

Data released by the Connecticut State Department of Education earlier this year indicates the state's public schools experienced their largest decline in overall enrollment since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. While there is no definitive answer to what caused the substantial drop in enrollment, the decline was likely influenced by declining birth rates, growing interest in private and home schooling, and recent changes to federal immigration policies.^{1,2,3,4}

These significant enrollment changes impact more than just the number of students in a classroom. They can affect the amount of state education funding a school district receives, including its Education Cost Sharing (ECS) grant, which is Connecticut's primary mechanism for distributing state funds to local and regional public school districts.

This brief provides a high-level analysis of the latest enrollment counts and examines their impacts on ECS grant allocations to districts.

Key Takeaways

- **K-12 enrollment has decreased across the state**
 - Total student enrollment decreased by 10,640 students (2.1%) between the 2024-25 and 2025-26 school years.
 - Resident Student and Need Student counts, which are used in the ECS formula, decreased between October 2024 and October 2025.
 - The number of Resident Students declined by 11,453 students (2.4%), while Need Student counts declined by 15,007 students (2.7%).
- **For the first time in over 10 years, multilingual learner enrollment declined**
 - The total number of multilingual learners enrolled in Connecticut's public schools decreased by 2,157 (3.8%).
 - The total Resident Student count of multilingual learners decreased by 2,643 (4.7%).
- **Enrollment changes impacted fully-funded ECS grant amounts**
 - Declines in enrollment reduced the potential benefits districts would see from changes to the ECS formula, such as increasing the formula's foundation amount.

¹ Council, D., Goulas, S., & Monachou, F. (2025). *Declining Public School Enrollment*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings. Retrieved from https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/20250827_ES_Goulas_LearningLossFINAL.pdf.

² National Center for Education Statistics. (2024, May). Annual Reports and Information Staff (Annual Reports): Public School Enrollment. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cga/public-school-enrollment>.

³ Barshay, J. (2025, September 22). Public school kids were already going missing. Now schools are poised to see sharper enrollment declines. *The Hechinger Report*. Retrieved from <https://hechingerreport.org/proof-points-public-school-enrollment-decline/>.

⁴ Sokoloff, N. (2026, May 10). 'Living in fear': Multilingual student enrollment drops in CT schools amid Trump immigration crackdown. *CT Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.ctpost.com/news/education/article/multilingual-enrollment-immigrant-families-trump-21945240.php>.

Total Enrollment

- **Statewide, K-12 enrollment declined by 10,640 students** (2.1%) between the 2024-25 and 2025-26 school years.
 - This represents the **largest single year decline** in Connecticut public school enrollment since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Though total enrollment declined statewide, it was **not felt uniformly across districts**, with 44 districts (22% of overall districts) experiencing increased enrollment.⁵
 - On average districts experienced a **decline of 53 students** between the 2024-25 and 2025-26 school years.
 - Changes ranged from a **decrease of 980 students** (5.2%) for New Haven Public Schools to an **increase of 316 students** (2.8%) for the Connecticut Technical Education and Career System.

Free or Reduced-Price Lunch Eligibility

- The total number of students eligible for **free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL) decreased by 8,160** (3.6%).
 - In addition to the total number of FRPL-eligible students declining, the **overall share of students eligible for FRPL also declined** from 44.8% to 44.2%.
- Changes in the number of students eligible for FRPL were not uniform across the state with 72 districts (36% of overall districts) experiencing an **increase in the number of FRPL-eligible students they serve**.
 - Changes ranged from a **decrease of 1,487 students** for Waterbury Public Schools to an **increase of 319** for Norwalk Public Schools.

Multilingual Learners

- For the first time in over 10 years, the number of students who are **multilingual learners decreased by 2,157** (3.8%).
 - Additionally, the overall percentage of students identified as multilingual learners decreased from 11.3% to 11.1%.
- Multilingual learner enrollment did not decline uniformly across the state, with 69 districts (34.5% of overall districts) experiencing **increased multilingual learner enrollment**.
 - Changes ranged from a **decrease of 388 students** for Hartford Public Schools to an **increase of 112** for the Connecticut Technical Education and Careers System.

⁵ This count excludes districts that opened during the 2025-26 school year.

Students with Disabilities

- The total number of students receiving **special education services increased by 801 (0.9%)**.
 - This increase, paired with decreasing enrollment, resulted in the **share of students receiving special education services reaching an all-time high of 19.1%**.
- Though a majority of districts reported an **increase in the number of students receiving special education services**, there were 78 districts (39% of overall districts) that reported decreases.
 - Changes ranged from a **decrease of 124 students** for New Haven Public Schools to an **increase of 141** for the Connecticut Technical Education and Career System.

Black, Indigenous, Latine, People of Color (BILPOC)

- The number of **BILPOC students declined by 3,938 (1.4%)**.
 - Though total enrollment of BILPOC students declined, the **overall percentage of students identified as BILPOC increased** from 54.9% to 55.3%.
- Though total BILPOC enrollment declined statewide and in a majority of districts, the **percentage of students identified as BILPOC increased in 127 districts** (63.5% of overall districts).
 - Changes ranged from a **decrease of 782 students** for Hartford Public Schools to an **increase of 335** for the Connecticut Technical Education and Career System.

Impact of Enrollment Changes on ECS Funding

- Changes to **student counts used in the calculation of ECS grants largely mirrored the changes in student enrollment** experienced by districts across the state.
 - These changes to student counts resulted in **significant impacts to ECS fully-funded grant amounts**.
- **The total amount needed to provide each town with its fully-funded ECS grant decreased by \$137.65 million from fiscal year 2026 to fiscal year 2027** — a decrease resulting from lower student counts and increased town wealth for a majority of towns.⁶
 - **Student enrollment and demographic shifts accounted for 52.1% (\$71.7 million)** of the total change to ECS fully-funded grant amounts.
 - **Town wealth changes accounted for 47.9% (\$66 million)** of the total change to ECS fully-funded grant amounts.

⁶ This total was calculated using the ECS formula before any of the existing hold-harmless provisions were applied.

- **Fully-funded ECS grant amounts decreased for 139 towns**, driven by changes in both enrollment and town wealth.
 - Among these towns, **an average of 70% of the change came from enrollment shifts**, while 30% was attributable to changes in municipal wealth.
- **Fully-funded ECS grant amounts increased for 30 towns**, driven primarily by changes in municipal wealth.