

## How Does Connecticut Fund Its Multilingual Learners?

Nearly \$13.3 billion is spent on K-12 public education in Connecticut each year. This funding comes from three primary sources: state aid, federal grants, and local property tax revenue.<sup>1</sup> The following sections provide an overview of how two of these funding sources (state aid and federal grants) support Connecticut's multilingual learner students.

### State Funding for Multilingual Learners

In Connecticut, school districts receive state funding for multilingual learner education through two primary mechanisms: the Bilingual Education Program grant and the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) formula.

#### ***Bilingual Education Program Grant***

The Bilingual Education Program grant allocates funding to assist schools in providing mandated bilingual programs for multilingual learner students. However, the grant program's eligibility requirements exclude approximately 40 percent of Connecticut's multilingual learners.

In order for a school to qualify for the Bilingual Education Program grant, it must have 20 or more eligible multilingual learner students who speak the same language. Schools eligible to receive these funds are also mandated to have a bilingual program that provides any eligible multilingual learner student with instruction in English and their native language.<sup>2</sup>

Currently, approximately \$3.8 million is appropriated annually to the Bilingual Education Grant Program. Eligible schools are awarded a portion of these funds. Despite the grant being largely flat-funded in recent years, the number of multilingual learners in mandated bilingual programs has grown. Since 2018, the number of students receiving funding from the Bilingual Education Program grant has grown from just over 20,000 to almost 29,000 in 2024.<sup>3</sup> However, because grant amounts are based on eligible students reported in October of the prior school year, grant allocations provided to districts may not reflect the current, accurate number of students being served. For example, though districts received funding for almost 26,000 students for the 2022-23 school year, data collected in October of that year shows that over 33,000 students were eligible to receive mandated bilingual programs.<sup>4</sup>

Additionally, the number of districts eligible for the grant has increased by over 56 percent (from 37 eligible districts to 58 districts) since 2018.<sup>5</sup> Even with the increase of funding allocated for the Bilingual Education Program grant during the 2023 legislative session — from \$1.9 million to the current \$3.8 million — the increase of eligible districts has resulted in an effective decrease in grant funding per student. When the grant increase for the Bilingual Education Program was initially provided, the average amount of aid per student increased by 78 percent — from approximately \$78 in 2022 to \$139 in 2023.<sup>6</sup>

However, because the grant remains flat-funded at the per-student grant amounts, the aid per-student has declined. From 2023 to 2024, the average grant per student has declined by almost 9 percent to \$127 per student.<sup>7</sup>

### **Education Cost Sharing (ECS) Formula**

The ECS formula is used by the State of Connecticut to distribute approximately \$2.36 billion in education funding annually to local and regional public school districts. ECS funding is the primary form of state education aid to Connecticut municipalities, and it is through the ECS formula that the majority of aid for multilingual learner students is provided.

The ECS formula<sup>A</sup> is made up of several different components: the foundation, the Base Aid Ratio, the phase-in schedule, and student need-based weights.<sup>8</sup> Together, these components determine how much ECS funding a school district receives to educate its students. For the purposes of this overview, we will only discuss the student need-based weights as they relate directly to funding for multilingual learners.

Students with certain learning needs are more likely to need additional resources in order to have equal access to educational opportunities. In order to assist districts and schools serving students with higher learning needs, the ECS formula includes weights for some of these specific student needs. The weights are used to drive greater funds to students — such as multilingual learners — who have been found to require additional resources and educational supports to achieve at the same levels as their peers who do not have these learning needs.

The ECS formula contains three “need-student” weights, which increase per-student state education aid for students with additional learning needs.

- **Low-income:** Increases the foundation amount<sup>B</sup> by 30 percent for each student who is eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL).<sup>9</sup>
- **Concentrated Poverty:** Increases the foundation amount an additional 15 percent (for a total of 45 percent) for students who are eligible for FRPL and reside in a district where 60 percent or more of the enrollment is also eligible for FRPL. This weight only applies to the number of students in the district above the 60-percent threshold and who are eligible for FRPL.<sup>10</sup>
- **Multilingual Learner:** Increases the foundation amount by 25 percent for each student identified as needing additional English-language skills.<sup>11</sup>

While the ECS formula contains a specific weight to drive additional dollars to districts educating multilingual learners, there is no requirement that the funds generated by the

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<sup>A</sup> Additional information about the ECS formula and its components can be found at <https://schoolstatefinance.org/issues/ecs-formula>.

<sup>B</sup> The foundation amount for the ECS formula is currently \$11,525 per student and is intended to represent the estimated cost of educating a general education student who does not have any additional learning needs. Conn. Gen. Statutes ch. 172, § 10-262f(9)

weight be used for purpose of educating multilingual learner students. This is also true for all three need-based weights in the ECS formula.

## Federal Funding for Multilingual Learners

The federal government provides a number of grants to state education agencies (SEAs), like the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), and school districts in order to support the education of multilingual learner students. One specific source of federal funding for multilingual learners is Title III: Language Instruction for English Learners and Immigrant Students.

The aim of Title III, which was authorized by the federal Every Student Succeeds Act, is to improve and enhance educational programs for multilingual learners and newly immigrated students, and it is the most focused federal funding provided for multilingual learners.<sup>12</sup> Title III funding can be used to:

- Ensure multilingual learners and immigrant students achieve English proficiency and meet high levels of academic achievement in English;
- Assist multilingual learners and immigrant students in reaching high levels of academic achievement in all academic subject areas so they can meet the same challenging state academic standards as their peers who are fluent in English;
- Assist teachers, including preschool teachers, principals, and other school leaders; SEAs; and school districts in establishing, implementing, and sustaining effective language instruction for multilingual learners and immigrant students;
- Assist teachers, including preschool teachers, principals; and other school leaders; SEAs; and school districts in enhancing their capacity to provide effective instructional programs to prepare multilingual learners and immigrant students to enter all-English instructional settings; and
- Promote parental, family, and community participation in language instruction programs for parents, families, and communities of multilingual learners.<sup>13</sup>

In FY 2023, Connecticut received approximately \$7.5 million in aid under Title III for multilingual learners and immigrant students.<sup>14</sup> Title III funding is allocated to each state based on its portion of the national population of multilingual learners and immigrant children and youth. Specifically, a state's Title III allocation amount is based on 80 percent of the state's share of multilingual learners nationwide and 20 percent of the state's share of recent immigrants, with a minimum allocation amount of \$500,000.<sup>15</sup> Each state then allocates its Title III funds to any district that has an approved Title III plan.<sup>16</sup> Up to 15 percent of a state's Title III funds may be used to accommodate districts that have experienced an increase in immigrant student enrollment.<sup>17</sup>

In recent years, there has not been a significant increase in Title III funding despite there being a consistent increase in the number of students identified as multilingual learners.<sup>18</sup> The funding for Title III remained flat for five years until FY 2020 when funds were increased by \$50 million to \$787.4 million.<sup>19</sup> Title III funding has been increased each year since with

the most recent allocation of \$890 million in FY 2023 representing an almost 21 percent increase over FY 2019 amounts.

## Funding Accountability & Spending Transparency

The State of Connecticut does not currently have a way to track and evaluate investments in multilingual learner student services in a comparative way. However, there have been attempts in the past to evaluate multilingual learner education to determine areas in which the state could improve.

In 2015, the State of Connecticut commissioned the state's six Regional Educational Service Centers (RESCs)<sup>c</sup> to conduct a survey to assess district multilingual education. The RESCs surveyed the multilingual learner services and bilingual education programs of the schools in each of the RESCs' six regions to determine if the RESCs would be able to aid in providing multilingual services to districts.<sup>20</sup>

When the report of the survey's findings was released, the report noted that due to the inconsistency in how districts reported the use of their funds for the education of multilingual learner students, the RESCs were unable to make inferences on multilingual learner funding.<sup>21</sup> This is partly because there is limited uniformity and specificity in the reporting of funds by school districts to the state. The survey results also reported pertinent information around multilingual learner staffing and other resources, but it could not make any inferences around spending on multilingual learner supports and programs.<sup>22</sup>

To make reporting easier on the district's administrative officials, Connecticut school districts report education spending through the Education Finance System.<sup>23</sup> This system works as a crosswalk between the uniform chart of accounts established by the CSDE and districts' current budget reporting processes and systems.

However, by doing this, Connecticut still does not have a truly uniformed system as the same expenditure can be classified differently by districts and municipalities. This lack of a uniform system, coupled with the lack of reporting requirements for multilingual learner program spending, limit transparency around resources for multilingual learners and make current funding and spending data either opaque or nonexistent.

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<sup>c</sup> Regional Educational Service Centers (RESCs) are six school-based partnerships created to provide high-quality, cost-effective services to Connecticut's school districts. RESCs' primary function is to provide cooperative purchasing for public school districts, and many of them operate magnet schools, special education programs, transportation services, etc.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2024). Table 1: Summary of Public Elementary-Secondary School System Finances by State: Fiscal Year 2022. *2022 Annual Survey of School System Finances*. Washington, DC: Author. Available from <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2022/econ/school-finance/secondary-education-finance.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Conn. Gen. Statutes ch. 164, § 10-17f.

<sup>3</sup> Connecticut State Department of Education. (n.d.). eGrants Management System: State Bilingual Grant. Available from <https://connecticut.egrantsmanagement.com/>.

<sup>4</sup> Connecticut State Department of Education. (2023). *Summary of Education-Related Legislation Enacted in the 2023 Regular Session*. Hartford, CT: Author. Retrieved from [https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/circular-letters/circ23-24/c-1\\_summary-of-education-related-legislation-2023-regular-session.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/circular-letters/circ23-24/c-1_summary-of-education-related-legislation-2023-regular-session.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Conn. Gen. Statutes ch. 172, § 10-262f(25).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Sugarman, J. (2021). *Funding English Learner Education: Making the Most of Policy and Budget Levers*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute. Retrieved from [https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/EL-insight-5\\_funding\\_final.pdf](https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/EL-insight-5_funding_final.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> 20 U.S.C. 6812

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Department of Education. (2023). *Funds for State Formula-Allocated and Selected Student Aid Programs: Connecticut*. Washington, DC: Author.

<sup>15</sup> Sugarman, J. (2021). *Funding English Learner Education: Making the Most of Policy and Budget Levers*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute. Retrieved from [https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/EL-insight-5\\_funding\\_final.pdf](https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/EL-insight-5_funding_final.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> RESC Alliance. (2016). *Executive Summary and Recommendations: RESC Alliance English Language Survey*. Old Lyme, CT: Author. Retrieved from [https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Board/BoardMaterials/110216/receipt\\_of\\_resc\\_report\\_english\\_learner\\_survey\\_data\\_analysis\\_and\\_feasibility\\_study.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Board/BoardMaterials/110216/receipt_of_resc_report_english_learner_survey_data_analysis_and_feasibility_study.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Connecticut School Finance Project. (2017). *An Update on Connecticut Education Spending Transparency*. New Haven, CT: Author. Retrieved from <https://schoolstatefinance.org/resource-assets/Transparency-Policy-Brief-Updated.pdf>.