



Set the bar. Meet the bar. Exceed the bar. Raise the bar!

Budget Community Forum



Dr. Andrae Townsel, Superintendent
Caitlin Richard, CFO
2/18/2026



Agenda



- Overview of HPS fiscal context and legislative priorities
- Overview of school budget process
- Opportunity to participate in the advocacy movement

We are highlighting progress
on our strategic plan



2025-2028 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

1

WHOLE AND
HEALTHY
STUDENTS

2

EXPANSIVE
LEARNING
AND
OPPORTUNITY

3

SKILLED AND
DIVERSE
TEAMS

4

OPERATIONAL
AND
MANAGEMENT
EXCELLENCE

Whole and Healthy Students Highlights



1

WHOLE AND
HEALTHY
STUDENTS

Chronic Absenteeism

▼ **5 percentage points**

From Feb 2025

Daily Attendance Rate

▲ **3.4 percentage points**

From Feb 2022 - Best in five years

Parents feel like school is a welcoming community

“My child is happy to go to school! We get meaningful feedback from teachers, and the whole place is just imbued with caring, compassion, and acceptance. This is a welcoming environment - a utopia - where everyone strives together for the betterment of all.”

- **Anonymous Family Member**

Schools are a consistent support system

“Currently my family rely on the teachers support because they are the most consistent accessible support system in our children’s life! The school doesn’t just offer academics/learning , it also offers free lunches, afterschool programs, access and trust so basically a safe haven where our kids simply builds a routine, trust the teachers and all the staffs. But mostly as a parent I rely on the teachers support.”

- **Anonymous Family Member**

Whole and Healthy Students Highlights



Elementary Literacy Proficiency

▲ 7 percentage points

From Feb 2025, DIBELS Composite

Students come home excited about learning

"A strong sense of community. Teachers who genuinely care. A curriculum that actually engages kids Safety and structure Clear communication When my child comes home excited about what they learned, it's a sign the school is doing something right."

- Anonymous Family Member

Student support services strengthens learning

"Consistent communication with teachers and school staff is the support our family relies on most to help address academic and social needs. Individualized learning support provided by the school, including specialized instruction and progress monitoring. School counseling services, academic support services, including teacher communication and tutoring, to help ensure our child stays on track academically."

- Anonymous Family Member

Middle School Proficiency

▲ 2 percentage points Reading Plus
▲ 7 percentage points Math Interim 2

From Feb 2025,
Reading PLUS, Math IA2

Focus on the whole child is important

"In the elementary school they are focused on the whole child. Not just reading and math but also other subjects and teaching students how to be good people. In the middle school and high school they are well structured and want all students to succeed by looking toward their future to go to college."

- Anonymous Family Member

Expensive Learning and Opportunity Highlights



2

EXPANSIVE
LEARNING
AND
OPPORTUNITY

Middle School Sports

▲ **50% growth in participation**

From 2022

Sports is a motivator for students

“My child is motivated when they know sports is made available throughout the school year or as an afterschool extra curriculum activities or club.”

- Anonymous Family Member

Extracurriculars are character building

“Free Extra curricular activities, through school or town (ie. Rec dept, cultural center, school itself, etc.) It helps build character of child and get them out of house in constructive ways.”

- Anonymous Family Member [Translated from Spanish]



Music curriculum raises the bar

“At this present time diversity in teaching. teachers who looks like him motivating him to continuing to strive [strive] for excellent. Also school resource his school offers an excellent music curriculum . It pushed him out of his box showing him that he could do much more.”

- Anonymous Family Member



Skilled and Diverse Teams Highlights



3

SKILLED AND
DIVERSE
TEAMS

Classroom Teacher Vacancies

▼ **41 fewer**

From Feb 2025

Staffing supports high standards

"In early childhood we really on our paraeducators and our early childhood educators (ECEs) to help support our youngest learners who are coming to school for the first time. These two components also help us stay in compliance with the NYAEC standards. We also rely on our Special Education Teachers to support our exceptional learners."

- Anonymous Staff Member

Special Ed Teacher Vacancies

▼ **33 fewer**

From Feb 2025

Support staff are essential

"People committed to the work and to our school community and theme make all the difference! All the "extras" who are really essential . Social workers, Behavior Tech, FCSSP, Counselor, resource teachers, etc."

- Anonymous Staff Member

Families value our staff members

"The teachers and staff that I have met are so kind and acknowledge my daughter when she greets them or talks to them. She comes home and talks about her teachers and school staff telling me how they helped her or how much she likes them."

- Anonymous Family Member

- HPS faces a **continual structural deficit**, driven by flat revenue and rising costs
- Our deficit is driven by **special education tuition** and **door-to-door transportation** for Hartford resident students who do not attend Hartford Public Schools. This includes non-HPS magnet schools, open choice schools, and out-of-district placements
- **We are proposing what we need - not what we will cut - for FY27:**
 - We have cut significantly over the past decade - further cuts will jeopardize the progress we are making
 - We will focus on specific legislative advocacy solutions to increase fiscal sustainability for HPS and address the structural issues

Budget Reductions in Recent Years



Over the last 11 years, the district has mitigated almost \$200 million in costs and has eliminated 644 positions to adopt balanced budgets each year.

	FY16	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21*	FY22*	FY23*	FY24*	FY25	FY26	TOTAL
Budget Mitigation Amounts	\$24.2	\$30.2	\$26.2	\$24.8	\$12.0	–	–	–	\$10.2	\$40.9	\$19.1	\$187.6
Total Budget (not including COVID relief funds)	\$429.4	\$422.3	\$420.9	\$415.8	\$429.8	\$426.9	\$422.9	\$422.7	-	\$429.4	\$452.1	
% Mitigated	5.6%	7.2%	6.2%	6.0%	2.8%	–	–	-	-	9.5%	4.2%	
Positions Eliminated/Added (including COVID relief funded positions in the FY22 column)												
Schools	(65.5)	(215.4)	(57.5)	1.7	36.0	–	218.6**	–	(12)	(309.9)	(54.9)	(458.9)
Central Office	(12.7)	(20.4)	(28.5)	(22.2)	(3.0)	–	47.0**	–	(12.5)	(73.9)*	(58.5)	(184.7)

* Fiscal years 2020-21 through 2023-2024 did not require extraordinary mitigation measures due to COVID relief funds and high vacancy rates during the pandemic.

** Positions were added to schools and central office using COVID relief funds over the course of FY21 through FY24, but for simplicity we included the maximum number of positions funded with COVID relief funds in the FY22 column.

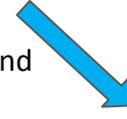
FY2027 Budget Process Overview



Data collection: Understanding our current fiscal reality to make smart assumptions for next year



Understanding the funding system components that most impact on our fiscal reality



Understanding the biggest cost and revenue drivers in our budget

Structural change: Building an advocacy movement around the school funding system

Strategic resource decisions: Making resource decisions that increase efficiency and align to our strategic plan



Education on the current school funding system and levers for change



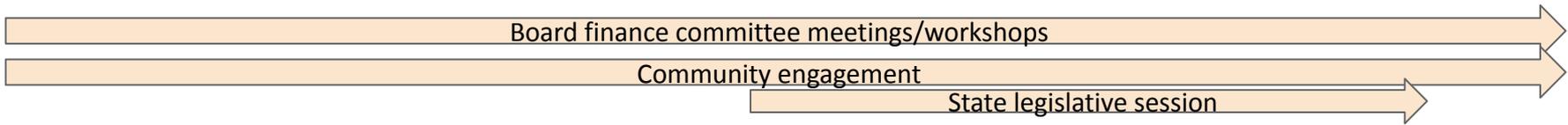
Community input on the most important budget priorities

Community engagement

FY2027 Budget Timeline



	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June
Inputs	Oct 1 enrollment data Vacancy rate FY25 close	SY25 performance data	Strategic plan overview	Mid-year enrollment data Tuition estimate					
Outputs				Updated deficit estimate	School site budgets Central office budgets Feb 18th: Community Budget forum	Draft of budget ask with detail	BOE budget vote - ask	End of State legislative session City Council budget vote	BOE budget vote - final



FY27 Deficit Update



Deficit estimate in October: \$35M



- Included staffing assumptions based on enrollment decline and the decreased vacancy rate
- Included assumption for decreased grant revenue for Alliance and Magnet Operating grants based on enrollment decline

What has changed since October? +\$10M



- Updates to the current-year budget that impact next year +\$8M
 - Additional of special education paraeducator positions based on IEPs: \$3M
 - Special education tuition rate increase: \$4M
 - State special education Excess Cost Grant decrease: \$1M
- New assumption:
 - Assuming a 10% decrease to some federal grants based on enrollment decline: \$2M

Deficit estimate in February: \$45M

Recommend a buffer for potential additional changes

NOTE: These estimates do NOT include funding provided from the city in FY26, as noted in the budget kickoff meetings. The city is currently providing funding in two capacities:

- \$4.5M of additional funds for CT Rise, ReadyCT, Opportunity Academy, dental clinics, and community-based organizations, plus other expenses
- \$3M in savings generated by potential consolidated services between the city and BOE

Defining the Structural Deficit



With \$70M in additional funding available from state action and continued city support, we would have a \$20M surplus

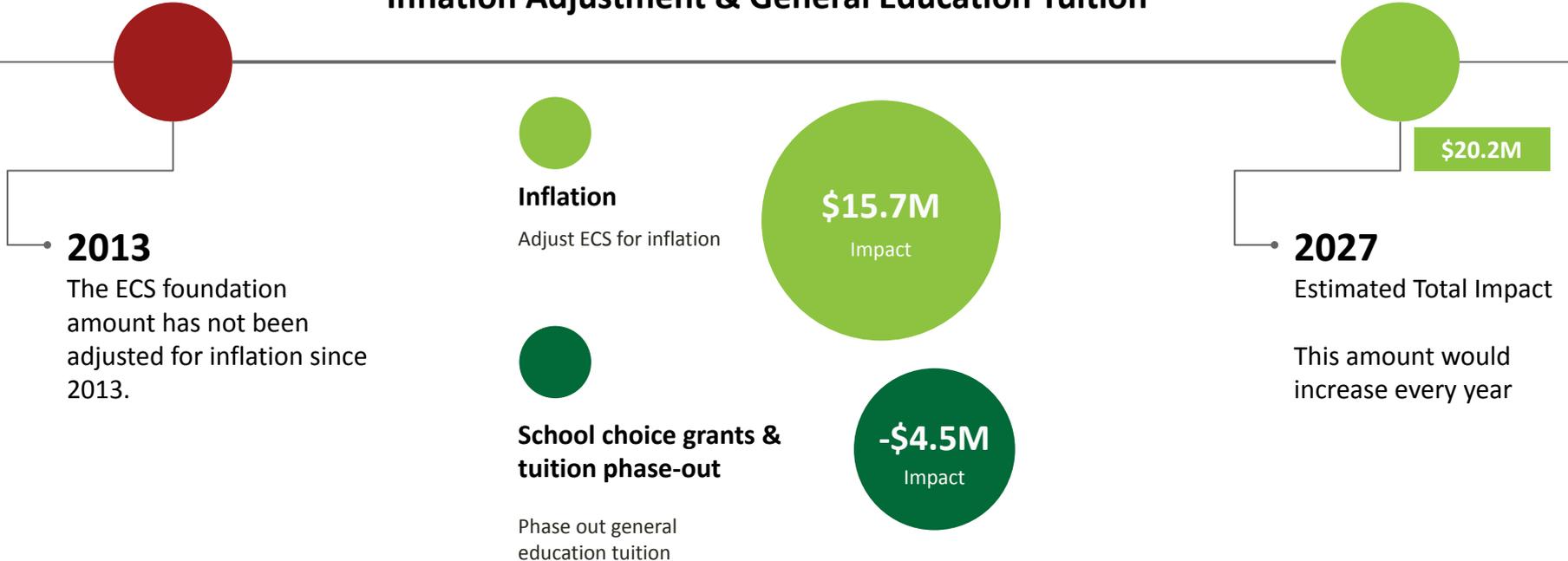
Here's what would need to happen to **keep Hartford whole**:

- Through the following legislative actions, the state could add approximately \$54M to Hartford's budget and eliminate \$16M in increased costs - **\$70M total**:
 - Inflation adjustment to ECS and elimination of general education tuition **\$20M** (\$16M in increased funding and \$4M of decreased costs)
 - Fulfillment of special education legislation from 2025: grant funding and rate-setting: **\$30M** (\$17M in grant funding and \$13M of decreased costs)
 - Count open choice students fully in Hartford's ECS formula and pay for door-to-door transportation for choice students: **\$20M**
- The city would need to:
 - Maintain the current **\$7.5M** additional funding
 - Provide additional funding to HPS depending on what is achieved at the state-level

Priority #1: Inflation adjustment to ECS and elimination of general education tuition



Inflation Adjustment & General Education Tuition



Priority #2: Fulfillment of special education legislation from 2025



Special Education

38% of total budget



SEED Grant

Full Funding

+\$12.6M
Impact



Special Education Tuition and Transportation Rate Setting

Cost Decrease

-\$13M
Impact

Special Education Tuition and Transportation

28% of total budget



Excess Cost Grant

Full Funding

+\$4.5M
Impact

▲ 8% YoY

More SpEd Resources Create Opportunities

"Kids who depend on support throughout the day have a Para and usually the Para are not able to stay late t to give them support so they can participate in after school activities."

- Anonymous Family Member

Priority #3: Count open choice students fully in Hartford's ECS formula and pay for door-to-door transportation for choice students



Aligning Special Education Responsibilities

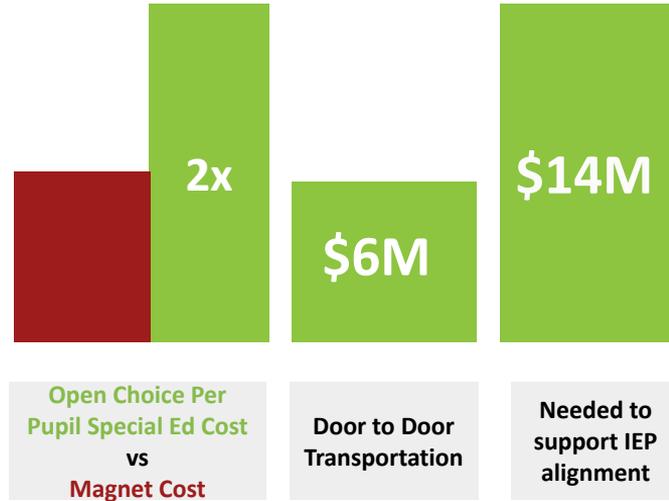
Current System

Sending District	IEP Responsibility
Hartford Public Schools	Service Costs

Proposed System

Hartford Public Schools	Service Costs & IEP Responsibility
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Financial Impact



Additional IEP Caseload

+600 students

Current Caseload: ~4,000

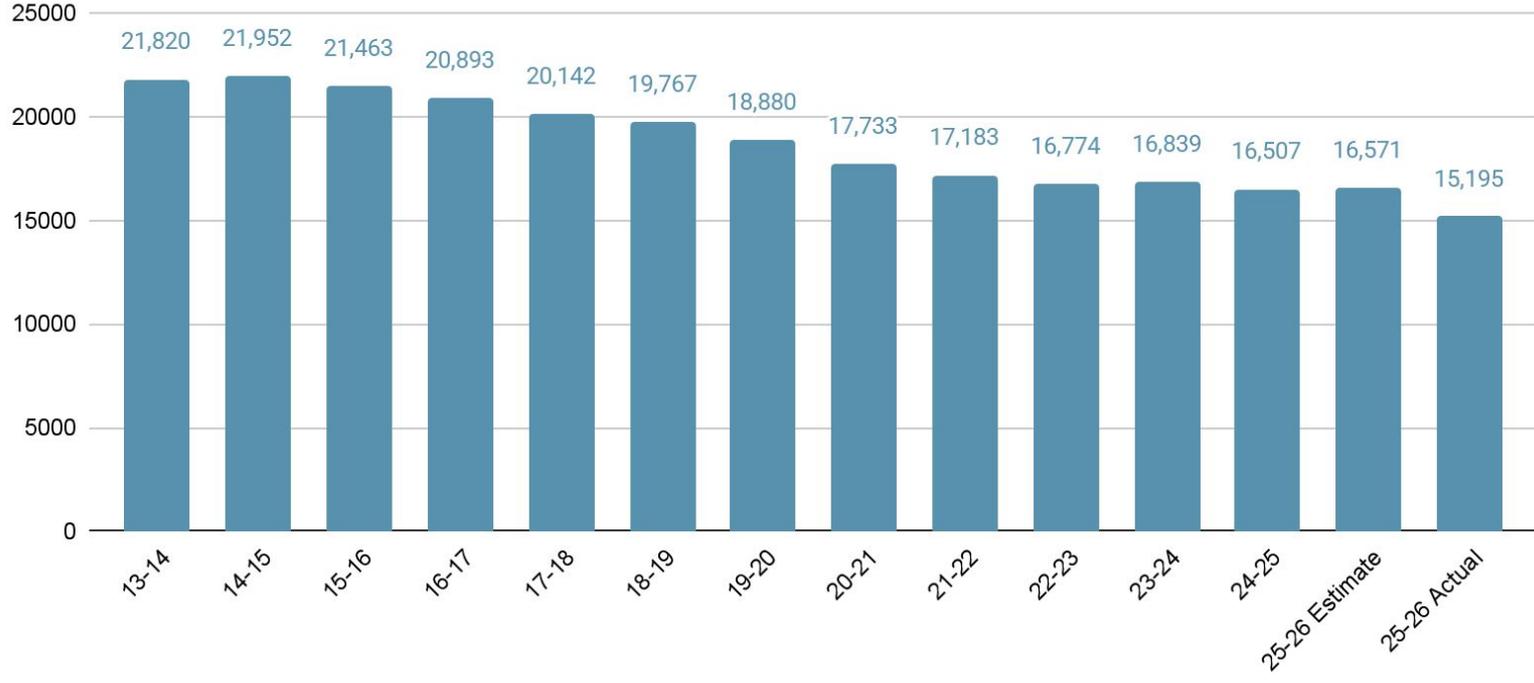
Families Feel the Impact of Special Education Coordination

"Too often, families are left waiting for updates or unsure about the next steps in their child's Individualized Education Program (IEP). Regular, proactive check-ins... would help ensure that everyone is on the same page and that my child's needs are being met consistently."

- Anonymous Family Member

Overview of the School Budget Process

HPS Enrollment Trends



Key Takeaways for School Budgets



- Same staffing and budget formulas **but** lower enrollment:
 - We are facing significant enrollment decline - this will be the single biggest cause of change in school budgets as most formulas are based on enrollment (including grant funds)
 - Enrollment projections are based on current enrollment rolled up to the next grade and include applicant and trend data for magnet schools
 - We are assuming a 10% reduction in Title I based on the declining enrollment. We are also facing greater restrictions on what can and can't be purchased with these dollars.
- New tools:
 - We will be using a new tool (Allovue): this solves for issues and errors from last year with multiple spreadsheets
 - High schools and combined middle and high schools will first build their schedule and then complete their budget in order to center student course needs

What could cause a change in a school's budget?



01

Enrollment

Are there more or less students attending my school?

- Staffing allocations for teachers and Assistant Principals
- Non-salary allocations for stipends, instructional supplies, staff overtime, substitutes
- School grant allocations such as Title I

02

Student Need

Are there more or less students with specific needs, like an IEP, that require different staff or services?

- Special education teachers and paraeducators
- Bilingual and TESOL
- Social workers and counselors

03

School Priorities

Do we need to invest in different activities or strategies based on the needs of our students?

- Justification of grant expenditures in line with district strategies, school-based goals, and grant applications

04

Revenue Availability

Is there a change in grant funds available to our school?

- Potential decreases to federal grants
- Schools may have access to school improvement grants, North Hartford Ascends, magnet grants, etc.

School Staffing and Budget Allocations



	How do schools receive positions ?	How do schools receive dollars ?
<p>Starting place based on student enrollment</p> <p>Fund source: ECS, Alliance, Magnet Operating</p>	<p>The staffing formulas allocate positions to schools based on student enrollment to meet the teaching and learning needs of all students</p>	<p>All schools receive restricted dollars based on the numbers of students and staff to cover expenses such as substitutes, stipends, and instructional supplies</p>
<p>Additional resources based on student need</p> <p>Fund source: Grants allocated based on student need and to magnet schools</p>	<p>Schools receive additional positions from district teams based on student needs, such as special education and bilingual teachers</p>	<p>Schools receive their full Title I allocation, which is based on the number of economically disadvantaged students. Schools also have access to other grants based on need, such as Comprehensive School Improvement, North Hartford Ascends, and Perkins grants</p>

Opportunity to Participate in the Advocacy Movement

Ways to Participate



- Sending a postcard to legislators
- Giving testimony at the capitol (can also submit written testimony)
- Hartford Day at the capitol 4/28
- Organizing other community members to participate and sharing the priorities with them
- Community Pulse



Raise your hand!

***YOUR SUPPORT STRENGTHENS
OUR CLASSROOMS.***

Here's what Hartford Public Schools' students need to keep thriving:



Updating public education funding based on inflation (ECS formula hasn't been adjusted since 2013) and ending local tuition billing



Fully funding SEED and Excess Cost grants, including the rate-setting commitments for special ed and transportation made in the 2025 legislative session



Realigning Open Choice and administrative capacity so that sending districts—not receiving districts—are responsible for the IEPs and related costs of special ed services

Dear Gov. Ned Lamont and CT State Legislators,



Your support for public education is essential for Hartford students. The people of Connecticut place a high value in providing strong, well-resourced education programs. Good public schools are sound investments in our children, ensuring the well-being of our neighborhoods for generations.

I urge you and all our elected leaders to build on the commitments we have already made to our students and our public schools. With sustained partnership and bold action, we are going to see Hartford rise!

Thank you,

From _____ Resident of _____
(Your full name) (Your City or Town)

I am a proud _____ Legislative District # _____
(Your role - student, parent, teacher, staff, leader, partner)

Providing Testimony



www.hartfordschools.org/HartfordRise

- Testimony instructions and resources
- Upcoming opportunity - Friday, February 20th:
 - The Education Committee will hold a public hearing on a number of bills Friday, Feb 20, at 10 am.
 - HB 5033 (the Governor's policy proposals on education) and SB 138 (State Department of Education Legislative proposals package).
 - Sign ups to testify for this hearing will close on Thursday at 3pm

Education Committee
Public Hearing
February 20, 2026

Public Hearing Testimony Comments
in opposition to
**HB 5033 AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR EDUCATION.**

Testimony of **NAME, POSITION**

Co-Chairs Senator McCrory and Representative Leeper, Ranking Members Senator Berthel and Representative Zupkus, and honorable Members of the Education Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on HB 5033 AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EDUCATION.

Introductory Paragraph:

- Provide your name, title (student/teacher/parent/Board Member, etc) and other details you believe are important to share
- Thank the Governor for introducing the legislation and for his ongoing commitment to education funding
- Explain that you are testifying in opposition to sections 1 through three, which would remove the current magnet school tuition cap of 58% and allow magnets to increase the rate at which they charge tuition

Bill Impact:

- With the current tuition cap in place, Hartford Board of Education currently spends 18 million dollars on general ed tuition
- If the tuition cap were to be repealed, this would result in a 13 million dollar increase in the budget, totaling \$31 million in tuition costs
- The proposal would also cut 12 million dollars in supplemental funding that RESCs currently receive.
- Any increase in magnet school tuition costs will directly result in a reduction of services for students attending school in district
- This legislation once again highlights the longstanding impact of the Sheff decision, which while well-intended has resulted in fewer resources for children attending community schools

Upcoming Opportunity



- The Education Committee will hold a public hearing on Friday, February 20, 2026 at 10:00 A.M. in Room 1E of the Legislative Office Building and via Zoom.
- Individuals who wish to testify must register using the **On-line Testimony Registration Form** by Thursday, February 19, 2026 at 3:00 P.M. Speaker order of approved registrants will be listed in a randomized order and posted on the Education Committee website on Thursday, February 19, 2026 at 6:00 P.M.
 - Speakers will be limited to **three minutes of testimony**.
- Please submit written testimony using the **On-line Testimony Submission Form**.

HB 5033 - Governor's Policy Proposals on Education



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- Any increase in magnet school tuition costs will directly result in a reduction of services for students attending school in district
- This legislation once again highlights the longstanding impact of the Sheff decision, which while well-intended has resulted in fewer resources for children attending community schools
- All of Hartford's students, whether attending in or out of district, deserve access to equitable funding, and we urge the state to honor the commitments made in previous session
- I respectfully request the legislature reject this proposal, and instead maintain the tuition cap and the \$12 million allocation currently in place for RESC Magnets

SB 138 - State Department of Education Legislative proposals package



- We fully support the intent of section 4, which would require sending districts to pay for both the IEP and the costs of special ed services. We support this proposal as long as it comes with the resources required to support the IEP process. We suggest this could be accomplished by counting open choice students fully in the ECS formula of the sending district.
- This change would both allow sending districts greater oversight of the IEP process, while ensuring students receive the services they are entitled to.
- **By counting open choice students fully in the ECS formula of the sending district, the policy ensures financial resources are available to support all Hartford students, whether attending school in or out of the district.**

Community Pulse Dashboard



Families Feel the Impact of Special Education Coordination

Special education needs are mentioned, highlighting the importance of IEPs, special education services, and support for students with disabilities. There are concerns about the availability and adequacy of these services, particularly for children with complex needs.

"My child is special needs and him getting out of school at 1pm everyday isn't working for my family of 2 working parents"

Anonymous Family Member

"Consistent communication with teachers and school staff is the support our family relies on most to help address academic and social needs. Individualized learning support provided by the school, including specialized instruction and progress monitoring."

Anonymous Family Member

"Consistent communication with teachers and school staff is the support our family relies on most to help address academic and social needs. Individualized learning support provided by the school, including specialized instruction and progress monitoring. School counseling services, academic support services, including teacher communication and tutoring, to help ensure our child stays on track academically."

Anonymous Family Member



District Priority:

Legislative Priority #3: Count open choice students fully in Hartford's ECS formula and pay for door-to-door transportation for choice students

This priority focuses on aligning responsibility for special education services in the open choice process. Currently, the district responsible for developing a student's IEP is not always the same district responsible for covering the cost of services. We support aligning both responsibility and funding, while ensuring adequate resources to manage the increased IEP workload. We are also advocating for the State to assume the cost of door-to-door transportation for open choice and magnet students to create greater consistency and sustainability.

We have been sending out quick, one question surveys every other week to get your input on what is going well and what can be improved in HPS to inform the budget process.

Coming soon - we will have all of this information on an interactive dashboard so you can join the community conversation!

Questions?