



# A UNIVERSE OF OPPORTUNITIES



CONNECTICUT  
Education

2024-2025

# Transforming Children's Behavioral Health Policy and Planning Committee

September 25, 2024

Connecticut State  
Department of Education



# Presentation Outline

- Setting the Stage
- Challenges and Opportunities: Voices from the Field
- Strategic Fiscal and Programmatic Responses



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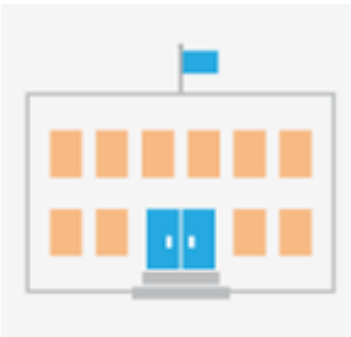
## Setting the Stage

# Connecticut Education Landscape

- **School Districts: 202**
- **Schools/Programs: 1,554**
- **Certified Staff FTE: 53,616**
- **Non-Certified Staff: ~69,000**

## Students: 512,652

- 53.8% Students of Color (~275,000)
- 44.0% Eligible for Free and Reduced-price School Meals (~225,000)
- 17.9% Students with Disabilities (~92,000)
- 10.6% English Learner/Multilingual Learners (~54,000)
- More than 180 Languages spoken
- 5,463 students experienced homelessness and housing instability in 23-24



# State Board of Education Strategic Plan 2023 - 2028

## Every Student Prepared for Learning, Life, and Work Beyond School



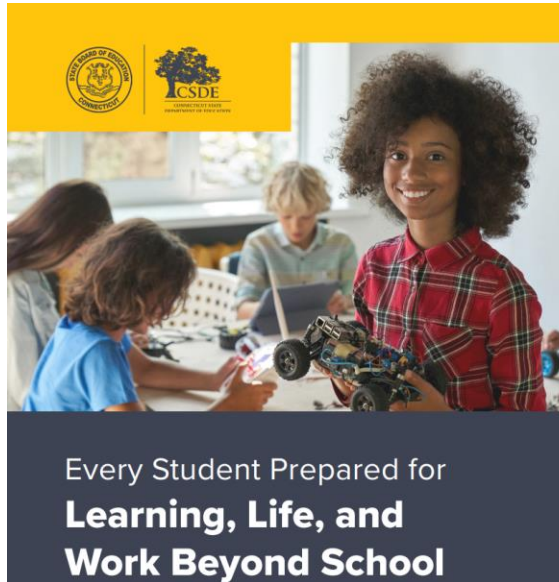
### **Ensure Equitable Access to Education**

All learners are supported, including those with high needs, and have equitable access to education regardless of background or advantage, including access to great teachers and leaders, and a diverse educational workforce.



### **Ensure Safe and Healthy Learning Environments**

Learning spaces are safe, compassionate, and culturally responsive. They are designed to support the academic, physical, and social-emotional well-being of all learners, including learners of color, multilingual learners, those with a disability, learners experiencing food and housing insecurities, learners coming from low-income families, and those who identify as LGBTQ.



### **Elevate Curriculum Frameworks**

Elevate Connecticut's curriculum frameworks to provide support for the development of rigorous, engaging instruction and the reliable assessment of universally required skills for life beyond school and a lifelong love of learning.



### **Create Multiple Career Pathways**

Create opportunities for all students to explore multiple career pathways through coordinated and rigorous programs that are developed in partnership with institutions of higher education and local/regional employers, and that align to economic opportunity and advance students in careers of their choice.





# 2024-2025 Focus Areas



## RECRUIT & RETAIN

Recruit and retain a diverse workforce of educators, while modernizing the certification process.



## SAFE & HEALTHY

Support safe and healthy learning environments for students and school staff with continued attention to addressing their mental health needs.



## PRESENT & ENGAGED

Ensure students are physically present in the classroom every day and actively engaged in learning.



## ELEVATE & SUPPORT

Elevate curriculum frameworks and curricula, with a continued focus on supporting early literacy.



## MODERNIZE & EXPAND

Modernize and expand post-secondary pathways that advance students in careers of their choice while growing Connecticut's workforce.



## IMPROVE & INCREASE

Improve outcomes for all students, with a focus on increased access and opportunity for students with disabilities.



## STRENGTHEN & PROMOTE

Strengthen partnerships with families and communities to promote high-impact practices that make a difference for all students, educators, and families.



# CSDE-Assigned Legislatively Mandated Task Forces and Councils Addressing Behavioral Health

- Transforming Children’s Behavioral Health Policy and Planning Committee
- Children’s Mental, Emotional and Behavioral Health Plan Implementation Advisory Board
- Behavioral Health Partnership Oversight Council
- Behavioral and Mental Health Oversight Council
- Comprehensive Needs of Children Task Force
- Social Emotional Learning and School Climate Advisory Collaborative
- Autism Spectrum Disorder Advisory Council
- School Based Health Center Advisory Committee
- School Nurse Advisory Council
- Social Impact of Hate Speech and Bullying Task Force
- State Advisory Council on Special Education
- Two-Generational Advisory Council
- Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee (JJPOC)



# A UNIVERSE OF OPPORTUNITIES

## Challenges and Opportunities: Voices from the Field





# Voices of Students

## Connecticut School Health Survey (2023)

- 35.2% of Connecticut high school students reported having felt sad or hopeless every day for two weeks in a row
- 27.8% reported that their mental health was not good most or all the time
- 15.7% said they had seriously considered attempting suicide
- 7.7% had actually attempted suicide

## VOICE CHANGE

Students were given the opportunity to propose and vote on how more than \$1.5 million in federal relief funds should be invested to reimagine Connecticut's schools.

**Over 80%** of Voice4Change submissions addressed the need for more social, emotional, and mental health supports for students and school staff.

[Voice 4 Change Program \(ct.gov\)](https://www.ct.gov/voice4change)



# Voices of School Leaders

## Behavioral Health Landscape Scan

- Long-term financial support to hire and maintain additional mental health support staff.
- Assistance with behavioral health and systems building on evidence-based practices.
- Coordination with external providers for mental health supports and referrals.
- Support with planning transition back into the classroom for staff and students, specifically for intellectual disabilities, mental health, and significant behavior issues.

## Social-Emotional Learning Landscape Scan and Focus Groups

- Scale-up SEL services and supports based on statewide findings to improve student academic and behavioral outcomes.
- SEL professional development for all staff.
- Intensify tier-one supports including expansion of “Components of Social, Emotional and Intellectual Habits to Grades 4-12.”
- Provide districts with a universal screening tool for SEL.



# Voices of Families & Communities

## Commissioner's Roundtable on Family and Community Engagement

*“Family Engagement is a full, equal, and equitable partnership among families, educators and community partners to promote children’s learning and development from birth through college and career.”*

### Friday CAFÉ

## (Community And Family Engagement)

**What:** In-person networking series for people who work at the intersection of families and learning.

**Who:** Family-facing professionals: early childhood, elementary, and secondary educators; family liaisons; school leaders; community-based educators; librarians; and afterschool staff.

## Community Stakeholder Forums and Survey on ARP ESSER Investments

- 42% of respondents ranked Social, Emotional, and Mental Health of Students and of Our School Staff as their highest priority.
- 38% of respondents ranked Learning Acceleration, Academic Renewal, and Student Enrichment as their highest priority.
- 12% of respondents ranked Building Safe and Healthy Schools as their highest priority.
- 8% of respondents ranked Family and Community Connections as their highest priority.

## Attendance Survey

Major themes for keeping students home:

- Illness
- Mental Health
- Safety
- Bullying



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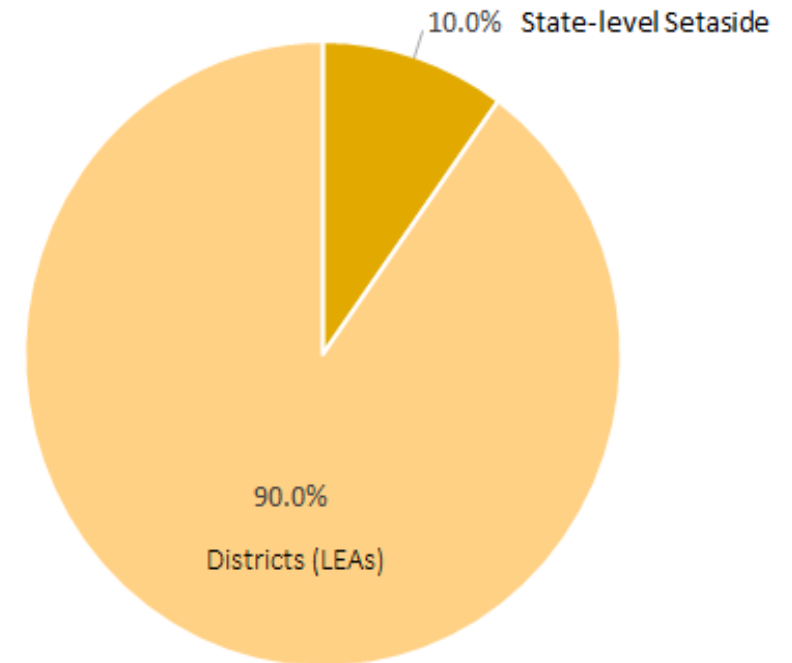
## Strategic Fiscal and Programmatic Responses

# Federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Funding

**\$1.7 billion** in total Federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds have been allocated to Connecticut since the start of the pandemic, in three installments (ESSER I, ESSER II, and ARP ESSER)

**90%** (~\$1.54 billion) is reserved for use at the district level.

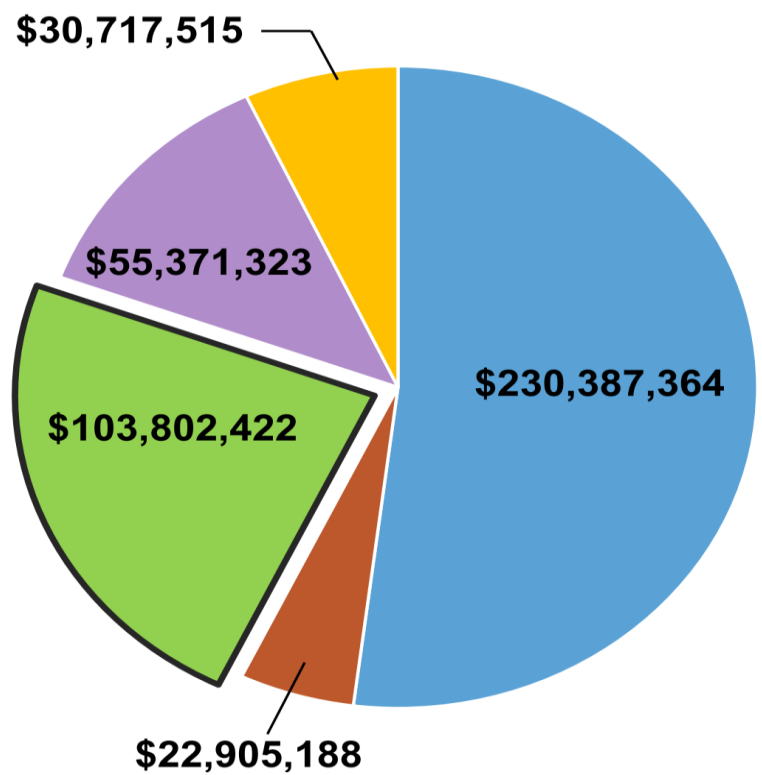
**10%** (~\$171 million) is reserved for use at the state level, including one-time investments that are self-sustaining and have measurable impact.



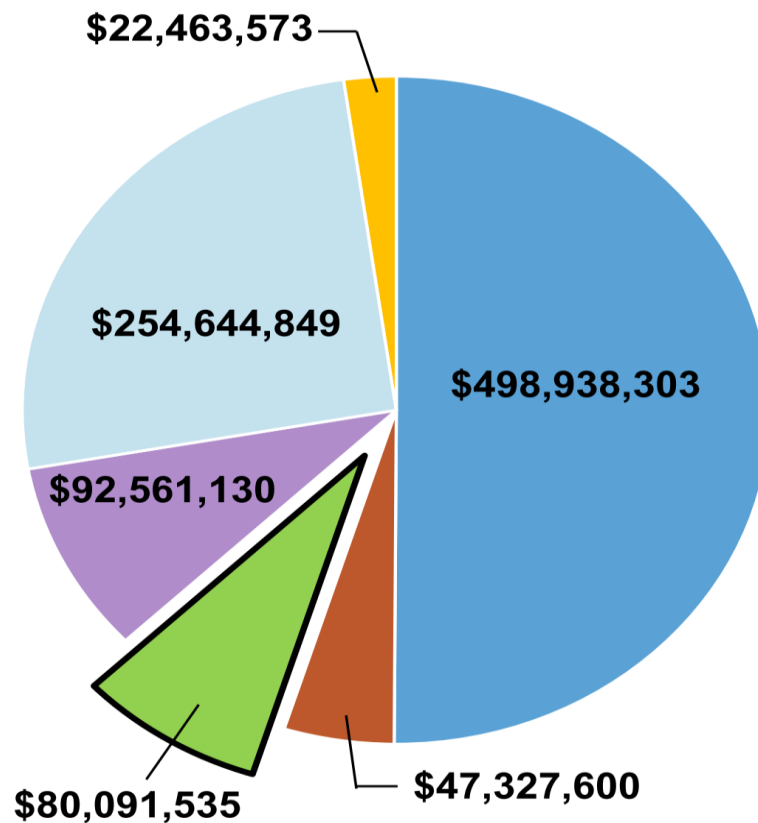


# ESSER Investments by Districts


### ESSER II District Investments by Priority Area



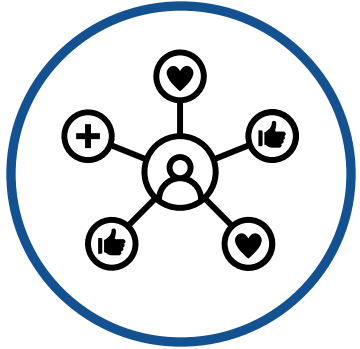
### ARP ESSER District Investments by Priority Area



- Priority 1: Learning Acceleration, Academic Renewal and Student Enrichment
- Priority 2: Family and Community Connections
- Priority 3 - Social, Emotional, and Mental Health of Students and Staff
- Priority 4: Strategic Use of Technology, Staff Development and the Digital Divide
- Priority 5: Building Safe and Healthy Schools
- Other



**Priority 3: Social, Emotional, and Mental Health  
of Students and School Staff**  
*(Over \$183M Budgeted by Districts for Investment Statewide)*



Investments to support students and school staff to re-engage with their school communities as schools returned to in-person learning.

### Illustrative Examples

- Converted school space to build a mental health suite with areas for group counseling and individual mental health services
- Provided Academic/Life Support Coaches by hiring interns and long-term substitutes to work 1:1 as advisors, mentors, and tutors for students in need
- Provided teachers with Trauma-Informed Training to deepen expertise and gain certification in this area
- Partnered with local Community Health Centers (CHC) for ongoing professional development to staff on SEL
- Created an Adult Climate Camp to focus on professional development in the areas of teaching and modeling emotional regulation, problem-solving and de-escalation



# Mental Health Grant Programs

## School Mental Health Workers Grant - \$5 Million

- **20** school districts hired 21.5 FTE Social Workers over three years for school years 2023-2025.
- **\$37,768 to \$120,000** annually

## School Mental Health Specialists Grant - \$15 Million

- **73** school districts hired Social Workers, Psychologists, Counselors, Trauma Specialists, BCBAs, Behavior Technicians, LPCs, for school years 2024-2026.
- **\$25,150.00 to \$120,000** annually

## Summer Mental Health Supports - \$8 Million

- **84** schools and summer camp programs to support the delivery of mental health services for students over the summer months.
- **\$12,000 to \$50,000** annually

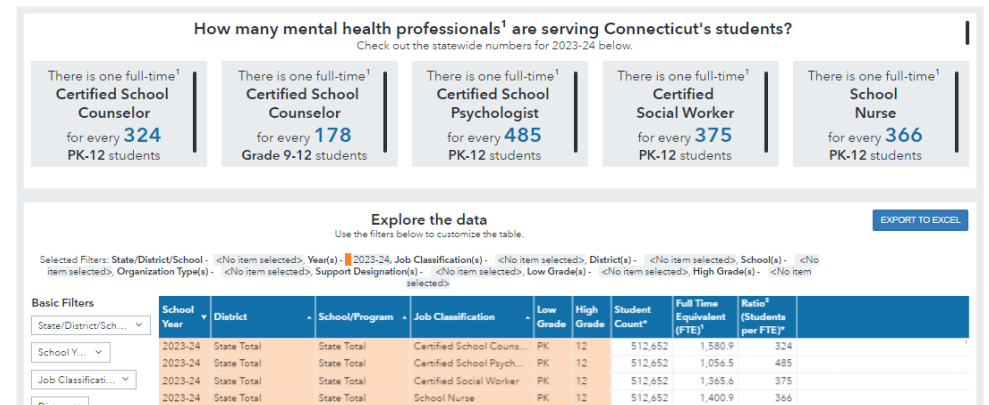
### Staffing Ratios

| School Year                   | 2021-22 | 2022-23 | 2023-24 |     |
|-------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|-----|
| Certified Social Worker       |         | 404     | 384     | 375 |
| Certified School Psychologist |         | 482     | 494     | 485 |
| Certified School Counselor    |         | 337     | 333     | 324 |

#### Mental Health Staff Ratios

Additional Reports: FTE Staffing | Classroom Teacher Attendance | Educator Vacancy Dashboard

This report presents the ratio of students to mental health workers. Four educator roles are currently included: Certified School Counselor, Certified School Psychologist, Certified Social Worker, and School Nurse. In the future, additional roles will be added including Trauma Specialist, Behavior Technician, Board Certified Behavior Analyst, and Marriage and Family Therapist. This report is designed to fulfill the requirements of Public Acts 22-47 and 22-116 of the Connecticut General Assembly. See related links, including detailed notes on how to navigate the report.







# Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA)

Universal screener designed to help teachers and school staff evaluate the social-emotional competence of children and better understand and support students to feel connected to school, confident, successful, and engaged in learning.

**86** Participating School Districts

**197,587** Students


- 80-88% of district leaders agreed or strongly agreed that the initiative has a positive impact on the students in their district
- School leaders highlighted:
  - Improvements in district and school culture
  - Helpful in identifying focus areas and informing instruction for individual students, groups of students, and schools
  - Useful in informing training for staff
- Student Growth – SY 2022-23:
  - Students had a 2 percent “significant” positive growth rate
  - Students had a 23 percent “considerable” positive growth rate
  - Percent of students in “Strength” category increased from fall to spring for all grades.



# Stronger Connections Grant Program

## \$9 Million Expansion of Title IVa under the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act

- **43** High Need School Districts Awarded:
  - *Criteria: 30% FRP Eligibility, 25% Chronic Absenteeism, High/Disproportionate Rates of Exclusionary Discipline*
- Investments:
  - **17** *Improving Social, Emotional and Mental Health*
  - **10** *Providing Behavioral Health Interventions and Addressing Exclusionary Discipline*
  - **7** *Addressing School Safety*
  - **9** *Addressing Absenteeism, Student Wellness, Family and Stakeholder Engagement*



# Keeping Students Connected: Learner Engagement and Attendance Program (LEAP)

- Visits that were made **in-person had more impact** than virtual visits or phone calls
  - 1 month after the initial home visit = **4%** point increase in attendance
  - 6 months after the initial home visit = **10%** point increase PreK to Grade 5
  - 6 months after the initial home visit = **20%** point increase for Grade 6-12
- **Results did not differ** based on:
  - Title of person conducting the home visit (certified/non-certified)
  - Whether the home visitor was from the school or from a community-based organization
- *Improved Family-School Relationships*
- *Better Understanding of the Home*
- *More Supportive vs. Punitive Relationships*
- *Increased Student Attendance*
- *Increased Student Engagement*
- *Increased Student Achievement*
- *Increased Feelings of Belonging*
- *Increased Access to Resources for Families*
- *Increased Expectations of Accountability*
- *Greater Gratitude and Appreciation*



# Behavioral Health Pilot

## **Goal:**

*Create a scalable and sustainable system of coordinated care for all K-12 schools to provide comprehensive behavioral and mental health supports and services to students and staff through pilot programs in seven school districts with unique demographics*

- **Outcome:** LEAs began to determine or finalized a process to systematically collect and regularly review behavioral health data.
- **Mental Health Promotion Services and Supports:** LEAs identified a social-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum, with a plan for adoption to increase SEL skills for all students.
- **Teaming:** LEAs developed a plan to meaningfully involve students and families to plan and improve the school mental health system.
- **Early Intervention and Treatment Services and Supports:** LEAs assessed and refined district supports (e.g., policies, procedures, monitoring, implementation supports) for Tier 2 & Tier 3 services and supports in all schools.



# Additional Initiatives and Interagency Collaboration

- State Board of Education Position Statement and Policy Guidance on Personal Technology Use in Connecticut Schools
- Virtual House Calls for Families: Supporting Your Child’s Health and Wellbeing during the School Year.
  - *“Social and Emotional Wellness for You and Your Child”* – Connecticut Children’s
  - *“Protecting Our Youth: A Community Approach to Suicide Prevention”* – DCF and DMHAS
  - *“Preparing Your Family for Cold and Flu Season”* – Yale School of Public Health
- Suicide Prevention Efforts
  - *Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale Workshops; Be Sensitive, Be Brave Training; Interagency Public Health Bulletin; 9-8-8 National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline; Interagency Crisis Response Team and Protocol*
- Handle With Care Partnership
- Strategic Initiatives on School Culture and Climate
- Investments in Child Nutrition Programs
- Support for Urgent Care Centers (UCC)



# Evaluation Efforts

## 12 current projects being evaluated by CCERC



**CCERC**

Center for Connecticut  
Education Research Collaboration

[Center for Connecticut  
Education Research  
Collaboration](#)

- Summer Enrichment Grant Program
- Investigating variations in ARP ESSER funding applications
- Theories of Action in ARP ESSER plans
- Teachers' and Leaders' Perceptions, Turnovers, and Supply
- Remote Learning Audit
- Learner Engagement and Attendance Program (LEAP)
- Identifying Effective and Equitable Social-emotional Supports for Students and Educators
- High-Dosage Tutoring
- Equity in Academic Recovery
- Advanced Course Taking Patterns in Connecticut High Schools
- Categorizing and Understanding Facilities and Long-term Capital Investments
- Behavioral Health Pilot



# Call to Action: *"A Universe of Opportunities"*

1. Continuous Communication and Feedback from Schools, Families, Communities, and Students
2. Authentic Engagement with State-Level Policymakers, State Agencies, and Stakeholders
3. Organized, Collaborative Approaches to Problem-Solving
4. Investing in What Works