Resource Allocation Review for Connecticut Districts

CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires that state education agencies (SEAs) conduct periodic resource allocation reviews (RAR) in districts that serve low-performing schools. The mandate represents a new opportunity for districts to examine the connection between resource allocation and academic outcomes. This document offers a step-by-step guide that district leaders can use when conducting their RARs.

Required by law, resource allocation, refers to the mechanism by which districts distribute money and other inputs to schools. While local education agencies (LEAs) distribute numerous types of resources, we recommend that districts start by examining how dollars are distributed (or the equivalent dollar costs of various schooling inputs). The dollar resources considered here include all federal, state, and local dollars and also include salaries.

It's also worth emphasizing that while a review of resource allocation could have a range of goals, the law states that the central purpose of the RAR is school improvement[i]. Toward this end, we see several ways that the RAR could ultimately help with school improvement, including that the review could:

- Identify resource allocation inequities that may exist when comparing schools or programs across the LEA.
    - What does a school or set of schools look like relative to its peers?
    - What changes in district allocation could help?
- Help LEA and school leaders connect resource allocation to student outcomes.
- Generate high-quality discussions between leaders at the district and school to uncover opportunities and obstacles to more strategic resource use to improve student performance.
- Create urgency among school and district leaders for leveraging resources to do more for students.
- Minimize the burden by tapping existing data and coordinating with other existing requirements.

The RAR is not an evaluation or accountability measure and does not result in punitive action against a school or LEA. The purpose of the RAR is not to surface specific action steps, but rather to have a conversation that connects resources to outcomes.

The following steps, discussion protocol and accompanying resources are designed to meet the above goals and to facilitate a community of practice around data on resources and outcomes.

Local Resource Allocation Review Protocol

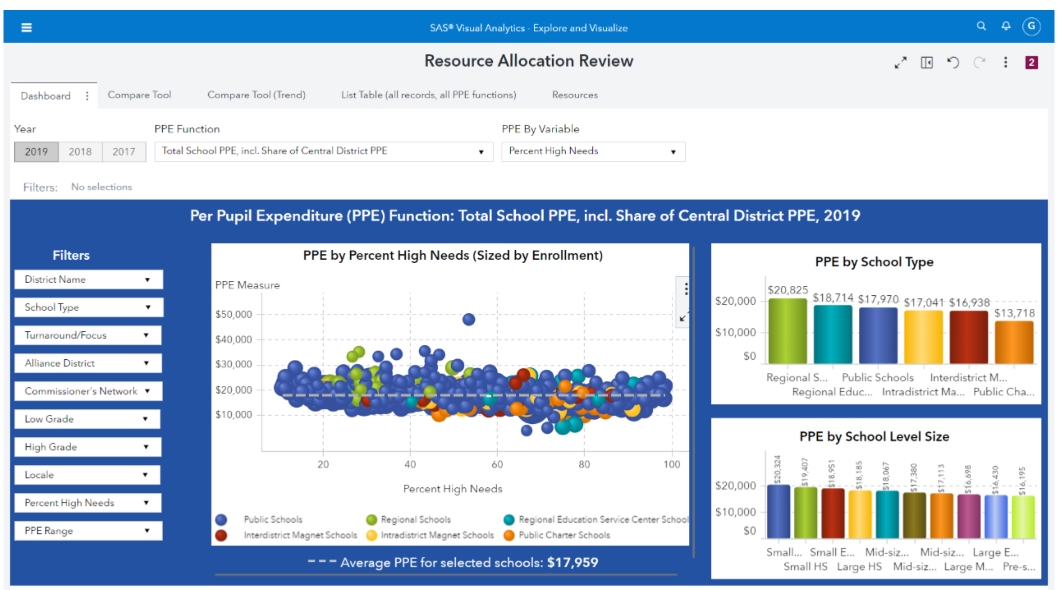
Step 1: District Leaders Prepare for the RAR

- Identify elementary, middle, high school or programs within or across grades or grade ranges for the RAR.
- Schedule a 90-minute meeting (in person or virtual) with leaders from the school(s). It is important to include the district business leader or CFO or other leader who is knowledgeable about the district's finances in the RAR. While the resource allocation review conversation between the SEA and the LEA and the conversation between the LEA and school leader can be separate, we recommend having one conversation with leaders at all three levels. Not only is this efficient, it allows both the district and school leaders to bring an important context to the SEA-led discussion.
- When scheduling this meeting, be sure to make clear to district and school leaders that the point of the RAR is professional development; it is meant to be an informative conversation, not a performance review nor a planning session.

Step 2: District Leaders Assemble Data and Conduct Base Analyses

- District leaders engage with the RAR report in either [EdSight public] or [EdSight Secure] to select data that are readily available, including demographic data, financial data, and outcomes data. (See [How to Use the Resource Allocation Review Report]).
- To facilitate a discussion about resource allocation, the RAR reports includes per pupil spending data visualizations of all district schools arrayed by type, size, and high needs proportion (see Figure 1) so that school leaders might see how their resources compare to those of other schools in the district.
- The scatterplot provides an opportunity to compare per-pupil spending to percent high needs, and performance across demographically similar schools across the state.

Figure 1. EdSight Secure Resource Allocation Review Report



Step 3: District Leaders share data with Building Leaders

The CSDE provides district and school leaders with access to the RAR report through both EdSight public and EdSight Secure. District leaders can determine how to also encourage school staff to access the RAR report, if desired in advance of discussion.

Step 4: District Leaders Engage in Discussion Protocol

Districts are encouraged to begin with the User Stories within the CSDE How to Use the Resource Allocation Report.

Part one of the protocol will likely surface different issues with district schools. For example, if the school targeted for resource allocation review receives less money per pupil than other schools in the district or than other similar peers, the district may want to rethink its allocation strategy.

Conversely, if the school receives more money per pupil, the data might spark discussion about resource types and efficiency. In either case, district and school leaders can discuss resource equity, how resources are applied in schools, the role of teacher experience and salary, and what is and isn't working for students.

A. District leader invites questions from school leader on the data provided
   - School leader asks questions [5 minutes]
   - District leader responds where feasible and acknowledges that data are inherently incomplete in that they do not capture all the relevant detail of the district, school, community, and context [5 minutes]

B. District leader briefly describes the current resource allocation methodology

   (Note that the federal Supplement, Not Supplant requirement calls for districts to be able to articulate a "resource allocation methodology" used to allocate resources to schools. A resource allocation methodology might be a staffing formula, student-based allocation, or some combination thereof.)

   - District leader describes the methodology [5 minutes]
   - School leader is invited to ask clarifying questions [3 minutes]
   - District leader responds [2 minutes]

C. District Leader asks school leader to reflect on the level of dollar resources allocated to the school

   - School leader offers any reactions [5 minutes]
   - District reflects/responds [5 minutes]

D. District and school leaders invited to reflect on how to better leverage resources to do more for students (including changing the mix of resources)
   - School leader reflects [10 minutes]
   - District leader reflects and responds [10 minutes]
   - School leader responds [5 minutes]

E. District and School leaders engage in discussion of possible opportunities and barriers
   - District leader recites back any possible opportunities for change identified by LEA or school leader and acknowledges any barriers [5 minutes]
   - School leader reflects and responds [5 minutes]
   - District leader reflects and responds [5 minutes]

F. District and school leader reflect on discussion and identify next steps
   - District leader(s) reflect and offer any other thoughts or next steps [5 minutes]
   - School leader reflects and offers any other thoughts or next steps [5 minutes]
   - District leader(s) summarize responses and any next steps [5 minutes]

Adapted from A Guide for SEA-led Resource Allocation Reviews (bscpcenter.org)

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[i] Connecticut Consolidated State Plan Under the Every Student Succeeds Act