

Overview

The Education Cost Sharing (ECS) formula is the method the State of Connecticut has established to distribute approximately \$2.46 billion annually in state education funding to local and regional public school districts. The ECS formula is made up of several different components: the foundation, student need-based weights, the Base Aid Ratio, and the phase-in schedule.¹

In 2024, the Connecticut General Assembly passed legislation that expanded the ECS formula to include more students participating in various public school choice programs.² This change used the existing ECS formula to provide choice program operators (interdistrict magnet, AgriScience, and charter school operators) with partially equitable education funding based on their students' unique learning needs.³

However, because of how this change was implemented, state grant formulas for school choice programs depend on the ECS formula definitions in state statute but in inconsistent ways. Some choice funding formulas explicitly refer to the statutory definitions of the ECS formula, such as the foundation amount, while others define key funding components separately, such as student need counts.^{4,5} This lack of consistency in how state grants for choice programs are calculated ultimately leads to an unpredictable system in which adjustments to the ECS formula impact schools unevenly and create disparities in education funding for students attending them.

To resolve this issue, policymakers should consider revising school choice program funding laws to: (1) create consistent and uniform connections to the state laws governing the ECS formula, (2) ensure equitable school funding for students no matter the type of public school they attend, and (3) avoid unintended inequities caused by future school funding policy changes.

Problem

Due to ongoing inconsistencies in the references that remain in statute, changes to the ECS formula continue to affect various school choice programs differently. This disconnect has impacted, and will continue to impact, funding across choice operators — potentially leading to unintended funding disparities due to future education funding policy changes.

Table 1 below details, by school choice operator, the different funding formula components and whether they are linked to the ECS formula.

¹ For more information on the ECS formula, please visit <https://schoolstatefinance.org/issues/ecs-formula>.

² Conn. Acts 24-81 §§ 112-119.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Conn. Acts 25-168 §§ 307-308.

Table 1: ECS Formula Components Connected to Choice Funding Formulas⁶

Formula Component	AgriScience (ASTE)	State Charter Schools	Board of Ed. (BOE) Magnet Operators	RESC/GUMS Magnet Operators
Foundation Amount	Connected	Connected	Connected	Connected
Student Weights	Connected	Disconnected	Connected	Disconnected
Phase-In Percentages	Disconnected	Disconnected	Disconnected	Disconnected

As shown in the table above, the foundation amounts for all school choice program funding formulas are directly linked to the ECS foundation amount. This means changes to the ECS foundation amount not only impact how local and regional public schools are funding but can also affect funding for operators of public schools of choice.

Alternatively, other funding components vary by school type and may not depend on the ECS formula. For instance, changes to the student need-based weights in the ECS formula would only impact AgriScience programs and host district magnet schools — leaving charter schools and RESCs unaffected. This could lead to further funding disparities among different school types.

Ultimately, modifications to the ECS formula may lead to variations in how the changes are implemented across various public school types. This lack of uniformity creates an unpredictable system where ECS formula adjustments affect different school types unevenly, resulting in inequities in education funding for Connecticut's students.

Solution

Policymakers must understand how changes to the ECS formula affect the calculations of various school choice program grants and impact the ability to create a more consistent and predictable education funding system. Moving forward, policymakers should consider revisions to these funding formulas to make consistent connections between the school choice program formulas and the ECS formula.

Explicitly connecting all formulas to the ECS formula in state law will help ensure students receive equitable, consistent, and predictable education funding no matter the type of public school they attend, while also avoiding unintended inequities that may arise from future funding changes.

⁶ Conn. Acts 24-81 §§ 112-119.