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

Budget Community Forum





Dr. Andrae Townsel, Superintendent
Caitlin Richard, CFO

4/8/2026

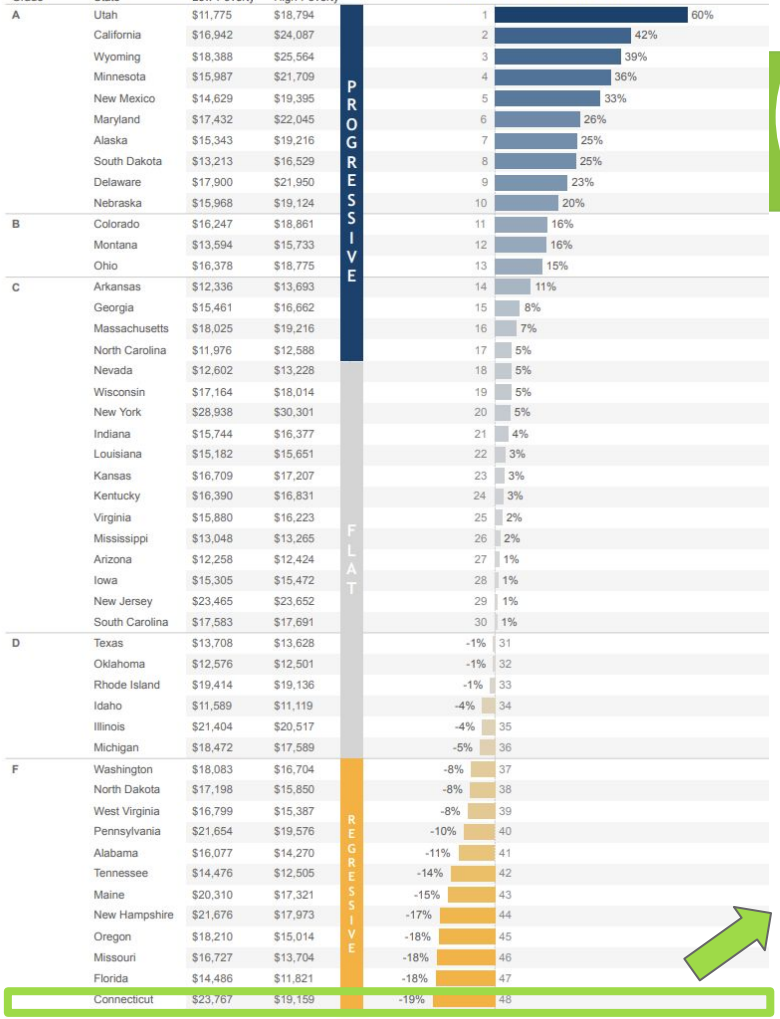






Agenda

- Overview of HPS fiscal context
- Legislative levers and advocacy



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Connecticut has the most inequitable school funding system in the country

State	Low-Poverty	High-Poverty	Funding Distribution: Advantage (+) / Disadvantage (-) in High-Poverty Districts	
Washington	$18,083	$16,704	-8%	37
North Dakota	$17,198	$15,850	-8%	38
West Virginia	$16,799	$15,387	-8%	39
Pennsylvania	$21,654	$19,576	-10%	40
Alabama	$16,077	$14,270	-11%	41
Tennessee	$14,476	$12,505	-14%	42
Maine	$20,310	$17,321	-15%	43
New Hampshire	$21,676	$17,973	-17%	44
Oregon	$18,210	$15,014	-18%	45
Missouri	$16,727	$13,704	-18%	46
Florida	$14,486	$11,821	-18%	47
Connecticut	$23,767	$19,159	-19%	48

REGRESSIVE

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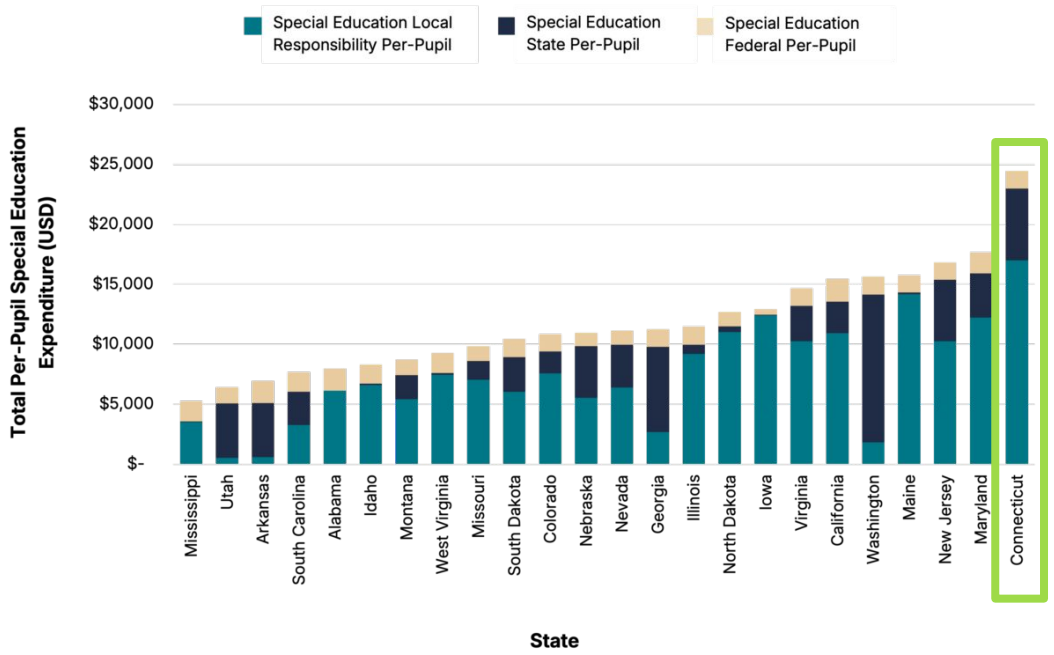
Connecticut also has some of the highest special education costs, with limited state funding support

Figure 3: Total (Local Responsibility, State, Federal) Per-Pupil K-12 Special Education Expenditure By State, Fiscal Year 2020

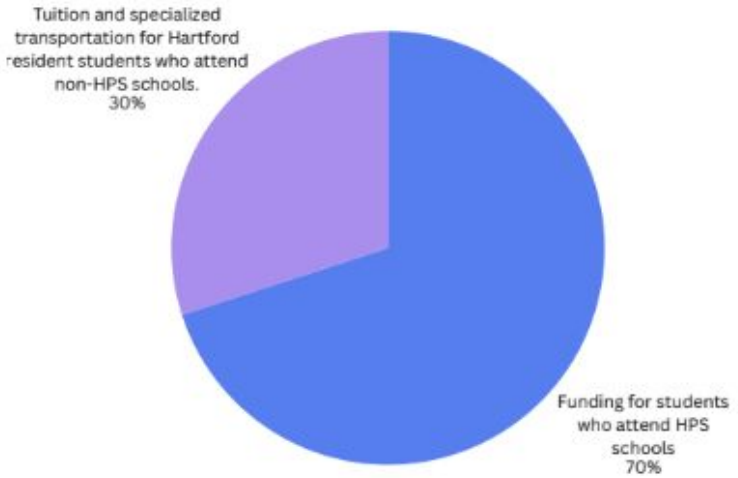


***Source**: National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data, FY20.*

BROOKINGS

HPS Budget Overview

Hartford Public Schools' budget is made up of:



(70%) Funding for students who attend HPS schools

(30%) Tuition and specialized transportation for Hartford resident students who attend non-HPS schools.
This includes:

- Non-HPS magnet schools (CREC)
- Open Choice schools
- Charter schools
- Private special education placements

Tuition

Two factors matter for tuition: Number of students and cost per student.

- Special education tuition has been increasing at the rate of 8% per year. There are currently no rates for special education tuition - we are charged different amounts by different providers
- In FY25, total tuition was **$115M**
  - **$18M** in general education tuition
    - We pay general education tuition for Hartford residents who attend non-HPS magnet schools. This was about $4,000 per student for 4,300 students

Full ECS per student

  - **$97M** in special education tuition. We pay this for Hartford resident students who attend:
    - Non-HPS magnet schools: **$25M**. This is about $22,000 per student for 1,100 students

Half ECS per student

    - Open choice schools: **$25M.** This is about $44,000 per student for 570 students
      - Hartford students outplaced by open choice schools: additional **$5M.** This is about $115,000 per student for 45 students

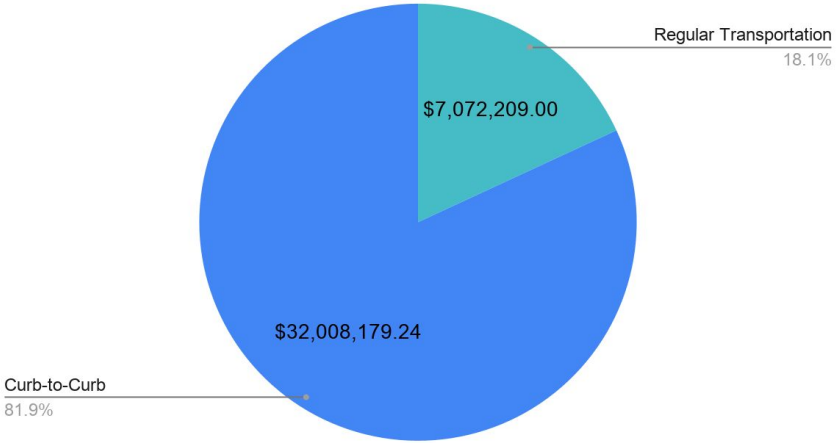
Full ECS per student

    - Private placement: **$42M**. This is about $130,000 per student for 310 students

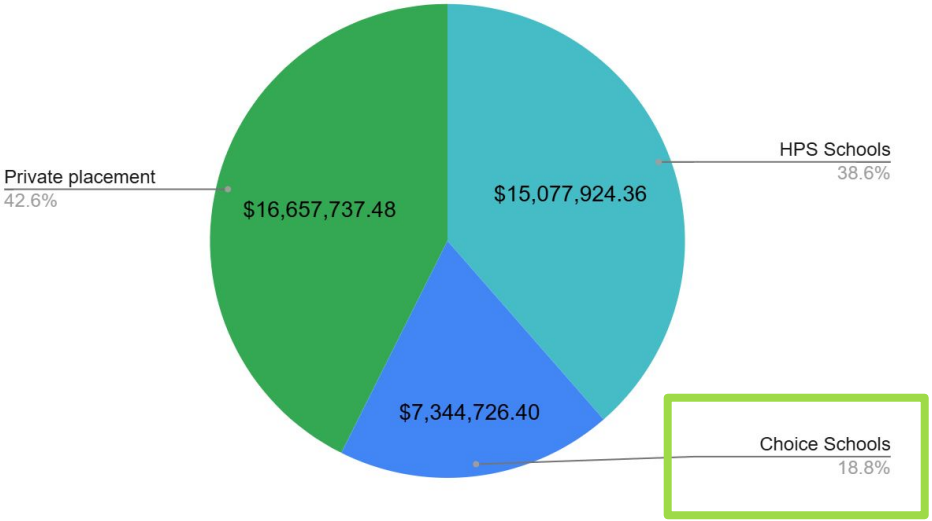
Transportation (projection)

Most of our transportation budget is specialized transportation, $7M of which is for choice schools

Transportation Costs by Type of Transportation



Transportation Costs by Type of School



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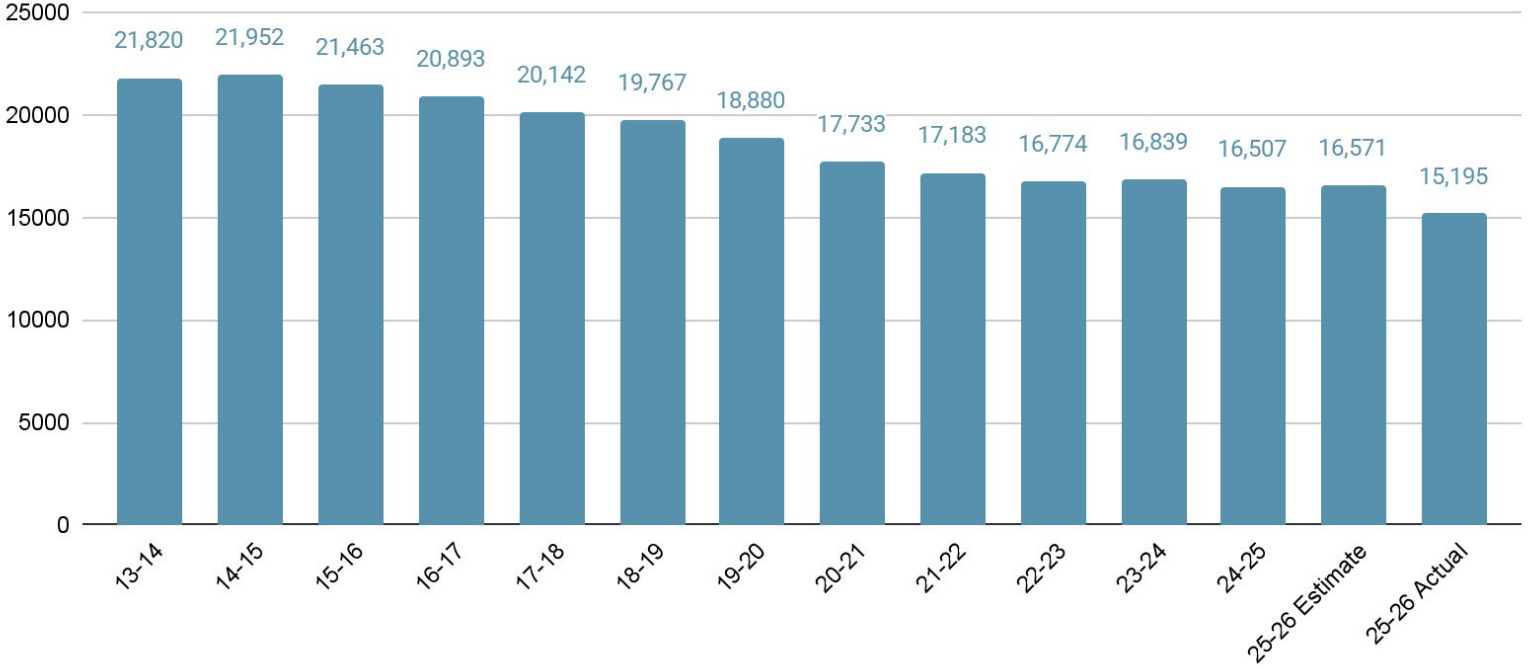
We pay for students who choose to leave the system, and we pay for students who choose to stay.

Enrollment Decline

This year's enrollment decrease is more substantial than anytime in the past decade - and more significant than other large, urban districts nationally



Impact of enrollment on costs

If enrollment is declining, why don't costs automatically go down?

- Students tend to leave HPS from across many different schools. Schools lose staff and dollars when they lose student enrollment.
- However, the enrollment loss in a given year may not be enough at one particular school and grade-level to change the number of teachers and other staff needed at that school.
- The students who choose to stay at that school often need a similar number of resources as before.

The district has made significant budget reductions in the past decade

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.

Current Fiscal Outlook

- **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
- Our deficit is structural and driven by **special education tuition** and **door-to-door transportation** for students who don't attend HPS (non-HPS magnets, open choice, special education private placements):
  - Our FY26 deficit is $22M
  - Our FY27 deficit is $52.5M

Budget Timeline

Date	Milestone
3/4	• Testimony at capitol: ECS inflation adjustment • Budget meetings with city council members
3/23	• Mayor's recommended budget released
4/1	• First city public budget hearing
4/8	• BOE budget community forum
4/14	• Board workshop on itemized estimate of expenditures
4/21	• BOE budget hearing at Board meeting
4/22	• BOE budget presentation with city council
4/28	• Final city public budget hearing • Hartford day at the capitol
5/6	• End of state legislative session
Mid-May	• City budget hearing and city council vote • Final BOE budget vote

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

Inflation Adjustment & General Education Tuition

2013

The ECS foundation amount has not been adjusted for inflation since 2013.

Inflation

Adjust ECS for inflation

$9.4M
Impact

School choice grants & tuition phase-out

Phase out general education tuition

-$2.6M
Impact

$12M

2027

Estimated Total Impact

This amount would increase every year to $48M in FY30

State Priority #2: Fulfillment of special education legislation from 2025

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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

▲ 8% YoY

Excess Cost Grant

Full Funding

+$4.5M
Impact

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

State 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

Financial Impact



Open Choice Per Pupil Special Ed Cost vs Magnet Cost	Door to Door Transportation	Needed to support IEP alignment

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."

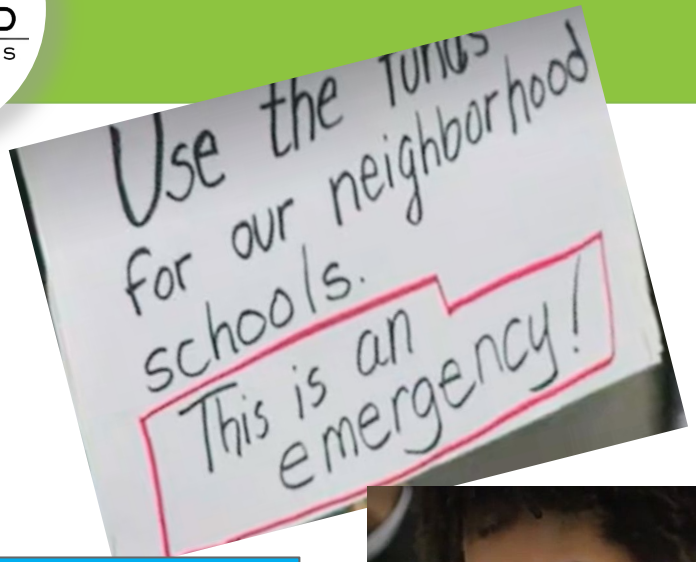
- Anonymous Family Member

Advocating for ECS inflation adjustment at the State capitol



City Priority

We are asking the city to increase their contribution to education and are working collaboratively to come up with a plan.



Advocating for city funding at city hall



HPS Priorities

- Advocacy to change the financial conditions in which we operate:
  - We are committed to offering the best education possible and advocating for the resources it takes to make that happen
- Budget reductions as part of strong fiscal management:
  - We are decreasing the total number of positions based on enrollment decline, as class size formulas allow
  - We are decreasing anything funded with one-time grant funds
- Targeted increases with long term impact:
  - We are planning to increase in-house special education programming to keep students close to home and save on outplacement costs

Ways to Participate

- Send a postcard to legislators
- Contact your state legislators and city council members
- Watch the virtual BOE workshop on 4/14 to see our itemized list of expenditures (draft budget book)
- Attend the BOE public budget hearing on 4/21 (Weaver High School 5:30 p.m.)
- Attend the city public budget hearing on 4/28 (Weaver High School 6:00 p.m.)
- Organize other community members to participate and sharing the priorities with them
- Fill out the Community Pulse Flash Polls

Community Input

Great teachers are limited by inequitable funding

"The teachers are dedicated but they are working with limited resources. They are doing the best they can and care about the students but the school district is very limited in things like Para educators which makes the teachers jobs harder. "

- Anonymous Family Member

"The teachers are great. The district remains underfunded and short staffed. The mayor has halted long needed building upgrades"

- Anonymous Family Member

"We keep cutting more and more positions and expecting positive results… the need for support staff and interventionists is significant in all schools."

- Anonymous Staff Member

Fair funding creates more opportunity for extracurriculars

"Continue the fight for fair funding of Hartford Public Schools. Music and Sports programs have been wonderful and I hope we can keep them! I worry about our kids having the tools to adapt to an AI-driven world and how that looks for high schools in a few years."

- Anonymous Family Member

Questions?