SCHOOL + STATE FINANCE PROJECT

Connecticut's Technical Education and Career System

Policy Briefing - December 20, 2021[A]

Introduction

There are a variety of public school choice programs in Connecticut, including magnet schools, charter schools, technical high schools, agriculture science and technology education centers, endowed private schools, designated high schools, and the Open Choice program. This policy briefing focuses solely on the Connecticut Technical Education and Career System (CTECS), formerly known as the Connecticut Technical High School System, and discusses its objectives, history, administration, and sources of funding.

Program History and Background

The CTECS is Connecticut's oldest system of public schools of choice.[1] Vocational-technical education initially operated at the local level with state oversight but gradually transitioned to state operation, and by 1915 became entirely state-maintained.[2] In 1917, Congress passed the Smith-Hughes Act, which made federal funding for vocational education conditional on oversight by a single state board.[3]

The CTECS is the largest public high school system in the state — educating 10,995 students during the 2019-20 school year.[4] The CTECS operates 17 diploma-granting high schools and offers 31 career technology education programs, sorted into 12 career clusters: Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources; Architecture and Construction; Arts, Audio/Visual Technology, and Communications; Health Technology; Hospitality and Tourism; Human Services; Information Technology; Law, Public Safety, Corrections and Security; Manufacturing; Marketing, Sales, and Service; Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM); and Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics.[5] A list of the specific trade programs can be found in the appendix of this policy briefing. The CTECS also offers traditional comprehensive high school programs in the areas of: English, mathematics, social studies, science, physical education, health education, and art.[6] Upon graduation, students receive a high school diploma and a certificate in a specific trade.[7]

Other CTECS Programs

The CTECS also operates the Bristol Technical Education Center (Bristol TEC), which provides 11th grade, 12th grade, and adult education. Bristol TEC does not offer comprehensive secondary school programs, and high school students complete academic coursework at their sending school.[8] Some sending school districts allow students to complete academic coursework before or after normal school hours, over the summer, or through online courses.[9] Students must pass their trade program and complete 720 hours of related instruction to receive a Bristol TEC High School Technology Certificate and earn five high school credits.[10]

[A] Originally published on July 24, 2019, and revised in January 2021, this policy briefing has been updated with statutory changes from the 2021 legislative session.

Bristol TEC also offers full-time, post-secondary school programs, as do the CTECS's two aviation maintenance technician schools:[11] 1) CT Aero Tech School in Hartford and 2) Stratford School for Aviation Maintenance Technicians. In addition, six technical high schools offer part-time evening apprentice and extension courses.[12]

Student Demographics

Fifty-seven percent of the 10,995 students attending CTECS schools during the 2019-20 school year were identified as BIPOC,[B] while 43 percent were identified as white.[13] Additionally, 11 percent of CTECS students required special education services; four percent were identified as English Learners; and 58 percent were classified as economically disadvantaged due to their eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch. Below are the totals and percentages of CTECS students by demographic compared to the demographics of all of Connecticut's 527,829 public school students.

Figure 1: 2019-20 CTECS Demographics Compared to All Connecticut Public School Students[14]

Demographic	Total CTECS Students	CTECS Percentage	Total Public School Students	State Percentage
White	4,677	42%	269,789	51%
BIPOC	6,318	58%	258,040	49%
Special Education	1,237	11%	84,398	16%
English Learner	485	4%	43,479	8%
Economically Disadvantaged	6,356	58%	228,535	43%

[B] The School and State Finance Project uses BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) to refer to individuals who self-identify as American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian; Black or African American; Hispanic/Latino of any race; Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander; or two or more races. Individual demographic categories and data used in the visualizations above comes from the Connecticut State Department of Education. The acronym BIPOC is used in an effort to be as inclusive, succinct, and accurate as possible when using racial and ethnic demographics in our work. However, we know no single acronym, identifier, or label can accurately define an individual or fully encompass the rich diversity of cultures, heritages, and backgrounds represented in the demographic data we use. For questions or comments about the demographic terms we use, please contact us at info@schoolstatefinance.org.

Program Eligibility and Student Participation

While many school choice programs are "blind admission," wherein all students are eligible to attend the program if they choose to participate and an open seat is available, CTECS students must apply and meet criteria for admissions. While CTECS' schools are divided into four regions, any student who has completed eighth or ninth grade and resides in Connecticut is eligible to apply for any CTECS school.[15] Students may apply to start at the beginning of their ninth-grade year, or transfer mid-year during their ninth- or 10th-grade years.[16]

Students can apply to up to four schools by submitting a form, completed by both the student and their parent/guardian, to the student's school counselor, principal, or teacher.[17] The student's school completes the sending school section and sends the full application to the student's first choice school. The application includes the previous and current year transcript, previous and current year discipline record, previous and current year attendance report, a completed Student Interest Form, and the most recent Smarter Balanced Report.[18] The application items are assigned points and students are placed on a ranked list by school based on their application's total score.[19]

A CTECS school then sends a "First Step" letter to selected students in early February with a "Parent Response Form," which is to be signed by the parent/guardian and returned to the technical high school.[20] At the end of the school year, the accepted student's current school sends the technical high school the following information for the accepted student: 1) health and immunization records; 2) English Learner program records, if applicable; 3) final eighth-grade transcript indicating successful completion of the eighth-grade, or ninth-grade transcript if applying for 10th grade; and 4) final discipline record that indicates no serious disciplinary infractions.[21]

If it is determined that a student applying to a CTECS school requires special education services, the student's sending district is responsible for convening a "Planning and Placement Team," which includes a CTECS representative, to address the student's transition to the CTECS school and ensure the student's Individualized Education Program reflects the current supports and services necessary for the student to access a free, appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment.[22]

Beginning with the 2019-20 school year, students interested in attending technical high schools in the Hartford region (E.C. Goodwin Technical High School, A.I. Prince Technical High School, or Howell Cheney Technical High School) must apply through the Regional School Choice Office (RSCO) of the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), which handles applications for all public school choice programs in the Hartford area.[23] The RSCO process for these schools differs from the other CTECS schools by not requiring report cards or test scores, and by using a school assignment process that utilizes a selection algorithm that takes into account hometown and trade preferences.[24]

Students who enter a CTECS school at the beginning of ninth grade participate in a career and technical exploratory program that "introduces each student to the goals and objectives for career and technical programs; provides an objective measure of student performance and a measure of potential for success for each student in all

career and technical programs."[25] The exploratory program is divided into three phases: 1) Phase I provides information on all offered career and technical programs, with students transitioning between programs every two days; 2) Phase II provides hands-on experience in three programs, with students transitioning between programs every four days; and 3) Phase III provides permanent placement in a career and technical program for the next three years.[26,27]

Students who transfer to a CTECS school in the middle of ninth grade or enter in their 10th grade year are exempted from the exploratory program requirement.[28] Curricula for each grade at CTECS schools alternates every two weeks between technology classes for trade certification and academic classes for state graduation requirements, each over a total of 91 days, for a total of 182 days.[29,30]

Connecticut Technical Education and Career System Governance

Administration

The Connecticut State Board of Education (SBOE) established and maintains the CTECS. However, the CTECS is advised by a separate state board of education called the Connecticut Technical Education System Board (referred to throughout this policy briefing as the CTECS board).[31] Currently, this board is made up of 11 members: four executives of businesses based in Connecticut, nominated by the Connecticut Employment and Training Commission and appointed by the governor; five members appointed by the SBOE; the commissioner of Connecticut's Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD); and the commissioner of Connecticut's Department of Labor (DOL). The chairperson, who serves on the SBOE as a nonvoting ex-officio member, is appointed by the governor.[32]

A candidate for superintendent of the CTECS is recommended by the CTECS board to the commissioner of the CSDE, who makes the decision to hire or reject the candidate.[33] If the candidate is rejected, the CTECS board recommends another candidate to the commissioner. The superintendent of the CTECS is "responsible for the operation and administration of the technical education and career schools and all other matters related to vocational, technical, technological and postsecondary education."[34]

While each CTECS school is supervised by a principal and, depending on the size, two to three assistant principals,[35] unlike traditional high schools, the principal is not involved in the hiring of staff or the creation of positions.[36] The commissioner of the CSDE, in accordance with policies established by the CTECS board, is responsible for staffing decisions, establishing rules for the management of CTECS funding, and with expending funds appropriated from the General Fund for the CTECS schools.[37] However, because CTECS is a division of a state agency and its employees are state employees, Connecticut's Office of Policy and Management is ultimately responsible for approving new positions or the filling of new positions.[38] In addition, when a vacancy does occur, collectively bargained rights may allow an employee a lateral transfer from another CTECS school.[39]

Additionally, each technical high school has a Career Technology Education Advisory Committee (CTEAC) made up of local business and industry leaders and CTECS administrators and teachers.[40] CTEACs advise on "program curricula; program facilities; state-of-the-art technology; occupational outlook; employability skills; and workplace credentials."[41]

Transition to an Independent Agency

In 2017, the Connecticut General Assembly passed Public Act 17-237, which transitions the CTECS into an independent executive branch agency and out of the oversight of the CSDE.[42] Beginning July 1, 2022, the CTECS board will consist of 11 members, all appointed by the governor, with at least two members being alumni of the system or having experience in manufacturing or a trade offered by the CTECS, and two members who are executives of businesses based in Connecticut and who have been nominated by the Governor's Workforce Council.[43] The commissioners of the CSDE, the DECD, and DOL, or their designees, will serve as ex-officio members.[44]

Following this transition, an executive director, appointed by the governor, will be responsible for the operation, administration, and financial accountability and oversight of the CTECS in matters relating to the central office, system-wide management, and other non-educational matters.[45] In addition, the superintendent of the CTECS will be appointed by the executive director at the recommendation of the CTECS board, and will continue to be responsible for the operation and administration of the individual schools.[46]

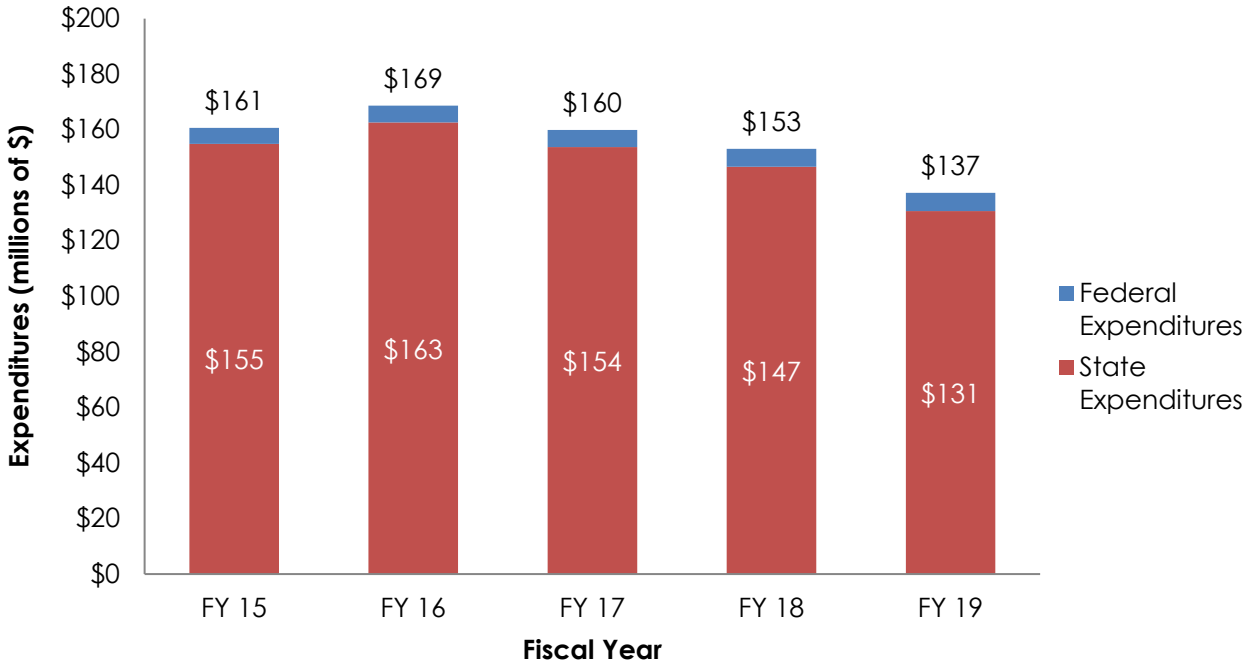
This transition was initially intended to take effect July 1, 2019[47] but has been delayed twice: 1) Conn. Act 17-2 §§ 72-82 (June Special Session) delayed the transition to July 1, 2020; and 2) Conn. Act 19-117 §§ 273-284 further delayed the transition to July 1, 2022. Delaying the transition to an independent executive branch agency is anticipated to save the State approximately $1 million, by delaying the hiring of 21 new administrative positions.[48]

Funding

Operating Funding

The CTECS is exclusively state-operated and funded out of the resources of the State of Connecticut's General Fund.[49] As a result, CTECS schools do not receive funding through the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) formula and CTECS students are not counted in the resident student count of the town in which they reside. The State provides, and assumes the costs for, special education services required by CTECES students.[50] The CTECS expended $155.9 million in expenditures in fiscal year 2019,[51] and the State appropriated $157.8 million to the system in FY 2020.[52] The graph below shows the budgeted state expenditures over the past five years. Please note these figures do not include the fringe benefit costs for past and current employees of the CTECS because those costs are budgeted centrally for all state employees under the state comptroller.

Figure 2: Total State Expenditures in Support of CTECS[53]



The State of Connecticut receives a federal grant specifically for technical education in the form of "Career and Technical Education – Basic Grants to States" authorized under Title I of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006. This grant was $10,844,369 for FY 2019, of which $202,196 went to the CTECS.[54,55] The State also receives annual federal grants for CTECS under: Title I, Title II Part A, and Title III Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA); the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA); Title IV Part A of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (when applicable); the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) (when applicable); and 21st Century Community Learning Centers as part of ESSA (when applicable).[56] A breakout of these grants is included in the appendix of this policy briefing.

Transportation Funding

Local and regional boards of education are responsible for the "reasonable and necessary" transportation of students residing in their district to the CTECS school the student attends, regardless of where the CTECS school is located.[57] Under Conn. Gen. Statutes ch. 172, § 10-266m, local and regional boards of education are eligible for a formula-based grant to help offset the costs of transportation.[58] However, the Connecticut General Assembly has not appropriated funding for the transportation grant line item since 2016 and, as a result, districts do not receive any state funding for transportation.[59] However, in order to comply with the Connecticut Supreme Court's 1996 ruling in *Sheff v. O'Neill*, and the case's subsequent stipulated agreements, the State provides funding to transport students to all school choice programs in the greater Hartford region — including CTECS schools in that region — that assist the State in meeting its obligations under *Sheff*.[60]

Capital Funding

Similar to operational expenses, capital improvement and capital equipment for the CTECS is funded entirely by the State.[61] The CTECS board is required to submit a 3-year rolling capital plan to the General Assembly's Education Committee; Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee; and Appropriations Committee.[62] The most recent rolling capital plan for the CTECS, covering FY 2019 through FY 2021, identified a need for $25.2 million to cover educational equipment, technology, infrastructure, vehicles, and energy efficiency projects.[63]

The General Assembly authorizes general obligation bonds to the CSDE, which issues grants to the CTECS for existing building and grounds improvements, equipment tools, vehicles, and technology upgrades.[64] From FY 2014 through FY 2020, the General Assembly authorized $37.5 million in bonding for the CTECS.[C] Of that authorized bonding amount, $6.77 million is unallocated as of July 1, 2020.[65]

Connecticut's Department of Administrative Services includes CTECS school construction projects on its list of school building projects, and approves applications for grants to assist the CTECS with repairing fire damage; correcting health, safety, and other code violations; replacing roofs; remedying air quality emergencies; and/or purchasing and installing portable classroom buildings.[66]

Employee Classification and Benefits

CTECS schools are state property and are operated with state funding. As a result, all CTECS employees are state employees and are provided full state health and pension benefits. CTECS teachers are allowed to choose between the State Employee Retirement System (SERS), where members contribute to a defined-benefit pension and pay Social Security, or the Teachers' Retirement System (TRS), where members contribute to a defined-benefit pension but do not pay into Social Security.[67] A report by the General Assembly's Office of Legislative Research explains a scenario where a teacher would choose the TRS system:

> In one common scenario, the technical high school system hires a teacher who has already worked for a local board of education and therefore is in the TRS. Since the teacher wants to continue building a TRS pension, he or she opts to stay in the TRS even though the teacher could join SERS and therefore also pay into Social Security.[68]

Administrative staff who hold a SBOE certificate or permit, such as guidance counselors, are considered teachers under the law and have the option to join SERS or TRS.[69] Non-certified staff are required to be members of SERS.[70]

[C] Since FY 2014, the General Assembly has authorized $55.5 million in general obligation bonds for the CTECS. However, this amount was reduced by $12 million under Conn. Act. 16-4 § 215 and $11 million under Conn. Act 17-2 § 504 (June Special Session), resulting in a total of $32.5 million in available general obligation bond authorizations.

Appendix

The table below details the number of students enrolled in each CTECS school, listed by region and school.

Table 1: CTECS Enrollment by Region and School, 2019-20[71]

School	Town/City	Enrollment	Waitlist[72,D]
A.I. Prince Technical High School	Hartford	716	*
Bullard-Havens Technical High School	Bridgeport	800	493
E. C. Goodwin Technical High School	New Britain	658	*
Eli Whitney Technical High School	Hamden	631	219
Ella T. Grasso Technical High School	Groton	535	51
Emmett O'Brien Technical High School	Ansonia	648	351
H. C. Wilcox Technical High School	Meriden	779	84
H. H. Ellis Technical High School	Danielson	702	42
Henry Abbott Technical High School	Danbury	696	204
Howell Cheney Technical High School	Manchester	643	*
J. M. Wright Technical High School	Stamford	428	37
Norwich Technical High School	Norwich	663	141
Oliver Wolcott Technical High School	Torrington	611	18
Platt Technical High School	Milford	805	546
Vinal Technical High School	Middletown	420	11
W. F. Kaynor Technical High School	Waterbury	800	380
Windham Technical High School	Willimantic	464	109

* Denotes data not provided by the CSDE

[D] Waitlist counts are based on applications. Students may apply to more than one school.

Table 2: CTECS Resident Town Count for the 2019-20 School Year (as of October 1, 2019) [73,E]

Town	Resident Town Count[F]
Andover	8
Ansonia	212
Ashford	26
Avon	
Barkhamsted	7
Beacon Falls	20
Berlin	25
Bethany	*
Bethel	24
Bethlehem	7
Bloomfield	13
Bolton	*
Bozrah	20
Branford	15
Bridgeport	1,056
Bristol	195
Brookfield	17
Brooklyn	72
Burlington	16
Canaan	9
Canterbury	51
Canton	*
Chaplin	21
Cheshire	44
Chester	*
Clinton	8
Colchester	40
Colebrook	*
Columbia	30
Cornwall	*
Coventry	47
Cromwell	22

Town	Resident Town Count[F]
Danbury	453
Darien	*
Deep River	7
Derby	97
Durham	24
Eastford	11
East Granby	*
East Haddam	18
East Hampton	29
East Hartford	189
East Haven	63
East Lyme	23
Easton	*
East Windsor	19
Ellington	19
Enfield	52
Fairfield	*
Farmington	9
Franklin	11
Glastonbury	9
Goshen	11
Granby	7
Greenwich	10
Griswold	80
Groton	124
Guilford	10
Haddam	14
Hamden	145
Hampton	18
Hartford	641
Hartland	8
Harwinton	29

[E] Data is suppressed pursuant to data suppression guidelines from the CSDE. Any cell with a value less than or equal to five is suppressed.

[F] The totals for the following towns include students attending Bristol TEC, which does not offer comprehensive secondary school programs and high school students complete academic coursework at their sending school: Berlin, Bristol, Burlington, Cheshire, Farmington, Goshen, Harwinton, Litchfield, Plainville, Plymouth, Portland, Southbury, Southington, Torrington, Union, Wallingford, Watertown, West Hartford, Winchester, and Woodbury.

Town	Resident Town Count[F]
Hebron	10
Kent	7
Killingly	125
Killingworth	*
Lebanon	48
Ledyard	49
Lisbon	38
Litchfield	20
Lyme	*
Madison	*
Manchester	171
Mansfield	23
Marlborough	*
Meriden	506
Middlebury	8
Middlefield	14
Middletown	148
Milford	92
Monroe	7
Montville	131
Morris	9
Naugatuck	152
New Britain	437
New Fairfield	38
New Hartford	9
New Haven	458
Newington	14
New London	203
New Milford	95
Newtown	26
Norfolk	8
North Branford	21
North Canaan	8
North Haven	10
North Stonington	13
Norwalk	64
Norwich	232
Old Lyme	10
Old Saybrook	6
Orange	8

Town	Resident Town Count[F]
Oxford	35
Plainfield	167
Plainville	31
Plymouth	65
Pomfret	12
Portland	34
Preston	30
Prospect	43
Putnam	73
Redding	6
Ridgefield	*
Rocky Hill	13
Salem	7
Salisbury	*
Scotland	12
Seymour	56
Sharon	*
Shelton	87
Sherman	6
Simsbury	*
Somers	12
Southbury	14
Southington	99
South Windsor	17
Sprague	19
Stafford	61
Stamford	341
Sterling	54
Stonington	35
Stratford	160
Suffield	*
Thomaston	42
Thompson	72
Tolland	26
Torrington	316
Trumbull	22
Union	*
Vernon	72
Voluntown	29
Wallingford	130
Warren	*

Town	Resident Town Count[F]
Washington	7
Waterbury	617
Waterford	43
Watertown	54
Westbrook	7
West Hartford	8
West Haven	236
Wethersfield	22
Willington	29

Town	Resident Town Count[F]
Winchester	46
Windham	270
Windsor	21
Windsor Locks	14
Wolcott	41
Woodbridge	*
Woodbury	18
Woodstock	23
TOTAL	**11,080**

Table 3: CTECS Career and Technical Programs for the 2019-20 School Year[74]

Career Cluster	Career Pathway
Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources	Bioscience and Environmental Technology
Architecture and Construction	Carpentry
	Electrical
	Facilities Management
	Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC)
	Masonry
	Plumbing and Heating
	Plumbing, Heating and Cooling
	Sustainable Architecture
Arts, Audio Visual Technology and Communications	Digital Media
	Sound Production Technology
Health Technology	Biotechnology
	Health Technology
Hospitality and Tourism	Culinary Arts
	Culinary Arts and Guest Services
	Tourism, Hospitality and Guest Services Management
Human Services	Hairdressing and Cosmetology
Information Technology	Electronics Technology
	Graphics Technology
	Information Systems Technology
Law, Public Safety, Corrections and Security	Criminal Justice and Protective Services
Manufacturing	Automated Manufacturing Technology
	Mechanical Design and Engineering Technology
	Mechatronics
	Precision Machining Technology
	Welding and Metal Fabrication
Marketing, Sales and Service	Marketing, Management and Entrepreneurship
Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)	Pre-Electrical Engineering and Applied Electronics Technology
Transportation, Distribution and Logistics	Automotive Collision Repair and Refinishing
	Automotive Technology
	Diesel and Heavy-Duty Equipment Repair

Table 4: Federal Grants Received by the CTECS, FYs 2015-19[75]

Year	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014
Title I	$3,266,503	$2,928,075	$2,939,677	$2,802,824	$2,557,090	$2,595,349
Title II Part A	$501,278	$516,544	$528,393	$558,186	$566,328	$567,830
Title III Part A	$54,847	$48,846	$52,879	$57,211	$53,795	$44,924
Title IV Part A	$198,715	$198,838	-	-	-	-
IDEA	$2,544,873	$2,530,393	$2,443,919	$2,447,573	$2,350,498	$2,335,730
NLS	-	-	-	$20,000	$19,998	-
CCLC	-	-	-	-	-	$81,879
TOTAL	**$6,566,216**	**$6,423,073**	**$6,155,197**	**$6,064,430**	**$5,722,290**	**$5,795,917**

Endnotes

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[4] Enrollment data provided to the School and State Finance Project by the Connecticut State Department of Education.
[5] Connecticut Technical Education and Career System. (2019). *Working for Students and Connecticut's Future: Strategic Operating Plan: 2019-2022.* Hartford, CT: Author. Retrieved from https://cttech.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/ctecs_strategicoperatingplan_lores_spreads-final1.pdf.
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[18] Ibid.
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[22] Conn. Acts 21-144.
[23] Connecticut Technical Education and Career System. (n.d.). Admissions. Retrieved from http://www.cttech.org/admissions.html.
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[26] Ibid.

[27] Connecticut Technical High School System. (2015). *Comparison of Traditional High School versus Connecticut Technical High School System (CTHSS)*. Middletown, CT: Author. Retrieved from http://www.cttech.org/assets/uploads/files/Admissions/CTHSS%20Considerations(1).pdf.
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[34] Conn. Gen. Statutes ch. 164, § 10-95q(b).
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