

Connecticut has a number of avenues for towns and school districts to regionally collaborate to share services, achieve efficiencies, and expand opportunities for student and families. Whether it is regional school districts, endowed academies, or designated high schools, municipalities currently have a variety of regional options and approaches when it comes to offering K-12 education to their resident students.

However, a number of opportunities exist to increase and improve these options and strengthen voluntary regional collaboration in K-12 education. This document outlines some of the opportunities available and how solutions could be implemented to address existing challenges.

Addition of Equity Component to Regional District Funding Structure

District wealth, student needs, and a town's ability to pay are not considerations in the current funding structure for regional school districts.

- **CHALLENGE:** Instead of being based on a district's student needs or the district's ability to pay for the operation of the regional school district it is a part of, the funding structure is based on student enrollment alone.
 - **SOLUTION:** The State should amend the Regional District Bonus in the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) formula to include an equity component that takes into account a district's student needs and town wealth.
- **CHALLENGE:** The financial contributions made by each town in a regional school district are the same per student, regardless of disparities in wealth between the participating districts.
 - **SOLUTION:** Per-student contributions to regional school districts should be equitable and account for a participating district's town wealth.

Greater Incentives & Support for Entering Regional Agreements

There is currently a lack of financial incentives or support from the State to assist towns wishing to enter into a regional school district or other cooperative solution.

Regional School Districts

In order to begin the process of entering a regional school district agreement, two or more neighboring districts must first create a joint temporary regional school study committee to determine the feasibility of creating a regional school district, and then report their findings to the State Board of Education.

- **CHALLENGE:** This is a time consuming and costly process for communities without financial incentives or support from the State.
 - **SOLUTION:** The State could provide some level of financial support to cover part or all of the costs associated with these studies to encourage districts to explore forming regional school districts.

Designated High Schools

Designated high schools (which only require a MOU between districts) provide a different path toward a regionalized approach and give small sending towns many options compared to a traditional regional school district agreement.

- **CHALLENGE:** Currently, the Regional District Bonus included in the ECS formula only provides additional funds to towns sending students to a regional school district or one of the state's three endowed academies.
 - **SOLUTION:** Extend the Regional District Bonus to include designated high schools and other regional cooperative agreements.
- **CHALLENGE:** Connecticut only allows for designated *high schools*, not designated K-12 education programs.
 - **SOLUTION:** The State should allow for designated K-12 education programs to provide an alternative regionalization structure that might benefit smaller districts who do not wish to enter a formal regional school district agreement.

Increased Flexibility for Exiting Regional School Districts

Once a town enters into a regional school district, it is very difficult for it to exit the district even if the town's enrollment, student needs, community wealth, or desire to be in a regional school district changes over time. The barriers for exiting a regional school district if ever needed turn away many communities from considering entering into a regional school district.

- **CHALLENGE:** In order for a town to exit a regional school district, all of the towns within the district must agree. If its fellow member towns do not agree, a town wishing to leave a regional school district may be struck in that agreement, which could harm the town financially and in terms of opportunities for its students.
 - **SOLUTION:** A fair, defined process should be created in statute that outlines how and when a town may exit a regional school district if its needs change.

Proportionate Representation on Regional School District Boards

The membership composition of a regional school district's board is not always proportionate to the enrollment each member town contributes to the regional school district, nor does it necessarily reflect the diversity in needs and/wealth of member towns. This opens up the possibility for towns underrepresented on a regional school district board to potentially be forced into decisions that could negatively impact them.

- **CHALLENGE:** State statute requires regional school district boards to have at least 5 members, with at least one member per town, but does not outline any proportionate representation requirements.
 - **SOLUTION:** State statutes should be amended to require more accurate and proportionate representation on regional school district boards that is reflective of town enrollment in the district.