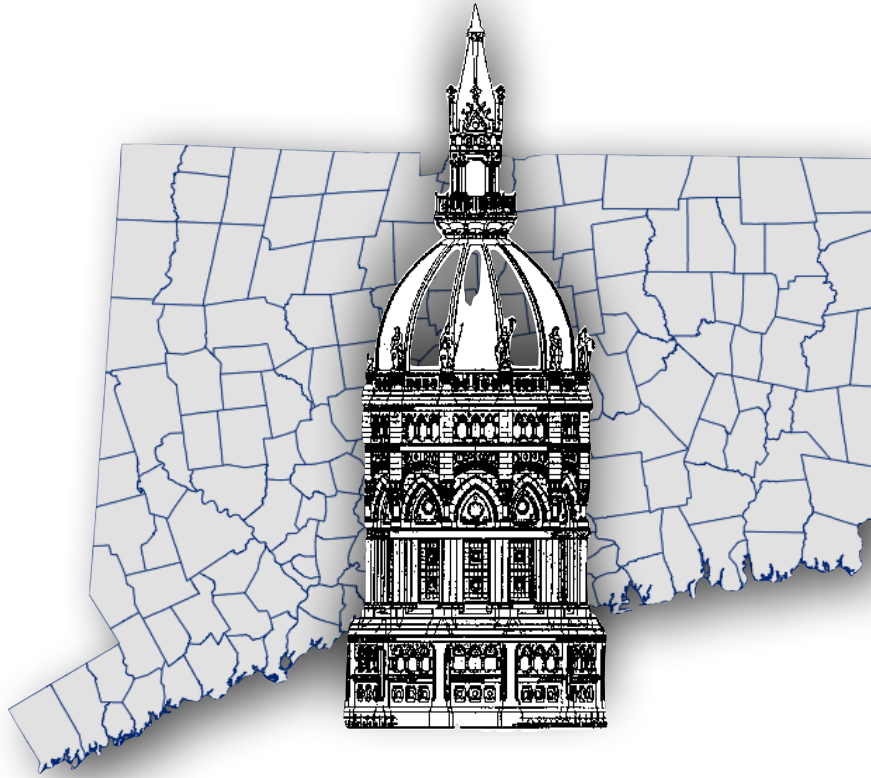


**Workforce Development,
Special Education and Governance**
Interim Report and Recommendations



ACIR

Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations

January 2025

Approved by ACIR - January 16, 2025

ACIR

The [Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations](#) (ACIR) is a 25-member agency of the State of Connecticut created in 1985 to study system issues between the state and local governments and to recommend solutions as appropriate. The membership is designed to represent the state legislative and executive branches, municipalities and other local interests, and the general public.

The role of ACIR, as contained in Section 2-79a of the Connecticut General Statutes, is to: (1) serve as a forum for consultation between state and local officials; (2) conduct research on intergovernmental issues; (3) encourage and coordinate studies of intergovernmental issues by universities and others; and (4) initiate policy development and make recommendations to all levels of government.

<https://portal.ct.gov/acir>

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Introduction

Connecticut's towns and cities are nearing a crisis point in their ability to deliver essential services. In large part this is due to the challenges of recruiting and retaining qualified people to fill the many positions necessary for delivering services in (general government and education). The problem is exacerbated by the state's disproportionate reliance on an already high and regressive property tax system.

The [Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations \(ACIR\)](#) believes that our recent experiences necessitated by the pandemic with town hall closures and reduced staff availability have shown Connecticut residents, government staff and elected officials that the traditional

means of providing local government services can be performed in different ways without an appreciable impact on their everyday lives. The change opportunities present today, as a function of our recent experience as well as the well-considered concepts that have been developed over the years, are ones that must be acted on while the opportunity for change exists - in short, **we must seize the moment.**

“On the municipal level, the shortages of teachers, police officers and volunteer firefighters have been duly noted. What hasn’t gotten nearly as much attention is the shortage of town hall workers, the assessors, zoning specialists, planners and others who deliver many of the services that town governments exist to provide... Thus they rely on poaching, overtime, retirees, part-timers from other towns and consultants.”

CT Mirror: CT towns, desperate to fill technical jobs, scramble for workers by Tom Condon
October 15, 2023

While ACIR's work on workforce development, special education and governance is not yet complete - our members have decided that the urgency for the attached recommendations is warranted for immediate action.

ACIR Work Plan

To address the pending crisis identified above, ACIR set its FY 2025 work plan to inform and advise the Governor, General Assembly, State Agencies, Municipalities, Regional Organizations and the Public by establishing two working groups: (1) **Municipal Workforce Development** and (2) **Special Education, Education Governance and Workforce Development.**

The **Municipal Workforce Development Work Group** was put in place in recognition that Connecticut's towns and cities are nearing a crisis point in their ability to recruit and retain qualified persons to fill positions to deliver essential municipal services. According to a recent report by the National League of Cities: "The current municipal labor shortage will negatively impact local governments' ability to deliver for their communities unless local leaders take the necessary steps to rebuild staffing capacity." The Municipal Workforce Development working group's charge was to:

- Explore and recommend actions regarding non-education public-sector hiring challenges, training, diversity, and retention that have put

local government's ability to deliver services at risk; and,

- Examine (expand on the Governor's Bill on Regional Services - House Bill 5056) opportunities and barriers for shared and regional approaches to address the public sector workforce challenge.

The **Special Education, Education Governance and Workforce Development Work Group** was put in place in recognition that education is the major obligation and cost for cities and towns and that, similar to the general government side - recruitment and retention of educational staff is a breaking point; as recently demonstrated by the Connecticut Department Education's [annual identification of education shortage areas](#). A 2021 New England Public Policy Center Report concluded that Connecticut's heavy reliance on the property tax for funding public K-12 education systems creates a cost-capacity gap between the funding needed to provide public education and the capacity to raise those funds. Added to this is Special education - which is by far the most volatile and costly burden on local taxpayers. Without a significant resolution, education costs - especially

those driven by Special Education - will continue to play havoc with local budgets and drive the property tax. The Special Education, Education Governance and Workforce Development working group's charge was to:

- Examine recent actions to address the varied needs of Special Education and make recommendations as warranted;
- Explore alternatives - including school governance, regionalization and shared services- to ease the cost-capacity gap for education; and,

- Explore and recommend actions regarding public-education hiring challenges, training, diversity, and retention that have put local government's ability to deliver services at risk

Both work groups, which were open to the public to participate, met during 2024 and have prepared multiple recommendations that ACIR puts forth for consideration in this report. Importantly, their work continues and will form the focus of ACIR's work for 2025. **ACIR welcomes feedback and the opportunity to discuss our interim recommendations.**

Summary: Interim Recommendations

ACIR's list of interim recommendations are divided into three categories: (1) Workforce Recruitment and Retention; (2) Innovation; and, (3) Research and Outreach. Additionally, during the course of the work, to date, of the two working groups multiple issues evolved that were common to both.

1. Workforce Recruitment and Retention

- A. Enable municipalities to post jobs with the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) employment [website](#);
 - B. Recruitment of special education teachers must be enhanced through financial incentives, improvements in respect and work conditions, and reducing paperwork to focus more on student interactions - including a study of educators who currently hold special education certifications but do not teach in special education programs;
 - C. Identify opportunities to reduce administrative burdens, increase employee autonomy, and provide robust professional development opportunities;
 - D. Recruitment and retention of educators and the public sector workforce generally, especially from diverse and underrepresented backgrounds, must remain a priority;
 - E. Develop and expand apprentice and related training programs for the public sector - including vocational and technical skills for students must be a focus for developing student skills for non-college pathways; and,
 - F. Identify and test options for improving the public sector work climate.
- LEA based on the community's needs. If districts are required to create a separate LEA in all situations, they would also have to create a separate governance system. That would deter many districts from attempting this;
 - III. Waive existing education space standards when renovating facilities for regionalized or cooperative programs;
 - IV. Enable existing regional districts to initiate studies for dissolution or reconstitution based on a majority vote of involved towns, rather than the currently required unanimous consent;
 - V. Grant statutory authority for the establishment of regional finance boards for communities within regional school districts by region-wide majority vote to oversee regional school budgets, ensuring fair fiscal oversight while reducing redundancy;
 - VI. Incentivize districts to build local special education programs to reduce outplacement, and leveraging regional service centers (RESCs) to increase capacity and quality of services across multiple towns; and,
 - VII. Increased funding for early intervention programs to reduce the number of children who ultimately require formal special education.

2. Innovation

- A. Identify and pilot regional public employee training opportunities to share teacher training and mentoring resources and training programs for core municipal functions and services.;
- B. For Education
 - I. Remove impediments that discourage efforts to provide education programming or staffing cooperatively or regionally;
 - II. Empower towns to establish cooperative schools and share those schools to be able to exist as separate LEAs or as part of an existing

3. Research and Outreach

- A. Restructure and repurpose multiple existing state assets resulting in a dynamic public center focused on research, problem solving and outreach for Connecticut's towns and cities..

Interim Recommendations Background and Detail

1. Workforce Recruitment and Retention

As noted, the public sector is at a crisis point in its ability to fully and properly provide educational and general government services. At the core of this is the scarcity of people choosing to pursue and/or continue a career in the public sector. Municipalities are competing with both the private sector and the state. Connecticut has significant numbers of position openings (about 73,000), competitive compensation and benefits, including remote work, all at a [one-stop site](#) - greatly enhancing recruitment. However, even with that advantage, the state still finds it difficult to attract new employees. The public sector is not alone in the challenges to recruit and retain people for needed jobs. The Connecticut Business and Industry's (CBIA) 2024 [Survey of Connecticut Business](#) mirrors the issues confronting our cities and towns. That report noted, as two of its key findings that: "78% report difficulty finding and retaining workers and 46% list employee recruitment and retention as their top investment priority [and] The lack of skilled job applicants (33%) and the state's high cost of living (21%) are the main factors hampering growth."¹

The Connecticut Department of Education's most recent [report on staffing needs in public schools](#) identifies three

categories of educators in short supply: "Teachers of Special Populations (Special Education PK-12,

"The negative stereotypes of government employment are ubiquitous. It is portrayed as stagnant, redundant work for inadequate compensation in an environment that discourages growth and innovation. The term "bureaucrat" is far more pejorative than empowering. All too often, the realities and benefits of public service are overshadowed by this perception. When these commonly held views are filtered through a lens of political division and argument, it is understandable why many young people and experienced professionals prefer to avoid a career in government altogether."

[The Local Government Skills Gap Report](#), Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 2018

"When governments hire apprentices, returns to the public sector are especially high. Apprentices hired from the local community reduce the need for other training programs. As with private employers, government agencies can use apprenticeships to fill job openings and those vacated by retiring employees, maintaining staffing and service continuity. Public sector apprenticeships can attract and expose young people to diverse career opportunities in government. Engaging and training young people for public sector careers can upgrade the quality and quantity of public services, thereby benefiting all residents."

Public Sector Apprenticeship: Improving Work for Governments and Residents Diana Elliott, Andrew Campbell, and John Marotta Urban Institute - [www.urban.org](#)

Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) PK-12 and Bilingual Education PK-12); General Education Teachers (Mathematics 4-12, Science 4-12, Social Studies 7-12, Technology Education PK-12 and World Languages 7-12); and for high-need districts, School Support Personnel (School Library & Media Specialists, School Psychologists, and Speech & Language Pathologists)."² The report notes that "Total public-school enrollment in Connecticut has been decreasing over time... enrollment of students of color, students eligible for subsidized lunch, special education students, and English language learners has increased in recent years, representing a growing need for educators to support the state's most vulnerable students."³ Persons seeking employment in education can utilize [CTREAP](#), a nationwide education job search platform that is supported in Connecticut through the six RESCs as a one-stop to conduct such a search. Connecticut's towns and cities do not have a similar service or a regular report analyzing local government employment needs. Our towns and cities do not have a comparable system identify labor shortages and a single point of contact for job seekers and municipalities seeking workers.

Compounding this is the fact that there has not been any research conducted as to what

¹ CBIA 2024 Survey of Connecticut Business, pg. 2

² Staffing Shortage Areas in Connecticut Public Schools, Boston University - Wheelock Educational Policy Center (WEPC) and the Connecticut Department of Education, Executive Summary, Page A

³ IBID, Executive Summary, page A

compensation is appropriate for specific positions in town government. In fact, many towns lack current position descriptions - further hindering them when they are in need of workers. To address the workforce recruitment and retention needs of our towns and school districts, ACIR puts forth the following interim recommendations for consideration:

A. Enable municipalities to post jobs with the Department of Administrative Services employment website. This addition would place all public sector jobs in one location - creating a simplified applicant system. It would also enable towns with limited recruitment resources to enhance their recruitment needs.

B. Recruitment of special education teachers must be enhanced through financial incentives, improvements in respect and work conditions, and reducing paperwork to focus more on student interactions. Incentivizing students from diverse backgrounds, including those who may have benefited from special education services themselves, could help diversify and strengthen the workforce. Pathways to educator preparation in this area, and all areas, should be streamlined within the work the CSDE and The CT Educator Preparation and Certification Board are doing and plan to do moving forward. *(Legislative Action)*

I. A study, if one is not already in pace or planned, of educators who currently hold special education certifications but do not teach in special education programs could provide a better understanding of how to improve the assignments of these educators and encourage them to work in these areas.

C. Identify opportunities to reduce administrative burdens, increase employee autonomy, and provide robust professional development opportunities. Teachers need sufficient support to grow professionally while avoiding burnout, which

is a major cause of workforce attrition. Additionally, highly specialized teachers involved in cooperative agreements face challenges if regional needs shift. They often find new employment but they can lose their tenure and years of service when starting in a new district.

D. Recruitment and retention of educators and the public sector workforce generally, especially from diverse and underrepresented

backgrounds, must remain a priority. There needs to be a sustained focus on building pathways from high school to college to education certification and for careers in general government, particularly for students of color and other marginalized groups. In addition, enhancements such as increased salaries and other benefits must be supported by the State to draw the best candidates to a declining pool of high school and undergraduate students interested in the education and public sector careers.

E. Develop and expand apprentice and related training programs for the public sector.

I. Engage the Office of Apprenticeship Training to add public sector apprenticeships

- (a) Programs like the National League of Cities (NLC) [Apprenticeship for Cities](#) to meet the employment needs of municipalities and foster careers should be pursued.
- (b) The RESCs and COGs should partner with their respective Workforce Development Boards and the CT Department of Labor to foster local public sector career development.
- (c) Partner with [ReadyCT](#), an affiliate of CBIA, to foster public sector career paths for Connecticut students.

II. Vocational and technical skills for students must be a focus for developing student skills for non-college pathways. Workforce readiness programs that emphasize technical skills, certifications, apprenticeships, and

“This combination of growing demand and stagnating supply indicates that teacher shortages will persist in these subject areas unless significant action is taken.”

Staffing Shortage Areas in Connecticut Public Schools, Boston University - Wheelock Educational Policy Center (WEPC) and the Connecticut Department of Education, Executive Summary

“Would you counsel a young person you cared about to choose a career in education?”

These days, most of us wouldn't. The systemic issues in education are becoming too massive to continue ignoring. Burned-out teachers, embattled administrators, overburdened counselors and support staff stretched to the breaking point: it's a recipe for disaster. And it's catching up with us. The problem is not just current teachers exiting the field. It's that there are fewer people entering the profession to replace them.”

No More Teachers: The Epic Crisis Facing Education In 2024 Mark C. Perna Contributor FORBES, Jan 3, 2024

partnerships with local businesses should be expanded to align education with Connecticut's economic needs. Post Secondary Entrance should be removed as one of the [12 metrics used in the Next Generation Accountability Standards](#)⁴ as this disincentivizes creative pathways for students.

- (a) **Public Sector Certificate Programs** - Community colleges should offer associate degrees and certificate programs for common public sector functions such as educational support, education para-professionals, administrative staffing - including budget, land use enforcement, building inspection, fire marshal, animal control, assessment, town clerk and taxation.
- (b) **Create flexible pathways for educator certification, cross-endorsement, and educator preparation** programs

III. Establish Regional Programs and Training Opportunities.

- (a) **Regional efforts to share teacher training and mentoring resources** should be encouraged, particularly in fields where there are significant workforce gaps, such as special education, STEM, and early childhood education. RESCs, district cooperation and educator preparatory programs should play roles in this work. This is especially important as professional development mandates increase. Find means to scale the many educator preparation, cross endorsement and additional training programs being piloted by the State and others to enhance opportunities across the State and to deepen the educator pool.
- (b) **Regional training programs for core municipal services** (inspections,

enforcement, public works, assessment, budget, taxation, voting) should be facilitated by the regional COGs individually or on a shared/collective basis to enhance the knowledge base and quality of municipal services.

F. Improve the Public Sector Work Climate.

During the work of both working groups the challenges of working in the public sector (both general government and education) in the age of social media and increased access due to platforms like ZOOM making meetings and events accessible as never before to the public was discussed at length. While all agreed that having meetings streamed live was a positive advancement - the use of social media to harass and sometimes threaten local elected officials and employees makes governing more challenging and places particular stress on the recruitment and retention of employees. In fact, one ACIR member noted that the threats from social media were now more of an issue than pay and benefits. According to recent work from the National League of Cities, "While more than 8 in 10 surveyed local officials have experienced some form of harassment, threats and violence, fewer than half work in an office with a strategy to handle these incidents."⁵

- I. ACIR should work with the [Bell Center for Public Service](#) to **develop civility training for public sector employees and elected officials as well as the public in their interactions with local government and education.**
- II. Working with the Connecticut Bar Association, ACIR should **develop guidelines/ recommendations that towns and schools may utilize Dealing with Harassment and Threats Towards Local Government Officials and Employees**

⁴ According to the Connecticut Department of Education "Connecticut's Next Generation Accountability System is a broad set of 12 indicators that help tell the story of how well a school is preparing its students for success in college, careers and life. It provides a holistic, multi-factor perspective of district and school performance. Districts/schools earn points on a broad set of 12 indicators (achievement, growth, chronic absenteeism, college and career readiness, high school graduation, postsecondary entrance, physical fitness, and the arts). Performance on each indicator is measured against a target. Student group performance receives additional weight in the system. The Accountability Index is the percentage of points earned across all available indicators."

⁵ On The Frontlines of Today's Cities: Trauma, Challenges and Solutions, National league of Cities, <https://www.nlc.org/resource/on-the-frontlines-of-todays-cities-trauma-challenges-and-solutions/>

2. Innovation

To address the challenges of workforce recruitment/retention and explore opportunities (as well as barriers) for shared and regional approaches to provide needed services, there should be an **open door to innovation**. To make clear, at the local level it is not the case of being adverse to innovation - rather it is the reality that alternatives to current practice must work. ACIR's approach to innovation is that it new approaches to service provision will more likely be the result of pilots. The changes to public sector operations resulting from the pandemic (for example - remote meetings, online transactions for licensing and permits, voting and remote work) were unique and out of necessity - however, it did demonstrate that differing approaches work. "It might sound counter intuitive, but the Coronavirus pandemic has provided a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for local authorities to radically rethink how they deliver services to their citizens...The status quo is hardly sustainable, so is it time for a more radical approach? Might a joined-up view help to make delivery of services more efficient and cost-effective?"⁶

Towns and cities routinely amend or create new processes and procedures, and incorporate new technologies to achieve efficiencies (innovation) in the ongoing effort to best serve the taxpayers and people of their respective jurisdictions. They have also used, to meet the needs of their municipalities, an array of shared or regional services that take the form of inter-municipal arrangements (some formal

and others not) and services provided other organizations - including non-profits such as the nine [Community Action Agencies](#), the 17 [Community Health Centers](#), multiple [911 regions](#), various statutorily authorized providers like the [15 public transit districts](#) and [73 health districts](#) and a range of regional services provided by the six [Regional Education Service Centers](#) (RESCs) and the nine [Regional Councils of Governments](#) (COGs). Importantly, the decision to use or not use an outside organization for needed services is a decision left to each municipality.

Most recently the coronavirus global pandemic necessitated immediate changes to carry out governmental functions including those provided by our 169 towns and cities. Prior to the pandemic remote meetings, conducting inspections online, issuing permits online, remote registration/voting and remote work were very much the exceptions and for many were totally unknown. However, out of necessity these and other accommodations to the pandemic were made and things worked - in fact, many things improved to the point that to go back to how things were pre-pandemic is simply not an option. Plato had it right - "Necessity is the mother of invention."

While the pandemic did accelerate innovation for local government - it also resulted in some very large challenges. Municipalities realized an increase in retirements and

with a very tight job market many employees took their skills to the private sector and the state to take more lucrative jobs in terms of wages and benefits. Municipalities discovered that their compensation plans were not at all competitive with the private

"Innovation takes many forms in cities, [and] towns... Whether driven by data and emerging technologies, meaningful resident engagement, or empowered employees, it's about finding new approaches to persistent challenges."

ICMA

"Government organizations must change to take advantage of the opportunities in the Post COVID-19 future. Most importantly, how government manages information and effectively leverages information technology will have a major impact on the ability of government organizations to emerge from the pandemic with improved services to citizens and a more motivated and engaged government workforce...Government leaders must embrace the fact that the future will be very different than the past; it is not possible to go back to "normal". The near term need for many government employees to operate virtually, as well as the longer-term implications on how government work gets done, will result in lasting changes. This provides a unique opportunity to leverage information technology, not just to support current virtual operations, but to help effect fundamental changes in how government operates... Now that we have "broken" old patterns and practices, there is an opportunity to implement long overdue changes by rapidly leveraging technology to modernize government processes."

Transforming Government to a Post COVID-19 World
The Partnership for Public Service

⁶ Local government in a post-COVID-19 world – supporting the shift in citizen behaviours and public service culture, Solace Blog - <https://solace.org.uk/local-government-in-a-post-covid-world/>

sector and the state. The traditional means of filling vacancies is not working leaving many towns - especially small and medium sized ones - with the dilemma of how to provide required services. Town hall functions such as tax collection, assessment, police, fire, EMS, inspection/enforcement, support staff, planning, public works and on the education side teachers and education support staff are all facing challenges - making them candidates for innovation.

One area where innovation has not occurred, despite a number of studies and initiatives since 2000, is with the property tax. Each of the studies conducted on the property tax in Connecticut have identified that our almost- exclusive reliance on the property tax locally contributes a list of problems that result in poor land use decisions, unnecessary economic competition between towns, racial inequities and more. Put another way, if our towns had other ways to raise revenue, property taxes would not need to be so high. What these studies have also pointed out is that Connecticut relies less on local service fees and user charges than most other states.

Connecticut towns are not currently permitted, statutorily, to diversify their income streams as they see fit through the use of fees and charges that local residents are comfortable imposing on themselves and other users of their town's services. The fees that towns can collect are required to approximate the cost of services provided. Additionally, to the extent the State of Connecticut relies on town clerks and other local agencies to collect and remit fees on its behalf, the percentage of fees a town must remit to the state could be revised or eliminated to provide more revenue options to our towns.

To enhance of opportunity for innovation for our towns and school districts, ACIR offers the following recommendations for consideration:

A. Identify and pilot regional public employee training opportunities to share teacher training and mentoring resources and training programs for core municipal functions and services.

- I. **Regional efforts to share teacher training and mentoring resources** should be encouraged, particularly in fields where there are significant workforce gaps, such as special education, STEM, and early childhood education. RESCs, district cooperation and educator preparatory programs should play roles in this work. This is especially important as professional development mandates increase. Find means to scale the many educator preparation, cross

COG Regional Service Examples

NVCOG - Regional Brownfields Partnership
CRCOG - Capitol Region Purchasing Council
CRCOG - IT Shared Services Program
CRCOG - Nutmeg Human Resources Portal
WestCOG - Western Connecticut Public Safety Training Facility
NHCOG - Northwest Hills Community Health Network of CT
NHCOG - Rural Independent Transportation System
NECCOG - Regional Animal Services Program
NECCOG - Regional Property Revaluation Program
NECCOG - Regional Paramedic Intercept
NECCOG - Shared Town Administrator Program
CRCOG/NECCOG - Crumbing Foundations
CRCOG/RiverCOG/NECCOG/SCCOG - Regional Election Advisor Program
COG Regions - Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies/
Federal Economic Development Districts
COG Regions - Human Services Coordinating Councils
COG/MPO Regions - Transportation Planning and Project Assistance

RESC Regional Service Examples

ACES - Health Insurance Collaborative
ACES - Adult Career & Community Empowerment Services
ACES - West Haven Collaborative
CES - Regional Assistive Technology Center
CES/EDAdvance - WorkspaceCT
CES - Regional Center for the Arts
CREC - Cooperative Purchasing Program
CREC - Resource Group's Professional Learning Services
CREC - Head Start and Early Head Start Program
EDAdvance - Data Services
EASTCONN - Technology Solutions Services
EASTCONN - Psychological & Behavioral Consultation
EASTCONN - Facilitates Collaborative, Regional Approaches To School Operations
LEARN - Teaching and Learning Hub
RESC's - Special Education Services
RESC's - Adult Education
RESC's - Food Service Programs
RESC's - Grant Procurement/Administration
RESC's - Transportation Services

endorsement and additional training programs being piloted by the State and others to enhance opportunities across the State and to deepen the educator pool.

- II. **Regional training programs for core municipal services** (inspections, enforcement, public works, assessment, budget, taxation, voting) should be facilitated by the regional COGs individually or on a shared/collective basis to enhance the knowledge base and quality of municipal services.

B. For local education:

- I. **Remove impediments that discourage efforts to provide education programming or staffing cooperatively or regionally.**
- II. **Empower towns to establish cooperative schools** and have those schools recognized as LEAs
- III. **Waive existing education space standards when renovating facilities** for regionalized or

cooperative programs. This can facilitate the reuse of existing buildings and offer incentives such as increasing the construction reimbursement bonus to 20% for regionalized or jointly operated programs.

IV. Enable existing regional districts to initiate studies for dissolution or reconstitution

based on a majority vote of involved towns, rather than the currently required unanimous consent. Simplify the process for towns wishing to exit a regional arrangement to better reflect shifts in local needs.

V. Grant statutory authority for the establishment of regional finance boards for

communities within regional school districts by region-wide majority vote to oversee regional school budgets, ensuring fair fiscal oversight while reducing redundancy.

VI. Incentivizing districts to build local special education programs to reduce outplacement, and leveraging regional service centers (RESCs) to increase capacity and quality of services across multiple towns.

VII. Increased funding for early intervention programs to reduce the number of children who ultimately require formal special education.

3. Applied Research with Corresponding Outreach

Connecticut lacks a government supported nonpartisan policy center to provide policymakers - at both the state and local level - with timely, high-quality research and analysis on important public policy issues. Such centers provide, which many states have, provide policymakers and the public with valuable information. Our state also lacks a coordinated system to provide outreach to inform and enhance the work of policymakers. Despite the lack of a nonpartisan policy center and outreach - Connecticut has, if properly coordinated and re-purposed the elements to support such a center and outreach.

For towns, cities and school districts, Connecticut has a great deal of data regarding municipalities and school districts. Access to data, with the exception of education, is fragmented and incomplete - lacking a one-stop approach. In terms of research and policy guidance, there are multiple public and private entities engaged in this - unfortunately, often the topics examined are not based on local needs and lacks coordination in terms of research, data and outreach.

The primary point of contact within state government for towns and cities is the [Intergovernmental Policy and Planning Division](#) (IGPP) of the Office of Policy and Management (OPM). IGPP “functions as a conduit for intergovernmental communications by gathering and disseminating information concerning the needs of local governments and Council of Governments, the programs of assistance available to them, and legislative activities affecting them. IGPP also coordinates state efforts to revitalize cities, preserve the unique charm of our state, and build livable, economically strong communities while protecting our natural resources for the enjoyment of future

“Good data, when thoughtfully collected and analyzed, can help governments at all levels set more effective policies and give officials the tools to gauge whether programs are meeting their objectives.”

How Local Governments Can Use Data to Better Serve Residents Experts discuss past, present, and future of government performance management, The Pew Charitable Trusts - ARTICLE June 22, 2023 By: Larry Eichel,

“State leaders make policy and budget decisions that directly impact important outcomes for residents—such as public safety, health and well-being, transportation and educational attainment. Using the best available research and data to guide those decisions is the key to evidence-informed policymaking. Evidence can help officials from all branches of government strategically target resources to programs and policies that are effective, promote innovation, improve transparency in budgeting, and build and sustain a culture of continuous learning and improvement... Policymakers need access to reliable and meaningful data and program evaluations to make the best use of public resources.”

The ABCs of Evidence-Informed Policymaking, September 23, 2020, Kristine Goodwin - National Conference of State Legislatures

generations. The IGPP Division includes two units - the [Office of Responsible Growth](#) (ORG) and the Assessment, Data Collection and Grants Management Unit.⁷ While IGPP, amongst its varied responsibilities, administers more than 20 municipal grants, represents OPM on multiple committees, provides administrative support to at least two statutory entities (including ACIR) and is responsible for the every five-year update of the Conservation and Development Policies Plan for Connecticut (C&D Plan), it has limited research and data maintenance capacity. IGPP has limited research and staffing capacity which ACIR has explored and

recommended in previous work to enhance “to provide the bandwidth needed to implement and foster collaboration at each level of government.⁸”

For public sector research, there are a several sources. Notably, The [Connecticut Open Data Portal](#) provides access to more than 700 data sets covering all state agencies.

Additional data are found through multiple state agencies. The Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) maintains a [listing](#) with links to a variety of data including Census, Population, Housing, Distressed Municipalities and [Town Profiles](#). Town Profiles, which are two page demographic profiles for each municipality, are used routinely by municipalities and others - Town Profiles are a product of the [Connecticut Data Collaborative, AdvanceCT](#). The Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) has a variety of data including a statewide registry of [vital records](#) and [annual population estimates](#) that our

towns, cities regions and others use routinely. The Connecticut Department of Labor has and [Office of Research](#) which “gathers, analyzes, and disseminates information on the economy, workforce and careers that is used to evaluate the economic health of Connecticut, to support and promote state workforce development activities, and to assist students and job

⁷ OPM Intergovernmental Policy and Planning Division (IGPP) Home Page, <https://portal.ct.gov/opm/igpp/igpp-home>

⁸ Report of the Task Force to Promote Municipal Shared Services Prepared by the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations Work Groups, February 7, 2020 - page 16

seekers in making career choices.⁹ The Office of Fiscal Analysis has a “[dashboard](#)” that “displays major sources of state aid to individual towns from FY 20 through FY 25. It also contains descriptions of the various state aid programs and details recent legislative changes.”

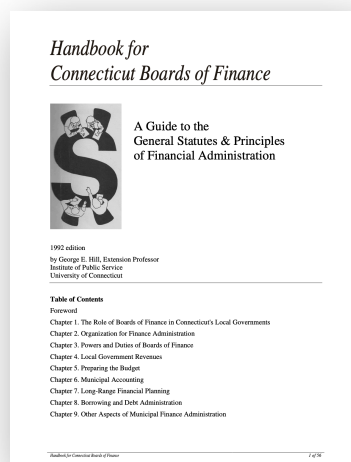
For researching economic issues on their implications for Connecticut there is the [Connecticut Center for Economic Analysis \(CCEA\)](#), at the University of Connecticut School of Business. “CCEA specializes in economic impact and policy analysis studies, as well as advising clients regarding business strategy, market analysis, and related topics. CCEA focuses particular attention on the economic and business dynamics of Connecticut... CCEA was created at the request of Governor Weicker in 1992 to serve the state’s citizens by providing timely and reliable information regarding Connecticut’s economy and to evaluate the potential impacts of proposed policies and strategic investments.¹⁰”

The General Assembly has two research offices: The [Office of Fiscal Analysis](#) (OFA) and the [Office of Legislative Research](#) (OLR). Both, on a routine basis, provide analysis and research concerning municipalities - local including education. Both OFA and OLR review legislation and express estimations as to the impact of pending legislation on municipalities. Unfortunately, the nature of the legislative process does not allow either to conduct a comprehensive analysis as to actual impacts - especially the variances that may exist depending on the capacity of a given municipality or school district. The General Assembly had, until 2017 when it was removed, the [Program Review and Investigations Committee](#) (PRI) which conducted “deep dives” on a range of topics - including many related to municipalities. Examples include “Regional Cooperation Between Local Boards of Education,” “Apprenticeship Programs and Workforce Needs,” “Connecticut’s Regional Planning Organizations” and, “Connecticut’ Tax System.” PRI, while praised for its work, ultimately was not nimble enough to be of value to the realities of the legislative calendar.

There are many private and non-profit organizations that provide research that contribute to our

understanding of the challenges and condition of our towns and cities. The [Connecticut Conference of Municipalities](#) (CCM) provides ongoing research, information and training to their members (which is essentially every municipality in the state). CCM has staffing in place to conduct research and outreach to towns and cities. CCM also has the resources to retain consultants to take deeper dives into issues such as [property tax reform](#), [flooding mitigation](#), and the [119K Commission](#) initiative. [CCM’s Municipal Career Center](#) contains videos that encourage residents to consider municipal government as a career -- from Connecticut municipal officials a listing of municipal job openings, as well as information about municipal internships. CCM’s affiliate insurance company, the [Connecticut Interlocal Risk Management Agency](#) (CIRMA) offers [on-line](#) and on-sight training covering dozens of municipal and education topics - plus an extensive resource library. The [Connecticut Education Association](#) (CEA) is key resource for information for Connecticut educators. Research from the [Federal Reserve Bank of Boston](#) has produced multiple studies focused on Connecticut, such as its 2015 report regarding [municipal fiscal disparities](#), 2021 report [Reforming Connecticut’s Education Aid Formula to Achieve Equity and Adequacy across School Districts](#), and a 2013 report [The Quest for Cost-Efficient Local Government in New England: What Role for Regional Consolidation?](#) providing valued information for policy deliberations. Similarly, there are multiple private organizations that conduct research specific to Connecticut local government - including the [School and State Finance Project](#), [Connecticut Voices for Children](#), and the [Yankee Institute](#). The [CT Data Collaborative](#), provides a one-stop data center covering a range of topics derived from Census and Connecticut data - enabling users to conduct their own research and [DataHaven](#) provides data at the local, regional and state level regarding wellness and equity. [AdvanceCT](#), an economic development organization working in close collaboration with DECED, provides a range of data for persons and business. The [Connecticut Business and Industry Association \(CBIA\)](#) additionally provides research and analysis related to the state’s business condition and employment.

For several decades towns and cities benefited from the Institute of Public Service (IPS) at the University of



⁹ About the State of Connecticut Department of Labor's Office of Research, <https://www1.ctdol.state.ct.us/mi/aboutus.asp>

¹⁰ CCEA website, About - <https://ccea.uconn.edu/about/>

Connecticut, which faded away in the early 2000s. IPS produced recurring reports and guidebooks focused on the issues and operations of local government. This work included reports on Grand Lists & % Tax Rates of Connecticut Towns and Cities, Handbook for Connecticut Boards of Finance: a Guide to the General Statutes & Principles of Financial Administration, Handbook for Connecticut Selectmen: a Guide to the General Statutes and Specific Powers of Selectmen Together with Statutory Citations, and a Handbook for Connecticut Tax Collectors. IPS essentially covered all aspects of local governance and additionally provided outreach education to towns and cities on their work. This is the same model that the UCONN Cooperative Extension System has in place of agriculture, land use and various environmental concerns.

For educational research within Connecticut government there is the [Center for Connecticut Education Research Collaboration](#) (CCERC) which is a relatively new research initiative started by the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) in collaboration with eight of the state's public and private colleges and universities. "The mission of CCERC is to address pressing issues in the state's public schools through high quality evaluation and research that leverages the expertise of researchers from different institutions possessing varied methodological expertise and content knowledge."¹¹ Current research projects (14 in progress) include: [Teachers and Leaders Turnover and Supply](#), and [Categorizing and Understanding Facilities and Long-term \(Capital\) Investments](#). Structurally, "CSDE sets the agenda, identifies projects, and allocates funding for CCERC. The University of Connecticut manages funding and provides an administrative team. A Steering Committee composed of researchers from

various Connecticut institutions guides the administrative team in developing and approving research projects and reports.¹² Additionally, CSDE maintains robust state education data with [EdSight](#) - an "interactive data portal for Connecticut's public districts, schools, and programs."¹³ CSDE additionally has its [Performance Office](#) which pulls together a range of sources to better understand and evaluate Connecticut's education system.

Specific to municipal and regional research and outreach in Connecticut is the [Institute for Municipal and Regional Policy](#) (IMRP) within the School of Public Policy at the University of Connecticut. IMRP is a "non-partisan organization based at the University, dedicated to improving local, state, and national public policy by addressing complex issues, ensuring the best outcomes for individuals and communities. By bridging the gap between academia, policymakers, practitioners, and the community, we champion fair, effective, and just public policy through applied research and community engagement."¹⁴ The focus, however, has almost exclusively, been on matters related to criminal justice.

There are several examples in other states of organizations focused on local government. Massachusetts has the [Division of Local Services](#) which has many of the same functions as the Intergovernmental Unit at OPM. DLS, amongst its duties, has a bureau dedicated to "providing training, support, and consulting services to local government" and offers other programs including [Local Finance](#)

[Commonwealth Fellowship Program](#) - which is designed to foster new finance professionals for municipalities. Several state cooperative extension systems - notably [Wisconsin](#) - address local governance. Their stated mission:

"... is to provide focus, coordination, and leadership to ... educational programs supporting local government, and to expand the research and knowledge base for local government education.



¹¹ Center for Connecticut Education Research Collaboration, Connecticut State Department of Education, Home Page - https://portal.ct.gov/ccerc?language=en_US
¹² Center for Connecticut Education Research Collaboration (CCERC), About Page, https://portal.ct.gov/ccerc/about-us?language=en_US
¹³ Connecticut State Department of Education, EdSight Home Page - https://public-edsight.ct.gov/?language=en_US
¹⁴ <https://imrp.dpp.uconn.edu/about/>

- To help new officials understand their roles and responsibilities as public officials in Wisconsin
- To develop the abilities of new and continuing officials to fulfill their roles and responsibilities
- To enhance the ability of Extension educators to establish relationships and work with local officials in their area
- To help officials keep current on topics and practices which affect their communities
- To help officials fulfill requirements when specific instruction is required by statute (such as Board of Review).

This instruction is usually in one of five forms:

- in-person workshops presented statewide in the spring and fall of each year
- teleconference programs on individual topics offered live and in recorded form
- video accompanied by written materials
- the Local Government Education website
- the Certified Public Manager Program group colleague cohorts and public classes

We research questions about local government in Wisconsin to gain insight into trends and solutions to problems.”¹⁵

There is a non-profit in Washington State - the [Municipal Research and Services Center](#) (MRSC) that “is an independent, nonpartisan, and educational nonprofit organization that helps local governments across Washington State better serve their communities by providing legal and policy guidance on any topic.”¹⁶ Topics covered by MRSC include training, research, publications library, electronic bidding, and more. Also in Washington State is the [Washington State Institute for Public Policy](#) (WSIPP) “a team of multidisciplinary researchers who conduct applied policy research ...to carry out practical, non-partisan research—at legislative direction—on issues of importance to Washington State... in Education, Criminal justice, Children and adult services, Health, [and] General government.”¹⁷ They are further charged by their legislature to “identify “evidence-based” policies. The goal is to provide Washington policymakers and budget writers with a list of well-researched public policies that can, with a high degree of certainty, lead to better statewide outcomes coupled with a more efficient use of taxpayer dollars.”¹⁸

Connecticut has the elements for a robust research (basic and applied) and corresponding outreach. What is missing is the coordination of these elements and a focus on the key issues challenging Connecticut’s municipalities. ACIR offers the following recommendations for consideration:

A. ACIR will establish a Center for Connecticut Local Government Collaboration (CCLG) to replicate and complement the Center for Connecticut Education Research Collaboration (CCERC).

- I. ACIR would serve as the lead or coordinating body for the CCLG;
- II. ACIR will form a working group of the public and private research and educational organizations to establish the Center for Connecticut Local Government Collaboration (CCLG);
- III. Once established, ACIR will facilitate a formal agreement by and between CCERC and CCLG to ensure coordination;
- IV. ACIR will examine and recommend funding options for the CCLG as well as delivery options for municipalities and school districts, and;
- V. A new website (perhaps modeled after the [Municipal Research and Services Center](#) (MRSC), as an extension of the current ACIR website, would be established as a one-stop for information and links to public and private resources for municipalities and school districts for information generated by CCLG, CCERC and other appropriate sources.

There are risks and costs to action. But they are far less than the long range risks of comfortable inaction.

John F. Kennedy

¹⁵ Local Government Education University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension, About - <https://localgovernment.extension.wisc.edu/about-the-local-government-center/>

¹⁶ MRSC, About Page - <https://mrsc.org/about/mrsc-services>

¹⁷ Washington State Institute of Public Policy website - <https://www.wsipp.wa.gov/>

¹⁸ Washington State Institute of Public Policy website <https://www.wsipp.wa.gov/BenefitCost>