district of residence by a state agency,^{ccxvii} and for the Readers for the Blind Program.^{ccxviii}

Montana

Montana uses a Census-Based system. Rather than allocate an amount per student with disabilities, the state provides a small flat amount for every student in the district: \$151.30 per student for special education instruction, and \$50.40 per student for special education related services.^{ccxix} Districts must raise \$1 of local funds for every \$3 in state funds provided for these purposes.^{ccxx} If a district has allowable costs exceeding the grants plus that required local match, the state will partially reimburse those costs, pursuant to statutory limits.^{ccxxi} The state also provides funding to special education cooperatives for administration and travel, and covers the cost of services for students with disabilities who are placed by the state in a district other than their district of residence.^{ccxxii}

Nebraska

Nebraska uses a Partial Reimbursement system. Districts are required to report all the costs associated with educating special education students; these costs are then converted into a per pupil figure.^{ccxxiii} A full-time equivalent special education enrollment figure is calculated by totaling the proportions of aggregate time each child receives special education and related services during the regular school day.^{ccxxiv} After this enrollment is multiplied by the per pupil cost amount, the general education instructional costs associated with these students are subtracted, leaving the costs of providing special education instruction and services.^{ccxxv} It is to this amount that the percentage reimbursement is applied.^{ccxxvi} The reimbursement rate is set based on the amount of funds appropriated for the purpose; the projected rate for FY' 2016 is estimated at 54 percent.^{ccxxvii} Separately, the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services is responsible for the costs of educating wards of the state or court who have been placed outside their district of residence, including special education costs.^{ccxxviii}

Nevada

Nevada passed legislation in 2015 that created a framework for a new education funding formula, including a Single Student Weight system for special education, but the precise value of the weight will not be set until the 2016-17 school year.^{ccxxix} The weight is projected to be approximately 2.0 when the new formula is fully implemented, but it will phase in over a multi-year period such that the difference between funding for students with disabilities and students without disabilities will increase steadily until the target funding level is achieved.^{ccxxx} The 2015 legislation also ordered the creation of a Special Education Contingency Account to reimburse districts and charter schools for extraordinary special education expenses.^{ccxxxi} Regulations regarding the reimbursement have not yet been finalized.^{ccxxxii}

New Hampshire

New Hampshire uses a Single Student Weight system. In FY' 2016, students with disabilities were funded at a flat \$1,915.86 over and above the base amount, which was \$3,561.27.^{ccxxxiii}

New Jersey

New Jersey uses a Census-Based system. The state assumes a certain percentage of students will require special education services and that another, smaller percentage will require speech services only, and provides flat amounts of funding for each student assumed to require those services.^{ccxxxiv} The census percentages and corresponding amounts of funding were last adjusted in FY' 2014. The state currently assumes 14.78 percent of students will require special education services and 1.72 percent of students will require only speech services, and funds those students at \$5,112 and \$1,221, respectively.^{ccxxxv} All districts receive this special education funding, even if they are too wealthy to qualify for other formula aid.^{ccxxxvi} The allocation is adjusted for local cost of living.^{ccxxxvii} There is also a reimbursement available for high-cost individual students; reimbursement rates and high-cost thresholds vary depending on the type of placement.^{ccxxxviii} School districts may apply for additional aid if they serve unusually

high numbers of students requiring especially cost-intensive services.^{ccxxxix} There is also state funding available for students with special transportation needs.^{ccxi}

New Mexico

New Mexico uses a Multiple Student Weights system. Students are assigned to one of four classes based on the degree of modification they require to the general education program.^{ccxli} Weights range from 1.7 to 3.0 times the base amount,^{ccxlii} which was \$4,005.75 in FY' 2015.^{ccxliii} The state also provides funding for ancillary services,^{ccxliv} such as speech therapy, mobility services, or psychological services.^{ccxlv} Additionally, there is a high-cost fund for students whose educational needs impose costs three times greater than the statewide average amount expended per student (a threshold that amounted to \$22,452 in FY' 2014), though districts only qualify if they serve a certain minimum number of high-cost students (that threshold varies with district size).^{ccxlii} The state separately funds the New Mexico School for the Deaf and the New Mexico School for the Blind.^{ccxlvii}

New York

New York uses a Single Student Weight system. Students with disabilities (defined as those receiving special services or being educated in special environments for more than a given proportion of the school day or year) are weighted at 2.41 times the base amount, which was \$6,451 in FY' 2015.^{ccxlviii} Students in their first year in a full-time, general education program after having been in a special education program receive transitional funding; they are weighted at 1.5 times the base amount.^{ccxlix} High Cost Aid is available when a district serves a student whose disability imposes costs exceeding the lesser of \$10,000 or four times the approved operating expense per pupil from two years prior.^{cc} The amount of the aid is adjusted for local wealth levels.^{ccli}

North Carolina

North Carolina uses a Single Student Weight system. The state provided \$3,926.97 per student with disabilities over and above the base amount in FY' 2015.^{cclii} (The base amount itself varies from district to district, and is the sum needed to cover 10 months of teacher salaries and benefits in a district divided by that district's enrollment.^{ccliiii}) North Carolina provides state money for a number of other special education programs and services, including group homes and other out-of-district placements, developmental day centers, community residential centers, behavioral support grants, and support for districts serving children with extraordinary needs that transfer into those districts after other funds have been allocated.^{ccliiv} There is a separate Disabilities Grant Program, created by the state but not administered by the Department of Education, which provides scholarships of up to \$3,000 for disabled students who attend private schools.^{ccliv}

North Dakota

North Dakota uses a Census-Based system. Rather than provide weighted funding for individual students with disabilities, the state weights the entire student population at 1.082 times the base amount, with the intention that the extra 8.2 percent will support districts in providing special education services.^{cclii} (The base amount was \$6,110 in FY' 2016.^{cclvii}) The state also provides funding for individual students whose costs exceed

four times the state average education cost per student, and for districts spending more than two percent of their annual budgets on the provision of special education to any one student.^{cclviii} Additionally, school districts can be reimbursed for 80 percent of room and board costs for a student with disabilities who is placed in a residential facility.^{cclix}

Ohio

Ohio uses a Multiple Student Weights system. Students are assigned to one of six disability categories, from Category 1 (speech disabilities only) to Category 6 (autism, deaf-blindness, or traumatic brain injury).^{cclx} Students in each category generate a flat amount of special education funding over and above the base amount (which was \$5,900 in FY' 2016), ranging from \$1,547 to \$25,134 in additional funding.^{cclxi} There are also state allocations for special education transportation,^{cclxii} catastrophic aid (a reimbursement of at least 50 percent of costs exceeding \$27,375 for children in Categories 2-5, or exceeding \$32,850 for children in Category 6), scholarships of up to \$20,000 apiece for students with autism to attend school outside their districts of residency, partial reimbursements for instructional services provided in the home, and reimbursements for school districts employing school psychologist interns.^{cclxiii}

Oklahoma

Oklahoma uses a Multiple Student Weights system. Each student is assigned to one of 13 weighted Primary Disability categories, ranging from Speech/Language Impairment (weighted at 1.05) to Vision Impairment and Traumatic Brain Injury (both weighted at 4.80).^{cclxiv} Students may also be assigned to a Secondary Disability category from the same list. Secondary Disability weights are the same as those for Primary Disabilities, except the base funding is not applied a second time, so the weight for the Secondary Disability is only the disability weight itself (e.g. .05 for Speech/Language Impairment).^{cclxv} A student's education plan may also list required Related Services connected to a disability category (such as audiology services, which are related to Hearing Impairment, a weighted category).^{cclxvi} When a student receives a service, he/she is additionally weighted for the disability with which that service is connected.^{cclxvii} When a student has all three (a Primary Disability, a Secondary Disability, and Related Services), the student's funding will first be weighted for the Primary Disability; then, the state will review the Secondary Disability and the Related Service to determine which of the two entries has a higher weight, and only that higher weight will be added to the Primary Disability weight.^{cclxviii} If a student's related service maps to his or her primary disability, the student is only weighted once for that disability.^{cclxix} In addition to the weighted student funding, the state provides scholarship money for students with disabilities whose parents send them to approved private schools.^{cclxx} Oklahoma does not have state funds available to support the education of high-cost special education students, but it does set aside some federal IDEA dollars for this purpose.^{cclxxi}

Oregon

Oregon uses a Single Student Weights system. Students with disabilities are weighted at two times the base amount.^{cclxxii} However, the percentage of enrollment that can be weighted for this purpose may not exceed 11 percent without approval from the

Department of Education.^{cclxxiii} Additionally, the state provides partial reimbursements for the education of students whose approved special education costs exceed \$30,000.^{cclxxiv} There is also state funding for: the Oregon School for the Deaf; hospital programs, day treatment programs, and residential treatment programs for children with disabilities; regional services provided to children with low-incidence disabilities; evaluation services to determine eligibility for special-needs services; and matching grants for Medicaid dollars secured by the district to support services provided to children with disabilities.^{cclxxv} The speech pathology program and skilled nursing facilities are supported by separate state funding streams.^{cclxxvi}

Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania's current system incorporates both Census-Based assumptions and block grants. The state government is engaged in a long-term budget fight that has left schools with indeterminate funding, and there is no statutory funding formula.^{cclxxvii} Of the nearly \$1 billion spent by the state on special education each year, the large majority is distributed at levels that have been frozen for seven years. That money was originally distributed based on a census formula that assumed a special education prevalence rate of 16 percent, but now, the money is essentially distributed as a block grant.^{cclxxviii} The remaining money (approximately \$20 million in FY' 2015, or about two percent of special education spending) is a separate appropriation distributed according to a new formula that includes three weighted student categories and adjusts the funds distributed based on district size, rurality, and property wealth.^{cclxxix}

Rhode Island

Rhode Island has no separate special education funding. The state's base per pupil funding amount (\$8,966 in FY' 2015^{cclxxx}) is based on average education expenditures across several northeastern states^{cclxxxi} and is intended to cover a portion of special education expenses.^{cclxxxii} However, the state does provide separate funds to defray especially high special education costs (effectively, those exceeding seven times the base amount)^{cclxxxiii} and fully supports the Hospital School at Hasbro Children's Hospital.^{cclxxxiv}

South Carolina

South Carolina uses a Multiple Student Weights system. Students are assigned to one of nine weighted categories based on their particular disabilities, or to a 10th category for homebound students.^{cclxxxv} The weights range from 1.74 to 2.57, depending on the diagnosis, applied to a base amount that was \$2,220 in FY' 2016.^{cclxxxvi} Homebound students with disabilities are funded at the base amount.^{cclxxxvii} State law requires 85 percent of the amount generated for a particular weighted category must be expended on that category of students.^{cclxxxviii} In addition to weighted funding, the state appropriates separate funding to meet the federal Maintenance of Effort requirements of the IDEA, allocated in proportion to districts' total special education membership, which can be spent with few restrictions.^{cclxxxix}

South Dakota

South Dakota uses a combination system incorporating Census-Based assumptions and Multiple Student Weights. Students are assigned to one of six categories: five based on

their specific disabilities, and a sixth for students requiring prolonged assistance.^{ccxc} Students in each category are funded with a flat amount of per pupil funding, ranging from \$4,896.59 to \$21,634.78, provided on top of the base amount,^{ccxci} which was \$4,877 in FY' 2016.^{ccxcii} However, the first category, for students with mild disabilities, is funded on a census basis: the supplementary allocation is applied to 10.04 percent of the total special education fall enrollment count rather than to an actual count of students who are assessed to have mild disabilities.^{ccxciii} The supplemental funding for students in these disability categories is kept separate, rather than being included in an overall formula amount for each district that is subject to a general state/local share arrangement.^{ccxciv} Districts are expected to levy a local property tax of 1.409 mills that is specific to special education, and the total special education allocation a district is entitled to receive is the sum of all its students' supplementary funding, reduced by the amount that a 1.409 mill tax should generate in that district.^{ccxcv} The state separately appropriates \$4 million per year for extraordinary costs funding, which is available to districts fulfilling certain prerequisites that serve individual students with high-cost disabilities (those who require special education services with costs exceeding twice their supplemental allocations) or must maintain high-cost special education programs.^{ccxcvi}

Tennessee

Tennessee uses a Resource-Based system. For staff costs, there are student-to-teacher ratios defined for various levels of special education service provision.^{ccxcvii} The number of students receiving services at each level is converted into teacher units (rounded to the nearest half-unit), which are each funded at a standard level (\$40,447 in FY' 2014).^{ccxcviii} There are also student-to-staff ratios specified for special education assistants.^{ccxcix} For classroom costs, the state provides funding for special education materials and supplies (\$36.50 per special education student in FY' 2014), instructional equipment (\$13.25 per special education student), and travel (\$17.25 per special education student) based on average costs from the three most recent years.^{ccc}

Texas

Texas uses a Multiple Student Weights system. Students with disabilities are assigned to one of 12 weighted categories based on their educational placements and the services they receive (including mainstream, homebound, resource room, and speech therapy), or to one of two specialized placement categories (students receiving services on a local school campus in a district other than their district of residence due to a residential placement, and students with disabilities who reside in state schools).^{ccci} Weights range from 1.1 to 5.0 times the base amount,^{cccii} which was \$5,140 in FY' 2016.^{ccciii} The state also provides funding for district-run extended-year special education programs and for the education of hospital-bound students.^{ccciv}

Utah

Utah uses a Block Grant system. The state provides a Special Education Add-On to districts' general education aid, which is modified from year to year based on the growth in special education enrollment.^{cccv} The number of students generating the aid is based on the previous-year allocation, to which the state adds an amount equal to the increase in special education enrollment between the previous year and the year before that, multiplied by 1.53.^{cccvi} This calculation is subject to three limitations: special

education enrollment in either prior year may not exceed 12.8 percent of total enrollment; the growth rate for special education enrollment cannot exceed the general enrollment growth rate in the district; and regardless of any drop in enrollment, the number of students with disabilities upon which the funding is based cannot be less than the average number of students with disabilities enrolled over the previous five years.^{cccvii} Once the number of students to be funded is determined, that number is multiplied by the per student add-on amount (determined annually by the state legislature; it was \$2,837 in FY' 2016) to produce the total add-on amount.^{cccviii} There are also state allocations for districts providing extended-year programs for students with severe disabilities;^{cccix} students in self-contained special education placements;^{cccx} students in state institutions;^{cccxi} students whose education costs exceed \$15,000;^{cccxi} partial scholarships for students with disabilities in private schools;^{cccxiii} and stipend funding for special educators working up to two extra weeks before or after the contracted school year.^{cccxiv}

Vermont

Vermont uses a combination system incorporating Resource-Based allocations and Partial Reimbursements. Each school district receives a grant based on salary costs. The state provides an amount equal to 60 percent of the district's special education units (that is, the teachers to which a district is entitled based on a ration of 9.75 special education teachers per 1,000 enrolled students) for the previous year times its average special education teacher salary for that year, plus an amount equal to the average special education administrator salary in the state for the previous year, prorated based on a statutory formula.^{cccxv} School districts also receive partial reimbursements for all special education expenditures not covered by federal aid (made at a rate set annually by the state in an effort to produce an outcome in which total non-federal spending on special education in the state is paid 60 percent by the state and 40 percent by localities).^{cccxvi} Extraordinary costs (those over \$50,000 for any one child) are reimbursed at a rate of 90 percent.^{cccxvii} Programs operated by the Vermont Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing are reimbursed at 80 percent.^{cccxviii} There is also 100 percent reimbursement for education of state-placed students, including those with out-of-state placements.^{cccix}

Virginia

Virginia uses a Resource-Based system. Based on the number of teachers and aides necessary to meet the special education program standards in each school given its count of students with disabilities, the state calculates a total funding amount required for that school's special education program, and it assumes responsibility for covering a share of that cost (the precise share varies depending on the district's ability to raise local funds).^{cccxx} The state also provides funds for a number of other special education purposes, including partial reimbursement of a district's tuition costs when a student must be enrolled in a public, regional special education program;^{cccxxi} a pool of funding from multiple state agencies that supports tuition for children in private special education schools;^{cccxxii} support for students with disabilities transitioning from grade school to postsecondary education and employment;^{cccxxiii} services for homebound students;^{cccxxiv} special education for incarcerated youth^{cccxxv} and for students in

medical facilities;^{cccxxvi} and competitive grants for institutions providing coursework to teachers seeking to be qualified in special education.^{cccxxvii}

Washington

Washington uses a Single Student Weight system. Students with disabilities are weighted at 1.9309 times their district's Basic Education Allocation rate,^{cccxxviii} an amount set individually for each district based on a resource-driven formula.^{cccxxix} However, only students with disabilities up to 12.7 percent of each district's enrollment may be weighted for special education.^{cccxxx} There are also funds provided in each district's general education funding apportionment based on the number of students with disabilities enrolled and the amount during the school day they receive special services.^{cccxxxi} Additionally, the state maintains a Special Education Safety Net to provide funding when a district serves a student who requires high-cost special education services^{cccxxxii} (the threshold was set at \$27,613 in FY' 2016^{cccxxxiii}) or provides an overall special education program that, for reasons beyond district control, impose a "disproportional and extraordinary cost" on the community.^{cccxxxiv}

West Virginia

West Virginia provides no separate education funding for most students with disabilities. There is a high-cost reimbursement available when a student with disabilities has eligible costs greater than \$33,400 annually.^{cccxxxv} When students are placed in out-of-state instruction programs because a free and appropriate public education cannot be provided to them in-state, districts may request reimbursement for the cost of the placement.^{cccxxxvi} When a student with disabilities is placed into a facility or foster home outside his or her home county by the Department of Health and Human Resources or the Department of Juvenile Services, districts may apply for reimbursement for the cost of that placement as well.^{cccxxxvii}

Wisconsin

Wisconsin uses a Partial Reimbursement system. Districts may request reimbursement for staff costs, transportation, and a few other specific costs related to the education of students with disabilities.^{cccxxxviii} The state also reimburses the costs of health treatment related to particular disabilities,^{cccxxxix} such as physical or orthopedic disabilities, hearing impairment, and emotional disturbance.^{cccxl} While all of these costs are, in theory, eligible for full reimbursement, the reimbursement rate is limited by the amount appropriated for this purpose.^{cccxli} The estimated proration rate for 2015-16 is 26.37 percent, which is similar to the rate in other recent years.^{cccxlii} There are three additional streams of state funding available for special education in the state: a partial reimbursement for when a student's special education costs exceed \$30,000;^{cccxlili} supplemental aid for districts with below-average education revenue available, fewer than 2,000 students, and special education costs exceeding 16 percent of expenditures;^{cccxliv} and tuition support for students living in children's, foster, or group homes and other out-of-district residential arrangements.^{cccxlv} Three additional programs were created in 2015 and will go into effect in the 2016-17 school year: payments of \$12,000 to a district receiving a student with disabilities who resides outside its borders through the state's open enrollment system;^{cccxli} private-school vouchers for students with disabilities who have had open enrollment applications to nonresident districts

rejected in the past;^{cccxlvi} and \$1,000 per student incentive payments to districts based on the postsecondary education and employment outcomes of their graduates with disabilities.^{cccxlviii}

Wyoming

Wyoming uses a Partial Reimbursement system. As part of its larger education grants to districts, the state is expected to provide an amount sufficient to reimburse 100 percent of the amount spent in the previous school year on special education programs and services.^{cccxlix} The reimbursement may only be for direct costs, rather than those that indirectly benefit students with disabilities, such as utilities and administration.^{cccl} Teacher costs may be included, prorated according to the percentage of time they spend on special education.^{cccli}

Acknowledgment: Thank you to Zahava Stadler, M.P.A.,M.S.Ed., and Katherine Von Culin for contributing research and writing to this report.

Endnotes

- ⁱ Connecticut State Department of Education. (2015). *CT Public School Enrollment_2000.mdb*. Available from <http://ctschoolfinance.org/data/connecticut-school-enrollment>.
- ⁱⁱ Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 (2004). (9) Free appropriate public education. --The term `free appropriate public education' means special education and related services that--
 (A) have been provided at public expense, under public supervision and direction, and without charge;
 (B) meet the standards of the State educational agency;
 (C) include an appropriate preschool, elementary school, or secondary school education in the State involved; and
 (D) are provided in conformity with the individualized education program required under section 614(d).
- ⁱⁱⁱ Conn. Gen. Statutes ch. 172, § 10-262h (2013).
- ^{iv} The Office of Fiscal Analysis & The Office of Legislative Research. (2014). *CT Special Education Funding*. Retrieved from http://www.housedems.ct.gov/more/SPED/pubs/OFA-OLR_Presentation_2013-01-23.pdf.
- ^v An Act Making Adjustments to State Expenditures and Revenues for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2015. 18 Conn. Acts 14-47, 30 June 2014.
- ^{vi} Connecticut State Department of Education. (2015). *CT Public School Enrollment_2000.mdb*. Available from <http://ctschoolfinance.org/data/connecticut-school-enrollment>.
- ^{vii} *Ibid.*
- ^{viii} Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 (2004). (9) Free appropriate public education. --The term `free appropriate public education' means special education and related services that--
 (A) have been provided at public expense, under public supervision and direction, and without charge;
 (B) meet the standards of the State educational agency;
 (C) include an appropriate preschool, elementary school, or secondary school education in the State involved; and
 (D) are provided in conformity with the individualized education program required under section 614(d).
- ^{ix} U.S. Census Bureau. (2014). *Public Education Finances: 2013*. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2015/econ/g13-aspef.pdf>.
- ^x *Ibid.*
- ^{xi} *Ibid.*
- ^{xii} U.S. Department of Education. (2014). *Letter from Director of the Office of Special Education Programs to Connecticut Education Commissioner*. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/fund/data/award/idea/2014partb/ct-letter-2014b.pdf>.
- ^{xiii} *Ibid.*
- ^{xiv} Horton v. Meskill, 172 Conn. 615 (Conn. Sup. Ct. 1977).
- ^{xv} Connecticut General Assembly. (2013). *Task Force to Study State Education Funding Final Report*. Retrieved from <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2013/rpt/2013-R-0064.htm>.
- ^{xvi} *Ibid.*
- ^{xvii} Conn. Gen. Statutes ch. 172, § 10-262h (2013).

^{xxviii} Conn. Gen. Statutes ch. 172, § 10-262f (2013), as amended by P.A. 95-226.

^{xxix} The Office of Fiscal Analysis & The Office of Legislative Research. (2014). *CT Special Education Funding*. Retrieved from http://www.housedems.ct.gov/more/SPED/pubs/OFA-OLR_Presentation_2013-01-23.pdf.

^{xxx} Conn. Gen. Statutes ch. 172, § 10-262h (2013).

^{xxxi} Conn. Gen. Statutes ch. 172, § 10-262f (2013), as amended by P.A. 95-226.

^{xxxii} The Office of Fiscal Analysis & The Office of Legislative Research. (2014). *CT Special Education Funding*. Retrieved from http://www.housedems.ct.gov/more/SPED/pubs/OFA-OLR_Presentation_2013-01-23.pdf.

^{xxxiii} An Act Implementing Provisions of the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2017 Concerning General Government, Education, Health and Human Services and Bonds of the State. 18 Conn. Acts 15-5, 30 June 2015.

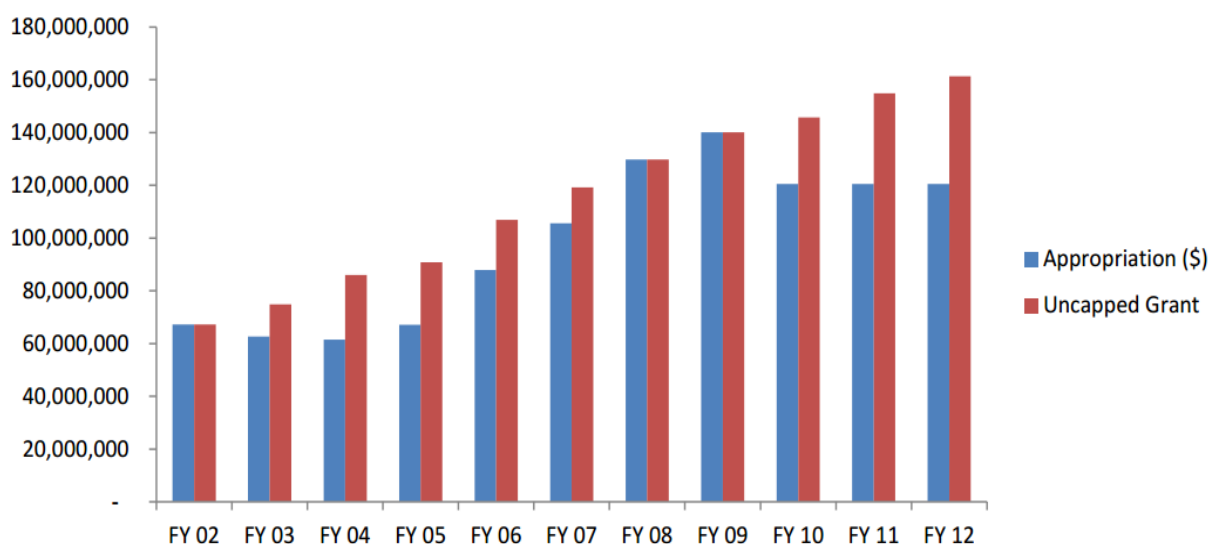
^{xxxiv} The Office of Fiscal Analysis & The Office of Legislative Research. (2014). *CT Special Education Funding*. Retrieved from http://www.housedems.ct.gov/more/SPED/pubs/OFA-OLR_Presentation_2013-01-23.pdf.

^{xxxv} Conn. Gen. Statutes ch. 164, § 10-76g (a) & (b).

^{xxxvi} The Office of Fiscal Analysis & The Office of Legislative Research. (2014). *CT Special Education Funding*. Retrieved from http://www.housedems.ct.gov/more/SPED/pubs/OFA-OLR_Presentation_2013-01-23.pdf.

^{xxxvii} *Ibid.*

The graph below details the effect of the Special Education Excess Cost Grant statutory cap on the percent level of reimbursement to districts.



^{xxxviii} Calculated by Kathy Guay based on Capped Funding/Full Funding. Data from: Connecticut Office of Policy and Management. (2015). *Agency Option Submission – Department of Education*. Retrieved from http://www.ct.gov/opm/lib/opm/budget/2016_2017_biennial_budget/options/SDE64000BudgetOptions.pdf.

^{xxxix} Connecticut State Department of Education. (2015). *2014-15 Net Current Expenditures per Pupil and 2015-16 Excess Cost Grant Basic Contributions*. Available from <http://ctschoolfinance.org/data/connecticut-public-school-district-spending-per-student-2014-15>.

^{xxx} *Ibid.*

^{xxx} Conn. Gen. Statutes ch. 172, § 10-266aa.

Connecticut State Department of Education. (2007). Model Special Education Policies and Procedures Manual. Retrieved from <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/DEPS/Special/PolicyProceduresManual.pdf>.

^{xxxii} Ibid.

^{xxxiii} Ibid.

^{xxxiv} Ahearn, E. (2010). *Financing Special Education: State Funding Formulas*. Alexandria, VA: National Association of State Directors of Special Education. Retrieved from http://nasdse.org/DesktopModules/DNNspot-Store/ProductFiles/82_dce66976-08dd-4cdd-abbd-1397e973c81a.pdf.

^{xxxv} See, for example, Richmond, M. and Fairchild, D. (2013). *Financing the Education of High-Need Students*. Washington, D.C.: Thomas B. Fordham Institute. Retrieved from <http://edex.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/publication/pdfs/Financing-the-Education-of-High-Need-Students-FINAL.pdf>

^{xxxvi} These figures include both general per-student ("base") and weighted special education funding. They correspond to either the 2014-15 or 2015-16 school year, depending on the availability of data, and are nominal, not adjusting for local cost or inflation. The calculation assumes the student has no additional special characteristics for which s/he would be weighted in the state's funding formula. This is the case for all such figures in this report.

^{xxxvii} Missouri only weights special education students above a certain incidence threshold. See Appendix II for more information.

^{xxxviii} Nevada passed legislation in 2015 that created a framework for a new education funding formula, including a single student weight for special education, but the value of the weight will not be set until the 2016-17 school year.

^{xxxix} North Carolina allocated \$3,927 per special education student above the base amount in 2014-15, but that base amount is not fixed statewide. Whatever per-student figure is sufficient to cover 10 months of teacher salaries and benefits in each district is the base amount used in that district.

^{xl} Oregon only weights special education students below a certain incidence threshold. See Appendix II for more information.

^{xli} Washington weights special education students at 1.9309 times each district's Base Education Allocation rate, set for each district through a resource-based formula. Washington also only weights special education students below a certain incidence threshold. See Appendix II for more information.

^{xlii} Maine's Multiple Student Weights system is atypical, because the different weights correspond to students in districts of different special education prevalence rates rather than to disability or service categories. See Appendix II for more information.

^{xliii} IDEA requires that in order to receive federal special education grant funds, states must set policies to ensure children with disabilities are educated in the least restrictive environment, which the law explains as follows: "To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities [...] are educated with children who are not disabled, and special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily." Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 (2004). Retrieved from <http://idea.ed.gov/download/statute.html>.

^{xliv} Hawaii is an unusual case because the state operates as a single school district and provides state funding directly to schools. Schools earn a part of the state's primary special

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- education appropriation, which is used mainly to fund staff salaries and benefits, in proportion to their number of special-needs students.
- xlv For the purposes of this report, states have been counted as using a Census-Based model if they assign special education funding at no more than two levels (such as Massachusetts' funding amounts for in-district and out-of-district placements, or New Jersey's funding amounts for general special education services and for speech services only), and use an assumed proportion of students for both funding levels. If a district incorporates Census-Based assumptions into a system that uses an actual tally of most students or funds at more than two levels, it is classified as a combination system.
- xlvi "This method provides for a base funding amount that is multiplied by a weight for each student. The weight factor varies depending on the perceived level of the student's educational needs. For example, higher funding levels are provided to students enrolled in special education, English Language Learner or at-risk programs". Griffith, M. (May 2005). *State Education Funding Formulas And Grade Weighting*. Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States. Retrieved from <http://www.lwvri.org/edstudy/2011-EdStudy-IVa-FundingFormulas.pdf>.
- xlvii Ariz. Rev. Stat. § 15-943.
- xlviii Ibid.
- xliv Ariz. Rev. Stat. § 15-761.
- i The Audit Unit, Arizona Department of Education. (2007). *Special Education Cost Study Submitted in Compliance with A.R.S. § 15-236*. Retrieved from <http://www.azed.gov/special-education/files/2011/06/specialeducationcoststudy2007.pdf>.
- ii Center for Student Achievement. *How are Arizona Public Schools Funded?* Retrieved from http://www.centerforstudentachievement.org/uploads/2/0/7/4/20740134/funding_graphic_11x17.pdf.
- iii Ibid.
- iiii Ariz. Rev. Stat. § 15-943.
- lv Ariz. Rev. Stat. § 15-901.
- lv Calculations by Patrick Gibson (12/15/2015)
- lvi Ariz. Rev. Stat. § 15-1182.
- lvii Ariz. Rev. Stat. § 15-881.
- lviii Ariz. Rev. Stat. § 15-945.
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