

CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Hartford

TO: State Board of Education

FROM: Charlene M. Russell-Tucker

DATE: January 14, 2026

SUBJECT: Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) Special Education Systems Review: WestEd Final Report

Executive Summary

On July 1, 2025, as part of its commitment to continuous improvement, the CSDE announced the launch of a comprehensive, independent evaluation of its special education infrastructure, processes, and support and accountability systems, including how complaints are received, tracked, investigated, and resolved. To lead the evaluation, WestEd, a nationally respected organization with deep expertise in special education, was engaged.

The review included over 1,000 stakeholder interactions, comprised of students, parents, policymakers, district leaders, state agency staff, technical assistance providers, and representatives of affiliates and higher education, among others.

Additionally, as part of their evaluation, WestEd collected and reviewed extensive amounts of data – both quantitative and qualitative. Sources included in this review are, but not limited to, administrative data (e.g., performance indicators, compliance reports), policy documents, strategic plans, prior evaluation and audit reports, research studies and literature reviews, and legislative or regulatory guidance.

WestEd completed its evaluation and published the findings and recommendations in the Connecticut State Department of Education Special Education Systems Review: Final Report, which is attached for review.

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Connecticut State Department of Education Special Education Systems Review: Final Report

December 2025

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For more information, visit [WestEd.org](https://www.wested.org). For regular updates on research, free resources, solutions, and job postings from WestEd, subscribe to the E-Bulletin, our semimonthly e-newsletter, at [WestEd.org/subscribe](https://www.wested.org/subscribe).

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Introduction

On July 1, 2025, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) issued a press release reaffirming Commissioner of Education Charlene Russell-Tucker’s commitment to ensuring high-quality special education services to all eligible students in the state. The Commissioner had previously expressed her commitment to ensuring that meaningful progress is made on the goals outlined in the State Board of Education’s 5-year comprehensive plan. This includes supporting schools, districts, and programs to ensure that students receiving special education and related services have increased access to general education settings to learn alongside their peers, providing an appropriate continuum of supports and services and ensuring that their IEPs reflect high expectations and meaningful access to the state’s academic content standards.

As part of this broader commitment to continuous improvement, and in response to recent public concerns about state special education complaint system response times, Commissioner Russell-Tucker initiated an independent systems review to ensure the CSDE is executing an effective and impactful special education system—one that improves outcomes for students receiving special education and related services and expands their access to opportunities.

Although Connecticut received the highest federal designation under the Office of Special Education Program’s (OSEP’s) accountability system for the fifth consecutive year in June of 2025, the decision to undertake this review demonstrates the CSDE’s commitment to continuous improvement and a strong focus on outcomes alongside compliance. As Commissioner Russell-Tucker stated, the goal is “to ensure the CSDE is building the strongest, most responsive special education system—one that improves outcomes and expands a universe of opportunities for all students with disabilities.”

Governor Lamont supported the Commissioner’s commitment: “Rather than being satisfied with the highest federal compliance results, Commissioner Russell-Tucker has recognized that our special education system needs a closer look, and she did not wait to act. This review reflects her commitment to transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement. I fully support this important step toward a stronger, more responsive system for students with disabilities in Connecticut.”

“Rather than being satisfied with the highest federal compliance results, Commissioner Russell-Tucker has recognized that our special education system needs a closer look, and she did not wait to act.”

Commissioner Russell-Tucker engaged WestEd, a nationally respected organization with extensive expertise in special education analysis and improvement, to conduct the systems review. WestEd’s team—composed of individuals who have served in the roles of state superintendent, special education director, and other state leadership roles and who have experience with national technical assistance leadership and qualitative and quantitative methodology—has worked with all 50 state education agencies and leads work for several of the nation’s federally funded technical assistance centers for special education. This includes leading the National Center for Systemic Improvement (NCSI), the federal technical assistance center dedicated to helping states transform their special education systems.

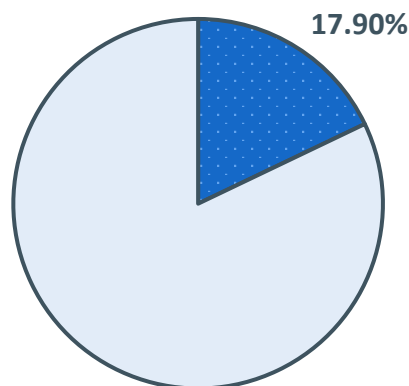
The review of the CSDE’s special education infrastructure, processes, support systems, and accountability systems involved collecting, reviewing, and summarizing information collected from a variety of sources. These included a comprehensive analysis of extant data, individual and small group interviews, focus groups with a broad set of stakeholders, and a widely disseminated survey. The findings from this review inform a set of actionable recommendations designed to enhance the department’s internal systems, policies, and practices and to improve its capacity to design and deliver special education supports and services to students with disabilities and their families, with the ultimate goal of improving outcomes for students across the state.

Background and History

In Connecticut, approximately 91,847 K–12 public school students were identified as having disabilities during the 2023–24 school year, which accounts for 17.9 percent of the student population. While schools and districts play a central role in providing high-quality special education services to these students, the CSDE as a whole—particularly its Bureau of Special Education (BSE)—also plays a key role in narrowing gaps and ensuring improved educational and postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities in Connecticut.

The CSDE monitors district compliance with federal and state special education requirements,

Figure 1. Percentage of Connecticut Students Receiving Special Education and Related Services(2023–24)



oversees the provision of individualized education programs (IEPs) and related services, identifies areas of noncompliance, and implements corrective actions. It also administers state and federal special education funds, issues policy and regulatory guidance, and provides professional learning, data support, and technical assistance on research- and evidence-based practices to strengthen district capacity for delivering high-quality special education services.

In April 2023, the General Assembly created the Task Force to Study Special Education Services and Funding. The task force examined challenges, including staffing shortages, resource inequities, and persistent achievement gaps. As noted in its final report, released in January 2025, “The Task Force recognizes that the system of special education in Connecticut needs improvement. The Task Force is clear that the time is ripe for Connecticut to make a renewed and strengthened commitment to public education, and especially to students with disabilities.” The Task Force’s recommendations, along with high-profile local complaints, informed new special education legislation adopted during the 2025 legislative session.

Data Collection Process

Review of Extant Data

The review of extant data—existing data collected for purposes other than the current evaluation—is a foundational step in any evaluation or systems review. It provides critical context, informs evaluation design, and helps identify strengths, gaps, and trends before new data are collected. Such a review helps provide insights into the current state of the system; identify existing evidence about performance, outcomes, and processes; suggest ways to reduce redundancy by leveraging existing data sources; and guide the development of evaluation questions, methodologies, and priority areas of focus. Sources typically included in this type of review are, but are not limited to, administrative data (e.g., performance indicators, compliance reports), policy documents, strategic plans, prior evaluation and audit reports, research studies and literature reviews, and legislative or regulatory guidance. At the start of the review process, the WestEd team examined numerous documents, including, but not limited to: the Connecticut State Board of Education’s Five-Year Comprehensive Plan for Education 2023–2028, *The Condition of Education in Connecticut 2023–24*, the report of the 2024 Task Force to Study Special Education Services and Funding, Connecticut’s IDEA Part B Determinations (2014–23), and Connecticut’s State Performance Plan (SPP) and Annual Performance Report (APR). (See [Appendix B](#) for a complete list of data and documents

reviewed.) The review of extant data, in part, informed the development of the interview and focus group questions as outlined below.

Interviews

The WestEd team conducted semi-structured interviews with individuals and small groups of two to three people. A semi-structured interview is a qualitative research method guided by a set of predetermined topics and open-ended questions that also allows flexibility to ask follow-up questions and explore unexpected or important topics as they arise. WestEd interviewers were able to probe deeper into interesting points, follow up on relevant topics, and ask spontaneous questions raised by participants that were not included in the original interview guide. This approach is ideal for exploratory research in social science fields because it strikes a balance between the rigidity of strictly pre-planned questions used in structured interviews and the flexibility and open-ended nature of unstructured interviews.¹

The WestEd team conducted 24 interviews with individuals and small groups. A complete list of interviewees can be found in [Appendix E](#). Nine small group interviews were conducted with staff in the CSDE Bureau of Special Education. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and was facilitated by a WestEd staff member, with assistance from a notetaker. With permission, interviews were recorded. Following introductions, the WestEd facilitator provided an overview of the purpose of the Special Education Systems Review, the interview process, and the broader review being conducted by WestEd. (See [Appendix C](#) for the interview protocol.)

Interview and Focus Group Questions

- What do you think the role and purpose of the CSDE should be in terms of supporting positive outcomes for students with disabilities?
- Relative to that purpose, what are the strengths of their current approach?
- Relative to that purpose, what are the challenges or areas in need of improvement in their current approach?
- What recommendations and ideas do you have for the CSDE for improvement?
- Is there anything we didn't ask that you think is important to share?

¹ Smith, J. (1995). Semi-structured interviewing and qualitative analysis. In J. A. Smith, R. Harré, & L. van Langenhove (Eds.), *Rethinking methods in psychology* (pp. 10–26). SAGE Publications Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446221792.n2>

Focus Groups

WestEd conducted 18 virtual and two in-person focus group meetings with individuals representing numerous organizations and entities, including, but not limited to, students, parents, policymakers, district leaders, state agency staff, technical assistance providers, and representatives of affiliate organizations and higher education. The two in-person focus group meetings were held with special education directors from districts and Approved Private Special Education Programs (APSEPs) at the 2025 CSDE Bureau of Special Education Back to School meeting. (See [Appendix F](#) for a full list of organizations and a description of participants.)

Each focus group meeting, whether virtual or in person, was approximately 60 minutes in length. Following introductions and a review of the process, the WestEd facilitator provided a brief overview of the purpose of the Special Education Systems Review, the process for the focus group meeting, and information about the broader systems review being conducted by WestEd. The same questions used for the individual interviews were used with the focus groups. A similar semi-structured process was followed, allowing facilitators to pose follow-up questions and explore unexpected or important topics as they arose.

Survey

Survey questions were drafted by the WestEd team to capture responses from a wider audience across the state. Questions were based on the review of extant data and information collected from interviews and focus groups and were shared with the CSDE team for feedback. The final survey contained 17 questions asking respondents to rate the CSDE's effectiveness in performing a variety of functions—including leadership, dispute resolution, collaboration, and guidance—and two open-response items. The first open-response item asked respondents to share any “bright spots” or areas related to the CSDE's effectiveness in serving students with disabilities in Connecticut. The second open-response item invited respondents to share any additional information about special education services in Connecticut. (See [Appendix H](#) for a copy of the survey.)

The WestEd team coordinated with 12 organizations to disseminate the survey link through their communication channels, including the Black Leaders and Administrators Consortium (BLAC), the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE), the Connecticut Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents (CALAS), the Connecticut Administrators of Programs for English Language Learners (CAPELL), the Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS), the Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center (CPAC), and the State Education Resource Center (SERC). The survey was also sent to all focus group invitees. The survey was administered from September 9, 2025, through October 6, 2025, and received a total of 1,444 responses.

Findings

Review of Extant Data

The review of extant data reveals a system focused on strong federal compliance, as affirmed by maintaining a “Meets Requirements” determination since 2021, alongside policy guidance and support mechanisms and local implementation challenges. While Connecticut demonstrates some areas of consistent performance at the state level, recent data show declining performance in evaluation timeliness, and challenges with individualized education program (IEP) implementation, service delivery, and staffing. State complaint system data from 2023 through 2025 indicate that corrective action was needed in many cases, often involving compensatory education and addressing documentation concerns. These patterns suggest that while Connecticut achieves federal compliance standards, opportunities exist to strengthen the consistency of special education services at the district and school levels in service to improving outcomes for students.

Interview and Focus Groups

In conducting interviews and focus groups, the WestEd team focused on gathering data about participants’ perceptions of the CSDE’s role and purpose in supporting positive outcomes for students with disabilities, the strengths of the CSDE’s current approach, and the challenges or areas in need of improvement in their current approach. Finally, participants were asked to provide any global or specific recommendations and ideas for the CSDE’s improvement. From these conversations, several key themes emerged, which are described below.

Oversight and Accountability

Despite being identified as key elements of CSDE’s role, oversight and accountability were also frequently mentioned as areas in need of improvement. When asked to describe the role of the CSDE in special education, many respondents perceived the department’s key responsibility to be providing statewide oversight of education, including enforcing policies, monitoring, and holding districts accountable for providing a free appropriate public education (FAPE). There were some variations by role, with representatives at the state level often expressing a desire to “go beyond” compliance and focus on innovation, monitoring, and improvement efforts that lead to improved student outcomes. Participants at a more local level often spoke about the

role the CSDE plays in providing resources and guidance to educators, while parents and attorneys focused on student rights and enforcement of policy.

CSDE should be able to have the mechanisms to achieve accountability. It should be able to move in and help fix districts that have problems. And I don't know whether it has those tools in its toolkit right now.

—Focus Group Participant

In particular, participants raised the issue of monitoring districts for appropriate implementation of state policies, and the ability of the state to follow through on building capacity within districts to implement best practices and enforce policies where needed. Participants noted that staff shortages at both the state and local education agency levels may have impacted monitoring efforts.

With the past practice that they had done many, many years ago ... it was arduous and it took a lot of manpower, so I think that is why they aren't doing it currently. They would go in and look at IEPs and look at the district and see the gaps but also do some professional development. So, it wasn't necessarily a negative thing ... it was a good opportunity for districts to say, "Okay, where are we lacking and how can we get that technical assistance?"

—Focus Group Participant

Dispute Resolution

Concerns regarding dispute resolution systems and related processes were raised by nearly every stakeholder group across multiple feedback opportunities. Much of the feedback centered on two elements of dispute resolution: state complaint investigations and due process hearings. Concerns included the timeliness of issuing investigation reports, the perceived capacity of due process hearing officers, and inequitable access to resources and support for parents and districts navigating the process, depending on whether they had legal representation. Several participants also highlighted that the current complaint system lacks any mechanism for appeal, leaving little recourse for parents or districts once a decision is made. Participants also raised concerns about the state's use of out-of-state hearing officers, who they suggested may lack understanding of state-specific requirements, and about perceived bias in decision-making, where they questioned if hearing officers were prioritizing district assertions over documentary evidence. Navigating the complex and technical

elements of the dispute resolution system also appears to pose a barrier for some families, particularly for those who cannot afford or otherwise access legal support.

I think one of the things they could do better certainly would be to train the educational consultants better in special ed law...I think between the state consultants and the hearing officers, getting training for the hearing officers so they have a better understanding. There have been situations where hearing officers have misled parents in pre-hearing conferences. And I know because I can sit in on those with parents. I think that better training would be helpful.
—Focus Group Participant

Communication and Collaboration

Feedback received regarding communication and collaboration with the CSDE was mixed. Many participants praised the growing efforts by the current administration to communicate directly through mechanisms such as the Friday CAFEs, a peer-to-peer learning network for any professional who supports family engagement in schools, and the Commissioner’s Network, as well as the willingness of the CSDE staff to respond to direct outreach. Multiple participants requested more direct communication, with some suggesting the revival of the Circular Letters.

The Commissioners Network is a great opportunity for people to come in, listen to the commissioner, listen to the different directors and things like that, and share what is going on around the State. And so, looking for ways to maybe even have that happen more often is maybe something, once we get to that point, I can share. But even things like Friday CAFE—that is something that has been really helpful, where family-facing professionals get together on a monthly basis and have the opportunity to talk about ways to connect with families and engage with families. So, I think there are a lot of positive things going on in Connecticut.
—Focus Group Participant

Despite praising the responsiveness of CSDE employees, stakeholders also raised concerns regarding the timeliness and consistency of information, particularly the delayed release of new guidance documents intended to help the field understand legal requirements and state policies. Multiple stakeholders also raised concerns that it was not always clear who in the department was responsible for any particular system or policy, making it difficult to know whom to contact for support.

We get all these new mandates that get passed down to us, whether they're federal or state guidelines and laws, but sometimes there is a delay in getting guidance and understanding about what the state expects us to do. If the state wants us to be uniform and kind of across the board, and try to give the same information to families, the same information to our staff, then they need to give us a little bit more detail on what their thoughts are on where we should be heading.

—Focus Group Participant

Engaging With the Legislature

In addition to collaborating internally and with other agencies, respondents across multiple key stakeholder groups recognized the important role of the CSDE in engaging with the Connecticut General Assembly. Respondents noted the efforts of the current administration to communicate and collaborate with the legislative body, particularly with the Special Education Committee and in advocating for funding. However, multiple respondents noted that there continues to be a disconnect between policy decisions made by the legislature and what is considered realistic or actionable by those in the education field. Respondents pointed out that several unfunded mandates in recent years have imposed policies that, while they may appear to improve student outcomes on the surface, are not feasible given the current funding and personnel shortages.

I think more collaboration with the education committee is needed to really look at the numbers and determine whether or not it's a feasible thing to do. We know the new legislation in July requires the Department of Education to develop an a la carte list of services for special ed students, which will be a very large task because all the things that students might require must be considered. Transportation is involved, and whether or not they have the capacity to do the work in the timeframe given is questionable. So, I wish there were a better way to communicate with legislators in general.

—Focus Group Participant

Resource Quality and Management

Participants across most stakeholder groups often spoke about the quality of resources provided by the CSDE, including guidance and documents related to best practices. Participants

also praised the quality of professional learning opportunities the department has provided recently and in the past.

Despite the high quality of materials, participants raised concerns about the accessibility to those resources beyond an administrator level. Many pointed to difficulties with website navigation as a barrier for educators and parents alike when searching for materials. They also noted a lack of a centralized hub for information. Respondents from multiple stakeholder groups raised concerns about not understanding the structure within the department or how to gather information online, resulting in educators, attorneys, and parents reaching out to individuals for information rather than being able to access it directly.

CT Special Education Data System (CT-SEDS)

Respondents across multiple stakeholder groups shared perspectives about their experiences using the CT Special Education Data System (CT-SEDS)—the state’s adaptive electronic eligibility and individualized education program (IEP) system. Feedback was often divided between those who used CT-SEDS at a broader systems level and those who engaged with it on an individual student level. Administrators, state employees, and case workers often expressed appreciation that the system enables them to maintain supports for students who move between districts. However, special education teachers, counselors, and parents expressed deep frustration with the system’s usability, citing the immense amount of time required to fill out forms and the restriction of information based on role. Concerns were also raised that usability and design elements of CT-SEDS, such as how checklists are configured, were driving policy and guidance decisions, rather than policy informing system design.

I think it takes staff a lot of time and effort to even produce documents from it [CT-SEDS], and then usually when we get the document, it contains tons and tons of errors and needs to be edited. But my biggest concern is when we go through checklists. For example, I had a student who qualified for special ed. The team at the PPT agreed that their own evaluation was not comprehensive and recommended an IEE, and we all agreed. But when we went through the checklist, it asked, “Is the evaluation comprehensive?” If we said no, it would not let us qualify the student for special ed or put together an IEP.

—Focus Group Participant

Staffing

Staffing was a persistent concern pertaining to both recruitment and retention, and at both local and state levels. Concerns were raised about the availability of staff, caseload and

workload, compensation, and funding availability. However, participants appreciated CSDE's demonstrated awareness and understanding of the nuances of this issue. Some suggestions for improvement included developing mechanisms for sharing resources across districts, reducing administrative burdens, and increasing support and stability for paraeducators.

Nobody wants to be ineffective; nobody wants to work so hard to feel like they're not making movements, that their kids aren't making movements. That's certainly not why we signed up to do this already really difficult job.... We really believe in "the small wins are the big wins." And when you're not seeing those, even small ones, people are leaving left and right. We need our schools to be fully funded, fully staffed, so that our most vulnerable students can get the high-quality world-class education that they deserve.

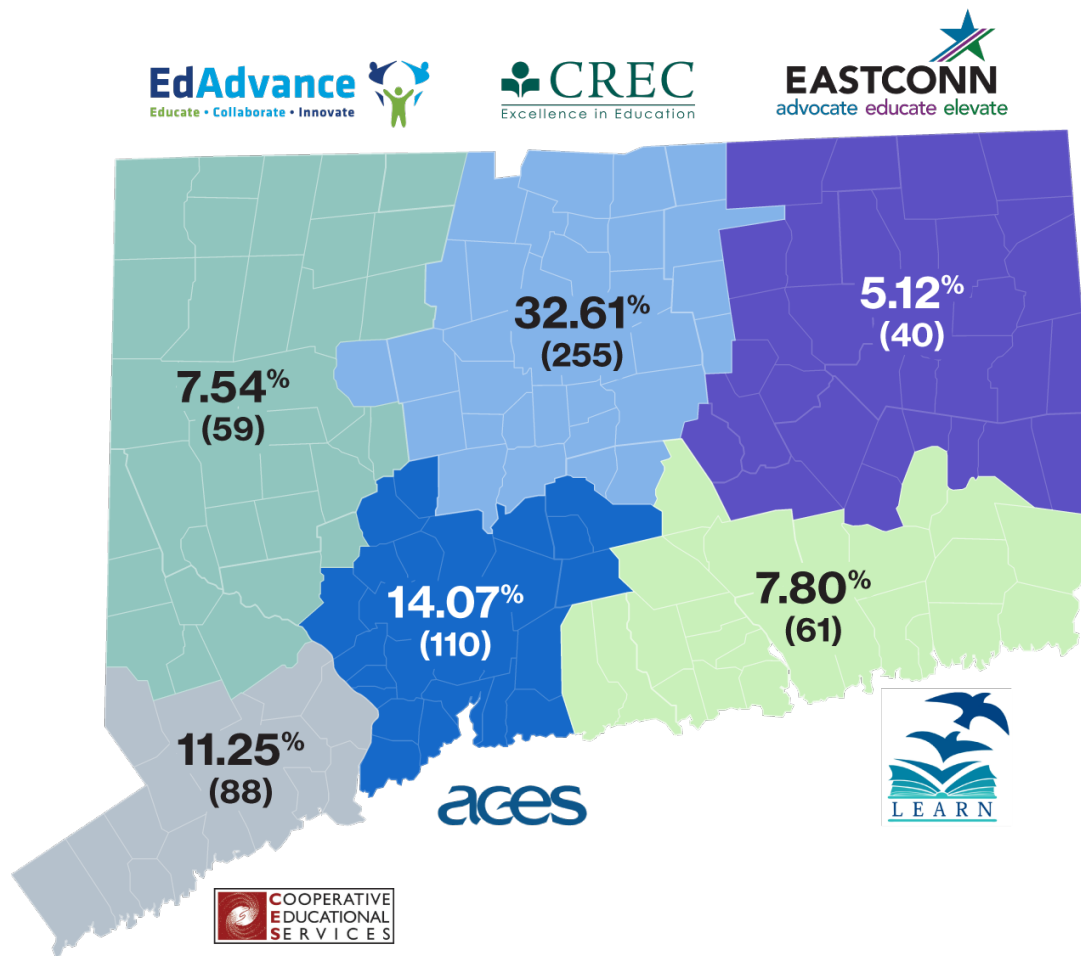
—Focus Group Participant

Survey

As noted earlier, survey data were also collected. The survey included 19 questions, grouped into the following five categories: Leadership, Dispute Resolution, Collaboration, Guidance, and Open Response. Below are descriptive statistics from the complete collection of responses from 782 participants. Additional information on how the survey data was processed is provided in [Appendix I](#), and more detailed survey results are provided in [Appendix J](#).

Most individuals who responded to the survey were special education teachers (34.14%), parents/guardians or family members (13.94%), or related services professionals (13.30%). As shown in Figure 1, most respondents were located within the service area of the Capitol Region Education Center (32.61%).

Figure 1. Survey Results—Respondents by Regional Educational Service Center



Note. Percentages were calculated using the total number of survey respondents ($n = 782$); 21.61% (169) did not specify an RESA.

Leadership

The Leadership section of the survey contained six items and asked respondents to rate how effectively they believed the CSDE carried out each leadership function. Across these functions most respondents felt the CSDE somewhat effectively or very effectively communicates a vision of supporting the success of students with disabilities (63.81%), provides statewide oversight and monitoring for special education services (57.16%), implements a system of accountability for special education services (56.52%), uses data to drive improvement for special education student outcomes (56.27%), provides clear guidance to educators and families on legal requirements for special education (67.90%), and provides statewide leadership to improve outcomes for students with disabilities (48.21%).

Dispute Resolution

The survey next asked respondents to rate how effectively the CSDE performs four dispute resolution functions. Across these four questions, most respondents indicated they were unsure about CSDE’s effectiveness in collaborating with other state agencies (66.11%), ensuring that complaint investigation findings are legally sound (60.05%), completing complaint investigations in a timely manner (59.41%), and sharing information from complaint investigations to increase understanding of legal requirements (51.79%). Additional information is provided in the table below.

Results Table 1. Survey Results—Dispute Resolution

Dispute Resolution	Not Effective % (n)	Somewhat Effective % (n)	Very Effective % (n)	Not Sure % (n)	Mean (SD)
Completing complaint investigations in a timely manner	11.01% (86)	18.18% (142)	11.40% (89)	59.41% (464)	2.01 (0.74)
Ensuring complaint investigations findings are legally sound	9.35% (73)	18.18% (142)	12.42% (97)	60.05% (469)	2.08 (0.74)
Sharing information from complaint investigations to increase understanding of legal requirements	19.10% (149)	19.87% (155)	9.23% (72)	51.79% (404)	1.80 (0.74)
Collaborating effectively with other state agencies	8.47% (66)	13.35% (104)	12.07% (94)	66.11% (515)	2.11 (0.77)

Note. Percentages were calculated using the number of respondents that answered, “Completing complaint investigations in a timely manner,” and “Ensuring complaint investigations findings are legally sound” (n = 781). Percentages were calculated using the number of respondents that answered, “Sharing information from complaint investigations to increase understanding of legal requirements” (n = 780). Percentages were calculated using the number of respondents that answered, “Collaborating effectively with other state agencies” (n = 779).

Collaboration

The next section of the survey asked respondents to rate how effectively the CSDE collaborates with various entities. Across each entity, respondents felt the CSDE somewhat effectively or very effectively collaborates with other state agencies (37.13%), school districts (48.34%), families (36.06%), and student and family advocates (35.55%). Notably, over 20 percent of respondents felt the CSDE was not effective in collaborating with school districts (22.63%) or families (25.58%).

Guidance

The last multiple-choice section of the survey asked respondents to rate how effectively the CSDE performs three guidance functions. Across these items, at least 45 percent of respondents felt the CSDE somewhat effectively or very effectively partners with the field to ensure students receive services from a qualified workforce (47.82%), supports the field to understand evidence-based practices for teaching and learning for students with disabilities (51.28%), and supports the field to understand legal requirements for special education services for students with disabilities (57.18%).

Open-Response Items

The survey contained two open-response items. The first asked respondents to share details of any “bright spots” or areas related to CSDE’s effectiveness in serving students with disabilities in Connecticut. The second asked respondents to share any additional information about special education services in Connecticut.

Each response was read and coded into a topic area. Topic areas were then grouped into themes. Three primary themes emerged and are described in Table 2.

Table 2. Survey Results—Themes from Open-Response Items

Theme	% (n)	Explication
Appreciation and a call for transparency and guidance from CSDE	25.58% (200)	This theme centered on communication and guidance from the CSDE. When stakeholders contact CSDE or its departments, CSDE is typically accessible, responsive to needs, and knowledgeable. However, respondents still called for transparency and guidance, including knowing who to contact and receiving direct communication from CSDE about legal topics. This theme encompassed the following topic areas: action, communication, and CSDE.
Desire to be seen and heard by CSDE	46.29% (362)	This theme addressed collaboration and communication. While collaboration and communication among stakeholders is occurring, respondents noted a disconnect between the CSDE, district and school administrators, direct services personnel (e.g., general and special educators, related services professionals, paraprofessionals), and parents/guardians and families. Across each of these roles, there was a desire to be seen and heard by the CSDE, especially when considering disconnects between what the CSDE expects schools/districts to do and what schools/districts can do with the resources they have. This theme encompassed the following topic areas: collaboration, communication, CT-SEDS, disconnects, and impact on educators.

Theme	% (n)	Explication
<p>Tensions and challenges in providing FAPE within the LRE</p>	<p>56.78% (444)</p>	<p>This theme captured experiences in obtaining or providing a free appropriate public education (FAPE) within the least restrictive environment (LRE). Respondents tended to focus on tensions and challenges arising from the eligibility process and available resources and supports. Stakeholders acknowledged a common goal of wanting to meet student needs, but methods and processes of actualizing that goal were often affected by resources or supports and differences in vision. This theme encompassed the following topic areas: compliance, consistency, identification and IEP services, impact on students, and resources and supports.</p>

Note. Percentages were calculated using the total number of survey respondents (n = 782).

Recommendations

Recommendations

The WestEd team collected and analyzed data from the above-described surveys, interviews, focus groups, as well as from extant data to identify key findings and systemic themes. These findings, which were consistently surfaced across all stakeholder groups, highlighted both existing strengths that can be leveraged and opportunities for improvement. The recommendations in this report were developed directly from these findings, addressing the specific concerns and priorities voiced by educators, families, administrators, policymakers, and other stakeholders. The recommendations are organized into four strategic areas: Leading with Vision, Improving Infrastructure, Activating Strategies for Instructional Impact, and Ensuring Effective Accountability and Improvement. This structure recognizes that special education systems and challenges are interconnected and therefore require coherent and coordinated solutions. The recommended actions speak to both CSDE's internal functions and its external engagement with the field and with families, addressing measures of both efficiency and effectiveness. Each recommendation responds to needs identified in the data, with some offering near-term solutions while others outline strategic actions for long-term, sustained improvement. Together, they provide a roadmap for strengthening Connecticut's special education system to better serve all students with disabilities and their families. It is important to note that undertaking all the suggestions at once would likely be less successful than if the Department instead prioritizes them and implements actions through a thoughtfully paced and phased improvement plan. Accordingly, WestEd's overarching recommendation is to consider them in that light.

1. Leading with Vision

- **Strategic Engagement and Communication.** The Department's commitment to positive results for students receiving special education services has been elevated through the Commissioner's actions to undertake this review. There is a vision for the success of students with disabilities that comes from the top; however, more effort is needed to communicate it and to help interest holders understand the actions the CSDE is taking to achieve it. Absent this understanding, there has been a trend wherein state policies have been mandated that are overlapping and duplicative to existing requirements under IDEA, and which have the unintended outcome of demanding attention on

similar yet different reporting requirements, in ways that can dilute staff time and attention to focus on more administrative functions than in spending time providing leadership for the field. Accordingly, the CSDE should elevate attention—within the agency and in the field—to the ways the Department is leading actions to achieve success for students with disabilities.

The Department should clearly articulate how the vision drives its planning and action steps. As initiatives, policies, and practices are implemented or sustained, it should consistently consider: Is this action likely to further our success in reaching our vision? If not, what do we need to change about the initiative, policy, or practice to increase alignment with the vision? CSDE and BSE leaders routinely meet with district leaders, advocacy groups, higher education, regional providers, and others. There may be opportunities to strengthen engagement with leading policymakers (e.g., the CT General Assembly, the Governor’s office) and other interest holders by routinely reporting special education student and systems data that are tied to the vision and by exploring and discussing how shared interests can be efficiently and effectively met.

Clear communications would strengthen stakeholders’ understanding of both efforts and outcomes—providing a picture of progress toward the vision while highlighting the challenges and successes in achieving the vision. Purposefully sharing the vision and aligned strategic actions with advocacy leaders and state policymakers could help reduce duplicative directives that have historically been created for the agency through legislative and other directives. In line with larger communications and outreach efforts, we suggest redesigning the CSDE/BSE website to improve navigation and provide a functionally searchable resource library. Further, we think it would be useful to continue seeking ongoing feedback from stakeholder groups to understand their issues and collaborate on finding and implementing solutions.

- **Strategic Plan.** Our review found that while there are strategic planning efforts in place, they may be fragmented and may not be as widely known or used to guide decision-making as would be desirable. WestEd recommends that BSE create aligned strategic action steps in keeping with the vision and overarching priorities established and shared by the Commissioner. Such planning should include development of clear annual goals, intended outcomes, milestones, and metrics to monitor progress. These actions should be aligned with the State Board’s Five-Year Comprehensive Plan (2023–2028) and include goals and outcomes developed collaboratively with leaders and staff across relevant CSDE Divisions and Bureaus (e.g., Academics, Performance, Talent). Strategic planning should ensure alignment to agency-level priorities and provide clear direction for BSE staff and colleagues across the agency. It could also strengthen communication with stakeholders and improve accountability and transparency—areas that interview and focus-group participants noted as ripe for improvement. It is further recommended that the CSDE establish structures and routines for ongoing review

cycles to track progress, assess impact, refine strategies, and report results to stakeholders.

2. Improving Infrastructure

- **Talent Mapping.** The CSDE's current approach to BSE staffing largely centers on spreading responsibilities across a wide number of people and assigning roles in ways that do not necessarily align with staff members' subject matter expertise and field experiences, resulting in uncertainties and possible duplication of effort as Bureau leaders undertake review, feedback, and approval processes. This summer, BSE leadership took purposeful action to assess the needs of the organization and align staffing decisions with those needs. While that was a strong effort in the right direction, the data revealed that an additional level of refinement may be beneficial. WestEd therefore suggests that the CSDE engage in a secondary talent mapping process to determine staff and leadership roles and responsibilities within BSE, as well as for BSE-embedded staff in other divisions. This process should consider the respective amounts of full-time equivalents (FTE) and capacity needed for BSE staff and leaders to meet federal and state requirements, and to otherwise provide leadership that promotes achievement of the state's vision for students with disabilities.

This process should be designed to center both efficiency and effectiveness as key parameters and should include the following elements: (a) evaluate the extent to which it makes sense to have staff across a wide range of responsibilities with small allocations of FTE to each set of responsibilities or to have staff concentrate their time on fewer responsibilities; (b) consider existing staff members' subject matter expertise and credibility when assigning roles and responsibilities; and (c) determine the conditions needed to support staff success and job satisfaction, including, if appropriate, providing professional learning opportunities and/or creating additional positions since having too much work to do within the existing staffing pool contribute to stress within the current system. Once the review is completed, action steps should be determined based on the identified strategies (e.g., staff reassignments, professional learning, hiring, outsourcing to consultants), along with a plan for communicating with the field to ensure that educators, families, and policymakers know whom to contact, and how, according to their particular needs.

- **Process Mapping.** There appear to be blockages or delays in the system when it comes to reviewing, refining, and approving BSE-issued materials such as policy guidance, complaint reports, and other documents intended to support the field in understanding and implementing federal and state requirements, as well as best practices. Further, there does not appear to be a clear solution or set expectation for addressing those cases in which expedited pathways for time-sensitive issues are needed. In both routine and exceptional situations, delays can impact the CSDE's reputation, create

inefficiencies for staff, hinder consistent implementation of legislative mandates, and result in information not being shared in the most timely and effective ways possible.

WestEd recommends that the BSE undertake efforts to map their existing processes for the development and dissemination of required reports and CSDE-generated guidance on policy and evidence-based practices. A process map is a visual representation that illustrates the steps, activities, and decision points involved in completing a specific process from start to finish. It helps people understand how work flows through an organization; identify inefficiencies or bottlenecks; and improve clarity, consistency, and quality in operations. Upon completion of the process maps, improvements should be identified, executed, and then monitored to ensure that the changes enhance the system. Regular reviews may indicate the need for further refinements based on subsequent lessons learned. Notably, the process solutions decided upon should include tracking systems to ensure that responses are addressed in timely and useful ways.

- **CT Special Education Data System (CT-SEDS).** Throughout the review, many respondents shared perspectives about their experiences using the CT Special Education Data System (CT-SEDS)—the state’s adaptive electronic eligibility and individualized education program (IEP) system. We suggest that the CSDE conduct a usability review of the CT-SEDS to understand in detail the issues users are experiencing and take subsequent actions to partner with the CT-SEDS vendor to improve user experience for educators, parents, and the BSE data team. As user experience improves over time, we think it would be worthwhile to consider ways that the CT-SEDS could be enhanced to support more robust evaluation and programming quality, including IEP implementation and monitoring capabilities.

3. Activating Strategies for Instructional Impact

- **Addressing Persistent Shortages.** High-quality special education teachers and related services professionals are essential for improving outcomes for students with disabilities. While districts are primarily responsible for filling hard-to-staff (and other) positions, the state education agency plays an important role in supporting these efforts. Through its Talent Office, the CSDE has made significant progress in recent years toward a more strategic approach to educator workforce and talent development. Despite these gains, Connecticut continues to experience persistent shortages of certified special education teachers, related services professionals, and paraeducators—mirroring national trends. Stakeholders identified these shortages as a critical challenge. To address this specific long-standing shortage area, WestEd recommends that the BSE and the Talent Office jointly develop a goal, along with aligned milestones and metrics, and collaborate closely on the strategies they develop to reduce the number of unfilled vacancies, or emergency certified special educators.

It is the understanding of the WestEd team that several focused efforts are already underway through the Talent Office. Therefore, we encourage greater publicity/communication around these efforts to build support and awareness, and to increase use of existing helpful resources. In addition, WestEd recommends that a representative from the BSE be invited to participate in existing meetings and other activities in which this shortage area is being addressed through Talent Office initiatives and other standing groups, including, but not limited to, the newly established CT Educator Preparation and Certification Board, EPP Deans' quarterly meetings, the CT Advisory Council for Teacher Professional Standards (CACTPS), and the CT Association of School Personnel Administrators (CASPA). Further, the CSDE may want to consider a structure or mechanism through which to facilitate enhanced coordination among these groups to ensure all interest holders and partner groups are working together to support the CSDE in meeting its intended goals and targeted metrics. Stakeholders also recommended that the CSDE work with districts and RESCs to explore expanded opportunities for shared-service staffing arrangements, particularly for educators and related services professionals serving low-incidence disabilities or in smaller and regional districts that cannot independently support and sustain specialized positions.

- **Strengthening Capacity Through High-Quality Professional Learning.** Beyond addressing shortages, the CSDE is responsible for supporting districts in strengthening educator capacity across the career continuum through high-quality professional learning and targeted supports. To advance this work, WestEd recommends that the CSDE's BSE and Talent Office jointly develop and implement strategic goals focused on enhancing the knowledge, skills, and capacity of pre- and in-service teachers and other professionals who serve students receiving special education and related services. High-quality professional learning supports educator effectiveness, job satisfaction, and retention. Connecticut's Teacher Education and Mentoring Program (TEAM) provides essential early-career support, and new special educators may benefit from additional coaching and structured opportunities for peer collaboration. Connecticut has a strong infrastructure for statewide professional learning through partnerships with the State Education Resource Center (SERC), the RESC Alliance, AFT, CEA, CAS, CAPSS, and others (see [Appendix A](#)). These partnerships are designed to deliver coordinated universal, targeted, and intensive supports. However, focus group and survey data reveal inconsistent access to professional learning across districts and regions.

Further, survey respondents and interviewees specifically requested guidance on dyslexia identification and intervention, clearer eligibility criteria, strategies for meeting the needs of students with significant cognitive disabilities, transition planning to secondary and postsecondary settings, and addressing behavioral challenges, including appropriate use of restraint and seclusion. In addition, current training may be falling short in reaching general educators, who increasingly serve students with disabilities in inclusive settings and are often first to notice support needs but lack the knowledge to

properly initiate referrals. At the same time, stakeholders highlighted promising collaborative practices that could be scaled statewide. Many related services professionals reported that communities of practice and lunch-and-learn sessions provide valuable peer support and knowledge-sharing. Formalizing and expanding these structures could improve access and consistency. Based on these findings, WestEd recommends that the BSE—working with other CSDE offices and partner organizations—strengthen the annual process for codeveloping goals for the statewide professional learning system.

4. Ensuring Effective Accountability and Improvement

- **Accountability for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**

Implementation. To achieve its articulated vision of improving outcomes for students with disabilities, the CSDE needs to ensure effective implementation of IDEA. Doing so requires a robust state special education accountability system—one that clearly defines expectations for local education agencies aligned with the overall vision, regularly assesses systemic ability to meet those expectations, holds districts and other entities accountable for any identified issues, and supports them in improving. As the first steps in strengthening the CSDE’s fulfillment of its monitoring and oversight responsibilities, WestEd recommends analyzing and refining the state’s current district monitoring schedule and approach, corrective action plan procedures and timelines, updates of noncompliance processes, local annual determinations, and district capacity-building supports.

- **Due Process.** There was universal agreement among survey, interview, and focus groups respondents that the state’s dispute resolution systems require some refinement. In particular, two subsystems surfaced as priorities for consideration: state complaint investigations and due process hearings. Regarding the due process system, the main critique was centered on whether due process hearing officers are adequately knowledgeable about not only federal law (i.e., IDEA) but also state-specific statutes and regulations. Questions were also raised about the state’s use of out-of-state hearing officers with some stakeholders asserting they may lack understanding of state-specific requirements, along with perceived bias in decision-making when hearing officers appear to trust district assertions over documentary evidence. The legal complexities of the system can present a barrier, particularly for families who cannot afford or have access to legal representation.

WestEd recommends the CSDE establish clear criteria for hearing officer competence (i.e., knowledge, skills, and abilities) and use this information to guide evaluation approaches by which evidence is collected and analyzed to ensure qualifications are consistently met by each individual hearing officer. Additionally, to address skepticism in the field about hearing officer capacity, we suggest the CSDE consider sharing information about the evidentiary-based process—and, where appropriate, relevant

data—with stakeholders to increase transparency around how hearing officers' competence is evaluated and ensured. Regular monitoring of hearing officer decisions would also aid in identifying problems and guiding training needs for the field. If evidence shows a need for improvement, strategies such as revised training, stricter selection criteria, and higher pay to attract stronger candidates should be considered. Lastly, stakeholders emphasized the value of the CSDE providing guidance for parents without legal representation to help them successfully navigate the process and experience equitable benefit from it. That might be best accomplished through partnership efforts with the state's Parent Training and Information Center, CPAC.

- **State Complaints.** A number of concerns were expressed about the state complaint investigation system, with three top issues emerging: legal sufficiency, timeliness in issuing reports, and the use of complaints to inform technical assistance to the field. WestEd strongly suggests that CSDE refine the complaint investigation process by engaging a legal expert (e.g., barred or unbarred attorney knowledgeable in federal and state law and case law) to support the process. Specifically, the legal expert should serve as a thought partner and reviewer for each step in the process, supporting complaint investigators in determining the relevant legal standards for issues alleged by the complainants, including relevant statutes, regulations, and case law; identifying necessary information to investigate the facts; applying legal analysis to the findings of fact to reach defensible conclusions; determining appropriate corrective actions as needed; and ensuring the legal integrity of the contents of the report. Regarding timing, the earlier recommendation on process mapping is highly relevant for this system and should be used to identify blockages or delays in finalizing reports. Once identified, the process should be systematically changed to resolve these delays. Further, a process for tracking the implementation of the newly refined system should be implemented to ensure integrity with both legal sufficiency and timeliness at each juncture of the review process.

Conclusion

The WestEd team thanks Commissioner Russell-Tucker for the opportunity to conduct this systems review and extends appreciation to CSDE staff for their support throughout the process, as well as for their visible commitment to ensuring excellent outcomes for students and families, and successful working conditions for educators. Findings from the review—grounded in more than 1,000 stakeholder interactions and a robust mix of quantitative and qualitative evidence—show that Connecticut has notable strengths to build on, along with systemic issues that require attention. As described above, the recommendations are organized around four strategic areas: Leading with Vision, Improving Infrastructure, Activating Strategies for Instructional Impact, and Ensuring Effective Accountability and Improvement. These recommendations provide a practical, evidence-informed roadmap for strengthening CSDE’s capacity to support high-quality special education statewide. Together, they call for clearer communication of a shared vision; stronger internal routines and processes; improvements to critical tools such as CT-SEDS; enhanced professional learning and staffing strategies; and a more transparent, timely, and legally sound dispute resolution system.

Implementing these recommendations will require thoughtful prioritization, phased execution, and sustained partnership among the Department, districts, families, advocates, CABA, CAPSS, RESCs, SERC, the General Assembly, and others. With a paced implementation plan that includes clear milestones, measurable outcomes, and routine public reporting, Connecticut can restore confidence in its dispute resolution systems, provide enhanced support to educators, schools, and districts, and strengthen outcomes for students with disabilities. Commissioner Russell-Tucker’s decision to commission this independent review reflects proactive leadership and a commitment to action; with focused follow-through and collaborative stewardship, the state is well positioned to ensure every student with a disability receives the high-quality services and opportunities they deserve.

Appendix A: Glossary of Organizational Terms

Organizations and Offices

ACES: Advocacy, Commitment, Excellence, Service (one of six parts of the RESC Alliance)

ADS: Department of Aging and Disability Services

AFT: American Federation of Teachers

BESB: Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind

BRS: Bureau of Rehabilitation Services

CABE: Connecticut Association of Boards of Education

CAPSEF: Connecticut Association of Private Special Education Facilities

CAPSS: Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents

CAS: Connecticut Association of Schools

CCSU: Central Connecticut State University (also known as “Central”)

CEA: Connecticut Education Association

CES: Cooperative Educational Services (two of six parts of the RESC Alliance)

ConnCASE: Connecticut Council of Administrators of Special Education

CPAC: Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center

CREC: Capitol Region Education Council (three of six parts of the RESC Alliance)

CSDE: Connecticut State Department of Education

CTECS: Connecticut Technical Education and Career System

DCF: Department of Children and Families

DDS: Department of Disability Services

DOJ: Department of Justice

DRCT: Disability Rights Connecticut

EASTCONN: Northeastern Connecticut’s RESC (four of six parts of the RESC Alliance)

ED: United States Department of Education

EdAdvance: Western Connecticut’s RESC (five of six parts of the RESC Alliance)

LEARN: Southeastern Connecticut’s RESC (six of six parts of the RESC Alliance)

OCA: Office of the Child Advocate

OCR: Office for Civil Rights

OEC: Office of Early Childhood

OSEP: Office of Special Education Programs

RESC/RESC Alliance: Regional Educational Service Centers (ACES, CES, CREC, EASTCONN, EdAdvance, LEARN)

SAC: Connecticut State Advisory Council for Special Education

SEEK CT: Special Education Equity for Kids of Connecticut (advocacy group)

SEPTA: Special Education Parent Teacher Association

SERC: State Education Resource Center (provides professional development and resources)

UConn: University of Connecticut

Terms

For items marked with an asterisk (), the definition is from <https://cpacinc.org/guide-to-terms.aspx>.*

504 Plan: The accommodations and supports or services necessary for a student with disabilities to access their education.

ABA: Applied Behavior Analysis—Uses principles of learning and motivation to teach new skills, reduce challenging behaviors, and improve important life outcomes—often for individuals with

autism—by breaking tasks into steps, applying positive reinforcement, and tracking progress to create meaningful change.

ADA: Americans with Disabilities Act

APR: Annual Performance Report—The document that states submit on a yearly basis to the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, to report on their progress in implementing IDEA requirements; a key component of the State Performance Plan (SPP), providing data on how well states are meeting their targets related to special education.

APSEP: Approved Private Special Education Program

* **Complaint:** A written request by a parent or other interested party to the Connecticut Bureau of Special Education to investigate whether a local school district is in violation of federal or state special education law.

CT-SEDS: Connecticut Special Education Data System—The statewide IEP system with parent portal to assist planning and placement teams in navigating special education process (rolled out within the last five years).

* **Dispute Resolution Options:** Different ways to help families and schools reach agreement, ranging from informal discussion to formal decisions (such as Mediation, IEP Facilitation, Ombudsperson).

DSAP: Durational Shortage Area Permit—A temporary teaching authorization used by districts for permanent teaching positions when they cannot find fully certified teachers.

* **Due Process:** An action that protects a person’s rights; in special education, applies to action taken to protect the educational rights of students with disabilities.

EdSight: CSDE’s interactive data portal for public districts, schools, and programs.

FAPE: Free Appropriate Public Education—The legal right guaranteed to all eligible students with disabilities under the IDEA; ensures that eligible students receive a public education, tailored to their individual needs, at no cost to their families.

FERPA: Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act—A federal law protecting student educational records.

IDEA: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act—The federal law (20 U.S.C. §§1400 et seq.) that requires the provision of FAPE and related services available to eligible children with disabilities; outlines the rights of students with disabilities and their parents and provides support to states in implementing these services.

IEE: Independent Educational Evaluation—An evaluation conducted by a qualified examiner who is not employed by the school district responsible for the public education of the child.

* **IEP:** Individualized Education Program—A written education program for a child with disabilities that is developed by a team of professionals (administrators, teachers, therapists, etc.) and the child’s parents; reviewed and updated at least yearly; describes the child’s present performance, what the child’s learning needs are, what services the child will need, when and for how long, and identifies who will provide the services.

LRE: Least Restrictive Environment—A foundational principle under IDEA that ensures students with disabilities are educated with their non-disabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate.

* **Mediation:** A voluntary process that allows parties to resolve their dispute without litigation; involves a qualified and impartial mediator who helps parents and schools express their views and positions in order to reach a mutual agreement.

* **Monitoring:** Activities designed to ensure that specific regulations or procedures are being carried out (for example, parents may monitor the IEP written for their child); state education agencies are required to establish monitoring procedures to determine the degree to which local education agencies are meeting IDEA requirements at the local level.

* **PPT:** Planning and Placement Team (IEP team/IEP meeting)—A group of individuals including the child’s parents and school professionals who determine the specific educational needs of the child and develop, review, and revise a child’s Individualized Education Program (IEP).

* **Related Services:** Transportation, developmental, corrective, and other supportive services that a child with disabilities requires in order to benefit from special education; may include speech pathology and audiology, psychological services, physical and occupational therapy, recreation, counseling services, medical services for diagnostic and evaluation purposes, school health services, social work services in schools, and parent counseling and training.

* **Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973:** A federal civil rights statute that protects the rights of persons with disabilities in programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance, which includes public schools.

Special Education: Specially designed instruction provided under the IDEA, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability.

* **SRBI:** Scientific Research Based Interventions—Connecticut’s framework for Response to Intervention (RTI); a general education model that refers to a tiered approach to instruction; used to promote the early identification of students who may be at risk for learning or behavioral difficulties.

SPP: State Performance Plan—As required by Part B of the IDEA to be developed by each state; must span six years and describe the state’s efforts to implement the requirements and purposes of IDEA and to improve its implementation statewide.

SSIP: State Systemic Improvement Plan—A federal initiative to improve results for children with disabilities by improving educational services, including special education and related services.

Surrogate Parent Program: A federally mandated program that provides educational advocacy services for children and youth under the jurisdiction of the Department of Children and Families (DCF) (foster children) or an unaccompanied minor or youth experiencing homelessness who need or may need special education.

TEAM: Teacher Education and Mentoring Program

Other Connecticut-Specific Information

- **CT Core Standards:** Connecticut’s expectations of what a student should know and be able to do at each grade level.
- **OHI–ADD/ADHD:** Connecticut’s standalone IEP category for Other Health Impairment or ADD/ADHD.
- **SLD/Dyslexia:** Connecticut’s standalone IEP category for Specific Learning Disability or dyslexia.
- **Smarter Balanced Assessments:** State standardized testing program in which Connecticut participates.

Appendix B: Review of Extant Data

This appendix presents an analysis of publicly available data relevant to Connecticut’s special education system, including school enrollment data, the organizational structure and staffing of the Bureau of Special Education, Connecticut’s federal IDEA determinations and State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report (SPP/APR) indicators from 2016 through 2025, dispute resolution trends including complaint summaries and due process hearing outcomes from 2023 through 2025, and relevant stakeholder input including recommendations from the 2024 Task Force to Study Special Education Services and Funding.

State Context

Population of Students With Disabilities

According to data from the Connecticut State Department of Education’s (CSDE) *Condition of Education in Connecticut* report, public school enrollment in the state totaled 512,652 students in prekindergarten through Grade 12 in the 2023–24 school year. Of this, 17.9 percent of students (91,847) received special education and related services. Nationally, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, 15 percent of students ages 3–21 received special education and related services in 2022–23, meaning Connecticut is slightly above the national average. The 2023–24 school year reflected the tenth year in a row that the percentage of students receiving special education and related services increased in Connecticut.

As of the 2023–24 school year, Connecticut operated 1,031 schools. The table below from the 2023–24 *Condition of Education in Connecticut* report outlines the types of schools that serve students in the state.

Extant Data Table 1. Types of Schools that Serve Students with Disabilities

Organization type	Number of schools
Public schools in local and regional districts	932
Regional Educational Service Center schools	26
Public charter schools	21
Connecticut Technical Education and Career System schools	17
Endowed academies	3
State agency facilities	30
College affiliated schools	2
Total number of schools	1,031

Beyond these schools, in the 2023–24 school year, 493 specialized programs provided targeted services to students, primarily serving students who receive special education services (349 of the programs).

Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education, Organization and Structure

The Connecticut State Department of Education’s Bureau of Special Education (BSE) is overseen by Bryan Klimkiewicz, Special Education Division Director, and Katherine Matz, Special Education Bureau Chief. The Bureau’s roughly 20 staff (including 3 clerical and support staff) are organized into three units as outlined below. While each of these units has designated areas of focus, there are also cross-cutting activities in which consultants from across the units are involved (e.g., SPP/APR indicators, contract management responsibilities, complaint investigations). Each of these units and a general description of their responsibilities are provided below.

Extant Data Table 2. Connecticut State Department of Education Bureau of Special Education Staffing Organization

Unit	Number of BSE staff	Type of work/responsibilities
Grants, funding, communications	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BSE newsletter, website • 619 grant and distribution, early childhood Special education, state interagency coordinating council (SICC) • 611 grant and distribution • Fiscal reviews, maintenance of effort (MOE), coordinated early intervening services (CEIS), Significant Disproportionality • Charter schools, para educators, related services • Low incidence disabilities • Restraint and seclusion • Indicators 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 12, 17
Program improvement	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • APSEP approval process • Assessment • Transition • Stakeholder engagement • CT-SEDS • IEP forms • Legislative reviews • Assistive technology and accessible educational materials • Indicators 3, 5, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14
Due process	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restraint and seclusion • Parent training • Advisory council • Legislative reviews • Hearing officer mediator training • Alternative dispute resolution • Surrogate parents • Records • Indicators 8, 15, 16

In addition to staff within these three units, the BSE employs two program managers, one who oversees Connecticut Special Education Data System (CT-SEDS) and a second who coordinates the state’s general supervision and monitoring activities. The BSE team also collaborates with other offices, teams, and individuals across the Department of Education as a whole (e.g., Office of Dyslexia and Reading Disabilities and the Performance Office who supports data activities).

Connecticut Special Education Data

Annual State IDEA Determinations

As described in its [Determinations Fact Sheet](#), the U.S. Department of Education is required under the IDEA “to issue an annual determination, based on the State Performance Plan (SPP) and Annual Performance Report (APR), which evaluates the State’s efforts to implement the requirements and purposes of the IDEA, and describes how the State will improve its implementation.” The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) process for determinations, including calculations, has been modified over time. Since 2021, Connecticut has received a determination of “Meets Requirements” for its implementation of IDEA, one of only thirteen states to receive this determination every year during the same time period.

Extant Data Table 3. Connecticut State Determinations Over Time

Year	Percentage (%)	Determination
2025	92.73%	Meets Requirements
2024	85.00%	Meets Requirements
2023	89.17%	Meets Requirements
2022	85.00%	Meets Requirements
2021	87.85%	Meets Requirements
2020	75.92%	Needs Assistance
2019	81.94%	Meets Requirements

Year	Percentage (%)	Determination
2018	82.50%	Meets Requirements
2017	78.75%	Needs Assistance
2016	82.92%	Meets Requirements

State Performance Plan and Annual Performance Report (SPP/APR)

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) requires states to develop a State Performance Plan (SPP) and annually submit data on 18 specific indicators through its Annual Performance Report (APR). The SPP/APR is due to OSEP annually each February. The SPP/APR includes the following indicators:

Part B FFY 2020–25 State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report Indicators

- 01.** Graduation. Percentage of youth with individualized education programs (IEPs) graduating with a regular diploma.
- 02.** Drop out. Percentage of youth with IEPs dropping out.
- 03.** Assessment. (a) Participation rate for children with IEPs, (b) proficiency rate for children with IEPs against grade-level academic standards, (c) proficiency rate for children with IEPs against alternate academic achievement standards, (d) gap in proficiency rates for children with IEPs and all students against grade-level academic achievement standards.
- 04.** Suspension and Expulsion. (a) Percentage of LEAs with significant discrepancy, (b) percentage of LEAs with significant discrepancy by race/ ethnicity with policies, procedures, and practices that contribute to the significant discrepancy.
- 05.** Educational environments (school age). Percentage of children with IEPs, age 5 and enrolled in kindergarten and ages 6–21, served (a) inside regular class 80 percent or more of the day; (b) inside regular class less than 40 percent of the day; (c) in separate schools, residential facilities, or homebound/hospital placements.
- 06.** Preschool environments. Percentage of children with IEPs, ages 3–5 who are enrolled in a preschool program, (a) receiving majority of special education and related services in regular early childhood program; (b) attending separate special education class, separate school, or residential facility; (c) receiving special education and related services in the home.

- 07.** Preschool outcomes. Percentage of preschool children ages 3–5 with IEPs with improved (a) positive social–emotional skills, (b) acquisition and use of knowledge and skills, (c) use of appropriate behaviors to meet their needs.
- 08.** Parent involvement. Percentage of parents who report that the school facilitated parent involvement.
- 09.** Disproportionate representation. Percentage of LEAs with disproportionate representation of racial/ethnic groups due to inappropriate identification.
- 10.** Disproportionate representation in specific disability categories. Percentage of LEAs with disproportionate representation of racial/ethnic groups in specific disability categories due to inappropriate identification.
- 11.** Child Find. Percentage of children evaluated within 60 days of parental consent or state time frame.
- 12.** Early childhood transition. Percentage of children found Part B eligible with IEP implemented by their third birthday.
- 13.** Secondary transition. Percentage of youth ages 16-plus with measurable, annually updated IEP goals and appropriate transition assessment, services, and courses.
- 14.** Post-school outcomes. Percentage of youth with IEPs no longer in school, (a) enrolled in higher education; (b) enrolled in higher education or competitively employed; (c) enrolled in higher education, other postsecondary education or training program, competitively employed, or in some other employment, within one year of leaving high school.
- 15.** Resolution sessions. Percentage of hearing requests resolved through resolution session settlement agreements.
- 16.** Mediation. Percentage of mediations held resulting in mediation agreements.
- 17.** State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP). SPP/APR includes a comprehensive, ambitious, achievable multiyear SSIP, which consists of Phase I (analysis), Phase II (plan), Phase III (implementation and evaluation). Stakeholder engagement is incorporated into all phases to improve results for children with disabilities.
- 18.** General supervision. Percentage of findings of noncompliance collected through all components of the SEA’s general supervision system that are corrected within one year of identification.

For compliance indicators (Indicators 4b, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 18), OSEP sets targets of either zero percent or 100 percent, depending on the indicator. For the remaining indicators (considered results indicators), states are required to elicit input from stakeholders to set state-specific targets.

Connecticut consistently performs better on the SPP/APR “compliance indicators” than the “results indicators,” a pattern common in many states.

The state continues to address disproportionality in the identification of students with disabilities by race/ethnicity, specifically noting that Black students are about twice as likely to be identified with intellectual disabilities compared to their non-Black peers. There are initiatives to improve educational outcomes for students with disabilities, such as the launch of a Special Education Call Center, the rollout of the CT-SEDS, and a \$5.9 million State Personnel Development Grant focused on improving outcomes in mathematics. Additionally, there is a focus on increasing the inclusion of students with disabilities with nondisabled peers. Currently, 69.5 percent of students with disabilities spend at least 80 percent of their time with nondisabled peers, however, this varies significantly by primary disability type. Efforts are also being made to modernize and expand postsecondary pathways to improve outcomes and opportunities for students with disabilities.

Extant Data Table 4. Connecticut Results and Compliance Overall Scoring, 2016–2025

Year	Status	Total points available	Points earned	Score (%)
2025	Results	20	18	90.00%
	Compliance	22	21	95.45%
2024	Results	20	16	80.00%
	Compliance	20	18	90.00%
2023	Results	24	20	83.33%
	Compliance	20	19	95.00%
2022	Results	16	12	75.00%
	Compliance	20	19	95.00%

Year	Status	Total points available	Points earned	Score (%)
2021	Results	16	13	81.25%
	Compliance	18	17	94.44%
2020	Results	24	17	70.83%
	Compliance	20	15	75.00%
2019	Results	24	18	75.00%
	Compliance	20	16	88.89%
2018	Results	24	18	75.00%
	Compliance	20	18	90.00%
2017	Results	24	15	62.50%
	Compliance	20	19	95.00%
2016	Results	24	17	70.83%
	Compliance	20	19	95.00%

Reviewing historical SPP/APR data, the following strengths emerge.

- Assessment participation (Indicator 3A):** The state’s data point to strong participation rates among children with disabilities in reading and math statewide assessments over the years. An exception is the state’s most recent participation rate for students with disabilities on the Grade 8 statewide math assessment which, at 93 percent, did not meet the benchmark of 95 percent.
- Dropout and graduation rates (Indicators 1 and 2):** Since 2016, the state has seen a decrease in the percentage of students with disabilities who drop out of school, although there has been fluctuation over time. The percentage of students with disabilities who graduated high school with a regular diploma has remained high, averaging 82 percent since 2016.

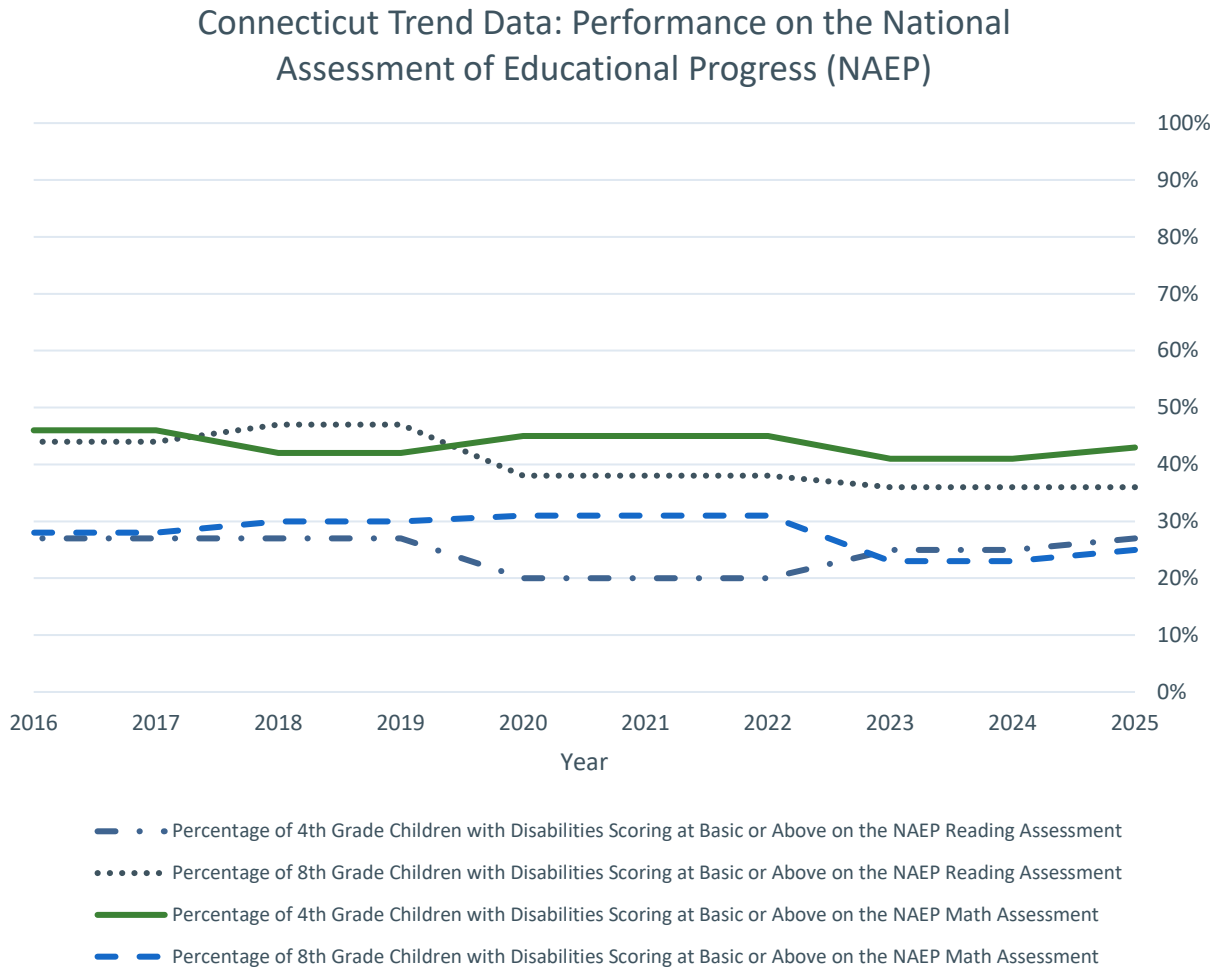
- **Disproportionality in identification or discipline rates for students with disabilities (Indicators 4B, 9, and 10):** Over time, Connecticut has reported few or zero districts with significant discrepancy, by race and ethnicity, in the rate of suspension and expulsion for students with disabilities. The state has also reported zero districts with disproportionate representation of racial and ethnic groups in special education and related services (including by specific disability categories) due to inappropriate identification.
- **Early childhood transition (Indicator 12):** The percentage of children found Part B eligible with an IEP implemented by their third birthday is consistently high in the state.
- **Post-secondary transition planning (Indicator 13):** Connecticut posts consistently strong data when it comes to the percentage of youth ages 16-plus with measurable, annually updated IEP goals and appropriate transition assessment, services, and courses.
- **Correcting long-standing noncompliance:** The state does not report any longstanding noncompliance that remains uncorrected.
- **Timely resolution sessions and mediation:** Connecticut consistently met state targets in terms of the percent of hearing requests that went to resolution sessions that were resolved through resolution session settlement agreements. The state also consistently met its target for the percent of mediations held that resulted in mediation agreements.

Conversely, the state has not consistently met SPP/APR targets for the following indicators.

- **Assessment performance (Indicator 3B):** While the academic achievement of students with disabilities (as measured by the percentage scoring at the basic or above level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has improved slightly over the years in Grade 4, it has remained flat or decreased in Grade 8. Since 2016, the percentage of students with disabilities who scored at the basic level or above has not reached 50 percent for either grade level or content area.
- **Timely initial evaluation (Indicator 11):** Connecticut's performance on SPP/APR Indicator 11 or the percentage of children evaluated within 60 days of parental consent or state time frame has declined over time from 99.63 percent in 2016 to 88.16 percent in 2025.

In addition to the SPP/APR data collections, the chart below shows CT's data for the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP). NAEP is a nationwide assessment often referred to as "The Nation's Report Card." NAEP provides a comprehensive measure of student's knowledge and abilities on various subjects include mathematics, reading, science, and writing. The results are also included within OSEP's annual determination process.

Extant Data Figure 1. Connecticut National Assessment of Educational Progress Trend Data (2016–2025)



Additional SPP/APR data, including trends over time and the state’s most recent submission, are included at the end of this appendix.

Dispute Resolution

Dispute resolution processes include complaint resolution, mediation, and due process hearings. Each of processes, adapted from the state’s FFY2022 SSP/APR Introduction, are outlined below.

- The complaint resolution process identifies and timely corrects noncompliance in an LEA’s implementation of federal and state special education requirements and identifies components of an LEA’s special education programming that need improvement (e.g., policies, procedures). The 2022 updated processes can be found at [Complaint Resolution Process](#).

- Mediation is a voluntary process offered to a parent and an LEA as a means to reach an agreement with respect to any matter relating to the proposal or refusal to initiate or change the identification, evaluation, or educational placement of the child, or the provision of a free appropriate public education.
- For due process hearings, the CSDE operates a single-tiered system, meaning special education due process hearings are conducted at the state level; there are no local hearings. CGS Section 10-76h and its corresponding regulations establish the due process hearing system, which is managed by the CSDE. Hearing officers are appointed by the CSDE and approved by the State Board of Education. Any party that requests a due process hearing, may also request an Advisory Opinion.

Special Education Complaint Summaries

Pursuant to Public Act PA 23-150, beginning July 1, 2023, the CSDE was required to post the summaries of complaints filed and corrective actions required by the Department. These [summaries are available online](#) for the general public. What follows is a summary of complaints from 2023 through July 2025 including the LEAs, individuals who filed complaints, and an outline of the issue and outcomes. Where corrective action was required, the following patterns of issues were identified related to IEP implementation: failure to implement or delayed implementation of the IEP including challenges with providing services and progress monitoring, use of accommodations and modifications, paraprofessional support, staffing issues, providing home instruction while awaiting out-of-district placements, or IEP’s providing minimal progress. Additional areas include challenges with Manifestation Determination Review, records, inaccurate tracking/documentation and evaluations.

2025

The publicly available data included in this report, as of July 2025, include five complaints have been filed, all by parents. In three cases, no corrective action was required. Both cases where corrective action was required related to paraprofessionals. Thomaston school district received two of five complaints available for 2025.

Extant Data Table 5. Connecticut Special Education Complaints Filed, 2025

District	Person filing complaint	Issue and outcome
Bridgepoint 25-0282	Parent	No corrective action—Recommendation to review General Statute §§ 10-236b(b) and 10-236b(j)(l) as part of annual restraint/seclusion training

District	Person filing complaint	Issue and outcome
Middletown 25-0274	Parent	Failure to provide accommodations (paraprofessional); Owed 2.25 hours of compensatory services
Old Saybrook 25-0387	Parent	No corrective action—Student attendance; Prior Written Notice (PWN)
Thomaston 25-0257	Parent	No corrective action—Start date for paraprofessional outside complaint investigation period
Thomaston 25-0265	Parent	Failure to provide services (paraprofessional); Corrective Action requiring the district to hire and implement the IEP as written, while tracking missed services.

2024

At the time of preparing this report, 25 total complaints were filed in 2024, 60 percent of which were filed by parents. The remaining 40 percent of complaints were filed by advocates, surrogate parents, Office of the Child Advocate, attorneys, or were not specified. In total, 24 percent of the complaints filed in 2024 did not require corrective action. The districts of Greenwich, Hartford, New Haven, and Waterbury all received two or more complaints each. Across complaints filed where corrective action was required, the following issues were identified: service provision or implementation, documentation or records, progress monitoring, procedural violations, compensatory services, and staffing or resource availability.

Extant Data Table 6. Connecticut Special Education Complaints Filed, 2024

District	Person filing complaint	Issue and outcome
Bolton 24-0274	Advocate on behalf of parent	Failure to provide instruction Inaccurate tracking No regular schedule for services District offered 7 hours compensatory time
Bristol 25-0255	Parent	No corrective action—Student records

District	Person filing complaint	Issue and outcome
Enfield 25-0158	Parent	No corrective action—Restraint and seclusion
Greenwich 24-0134	Parent	Inaccurate Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP); Goals not measurable
Greenwich 24-0283	Parent	Missed services Delayed implementation of accommodations and modifications Paraprofessional Records not shared with parent 27.5 hours compensatory time
Greenwich 25-0220	Parent	Child Find Owed compensatory time
Groton 24-0388	Surrogate parent	Records released without parental consent
Hartford 24-0587	Office of the Child Advocate	Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) IEP implementation while hospitalized 79 hours compensatory time
Hartford 25-0235	Advocate	Transportation Manifestation Determination Review (MDR) not conducted
Madison 24-0416	Parent	Records not provided
Manchester 24-0290	Parent	Services not fully implemented Tracking/documenting services Minimal progress Progress monitoring
New Haven 24-0282	Not specified	Missed services Home instruction while waiting for out-of-district placement 270 hours compensatory time Manifestation Determination Review by Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA)

District	Person filing complaint	Issue and outcome
New Haven 24-03-83	Attorney	MDR not conducted
New Haven 24-0562	Attorney	Services not fully implemented Unchanged goals
New Haven 24-0586	Parent	No correction action—IEP and BIP implementation
New Haven 25-0040	Parent	Assistive technology (AT) services not provided Progress report timelines
Norwalk 24-0325	Surrogate parent	Program review not conducted timely
Stamford 24-0375	Parent	Minimal progress Extended School Year
Waterbury 24-0377	Parent	Services not provided in general education
Waterbury 25-0197	Parent	No corrective action—Registered Behavior Technician (RBT) coverage
Waterbury 25-0198	Parent	Services not provided due to staffing
Watertown 24-0553	Parent	Minimal progress Behavior, documentation, and inaccurate reporting
Westport 25-0214	Parent	No corrective action—Independent Education Evaluation (IEE), parent participation in meetings
Windham 24-0376	Advocate	Parent participation in meetings Progress monitoring
Wolcott 24-0343	Surrogate parent	No corrective action—MDR requirements

2023

In 2023, the majority (68 percent) of complaints were filed by parents. Less than half (42 percent) did not require corrective action. Across complaints filed where corrective action was required, the following issues were identified: failure to implement the IEP or missed services, compensatory services, procedural concerns, parent participation, and communication and staffing concerns.

Extant Data Table 7. Connecticut Special Education Complaints Filed, 2023

District	Person filing complaint	Issue and outcome
Bethel 24-0061	Parent	No corrective action—related services, review of existing evaluation data
Bristol 24-0011	Not specified	Failure to implement IEP 25 hours compensatory time
Brookfield 24-0202	Parent	Failure of services due to paraprofessional staffing
Connecticut Technical Education and Career System 24-0023	Not specified	No corrective action—FAPE
Danbury 24-0097	Not specified	Failure to implement IEP 60 hours compensatory time
Enfield 24-0139	DCF	No corrective action—Parent participation and translation services
Manchester 24-0021	Parent	Insufficiently comprehensive evaluation
Meriden 24-0166	Parent	MDR requirements
Middletown 24-0135	Parent	No corrective action—services
New Haven 24-0070	Parent	Missed services Home instruction while waiting for out-of-district placement

District	Person filing complaint	Issue and outcome
Newington 24-0096	Parent	No corrective action—transportation
Norwich 24-0157	Parent	Missed services—paraprofessional
Region 17 24-0156	Advocate	Behavior impact on learning
Stamford 24-0108	Parent	IEP revision without basis Prior Written Notice
Vernon 24-0201	Parent	No corrective action—BIP implementation and access to aides
Wallingford 24-0023	Not specified	No corrective action—FAPE
Waterbury 24-0163	Parent	Failure to implement IEP timely
Westport 24-0008	Parent	Failure to implement IEP Staff training
Windsor 24-0185	Parent	No corrective action—missed tutoring services and implementing accommodations while showing progress

Hearing Decisions

All fully adjudicated hearing decisions are tracked and [publicly available](#). Across 2023 to 2025, a little over one third (37.5 percent) of hearings resulted in the case being dismissed and others found no violations, moot issues, or the district’s actions to be appropriate. There are patterns for some issues and final orders, including disagreements with evaluations, Independent Educational Evaluations (IEE), reimbursement for tuition, services and/or evaluations, and Child Find. The below tables outline the publicly available final decisions and orders for hearing decisions from 2023 through July 2025.

2025

Extant Data Table 8. Connecticut Special Education Hearing Decisions, 2025

Hearing decision	Final decision and order
25-0011	The Transition Assessment of the student was appropriately designed and administered. The student is not entitled to an IEE in the area of transition at public expense.
25-0055	Proposed IEP doesn't provide FAPE Tuition reimbursement
25-0077	Dismissed
25-0092 and 25-0349	Dismissed
25-0113	The Psychological Evaluation of the student was appropriately designed and administered. The student is not entitled to a neuropsychological evaluation IEE at public expense.
25-0200	Placement change during pendency Assignment of Independent Educational Consultant Reconvene in 90 days
25-0254	No violations and moot issues
25-0284	Child Find Reimbursement: Tuition, out-of-pocket costs, neuropsychological evaluation
25-0373	Dismissed
25-0469	Dismissed

2024

Extant Data Table 9. Connecticut Special Education Hearing Decisions, 2024

Hearing decision	Final decision and order
24-0088	Dismissed
24-0242	The Board of Education’s Initial Eligibility Evaluation of student was appropriate. The Board of Education is not required to fund an Independent Educational Evaluation of student.
24-0355	The Board of Education’s evaluation of student was appropriate. The Board of Education is not required to fund an Independent Educational Evaluation of student.
24-0418	Dismissed
24-0429	No denial of FAPE
24-0526	Stay put
24-0533	FAPE denial Tuition reimbursement

2023

Extant Data Table 10. Connecticut Special Education Hearing Decisions, 2023

Hearing decision	Final decision and order
23-0090	Dismissed
23-0091	Evaluations and reconvene to plan
23-0152	Child not eligible

Hearing decision	Final decision and order
23-0171	Dismissed
23-0199	Fund placement for one year
23-0207	Dismissed
23-1214	The evaluations that made up the Reevaluation of the Student were appropriately designed and administered. The Student is not entitled to an IEE at public expense.
23-0222	Take jurisdiction of DCF involved youth; Convene meeting
23-0282	Complete evals, IEE denied
23-0302	Dismissed
23-0308	Child Find Reimbursement: evaluation
23-0354	Reimbursement: Tuition, private therapy, instruction, neuropsychological
23-0514	Dismissed
23-0525	IEE
23-0566	Dismissed

Connecticut Office of the Child Advocate (OCA)

Letter

The stated mission of the Connecticut Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) is to “ensure that publicly funded agencies that serve children are accountable to the citizens and families of Connecticut and effectively care for the most vulnerable children.” The organization investigates a range of complaints related to services provided to children, within the public education sphere and beyond. Special education features prominently in the complaints investigated by the OCA as outlined in its 2023–24 annual report. The OCA noted that 23 percent of the primary concerns

driving inquiries to the organization were related to special education. The only category with a higher percentage of complaints was child protections/welfare (36 percent). The remaining categories generated fewer inquiries: legal-family court (8 percent), general education (8 percent), mental health (8 percent) and other (17 percent).

Included in [OCA's 2024 annual report](#), OCA indicates issues addressed and/or investigated related to special education included “lack of access to appropriate special education and related services for children with disabilities in the least restrictive environment” and “lack of timely and available services for children with intellectual and developmental disabilities.” OCA also reported these same issues addressed and/or investigated as part of its [2023 annual report](#).

The OCA also assists families by participating in Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meetings, resolution sessions, and early stages of dispute resolution. When resolutions are not reached, OCA files administrative complaints with the CSDE. OCA also conducts [systemic reviews/investigations](#) on school districts and privately run, publicly funded programs providing special education services. OCA in partnership with Disability Rights of Connecticut (DRCT) completes investigations into state-approved private special education programs (APSEPS) and private special education facilities out-of-state providing services to Connecticut students with disabilities. OCA and DRCT filed a [complaint with DOJ](#) alleging disability discrimination by school districts and also filed a [complaint with US ED–OSEP](#) in September 2024. Additional systems investigations during 2023 to 2025 included a review of entities providing Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) treatment.

Stakeholder Perspectives

Correspondence From Attorneys

Attorneys and advocates shared a series of concerns regarding Connecticut’s special education system. Key issues included the complaint system’s timeliness and perceived bias in determinations, lack of transparency in publishing decisions, and concerns about specific rulings such as emails not qualifying as educational records unless printed. Stakeholders also raised questions about the interpretation of IEE requirements following *D.S. v. Trumbull*, private school subpoena waivers, and functionality of the CT-SEDS system. Additional concerns focused on hearing officer training, delayed autism guidelines, and district compliance monitoring. While school district attorneys defended current practices and acknowledged CSDE’s professionalism, parent advocates requested meetings with leadership to discuss legal review of determinations and clearer guidance on special education policies and recent legislation.

Task Force to Study Special Education Services and Funding

In January 2025, the Task Force to Study Special Education Services and Funding issued its final report. Members of the Task Force included representatives from the Connecticut Association

of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS), Special Education Equity for Kids of Connecticut (SEEK), the Connecticut Council of Administrators of Special Education (ConnCASE), the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE), the Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS), and school district leadership.

The Task Force identified the following items as challenges in the state: funding (excess cost; other state funding for special education; funding of charter, magnet CTECs, agri-science schools; cost of providing special education; and approved private special education placements); eligibility (identification; age limit for developmental delay; and behavior); and services (staff shortages; prekindergarten; transition to adulthood; artificial intelligence; and gifted and talented). The final report also contained recommendations to address four areas of concern: staffing shortages, funding, inequity, and effectiveness.

Connecticut State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report (SPP/APR) Trend Data, 2021–23

Extant Data Table 11. Indicator 1: Graduation

Reporting Year	Target	Data	Status
FFY 2023	85.50%	86.21%	Met target
FFY 2022	85.00%	84.46%	Did not meet target
FFY 2021	85.00%	87.53%	Met target

Extant Data Table 12. Indicator 2: Dropout

Reporting Year	Target	Data	Status
FFY 2023	12.00%	9.92%	Met target
FFY 2022	12.00%	13.85%	Did not meet target
FFY 2021	12.00%	11.52%	Met target

Extant Data Table 13. Indicator 3a: Assessment—Participation of Children With IEPs

Reporting Year	Target	Data	Status
FFY 2023	Reading	Reading	Reading
	A: >= 95.00%	A: 97.14%	A: Met target
	B: >= 95.00%	B: 94.72%	B: Did not meet target
	C: >= 95.00%	C: 84.48%	C: Did not meet target
	Math	Math	Math
	A: >= 95.00%	A: 96.62%	A: Met target
B: >= 95.00%	B: 93.13%	B: Did not meet target	
C: >= 95.00%	C: 84.32%	C: Did not meet target	
FFY 2022	Reading	Reading	Reading
	A: >= 95.00%	A: 97.24%	A: Met target
	B: >= 95.00%	B: 94.63%	B: Did not meet target
	C: >= 95.00%	C: 84.96%	C: Did not meet target
	Math	Math	Math
	A: >= 95.00%	A: 96.82%	A: Met target
B: >= 95.00%	B: 92.77%	B: Did not meet target	
C: >= 95.00%	C: 84.87%	C: Did not meet target	
FFY 2021	Reading	Reading	Reading
	A: >= 95.00%	A: 97.25%	A: Met target
	B: >= 95.00%	B: 94.66%	B: Did not meet target
	C: >= 95.00%	C: 84.38%	C: Did not meet target
	Math	Math	Math
	A: >= 95.00%	A: 96.82%	A: Met target
B: >= 95.00%	B: 93.12%	B: Did not meet target	
C: >= 95.00%	C: 84.41%	C: Did not meet target	

Extant Data Table 14. Indicator 3b: Assessment—Proficiency of Children With IEPs (Grade Level Academic Achievement Standards)

Reporting Year	Target	Data	Status
FFY 2023	Reading A: >= 16.50% B: >= 15.25% C: >= 21.00%	Reading A: 17.87% B: 15.17% C: 20.01%	Reading A: Met target B: Did not meet target C: Did not meet target
	Math A: >= 15.00% B: >= 8.25% C: >= 8.50%	Math A: 17.95% B: 8.58% C: 6.28%	Math A: Met target B: Met target C: Did not meet target
FFY 2022	Reading A: >= 16.00% B: >= 14.50% C: >= 20.50%	Reading A: 17.28% B: 14.23% C: 17.54%	Reading A: Met target B: Did not meet target C: Did not meet target
	Math A: >= 14.00% B: >= 7.50% C: >= 8.00%	Math A: 17.35% B: 7.58% C: 6.84%	Math A: Met target B: Met target C: Did not meet target
FFY 2021	Reading A: >= 15.50% B: >= 13.75% C: >= 20.00%	Reading A: 17.72% B: 13.31% C: 17.78%	Reading A: Met target B: Did not meet target C: Did not meet target
	Math A: >= 13.00% B: >= 6.75% C: >= 7.48%	Math A: 14.75% B: 6.31% C: 7.09%	Math A: Met target B: Did not meet target C: Did not meet target

Extant Data Table 14. Indicator 3c: Assessment—Proficiency of Children With IEPs (Alternate Academic Achievement Standards)

Reporting Year	Target	Data	Status
FFY 2023	Reading A: >= 33.00% B: >= 25.00% C: >= 40.00%	Reading A: 27.27% B: 16.63% C: 33.13%	Reading A: Did not meet target B: Did not meet target C: Did not meet target
	Math A: >= 33.00% B: >= 45.50% C: >= 36.50%	Math A: 31.46% B: 49.56% C: 28.36%	Math A: Did not meet target B: Met target C: Did not meet target
FFY 2022	Reading A: >= 30.50% B: >= 22.50% C: >= 39.00%	Reading A: 29.70% B: 21.93% C: 35.60%	Reading A: Did not meet target B: Did not meet target C: Did not meet target
	Math A: >= 31.00% B: >= 44.00% C: >= 36.00%	Math A: 29.80% B: 45.73% C: 37.20%	Math A: Did not meet target B: Met target C: Met target
FFY 2021	Reading A: >= 28.00% B: >= 20.00% C: >= 38.00%	Reading A: 29.98% B: 21.69% C: 32.98%	Reading A: Met target B: Met target C: Did not meet target
	Math A: >= 29.00% B: >= 43.00% C: >= 35.50%	Math A: 30.18% B: 45.01% C: 35.50%	Math A: Met target B: Met target C: Did not meet target

Extant Data Table 15. Indicator 3d: Assessment Gap in Proficiency Rates

Reporting Year	Target	Data	Status
FFY 2023	Reading A: <= 41.50% B: <= 45.25% C: <= 45.25%	Reading A: 32.38% B: 34.66% C: 35.47%	Reading A: Met target B: Met target C: Met target
	Math A: <= 39.50% B: <= 39.50% C: <= 35.50%	Math A: 31.75% B: 29.63% C: 23.17%	Math A: Met target B: Met target C: Met target
FFY 2022	Reading A: <= 42.00% B: <= 46.00% C: <= 46.00%	Reading A: 32.37% B: 34.90% C: 35.11%	Reading A: Met target B: Met target C: Met target
	Math A: <= 40.00% B: <= 40.00% C: <= 36.00%	Math A: 30.92% B: 28.61% C: 27.09%	Math A: Met target B: Met target C: Met target
FFY 2021	Reading A: <= 42.00% B: <= 46.00% C: <= 46.00%	Reading A: 32.26% B: 36.65% C: 38.46%	Reading A: Met target B: Met target C: Met target
	Math A: <= 40.00% B: <= 40.00% C: <= 36.00%	Math A: 31.28% B: 28.50% C: 27.99%	Math A: Met target B: Met target C: Met target

Extant Data Table 16. Indicator 4a: Discipline—Suspension and Expulsion (% of LEAS with significant discrepancy)

Reporting Year	Target	Data	Status
FFY 2023	15.00%	14.71%	Met target
FFY 2022	20.00%	12.35%	Met target
FFY 2021	5.00%	0.59%	Met target

Extant Data Table 17. Indicator 4b: Discipline—Suspension and Expulsion (% of LEAs with significant discrepancy by race/ethnicity)

Reporting Year	Target	Data	Status
FFY 2023	0%	0%	Met target
FFY 2022	0%	2.76%	Did not meet target
FFY 2021	0%	0%	Met target

Extant Data Table 18. Indicator 5: Educational Environments—School Age

Reporting Year	Target	Data	Status
FFY 2023	A: >= 68.00% B: <= 7.20% C: <= 7.15%	A: 66.00% B: 8.03% C: 5.77%	A: Did not meet target B: Did not meet target C: Met target
FFY 2022	A: >= 67.50% B: <= 7.20% C: <= 7.20%	A: 67.97% B: 8.29% C: 6.40%	A: Met target B: Did not meet target C: Met target

Reporting Year	Target	Data	Status
FFY 2021	A: >= 67.25% B: <= 7.20% C: <= 7.25%	A: 68.01% B: 7.42% C: 6.71%	A: Met target B: Did not meet target C: Met target

Extant Data Table 19. Indicator 6: Preschool Environments

Reporting Year	Target	Data	Status
FFY 2023	A: >= 63.00% B: <= 24.00% C: <= 2.50%	A: 65.81% B: 20.75% C: 0.20%	A: Met target B: Met target C: Met target
FFY 2022	A: >= 61.50% B: <= 24.50% C: <= 2.50%	A: 65.88% B: 17.96% C: 0.31%	A: Met target B: Met target C: Met target
FFY 2021	A: >= 60.00% B: <= 25.00% C: <= 2.50%	A: 66.71% B: 20.94% C: 0.44%	A: Met target B: Met target C: Met target

Extant Data Table 20. Indicator 7: Preschool Outcomes Parent Survey

Reporting Year	Target	Data	Status
FFY 2023	A1: >= 87.00% A2: >= 66.00% B1: >= 90.00% B2: >= 71.00% C1: >= 96.00% C2: >= 65.00%	A1: 88.94% A2: 62.53% B1: 95.23% B2: 82.25% C1: 96.60% C2: 61.14%	A1: Met target A2: Did not meet target B1: Met target B2: Met target C1: Met target C2: Did not meet target

Reporting Year	Target	Data	Status
FFY 2022	A1: >= 86.00% A2: >= 65.00% B1: >= 87.00% B2: >= 68.00% C1: >= 94.50% C2: >= 60.11%	A1: 87.78% A2: 61.51% B1: 87.52% B2: 65.69% C1: 96.13% C2: 58.67%	A1: Met target A2: Did not meet target B1: Met target B2: Did not meet target C1: Met target C2: Did not meet target
FFY 2021	A1: >= 85.00% A2: >= 64.00% B1: >= 86.00% B2: >= 67.00% C1: >= 94.00% C2: >= 61.00%	A1: 88.10% A2: 64.90% B1: 87.35% B2: 67.03% C1: 95.78% C2: 60.11%	A1: Met target A2: Met target B1: Met target B2: Met target C1: Met target C2: Did not meet target

Extant Data Table 21. Indicator 8: Parent Survey

Reporting Year	Target	Data	Status
FFY 2023	85.00%	84.28%	Did not meet target
FFY 2022	85.00%	85.11%	Met target
FFY 2021	85.00%	81.66%	Did not meet target

Extant Data Table 22. Indicator 9: Disproportionate Representation

Reporting Year	Target	Data	Status
FFY 2023	0%	0%	Met target
FFY 2022	0%	0%	Met target
FFY 2021	0%	0%	Met target

Extant Data Table 23. Indicator 10: Disproportionate Representation in Specific Disability Categories

Reporting Year	Target	Data	Status
FFY 2023	0%	0%	Met target
FFY 2022	0%	0%	Met target
FFY 2021	0%	0%	Met target

Extant Data Table 24. Indicator 11: Initial Evaluation

Reporting Year	Target	Data	Status
FFY 2023	100%	88.16%	Did not meet target
FFY 2022	100%	85.66%	Did not meet target
FFY 2021	100%	98.78%	Did not meet target

Extant Data Table 25. Indicator 12: Early Childhood Transition

Reporting Year	Target	Data	Status
FFY 2023	100%	98.44%	Did not meet target
FFY 2022	100%	96.26%	Did not meet target
FFY 2021	100%	99.95%	Did not meet target

Extant Data Table 26. Indicator 13: Secondary Transition

Reporting Year	Target	Data	Status
FFY 2023	100%	99.60%	Did not meet target
FFY 2022	100%	96.12%	Did not meet target
FFY 2021	100%	99.77%	Did not meet target

Extant Data Table 27. Indicator 14: Post-School Outcomes

Reporting Year	Target	Data	Status
FFY 2023	A: >= 40.00% B: >= 85.00% C: >= 95.00%	A: 46.17% B: 90.61% C: 98.04%	A: Met target B: Met target C: Met target
FFY 2022	A: >= 40.00% B: >= 85.00% C: >= 95.00%	A: 45.20% B: 92.41% C: 98.30%	A: Met target B: Met target C: Met target
FFY 2021	A: >= 40.00% B: >= 85.00% C: >= 95.00%	A: 42.21% B: 95.02% C: 98.91%	A: Met target B: Met target C: Met target

Extant Data Table 28. Indicator 15: Resolution Sessions

Reporting Year	Target	Data	Status
FFY 2023	>= 35.00%	67.09%	Met target
FFY 2022	>= 30.00%	53.01%	Met target

Reporting Year	Target	Data	Status
FFY 2021	>= 25.00–50.00%	50.68%	Met target

Extant Data Table 29. Indicator 16: Mediation

Reporting Year	Target	Data	Status
FFY 2023	>= 55.00%	70.39%	Met target
FFY 2022	>= 55.00%	79.19%	Met target
FFY 2021	>= 50.00%	81.48%	Met target

Extant Data Table 30. Indicator 17: State Systemic Improvement Plan—Increase Reading Performance for All 3rd Grade Students With Disabilities Measured by CT ELA Performance Index

Reporting Year	Target	Data	Status
FFY 2023	48.50%	49.65%	Met target
FFY 2022	47.50%	49.64%	Met target
FFY 2021	47.50%	49.66%	Met target

Extant Data Table 31. Indicator 18: General Supervision

Reporting Year	Target	Data	Status
FFY 2023	100%	100%	N/A

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Opening & Welcome: (1 minute)

Introduction: Thank you for making the time to speak with me (us) today. My name is [X], and I am [X] with WestEd. (If appropriate, ask WestEd colleagues to introduce themselves)

Purpose: The Commissioner of Education engaged WestEd to conduct a comprehensive systems review of state-level special education supports and infrastructure within the Bureau of Special Education and the Department more broadly. The goal of the review is to collect and review data in order to make recommendations that enhance the capacity of the Department, in order to improve support and services to the field that then improve outcomes for students with disabilities and their families across the state.

Process: As part of the review, WestEd will review extant data, and will conduct individual interviews and focus groups with a broad set of stakeholders and will develop and administer a survey to ensure a wider group of interested parties have the opportunity to share their perspectives about the current system. Information gathered will be reviewed, synthesized, and included in a report to the CSDE, including actionable recommendations that can drive improvement of the policies, structures, and practices within the Bureau of Special Education and the CSDE more broadly.

Plan: Today's interview will last for one hour. We are recording this session purely for notetaking support. The data will remain confidential, and your name will not be used. Do agree to recording the interview (receive verbal confirmation). (START RECORDING)

Do you have any questions before we get started?

Interviewee Introduction: Please share your name, your title, if appropriate, and the role or roles you play relative to students receiving special education services in CT.

Questions:

1. What do you think the role and purpose of the CSDE should be in terms of supporting positive outcomes for students with disabilities?
 19. Relative to that purpose, what are the strengths of their current approach?

- a. (Optional Probe: What do you believe is working well for students receiving special education services in Connecticut?)
 - 20.** Relative to that purpose, what are the challenges or areas in need of improvement in their current approach?
 - 21.** What recommendations and ideas do you have for CSDE for improvement?
- b. (Probe: Can ask what role various entities should play in improving/supporting improvement)
 - i. CT State Department of Education
 - ii. District leaders
 - iii. School leaders
 - iv. CT General Assembly (legislature)
 - v. Institutes of Higher Education/Educator Preparation Programs
 - vi. Community partners, advocates, or other interested parties
 - vii. Others?
- 22.** Is there anything we didn't ask that you think is important to share?

Closing: (1 minute)

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me/us today. The WestEd team will be conducting interviews and focus groups through the end of August. We will then send out a survey to provide an opportunity for a wider group of people to share their perspectives. If there are things you think of later or did not have the opportunity to share in today's session, please feel free to complete the survey when it is released. Information gathered through interviews, focus groups, the review of extant data and the survey will be reviewed and summarized to create observations and themes that will inform the actionable recommendations to be included in the report to the Commissioner. We expect to deliver the report in mid-to-late December.

Appendix D: Focus Group Protocol

Opening & Welcome: (5 minutes)

Introduction: Thank you for making the time for this conversation. My name is [X] and I am a [X] with WestEd. I am joined by my colleagues [X].

Purpose: The Connecticut Commissioner of Education engaged WestEd to conduct a comprehensive systems review of state-level special education supports and infrastructure within the Bureau of Special Education and the Department more broadly. The goal of the review is to collect and review data in order to make recommendations that enhance the capacity of the Department, in order to improve support and services to the field that then improve outcomes for students with disabilities and their families across the state.

Process: As part of the review, WestEd will review extant data, will conduct individual interviews and focus groups with a broad set of stakeholders and will develop and administer a survey to ensure a wider group of interested parties have the opportunity to share their perspectives about the current system. Information gathered will be reviewed, synthesized, and included in a report to the CSDE, including actionable recommendations that can drive improvement of the policies, structures, and practices within the Bureau of Special Education and the CSDE more broadly.

Plan: This focus group is composed of [X] representatives. Today's focus group will last for one hour. We will break into smaller breakout rooms to ensure there are ample opportunities for all participants to share their input. We are recording this session purely for notetaking support, data will remain confidential and individual names will not be used. Please hit the thumbs up button if you agree to the recording. If you are not comfortable being recorded, please feel free to drop off and you will have the opportunity to share your input via the survey that will be administered at a later date. No individual or personally identifiable data will be shared with the Department. We ask that you respect the confidentiality of your fellow participants and not share any of the information discussed by others.

Are there any questions before we get started?

Breakout Rooms: (50 minutes)

Group Agreements (1 minute):

Before we begin, here are the expectations we will set for this session.

- **Respect people and their opinions, even if you disagree:** Value diverse viewpoints and lived experiences and approach others' comments with curiosity rather than judgment.
- **Share the Air:** Balance speaking and listening. Speak up and make space for others to do the same.
- **Stay on Topic:** Keep comments focused and relevant.
- **Respect Confidentiality:** Information shared in the group stays within the group, except for publicly known information.
- **Clarify Jargon and Acronyms** as needed for the group to understand your comment.
- **Use Chat as well as Speaking Up-** During our conversation use the chat feature to share ideas in addition to adding your voice to the conversation

Participant Introductions (2 minutes): Participant introductions: Let's quickly go around the zoom room and introduce ourselves. Please share your name, role/title, and organization you represent.

Note to Facilitators: Guide the conversation

- Ensure everyone has an opportunity to share their ideas. Before moving to the next question, invite people who have not yet responded to share their ideas. It's okay if some people don't respond to every question but try to give everyone a chance to share.
- Redirect the conversation if people start talking about unrelated issues or topics.
- Some people may feel more comfortable sharing ideas aloud while others may be more comfortable typing into the chat box. Encourage people to share in whichever way is most comfortable for them.
- To gather as much information as possible, you may want to ask the following questions to try to get more details:
 - “Can you give an example?”
 - “What might that look like?”
 - “What do others think or know about the topic?”
 - “Does anyone have a different idea?”
 - “Does everyone agree? Does anyone disagree?”

Questions & Notes:

1. What do you think the role and purpose of the CSDE should be in terms of supporting positive outcomes for students with disabilities?
 23. Relative to that purpose, what are the strengths of their current approach?
- c. (Optional Probe: What do you believe is working well for students receiving special education services in Connecticut?)
 24. Relative to that purpose, what are the challenges or areas in need of improvement in their current approach?
 25. What recommendations or ideas do you have for CSDE for improvement?
- d. (Optional Probe: Can ask what role various entities should play in improving/supporting improvement)
 - i. CT State Department of Education
 - ii. District leaders
 - iii. School leaders
 - iv. CT General Assembly (legislature)
 - v. Institutes of Higher Education/Educator Preparation Programs
 - vi. Community partners, advocates, or other interested parties
 - vii. Others?
26. Is there anything we didn't ask you that you think is important to share?

Closing (1 minute)

Thank you for participating in today's focus group. The WestEd team will be conducting interviews and focus groups through the end of August. We will then send out a survey to provide an opportunity for a wider group of people to share their perspectives. If there are things you think of later or did not have the opportunity to share in today's session, please feel free to complete the survey when it is released. Information gathered through interviews, focus groups, the review of extant data and the survey will be reviewed and summarized to create observations and themes that will inform the actionable recommendations to be included in the report to the Commissioner. We expect to deliver the report in mid-to-late December.

Appendix E: Interviewees

- Kim Bean, Project Manager: Bureau of Special Education, Connecticut Department of Education
- Erin Benham, State Board of Education Vice Chair: Connecticut State Board of Education
- Jay Brown, Consultant: Bureau of Special Education, Connecticut Department of Education
- Mary Beth Bruder, Director: University of Connecticut Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities
- Beth Bye, Commissioner: Connecticut Office of Early Childhood
- Bridget Corcoran Adams, Consultant: Bureau of Special Education, Connecticut Department of Education
- Nicole Cossette, Part C Coordinator Division Director, Connecticut Office of Early Childhood
- Sean Cronin, Consultant: Bureau of Special Education, Connecticut Department of Education
- Ashley DiGangi, Consultant: Bureau of Special Education, Connecticut Department of Education
- Kirsten Dovenberg, Consultant: Bureau of Special Education, Connecticut Department of Education
- Sarah Eagan, Executive Director: Center for Children’s Advocacy
- Andy Feinstein, Attorney: Feinstein Education Law Group
- Christina Ghio, Connecticut Child Advocate: Office of the Child Advocate
- Laura Guererra, Consultant: Bureau of Special Education, Connecticut Department of Education
- Jen James, Consultant: Bureau of Special Education, Connecticut Department of Education

- Renee Kleinmann, Consultant: Bureau of Special Education, Connecticut Department of Education
- Bryan Klimkiewicz, State Director of Special Education: Connecticut Department of Education
- Ada Kovaci-Kume, Consultant: Bureau of Special Education, Connecticut Department of Education
- Michelle Laubin, Attorney: Berchem Moses, P.C.
- Heather Levitt Doucette, Project Manager: Bureau of Special Education, Connecticut Department of Education
- Michelle Levy, Service Program Manager, Connecticut Office of Early Childhood
- Laura Luna, Consultant: Bureau of Special Education, Connecticut Department of Education
- Katherine Matz, State Special Education Bureau Chief: Connecticut Department of Education
- Mike McKeon, Director of Legal and Governmental Affairs: Connecticut Department of Education
- Diane Murphy, Consultant: Bureau of Special Education, Connecticut Department of Education
- Georgette Nemr, Consultant: Bureau of Special Education, Connecticut Department of Education
- Alexa Osterhaut, Consultant: Bureau of Special Education, Connecticut Department of Education
- Karen Pascale, Head Start State Collaboration Office Director: Connecticut Office of Early Childhood
- Dori Papa, Consultant: Bureau of Special Education, Connecticut Department of Education
- Allison Quirion, Parent/Advocate: Decoding Dyslexia – CT
- Fran Rabinowitz, Executive Director: Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents
- Charlene M. Russell-Tucker, Commissioner: Connecticut Department of Education
- Sinthia Sone-Moyano, Deputy Commissioner for Educational Supports and Wellness: Connecticut Department of Education
- Michael Tavernier, Consultant: Bureau of Special Education, Connecticut Department of Education

- Donna Thompson Bennett, Executive Director: National Parent Leadership Institute
- Alycia Trakas, Consultant: Bureau of Special Education, Connecticut Department of Education
- Elena Trueworthy, Deputy Commissioner: Connecticut Office of Early Childhood
- Viviana Toure, Consultant: Bureau of Special Education, Connecticut Department of Education

Appendix F: Focus Group Participants

Shae Adams	Leona Adamczyk	Kristen Allen	Megan Alubicki Flick	Emily Ball
Larry Barlow	Erica Bauer	Vita Beebe	Albert Benejan Grajales	Jennifer Benevento
Nachi Bhatt	Gina Biondi	Jola Borto	Jean Borrup	Robert Boshka
Alicia Bowman	Elizabeth Brown	Sharon Bruce	Allyson Brunetti	Mary Burgard
Ingrid Canady	Brady Canozza	Tiffany Caouette	Scarlett Carroll	Leah Champ Burdick
Chris Chemerka	Jill Chuckas	Deana Chrzan	Patti Clarke	Natasha Clarke- Gravina
Michael Cocchiola	Zania Collier	Claire Conroy	Tom Cosker	Nicole Cossette
Tina Courpas	Lisa Crowley	Shawn Cyr	Rachel D’Amora	Sally Dastoli
Ann Marie Davidson	Marjorie Davis	Shellye Davis	Ann Denué	Nitza Diaz-Candelo
Sheri DiNello	Amanda Dobler	David Doukas	Roberta Downer	Sarah Eagan
Lois Eldridge	Andrew Feinstein	Sarah Fennessy	Michelle Fitzgerald	John Flanders
Adriana Fontaine	Jeffrey Forte	Solandy Forte	Lori Fortuna	Jen Fox
Sara Fulton	Kathie Gabrielson	Melissa Gagne	Casey Gallagher	Kristy Giacco
Lisa Gianni	Alison Giuliano	Alyssa Goduti	Yvette Goorevitch	Bridgette Gordon- Hickey
Jenny Graves	Lisa Gregory	Eliabeth Guay	Douglas Guilbert	Ajit Gopalakrishnan
Rigopoula Halkias	Jane Hampton- Smith	Pearl Hanson	David Heg	Karen Helene
Laura Heneghan	Patti Hess	Charles Hewes	Jennifer Hoffman	Lisa Hughes
Gary Hunt	Christa Jachym	Shakira Jacobs- Vazquez	Carol Jenkins	Jennifer Jenkins
Laura Johns	Dana Johnson	Nancy Johnston	Kevin Keating	Rebecca Kellam
Gwen Killheffer	Lisa Kimyachi	Maryam Khan	Karen King	Laura Knapp
Allison Kopie	Ada Kovaci-Kume	Patricia Kronk	Christine Kuehlewind	Gail Lanza
Christopher Latka	Michelle Laubin	Elisa Laudati	Jennifer Laviano	Michelle LeBrun- Griffin

Jennifer Leeper	Stephanie Levin	Michelle Levy	Leonard Lockhart	Michael Lopes
Jacqueline Lubin	Bryan Luizzi	Jennifer Lussier	Megan Mackey	Lauren Mancini-Averitt Meriden
Laurie Markus	Joshua Martin	Silvia Mayo Molina	Athena McAlenney	Patrice McCarthy
Eben McKnight	Marni McNiff	Kathryn Meyer	Jody Minotti	Jillian Moccia
John Molteni	Sarah Moon	Goviana Morales	Maria Morelli-Wolfe	Anne Munkenbeck
Diane Murphy	Melissa Nahas	Lisa Naughton	Matthew Nichols	Naomi Nova
Jessica Ocasio	Ashley Oldham	Emilia Oliveira	Melissa Olson	Miguel Pabon
Karen Packtor	Maria Pastorelli	Shamim Patwa	Christine Peck	Gianni Perugini
Michelle Pion	Fran Rabinowitz	Kate Raftery	Agata Raszczyk	Phillip Reyes
Rose Reyes	Kaylan Ricciardi	Joyce Rioux	Cynthia Ritchie	Laura Rivera
Bernice Rizk	Marcia Robinson	Herbert Rosen	Tracy Sanford	Tricia Santos
Meg Scata	Kate Schrock	Phillip Shenkman	Christine Sipala	Marcelo Sousa
Ravit Stein	Cindy Steele-Pucci	Laurie Stubbs	Shanequa Sturgis-Nash	Patricia Sullivan-Kowalski
Catherine Summ	Julie Swanson	Kate Sweeney	Lauren Tafrate	Heather Tartaglia
Lydia Tedone	Melanie Tietjen	Renee Toper	Aimee Turner	Tammy Venenga
Nicole Vitale	Genevive Walker	Lily Watkins	Joanne White	Diane Willcutts
Brandalyn Williams	Ana Wittig	Ashley Wright	Missy Wrigley	Susan Yankee
Linda Yoder	Amy Yost	Rolando Young	Julie Zellner	Leslie Zupkus

Appendix G: Interview and Focus Group Code Book

01. Category: Interview section and general sentiment of the response

- Role of CSDE
- Strength
- Challenge
- Suggestion

02. Communication: Responses related to communication methods, content, and quality

- Accessibility
- Availability of staff
- Community Liaison
- Addressing misinformation
- Sharing CSDE Mission & Vision
- Raising awareness
- Responsiveness

03. Oversight: Responses related to CSDE oversight

- Accountability
- Enforcement
- Focused Monitoring
- Program evaluation
- Setting Standards

04. Resources Sharing: Responses related to resources already created by CSDE, CSDE role in distributing resources, and identifying areas of need.

- Accessibility of resources
- Creating resources
- Disseminating resources
- Elevating best practices
- High quality resources
- Issuing Guidance
- Resources for parents
- Spotlighting districts
- Website design
- Professional Learning

05. Managing Funding: The role of CSDE in securing, managing, and providing funding across the state. Also identifying issues related to funding.

06. Due Process and State Complaints Process: Any responses related to due process and/or the dispute resolution system.

- Consistency of decisions
- Clarity of process
- Mediation
- Predetermination
- Quality of hearing officers
- Volume of complaints
- Accessibility

07. Collaboration: Responses relating to the ability of CSDE to collaborate internally and externally.

- Inter-agency
- Intra-agency
- Legislature

08. Staffing: Any responses relating to staff, at both the state and local level.

- Credentialing
- High quality staff
- LEA

- Qualifications and training
- Retention
- SEA
- Shortages

09. Engagement with stakeholders

10. CT-SEDS: Any responses pertaining to CT-SEDS.

- Centralized system
- Parent Portal
- Responsive support team
- Targeted assessments
- Uniformity of data
- Usability

11. Data & Reporting: Responses related to data use and reporting.

- Annual reporting
- Data collection
- Data sharing
- Data Use

12. Timeliness: Double coded to communication, issuing guidance, due process, etc.

13. CSDE Infrastructure: Comments relating to CSDE systems and infrastructure.

- Internal Inconsistency
- Internal redundancy
- Follow through
- Transparency
- Systemization of roles
- State Civil Rights Office
- Surrogate Parent Program

14. Increased need in the student population: Statements related to specific needs of students and their families.

- Absenteeism
- Behavior management
- Bullying

- Mental Health
- Multilingual learners and families
- Truancy
- Wraparound services

15. Implementation across districts

16. Mindset: Responses that touch on perceived mindsets or attitudes, such as systemic biases, passion, empathy, etc.

- Bias towards LEAs
- Empathetic staff
- Reactive system
- Systemic bias
- Trust

17. Student Support Systems: Responses relating to elements of the system used to directly support students.

- Administrative burden
- Early intervention
- Implementing IEPs
- PPT Meetings
- Predetermination
- Student identification
- Collaborative teaching
- District out-placement

18. Engaging with legislature: Responses relating to how CSDE engages with the Connecticut legislature. Often cross coded with collaboration.

- Navigating new legislative requirements
- Communicating with legislature

Appendix H: CSDE Special Education System Review Survey

Thank you for taking the time to share your perspectives on how the Connecticut State Department of Education can improve special education services in the state. The Commissioner of Education engaged WestEd to review the current system of state-level special education supports to find out what is working well, and where the State Department of Education can improve support to students, families, service providers, and educators.

In addition to this survey, WestEd is conducting interviews and focus groups with a wide variety of people who are involved with and/or impacted by the special education system. The feedback gathered through this survey, interviews, and focus groups will be analyzed by WestEd, and major themes will be shared in a report to the Connecticut Commissioner of Education. WestEd will not share any personal or identifiable information with the Connecticut State Department of Education. The survey is anonymous.

This should take you no more than 5-10 minutes to complete.

Please provide the following information about yourself:

1. What is your primary role? (X1)

- Advocate
- Connecticut State Department of Education Employee
- District Administrator
- General Education Classroom Teacher
- Higher Education Employee
- K-12 Student
- Other (please specify): _____ (X1_14_TEXT)
- Paraeducator

- Parent/Guardian or Family Member
- Policy Maker (e.g., legislator, Board member)
- Related Services Professional (e.g., School counselor, Occupational therapist, Social worker, School Psychology, etc.)
- School Administrator
- Special Education Teacher
- Technical Assistance Provider

Display this question:

If 1 = Other (please specify)

If you selected Other as your answer to the previous question, please describe your role. (QID4)

19. Organization/School District (X2)

We are interested in hearing your feedback on how well the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) is supporting positive outcomes for special education students across the state. Please choose the rating that you feel best describes the work of the current CSDE.

20. Please rate how well CSDE performs the following leadership functions.

	Not Effective (6)	Somewhat Effective (7)	Very Effective (8)	I'm Not Sure (9)
Communicating a vision for supporting the success of students with disabilities. (X3_1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Providing statewide oversight and monitoring for special education services. (X3_2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Not Effective (6)	Somewhat Effective (7)	Very Effective (8)	I'm Not Sure (9)
Implementing a system of accountability for special education services. (X3_3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Using data to drive improvement for special education student outcomes. (X3_4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Providing clear guidance to educators and families on legal requirements for special education. (X3_5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Providing statewide leadership to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. (X3_6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

21. Please rate how well CSDE performs the following dispute resolution functions.

	Not Effective (1)	Somewhat Effective (2)	Very Effective (3)	I'm Not Sure (4)
Completing complaint investigations in a timely manner. (X4_1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ensuring complaint investigations findings are legally sound. (X4_2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sharing information from complaint investigations to increase understanding of legal requirements. (X4_3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Making sure hearing officers are properly qualified. (X4_4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

22. Please rate how well CSDE collaborates with other organizations.

	Not Effective (1)	Somewhat Effective (2)	Very Effective (3)	I'm Not Sure (4)
Collaborating effectively with other state agencies. (X5_1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Collaborating effectively with school districts. (X5_2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Collaborating effectively with families. (X5_3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Collaborating effectively with student and family advocates. (X5_4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

23. Please rate how well CSDE performs the following guidance functions.

	Not Effective (1)	Somewhat Effective (2)	Very Effective (3)	I'm Not Sure (4)
Partnering with the field to ensure students receive services from a qualified workforce (teachers, related service providers, paraeducators, etc.). (X6_1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Supporting the field to understand evidence-based practices for teaching and learning for students with disabilities. (X6_2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Supporting the field to understand legal requirements for special education services for students with disabilities. (X6_3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

24. Please share details of any “bright spots” or areas related to CSDE’s effectiveness in serving students with disabilities in Connecticut that you would like us to know. (X7)

25. Please share any additional information about special education services in Connecticut. (X8)

Appendix I: Survey Methods

This appendix describes procedures used for analyzing and cleaning the survey data.

Analysis of Multiple-Choice Survey Items

The multiple-choice survey items were analyzed descriptively and coded numerically. The multiple-choice survey items asking about leadership, resolution, collaboration, and guidance asked respondents to use a 4-point Likert scale for effectiveness (Not Effective, Somewhat Effective, Very Effective, I'm not sure). Each point in the Likert scale was assigned a numeric value so that a higher level of effectiveness corresponded with a higher number. Specifically, "Not Effective" was coded as 1, "Somewhat Effective" as 2, and "Very Effective" as 3. The final Likert scale option ("I'm not sure") was not assigned a numeric value and was excluded from the calculation of means and standard deviations.

Analysis of Open-Response Survey Items

Each open-response question was analyzed using conventional content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005²), an inductive method in which codes emerge directly from participants' responses (Saldaña & Omasta, 2016³). The thematic coding process involved three rounds.

First, all responses from one item were compiled in an Excel spreadsheet and read several times to become familiar with the data. Initial codes were created by systematically analyzing each response and grouping related information, with a focus on keeping the codes closely aligned with participants' original language to maintain their intended meaning. Importantly, each response could be tagged with more than one thematic code. As the thematic coding continued, preliminary codes were refined, and earlier choices were reassessed as new insights emerged. In the second phase, initial codes were grouped into possible themes by examining data from all responses and comparing these with alignment with the original text. In the final round, the themes were further refined and merged into broader, overarching

² Hsieh, H., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research, 15*(9), 1277–1288. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687>

³ Saldaña, J., & Omasta, M. (2016). *Qualitative research: Analyzing life*. Sage Publications.

categories. These categories were named and described through ongoing analysis and collaboration with the larger WestEd team. This systematic approach ensured the themes were grounded in participants’ voices and accurately reflected their survey responses.

Additionally, we used several strategies to ensure transparency in the coding process. First, the data were read and reread multiple times to ensure a strong understanding and familiarity with the content. Second, codes were designed to closely mirror the participants’ original language, prioritizing their perspectives rather than researcher interpretation. Third, both inductive (data-driven) and deductive (theory-driven) methods were utilized, allowing themes to form naturally while also drawing on existing research to provide context. Fourth, we used a constant comparison method throughout the analysis which allowed for ongoing refinement of themes.

Cleaning Primary Role (X1, QID4)

Item X1 asked respondents to select their primary role and provided “Other” as a response option. Respondents who selected “Other” were provided an open-response item (QID4) to further detail their role. These answers were exported from Qualtrics into an Excel spreadsheet. The responses were read and recoded, when appropriate, into the existing categories for X1 or grouped into a new category. For example, “Reading” was recoded into “General Education Teacher.” Additionally, one respondent could be coded into multiple roles. For example, “I am both a general education teacher in a public school, as well as a parent of a child who receives special education” was coded as “General Education Teacher” and “Parent/Guardian or Family Member.”

The final variable contained 27 distinct roles, which were then grouped into 14 larger buckets (see Methods Table X1).

Methods Table X1. Initial and Final Coding of Primary Role (X1) and Other (QID4)

Role	Final Coding
Advocate	Advocate
Attorney for Board or District	Other
Attorney for Families of Special Education Students	Other
Community Based Organization	Other

Role	Final Coding
Connecticut State Department of Education Employee	Connecticut State Department of Education Employee
District Administrator	School or District Administrator
Early Childhood Educator	Other Instructional Staff
Executive/Instructional Coach	Technical Assistance Provider
General Education Classroom Teacher	General Education Classroom Teacher
General Education Non-Academic Classroom Teacher	Other Instructional Staff
Higher Education Employee	Higher Education Employee
K–12 Student	K–12 Student
Multiple roles - Not Specified	Other
Paraeducator	Paraeducator
Parent/Guardian or Family Member	Parent/Guardian or Family Member
Policy Maker (e.g., legislator, Board member)	Policy Maker (e.g., legislator, Board member)
Reading Specialist or Interventionist	Other Instructional Staff
Related Services Professional (e.g., School counselor, Occupational therapist, Social worker, School Psychology, etc.)	Related Services Professional (e.g., School counselor, Occupational therapist, Social worker, School Psychology, etc.)
Retired Teacher	Other
School Administrator	School or District Administrator
School Administrator or District Administrator	School or District Administrator

Role	Final Coding
Special Education Teacher	Special Education Teacher
Taxpayer	Other
Teacher on Special Assignment	Other Instructional Staff
Technical Assistance Provider	Technical Assistance Provider
TESOL/Bilingual Teacher	Other Instructional Staff
Union Leader	Other

Cleaning Organization or District (X2)

Item X2 asked respondents to provide their organization or school district and was optional to answer. Most respondents provided their school’s name or district’s name, while others provided their organization. This open-response item was cleaned to preserve respondents’ anonymity by grouping schools into districts, then districts into geographic regions or regional educational service centers (RESCs). Methods Table X2 below provides respondents’ answers to X2 and its corresponding geographic and RESC region.

Methods Table X2. Initial and Final Coding of Organization or District (X2)

Response to X2 (Organization or District)	Geographic Region	RESC
Advocacy or Consulting Agency	Advocacy or Consulting Agency	N/A
Aging and Disability Services, Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind	Connecticut State Department of Education - Department of Aging and Disability Services	N/A
Ansonia School District	Naugatuck Valley Planning Region	ACES
Area Cooperative Educational Services	South Central Connecticut Planning Region	ACES

Response to X2 (Organization or District)	Geographic Region	RESC
Avon School District	Capitol Planning Region	CREC
Barkhamsted School District	Northwest Hills Planning Region	EdAdvance
Berlin School District	Capitol Planning Region	CREC
Bethany School District	South Central Connecticut Planning Region	ACES
Bethel School District	Western Connecticut Planning Region	EdAdvance
Birth to Grade 3	Birth to Grade 3	N/A
Bloomfield School District	Capitol Planning Region	CREC
Bolton School District	Capitol Planning Region	CREC
Bozrah School District	Southeastern Connecticut Planning Region	EASTCONN
Branford School District	South Central Connecticut Planning Region	ACES
Bridgeport School District	Greater Bridgeport Planning Region	Cooperative Educational Services
Bristol School District	Naugatuck Valley Planning Region	CREC
Brookfield School District	Western Connecticut Planning Region	EdAdvance
Bureau of Special Education	Connecticut State Department of Education - Bureau of Special Education	N/A
Canton School District	Capitol Planning Region	CREC
Capital Preparatory Harbor School District	Charter School District	CREC
Capitol Region Education Council	Capitol Planning Region	CREC

Response to X2 (Organization or District)	Geographic Region	RESC
Central Connecticut State University	Higher Education Institution	N/A
Cheshire School District	Naugatuck Valley Planning Region	ACES
Clinton School District	Lower Connecticut River Valley Planning Region	LEARN
Community Organization (Human Resources Agency of New Britain)	Community Organization	N/A
Community Organization (YMCA)	Community Organization	N/A
Connecticut Association of Schools	Educator Organization - Administrator	N/A
Connecticut College Child Development Lab School	Preschool	N/A
Connecticut State Department of Education	Connecticut State Department of Education	N/A
Connecticut Technical Education and Career System	Connecticut Technical Education and Career System	N/A
Cooperative Educational Services	Greater Bridgeport Planning Region	Cooperative Educational Services
Coventry School District	Capitol Planning Region	EASTCONN
Cromwell School District	Lower Connecticut River Valley Planning Region	CREC
Danbury School District	Western Connecticut Planning Region	EdAdvance
Darien School District	Western Connecticut Planning Region	Cooperative Educational Services

Response to X2 (Organization or District)	Geographic Region	RESC
Department of Aging and Disability Services	Connecticut State Department of Education - Department of Aging and Disability Services	N/A
Department of Developmental Services	Connecticut State Department of Education - Department of Developmental Services	N/A
Derby School District	Naugatuck Valley Planning Region	ACES
East Granby School District	Capitol Planning Region	CREC
East Haddam School District	Lower Connecticut River Valley Planning Region	LEARN
East Hampton School District	Lower Connecticut River Valley Planning Region	LEARN
East Hartford School District	Capitol Planning Region	CREC
East Lyme School District	Southeastern Connecticut Planning Region	LEARN
East Windsor School District	Capitol Planning Region	CREC
Eastern Connecticut Regional Educational Service Center (EASTCONN)	Northeastern Connecticut Planning Region	EASTCONN
Eastford School District	Northeastern Connecticut Planning Region	EASTCONN
Ellington School District	Capitol Planning Region	CREC
Fairfield School District	Greater Bridgeport Planning Region	Cooperative Educational Services
Farmington School District	Capitol Planning Region	CREC
Franklin School District	Southeastern Connecticut Planning Region	EASTCONN

Response to X2 (Organization or District)	Geographic Region	RESC
Glastonbury School District	Capitol Planning Region	CREC
Goodwin University Educational Services (GUES)	University Lab School	N/A
Granby School District	Capitol Planning Region	CREC
Greenwich School District	Western Connecticut Planning Region	Cooperative Educational Services
Griswold School District	Southeastern Connecticut Planning Region	EASTCONN
Groton School District	Southeastern Connecticut Planning Region	LEARN
Guilford School District	South Central Connecticut Planning Region	LEARN
Hamden School District	South Central Connecticut Planning Region	ACES
Hampton School District	Northeastern Connecticut Planning Region	EASTCONN
Hartford Federation of Teachers	Educator Organization - Union	N/A
Hartford School District	Capitol Planning Region	CREC
Independent Special Education School	Independent Special Education School	N/A
Jumoke Academy District	Charter School District	N/A
Killingly School District	Northeastern Connecticut Planning Region	EASTCONN
Law Firm	Law Firm	N/A
LEARN	Southeastern Connecticut Planning Region	LEARN
Lebanon School District	Southeastern Connecticut Planning Region	EASTCONN

Response to X2 (Organization or District)	Geographic Region	RESC
Ledyard School District	Southeastern Connecticut Planning Region	LEARN
Lisbon School District	Southeastern Connecticut Planning Region	EASTCONN
Madison School District	South Central Connecticut Planning Region	LEARN
Manchester School District	Capitol Planning Region	CREC
Marlborough School District	Capitol Planning Region	EASTCONN
Meriden School District	South Central Connecticut Planning Region	ACES
Middletown School District	Lower Connecticut River Valley Planning Region	ACES
Milford School District	South Central Connecticut Planning Region	ACES
Monroe School District	Greater Bridgeport Planning Region	Cooperative Educational Services
Montville School District	Southeastern Connecticut Planning Region	LEARN
Multiple Affiliations	Multiple Affiliations	N/A
N/A	N/A	N/A
Naugatuck School District	Naugatuck Valley Planning Region	ACES
New Britain School District	Capitol Planning Region	CREC
New Fairfield School District	Western Connecticut Planning Region	EdAdvance
New Hartford School District	Northwest Hills Planning Region	EdAdvance
New Haven School District	South Central Connecticut Planning Region	ACES

Response to X2 (Organization or District)	Geographic Region	RESC
New London School District	Southeastern Connecticut Planning Region	LEARN
New Milford School District	Western Connecticut Planning Region	EdAdvance
Newington School District	Capitol Planning Region	CREC
Newtown School District	Western Connecticut Planning Region	EdAdvance
None	None	N/A
North Haven School District	South Central Connecticut Planning Region	ACES
Norwalk School District	Western Connecticut Planning Region	Cooperative Educational Services
Norwich Free Academy District	Southeastern Connecticut Planning Region	LEARN
Norwich School District	Southeastern Connecticut Planning Region	LEARN
Office of Early Childhood (OEC)	Connecticut State Department of Education - Office of Early Childhood	N/A
Old Saybrook School District	Lower Connecticut River Valley Planning Region	LEARN
Orange School District	South Central Connecticut Planning Region	ACES
Oxford School District	Naugatuck Valley Planning Region	ACES
Plainfield School District	Northeastern Connecticut Planning Region	EASTCONN
Plainville School District	Capitol Planning Region	CREC
Plymouth School District	Naugatuck Valley Planning Region	EdAdvance

Response to X2 (Organization or District)	Geographic Region	RESC
Portland School District	Lower Connecticut River Valley Planning Region	CREC
Preston School District	Southeastern Connecticut Planning Region	LEARN
Private School	Private School	N/A
Professional Organization (CEA)	Educator Organization	N/A
Professional Organization (ConnCASE)	Educator Organization - Administrator	N/A
Putnam School District	Northeastern Connecticut Planning Region	EASTCONN
Redding School District	Greater Bridgeport Planning Region	Cooperative Educational Services
Regional Educational Service Center (EdAdvance)	Northwest Hills Planning Region	EdAdvance
Regional School District 04	Lower Connecticut River Valley Planning Region	LEARN
Regional School District 05	South Central Connecticut Planning Region	ACES
Regional School District 08	Capitol Planning Region	EASTCONN
Regional School District 09	Greater Bridgeport Planning Region	Cooperative Educational Services
Regional School District 10	Northwest Hills Planning Region	CREC
Regional School District 13	Lower Connecticut River Valley Planning Region	ACES
Regional School District 14	Naugatuck Valley Planning Region	EdAdvance

Response to X2 (Organization or District)	Geographic Region	RESC
Regional School District 15	Naugatuck Valley Planning Region	EdAdvance
Regional School District 16	Naugatuck Valley Planning Region	ACES
Regional School District 17	Lower Connecticut River Valley Planning Region	LEARN
Regional School District 19	Capitol Planning Region	EASTCONN
Residential Treatment Facility (Connecticut Junior Republic)	Independent Special Education School	N/A
Ridgefield School District	Western Connecticut Planning Region	Cooperative Educational Services
Rocky Hill School District	Capitol Planning Region	CREC
School District - Multiple Affiliations	Multiple Affiliations	N/A
School District - Not Specified	Not Specified	LEARN
School District - Not Specified	Not Specified	N/A
Self-employed	Self-employed	N/A
Seymour School District	Naugatuck Valley Planning Region	ACES
Shelton School District	Naugatuck Valley Planning Region	Cooperative Educational Services
Simsbury School District	Capitol Planning Region	CREC
Somers School District	Capitol Planning Region	CREC
South Windsor School District	Capitol Planning Region	CREC

Response to X2 (Organization or District)	Geographic Region	RESC
Southington School District	Capitol Planning Region	CREC
Stafford School District	Capitol Planning Region	EASTCONN
Stamford School District	Western Connecticut Planning Region	Cooperative Educational Services
Statewide	Statewide	N/A
Stratford School District	Greater Bridgeport Planning Region	Cooperative Educational Services
Suffield School District	Capitol Planning Region	CREC
The Bridge Academy District	Charter School District	Cooperative Educational Services
The Woodstock Academy District	Northeastern Connecticut Planning Region	EASTCONN
Thompson School District	Northeastern Connecticut Planning Region	EASTCONN
Tolland School District	Capitol Planning Region	EASTCONN
Torrington School District	Northwest Hills Planning Region	EdAdvance
Trumbull School District	Greater Bridgeport Planning Region	Cooperative Educational Services
Unified School District #1	Unified School District	CREC
Unified School District #2	Unified School District	ACES
University of Connecticut	Higher Education Institution	N/A
University of Hartford	Higher Education Institution	N/A

Response to X2 (Organization or District)	Geographic Region	RESC
Vernon School District	Capitol Planning Region	CREC
Voluntown School District	Northeastern Connecticut Planning Region	EASTCONN
Wallingford School District	South Central Connecticut Planning Region	ACES
Waterbury School District	Naugatuck Valley Planning Region	ACES
Waterford School District	Southeastern Connecticut Planning Region	LEARN
Watertown School District	Naugatuck Valley Planning Region	EdAdvance
West Hartford School District	Capitol Planning Region	CREC
West Haven School District	South Central Connecticut Planning Region	ACES
Westbrook School District	Lower Connecticut River Valley Planning Region	LEARN
Western Connecticut State University	Higher Education Institution	N/A
Wethersfield School District	Capitol Planning Region	CREC
Willington School District	Capitol Planning Region	EASTCONN
Wilton School District	Western Connecticut Planning Region	Cooperative Educational Services
Winchester School District	Northwest Hills Planning Region	EdAdvance
Windham School District	Southeastern Connecticut Planning Region	EASTCONN
Windsor Locks School District	Capitol Planning Region	CREC
Windsor School District	Capitol Planning Region	CREC

Response to X2 (Organization or District)	Geographic Region	RESC
Woodbridge School District	South Central Connecticut Planning Region	ACES
Woodstock School District	Northeastern Connecticut Planning Region	EASTCONN

Appendix J: Survey Results

This appendix provides more detailed survey results, including results for each survey item as well as results for each survey item delineated by role.

All data cleaning, descriptives, and analyses were conducted in R (version 4.5.1; R Core Team, 2025⁴), and all code and data codebooks can be provided upon request. Of note, some items had missing data, even though every multiple-choice survey item was marked required to answer.

Role

The first survey item asked respondents to select their primary role and included a response option for “Other.” Importantly, respondents could be coded into more than one category. For example, a respondent who is a parent and a special education teacher would be counted in the “Parent/Guardian or Family Member” as well as “Special Education Teacher” roles.

Results Table X1. Survey Results—Primary Role

Role	% (n)
Advocate	1.66% (13)
Connecticut State Department of Education Employee	1.92% (15)
General Education Classroom Teacher	12.28% (96)
Higher Education Employee	1.15% (9)

⁴ R Core Team. (2025). *R: A language and environment for statistical computer*. R Foundation for Statistical Computing. <https://www.r-project.org/>

Role	% (n)
K–12 Student	0.13% (1)
Paraeducator	2.05% (16)
Parent/Guardian or Family Member	13.94% (109)
Policy Maker (e.g., legislator, Board member)	0.64% (5)
Related Services Professional (e.g., School counselor, Occupational therapist, Social worker, School Psychology, etc.)	13.30% (104)
School or District Administrator	13.68% (107)
Special Education Teacher	34.14% (267)
Technical Assistance Provider (including executive/instructional coaches)	2.05% (16)
Other Instructional Staff	2.05% (16)
Other	1.92% (15)

Note. Percentages were calculated using the total number of survey respondents ($n = 782$). “Other Instructional Staff” included roles such as early childhood educator, general education non-academic classroom teacher, reading specialist or interventionist, and TESOL/Bilingual teacher. “Other” included roles such as attorneys for board/district or families of special education students, community-based organizations, retired educators, taxpayers, union leaders, and multiple roles (not specified).

Item X2 asked respondents to provide their organization or school district and was optional to answer. Most respondents provided their school’s name or district’s name, while others provided their organization. This open-response item was cleaned to preserve respondents’ anonymity by grouping schools into districts, then districts into regions or regional educational service centers (RESCs). Notably, 20–30% of respondents did not elect to provide this information.

Results Table X2. Survey Results—Respondents by Regional Educational Service Center

Region	% (n)
Area Cooperative Education Services (ACES)	14.07% (110)
Capitol Region Education Center (CREC)	32.61% (255)
Cooperative Educational Services (CES)	11.25% (88)
EASTCONN	5.12% (40)
EdAdvance	7.54% (59)
LEARN	7.80% (61)
No RESC Specified	21.61% (169)

Note. Percentages were calculated using the total number of survey respondents (n = 782).

Results Table X3. Survey Results—Respondents by Geographic Region

Region	% (n)
Capitol Planning Region	31.97% (250)
Greater Bridgeport Planning Region	4.99% (39)
Lower Connecticut River Valley Planning Region	4.86% (38)
Naugatuck Valley Planning Region	9.34% (73)
Northeastern Connecticut Planning Region	2.43% (19)
Northwest Hills Planning Region	1.66% (13)
South Central Connecticut Planning Region	7.29% (57)

Region	% (n)
Western Connecticut Planning Region	10.10% (79)
No Region Specified	27.37% (214)

Note. Percentages were calculated using the total number of survey respondents (n = 782).

Leadership

The Leadership section of the survey contained six items and asked respondents to rate how effective they believed CSDE carried out each leadership function.

Results Table X4. Survey Results—Leadership Functions

	Not Effective % (n)	Somewhat Effective % (n)	Very Effective % (n)	Not Sure % (n)	Mean (SD)
Communicating a vision for supporting the success of students with disabilities (X3_1)	24.81% (194)	48.85% (382)	14.96% (117)	11.38% (89)	1.89 (0.66)
Providing statewide oversight and monitoring for special education services (X3_2)	29.80% (233)	43.35% (339)	13.81% (108)	13.04% (102)	1.82 (0.68)
Implementing a system of accountability for special education services (X3_3)	33.63% (263)	40.92% (320)	15.60% (122)	9.85% (77)	1.80 (0.71)
Using data to drive improvement for special education student outcomes (X3_4)	29.41% (230)	39.26% (307)	17.01% (133)	14.32% (112)	1.86 (0.72)
Providing clear guidance to educators and families on legal requirements for special education (X3_5)	26.47% (207)	44.76% (350)	23.15% (181)	5.63% (44)	1.96 (0.72)
Providing statewide leadership to improve outcomes for students with disabilities (X3_6)	39.00% (305)	38.49% (301)	9.72% (76)	12.79% (100)	1.66 (0.67)

Note. Percentages were calculated using the total number of survey respondents (n = 782).

Dispute Resolution

The survey next asked respondents to rate how effectively CSDE performs four dispute resolution functions.

Results Table X5. Survey Results—Dispute Resolution

	Not Effective % (n)	Somewhat Effective % (n)	Very Effective % (n)	Not Sure % (n)	Mean (SD)
Completing complaint investigations in a timely manner (X4_1)	11.01% (86)	18.18% (142)	11.40% (89)	59.41% (464)	2.01 (0.74)
Ensuring complaint investigations findings are legally sound (X4_2)	9.35% (73)	18.18% (142)	12.42% (97)	60.05% (469)	2.08 (0.74)
Sharing information from complaint investigations to increase understanding of legal requirements (X4_3)	19.10% (149)	19.87% (155)	9.23% (72)	51.79% (404)	1.80 (0.74)
Collaborating effectively with other state agencies (X4_4)	8.47% (66)	13.35% (104)	12.07% (94)	66.11% (515)	2.11 (0.77)

Note. Percentages were calculated using the number of respondents that answered, “Completing complaint investigations in a timely manner” and, “Ensuring complaint investigations findings are legally sound” (*n* = 781). Percentages were calculated using the number of respondents that answered, “Sharing information from complaint investigations to increase understanding of legal requirements” (*n* = 780). Percentages were calculated using the number of respondents that answered, “Collaborating effectively with other state agencies” (*n* = 779).

Collaboration

The next section of the survey asked respondents to rate how effectively CSDE collaborates with a variety of entities.

Results Table X6. Survey Results—Collaboration

	Not Effective % (n)	Somewhat Effective % (n)	Very Effective % (n)	Not Sure % (n)	Mean (SD)
Collaborating effectively with other state agencies (X5_1)	13.83% (108)	28.94% (226)	8.19% (64)	49.04% (383)	1.89 (0.65)
Collaborating effectively with school districts (X5_2)	22.63% (117)	34.40% (269)	13.94% (109)	29.03% (227)	1.88 (0.71)
Collaborating effectively with families (X5_3)	25.58% (200)	26.47% (207)	9.59% (75)	38.36% (300)	1.74 (0.71)
Collaborating effectively with student and family advocates (X5_4)	19.31% (151)	25.06% (196)	10.49% (82)	45.14% (353)	1.84 (0.72)

Note. Percentages were calculated using the number of respondents that answered, “Collaborating effectively with other state agencies” (n = 781). Percentages were calculated using the number of respondents that answered, “Collaborating effectively with school districts,” “Collaborating effectively with families,” and “Collaborating effectively with student and family advocates” (n = 782).

Guidance

The last multiple-choice section of the survey asked respondents to rate how effectively the CSDE performs three guidance functions.

Results Table X7. Survey Results—Guidance

	Not Effective % (n)	Somewhat Effective % (n)	Very Effective % (n)	Not Sure % (n)	Mean (SD)
Partnering with the field to ensure students receive services from a qualified workforce (teachers, related service providers, paraeducators, etc.) (X6_1)	36.03% (281)	36.92% (288)	10.90% (85)	16.15% (126)	1.70 (0.69)
Supporting the field to understand evidence-based practices for teaching and learning for students with disabilities (X6_2)	35.77% (279)	38.72% (302)	12.56% (98)	12.95% (101)	1.73 (0.70)
Supporting the field to understand legal requirements for special education services for students with disabilities (X6_3)	27.82% (217)	41.03% (320)	16.15% (126)	15.00% (117)	1.86 (0.71)

Note. Percentages were calculated using the number of respondents that answered these items (n = 780).

Differences by Role

These next tables delineate each survey item by role.

Results Table X8. Survey Results—Differences by Role: Communicating a vision for supporting the success of students with disabilities (X3_1)

	Not Effective % (n)	Somewhat Effective % (n)	Very Effective % (n)	Not Sure % (n)	Mean (SD)
All Respondents	24.81% (194)	48.85% (382)	14.96% (117)	11.38% (89)	1.89 (0.66)

	Not Effective % (n)	Somewhat Effective % (n)	Very Effective % (n)	Not Sure % (n)	Mean (SD)
General Education Teachers	37.50% (36)	34.38% (33)	6.25% (6)	21.88% (21)	1.60 (0.64)
Parent/Guardian or Family Members	34.86% (38)	38.53% (42)	13.76% (15)	12.84% (14)	1.76 (0.71)
Related Services Professionals	16.35% (17)	48.08% (50)	18.27% (19)	17.31% (18)	2.02 (0.65)
School or District Administrators	6.54% (7)	58.88% (63)	32.71% (35)	1.87% (2)	2.27 (0.58)
Special Education Teachers	27.72% (74)	53.56% (143)	9.36% (25)	9.36% (25)	1.80 (0.61)

Note. Percentages were calculated using the total number of survey respondents by role. For example, 34.38% of general education teachers selected “Somewhat Effective.”

Results Table X9. Survey Results—Differences by Role: Providing statewide oversight and monitoring for special education services (X3_2)

	Not Effective % (n)	Somewhat Effective % (n)	Very Effective % (n)	Not Sure % (n)	Mean (SD)
All Respondents	29.80% (233)	43.35% (339)	13.81% (108)	13.04% (102)	1.82 (0.68)
General Education Teachers	48.96% (47)	27.08% (26)	2.08% (2)	21.88% (21)	1.40 (0.55)
Parent/Guardian or Family Members	44.95% (49)	31.19% (34)	9.17% (10)	14.68% (16)	1.58 (0.68)
Related Services Professionals	18.27% (19)	55.77% (58)	13.46% (14)	12.50% (13)	1.95 (0.60)
School or District Administrators	7.48% (8)	59.81% (64)	27.10% (29)	5.61% (6)	2.21 (0.57)

	Not Effective % (n)	Somewhat Effective % (n)	Very Effective % (n)	Not Sure % (n)	Mean (SD)
Special Education Teachers	28.84% (77)	45.32% (121)	13.48% (36)	12.36% (33)	1.82 (0.67)

Note. Percentages were calculated using the total number of survey respondents by role. For example, 27.08% of general education teachers selected “Somewhat Effective.”

Results Table X10. Survey Results—Differences by Role: Implementing a system of accountability for special education services (X3_3)

	Not Effective % (n)	Somewhat Effective % (n)	Very Effective % (n)	Not Sure % (n)	Mean (SD)
All Respondents	33.63% (263)	40.92% (320)	15.60% (122)	9.85% (77)	1.80 (0.71)
General Education Teachers	60.42% (58)	20.83% (20)	2.08% (2)	16.67% (16)	1.30 (0.51)
Parent/Guardian or Family Members	51.38% (56)	28.44% (31)	10.09% (11)	10.09% (11)	1.54 (0.69)
Related Services Professionals	22.12% (23)	54.81% (57)	11.54% (12)	11.54% (12)	1.88 (0.61)
School or District Administrators	7.48% (8)	60.75% (65)	30.84% (33)	0.93% (1)	2.24 (0.58)
Special Education Teachers	30.34% (81)	41.20% (110)	17.98% (48)	10.49% (28)	1.86 (0.72)

Note. Percentages were calculated using the total number of survey respondents by role. For example, 20.83% of general education teachers selected “Somewhat Effective.”

Results Table X11. Survey Results—Differences by Role: Using data to drive improvement for special education student outcomes (X3_4)

	Not Effective % (n)	Somewhat Effective % (n)	Very Effective % (n)	Not Sure % (n)	Mean (SD)
All Respondents	29.41% (230)	39.26% (307)	17.01% (133)	14.32% (112)	1.86 (0.72)
General Education Teachers	39.58% (38)	35.42% (34)	7.29% (7)	17.71% (17)	1.61 (0.65)
Parent/Guardian or Family Members	41.28% (45)	32.11% (35)	8.26% (9)	18.35% (20)	1.60 (0.67)
Related Services Professionals	24.04% (25)	40.38% (42)	19.23% (20)	16.35% (17)	1.94 (0.72)
School or District Administrators	21.50% (23)	43.93% (47)	28.04% (30)	6.54% (7)	2.07 (0.73)
Special Education Teachers	29.21% (78)	40.07% (107)	16.85% (45)	13.86% (37)	1.86 (0.72)

Note. Percentages were calculated using the total number of survey respondents by role. For example, 35.42% of general education teachers selected “Somewhat Effective.”

Results Table X12. Survey Results—Differences by Role: Providing clear guidance to educators and families on legal requirements for special education (X3_5)

	Not Effective % (n)	Somewhat Effective % (n)	Very Effective % (n)	Not Sure % (n)	Mean (SD)
All Respondents	26.47% (207)	44.76% (350)	23.15% (181)	5.63% (44)	1.96 (0.72)
General Education Teachers	33.33% (32)	43.75% (42)	12.50% (12)	10.42% (10)	1.77 (0.68)
Parent/Guardian or Family Members	42.20% (46)	35.78% (39)	17.43% (19)	4.59% (5)	1.74 (0.75)

	Not Effective % (n)	Somewhat Effective % (n)	Very Effective % (n)	Not Sure % (n)	Mean (SD)
Related Services Professionals	18.27% (19)	51.92% (54)	24.04% (25)	5.77% (6)	2.06 (0.67)
School or District Administrators	14.02% (15)	46.73% (50)	37.38% (40)	1.87% (2)	2.24 (0.69)
Special Education Teachers	26.22% (70)	46.44% (124)	22.47% (60)	4.87% (13)	1.96 (0.72)

Note. Percentages were calculated using the total number of survey respondents by role. For example, 43.75% of general education teachers selected “Somewhat Effective.”

Results Table X13. Survey Results—Differences by Role: Providing statewide leadership to improve outcomes for students with disabilities (X3_6)

	Not Effective % (n)	Somewhat Effective % (n)	Very Effective % (n)	Not Sure % (n)	Mean (SD)
All Respondents	39.00% (305)	38.49% (301)	9.72% (76)	12.79% (100)	1.66 (0.67)
General Education Teachers	43.75% (42)	36.46% (35)	1.04% (1)	18.75% (18)	1.47 (0.53)
Parent/Guardian or Family Members	44.04% (48)	33.94% (37)	6.42% (7)	15.60% (17)	1.55 (0.64)
Related Services Professionals	34.62% (36)	44.23% (46)	5.77% (6)	15.38% (16)	1.66 (0.60)
School or District Administrators	26.17% (28)	49.53% (53)	21.50% (23)	2.80% (3)	1.95 (0.70)
Special Education Teachers	43.45% (116)	35.96% (96)	7.12% (19)	13.48% (36)	1.58 (0.64)

Note. Percentages were calculated using the total number of survey respondents by role. For example, 36.46% of general education teachers selected “Somewhat Effective.”

Results Table X14. Survey Results—Differences by Role: Completing complaint investigations in a timely manner (X4_1)

	Not Effective % (n)	Somewhat Effective % (n)	Very Effective % (n)	Not Sure % (n)	Mean (SD)
All Respondents	11.01% (86)	18.18% (142)	11.40% (89)	59.41% (464)	2.01 (0.74)
General Education Teachers	11.46% (11)	17.71% (17)	5.21% (5)	65.63% (63)	1.82 (0.68)
Parent/Guardian or Family Members	25.69% (28)	21.10% (23)	6.42% (7)	46.79% (51)	1.64 (0.69)
Related Services Professionals	6.73% (7)	10.58% (11)	7.69% (8)	75.00% (78)	2.04 (0.77)
School or District Administrators	4.67% (5)	23.36% (25)	28.04% (30)	43.93% (47)	2.42 (0.65)
Special Education Teachers	8.65% (23)	15.04% (40)	10.53% (28)	65.79% (175)	2.05 (0.75)

Note. Percentages were calculated using the total number of survey respondents by role. For example, 17.71% of general education teachers selected “Somewhat Effective.”

Results Table X15. Survey Results—Differences by Role: Ensuring complaint investigations findings are legally sound (X4_2)

	Not Effective % (n)	Somewhat Effective % (n)	Very Effective % (n)	Not Sure % (n)	Mean (SD)
All Respondents	9.35% (73)	18.18% (142)	12.42% (97)	60.05% (469)	2.08 (0.74)
General Education Teachers	3.13% (3)	23.96% (23)	6.25% (6)	66.67% (64)	2.09 (0.53)
Parent/Guardian or Family Members	22.02% (24)	13.76% (15)	7.34% (8)	56.88% (62)	1.66 (0.76)

	Not Effective % (n)	Somewhat Effective % (n)	Very Effective % (n)	Not Sure % (n)	Mean (SD)
Related Services Professionals	6.73% (7)	11.54% (12)	9.62% (10)	72.12% (75)	2.10 (0.77)
School or District Administrators	5.61% (6)	26.17% (28)	26.17% (28)	42.06% (45)	2.35 (0.66)
Special Education Teachers	7.89% (21)	15.41% (41)	10.90% (29)	65.79% (175)	2.09 (0.74)

Note. Percentages were calculated using the total number of survey respondents by role. For example, 23.96% of general education teachers selected “Somewhat Effective.”

Results Table X16. Survey Results—Differences by Role: Sharing information from complaint investigations to increase understanding of legal requirements (X4_3)

	Not Effective % (n)	Somewhat Effective % (n)	Very Effective % (n)	Not Sure % (n)	Mean (SD)
All Respondents	19.10% (149)	19.87% (155)	9.23% (72)	51.79% (404)	1.80 (0.74)
General Education Teachers	15.63% (15)	21.88% (21)	3.13% (3)	59.38% (57)	1.69 (0.61)
Parent/Guardian or Family Members	31.19% (34)	17.43% (19)	4.59% (5)	46.79% (51)	1.50 (0.66)
Related Services Professionals	17.31% (18)	13.46% (14)	4.81% (5)	64.42% (67)	1.65 (0.72)
School or District Administrators	15.89% (17)	28.04% (30)	26.17% (28)	29.91% (32)	2.15 (0.77)
Special Education Teachers	16.23% (43)	19.62% (52)	7.55% (20)	56.60% (150)	1.80 (0.72)

Note. Percentages were calculated using the total number of survey respondents by role. For example, 21.88% of general education teachers selected “Somewhat Effective.”

Results Table X17. Survey Results—Differences by Role: Making sure hearing officers are properly qualified (X4_4)

	Not Effective % (n)	Somewhat Effective % (n)	Very Effective % (n)	Not Sure % (n)	Mean (SD)
All Respondents	8.47% (66)	13.35% (104)	12.07% (94)	66.11% (515)	2.11 (0.77)
General Education Teachers	8.33% (8)	17.71% (17)	6.25% (6)	67.71% (65)	1.94 (0.68)
Parent/Guardian or Family Members	13.76% (15)	12.84% (14)	9.17% (10)	64.22% (70)	1.87 (0.80)
Related Services Professionals	3.88% (4)	8.74% (9)	4.85% (5)	82.52% (85)	2.06 (0.73)
School or District Administrators	6.54% (7)	18.69% (20)	26.17% (28)	48.60% (52)	2.38 (0.71)
Special Education Teachers	7.14% (19)	11.65% (31)	11.28% (30)	69.92% (186)	2.14 (0.78)

Note. Percentages were calculated using the total number of survey respondents by role. For example, 17.71% of general education teachers selected “Somewhat Effective.”

Results Table X18. Survey Results—Differences by Role: Collaborating effectively with other state agencies (X5_1)

	Not Effective % (n)	Somewhat Effective % (n)	Very Effective % (n)	Not Sure % (n)	Mean (SD)
All Respondents	13.83% (108)	28.94% (226)	8.19% (64)	49.04% (383)	1.89 (0.65)
General Education Teachers	14.58% (14)	19.79% (19)	2.08% (2)	63.54% (61)	1.66 (0.59)
Parent/Guardian or Family Members	20.37% (22)	25.00% (27)	11.11% (12)	43.52% (47)	1.84 (0.73)

	Not Effective % (n)	Somewhat Effective % (n)	Very Effective % (n)	Not Sure % (n)	Mean (SD)
Related Services Professionals	8.65% (9)	25.96% (27)	7.69% (8)	57.69% (60)	1.98 (0.63)
School or District Administrators	7.48% (8)	33.64% (36)	17.76% (19)	41.12% (44)	2.17 (0.64)
Special Education Teachers	14.61% (39)	31.09% (83)	4.12% (11)	50.19% (134)	1.79 (0.58)

Note. Percentages were calculated using the total number of survey respondents by role. For example, 19.79% of general education teachers selected “Somewhat Effective.”

Results Table X19. Survey Results—Differences by Role: Collaborating effectively with school districts (X5_2)

	Not Effective % (n)	Somewhat Effective % (n)	Very Effective % (n)	Not Sure % (n)	Mean (SD)
All Respondents	22.63% (117)	34.40% (269)	13.94% (109)	29.03% (227)	1.88 (0.71)
General Education Teachers	23.96% (23)	32.29% (31)	4.17% (4)	39.58% (38)	1.67 (0.60)
Parent/Guardian or Family Members	27.52% (30)	25.69% (28)	14.68% (16)	32.11% (35)	1.81 (0.77)
Related Services Professionals	16.35% (17)	39.42% (41)	8.65% (9)	35.58% (37)	1.88 (0.62)
School or District Administrators	17.76% (19)	41.12% (44)	32.71% (35)	8.41% (9)	2.16 (0.73)
Special Education Teachers	26.59% (71)	34.08% (91)	9.36% (25)	29.96% (80)	1.75 (0.67)

Note. Percentages were calculated using the total number of survey respondents by role. For example, 32.29% of general education teachers selected “Somewhat Effective.”

Results Table X20. Survey Results—Differences by Role: Collaborating effectively with families (X5_3)

	Not Effective % (n)	Somewhat Effective % (n)	Very Effective % (n)	Not Sure % (n)	Mean (SD)
All Respondents	25.58% (200)	26.47% (207)	9.59% (75)	38.36% (300)	1.74 (0.71)
General Education Teachers	25.00% (24)	31.25% (30)	3.13% (3)	40.63% (39)	1.63 (0.59)
Parent/Guardian or Family Members	47.71% (52)	26.61% (29)	11.01% (12)	14.68% (16)	1.57 (0.71)
Related Services Professionals	22.12% (23)	20.19% (21)	2.88% (3)	54.81% (57)	1.57 (0.62)
School or District Administrators	8.41% (9)	32.71% (35)	19.63% (21)	39.25% (42)	2.18 (0.66)
Special Education Teachers	25.47% (68)	22.85% (61)	7.49% (20)	44.19% (118)	1.68 (0.70)

Note. Percentages were calculated using the total number of survey respondents by role. For example, 31.25% of general education teachers selected “Somewhat Effective.”

Results Table X21. Survey Results—Differences by Role: Collaborating effectively with student and family advocates (X5_4)

	Not Effective % (n)	Somewhat Effective % (n)	Very Effective % (n)	Not Sure % (n)	Mean (SD)
All Respondents	19.31% (151)	25.06% (196)	10.49% (82)	45.14% (353)	1.84 (0.72)
General Education Teachers	18.75% (18)	30.21% (29)	3.13% (3)	47.29% (46)	1.70 (0.58)
Parent/Guardian or Family Members	34.86% (38)	23.85% (26)	9.17% (10)	32.11% (35)	1.62 (0.72)

	Not Effective % (n)	Somewhat Effective % (n)	Very Effective % (n)	Not Sure % (n)	Mean (SD)
Related Services Professionals	16.35% (17)	18.27% (19)	5.77% (6)	59.62% (62)	1.74 (0.70)
School or District Administrators	8.41% (9)	25.23% (27)	21.50% (23)	44.86% (48)	2.24 (0.70)
Special Education Teachers	19.48% (52)	24.34% (65)	8.24% (22)	47.94% (128)	1.78 (0.70)

Note. Percentages were calculated using the total number of survey respondents by role. For example, 30.21% of general education teachers selected “Somewhat Effective.”

Results Table X22. Survey Results—Differences by Role: Partnering with the field to ensure students receive services from a qualified workforce (teachers, related service providers, paraeducators, etc.) (X6_1)

	Not Effective % (n)	Somewhat Effective % (n)	Very Effective % (n)	Not Sure % (n)	Mean (SD)
All Respondents	36.03% (281)	36.92% (288)	10.90% (85)	16.15% (126)	1.70 (0.69)
General Education Teachers	54.17% (52)	25.00% (24)	5.21% (5)	15.63% (15)	1.42 (0.61)
Parent/Guardian or Family Members	38.89% (42)	36.11% (39)	5.56% (6)	19.44% (21)	1.59 (0.62)
Related Services Professionals	24.49% (24)	46.94% (46)	6.12% (6)	22.45% (22)	1.85 (0.65)
School or District Administrators	28.97% (31)	43.93% (47)	14.95% (16)	12.15% (13)	1.84 (0.69)
Special Education Teachers	37.97% (101)	36.09% (96)	10.15% (27)	15.79% (42)	1.67 (0.68)

Note. Percentages were calculated using the total number of survey respondents by role. For example, 25.00% of general education teachers selected “Somewhat Effective.”

Results Table X23. Survey Results—Differences by Role: Supporting the field to understand evidence-based practices for teaching and learning for students with disabilities (X6_2)

	Not Effective % (n)	Somewhat Effective % (n)	Very Effective % (n)	Not Sure % (n)	Mean (SD)
All Respondents	35.77% (279)	38.72% (302)	12.56% (98)	12.95% (101)	1.73 (0.70)
General Education Teachers	41.67% (40)	34.38% (33)	6.25% (6)	17.71% (17)	1.57 (0.63)
Parent/Guardian or Family Members	38.53% (42)	34.86% (38)	7.34% (8)	19.27% (21)	1.61 (0.65)
Related Services Professionals	29.13% (30)	39.81% (41)	14.56% (15)	16.50% (17)	1.83 (0.71)
School or District Administrators	27.10% (29)	46.73% (50)	20.56% (22)	5.61% (6)	1.93 (0.71)
Special Education Teachers	40.23% (107)	38.72% (103)	10.53% (28)	10.53% (28)	1.67 (0.68)

Note. Percentages were calculated using the total number of survey respondents by role. For example, 34.38% of general education teachers selected “Somewhat Effective.”

Results Table X24. Survey Results—Differences by Role: Supporting the field to understand legal requirements for special education services for students with disabilities (X6_3)

	Not Effective % (n)	Somewhat Effective % (n)	Very Effective % (n)	Not Sure % (n)	Mean (SD)
All Respondents	27.82% (217)	41.03% (320)	16.15% (126)	15.00% (117)	1.86 (0.71)
General Education Teachers	40.63% (39)	33.33% (32)	6.25% (6)	19.79% (19)	1.57 (0.64)
Parent/Guardian or Family Members	32.11% (35)	37.61% (41)	9.17% (10)	21.10% (23)	1.71 (0.67)

	Not Effective % (n)	Somewhat Effective % (n)	Very Effective % (n)	Not Sure % (n)	Mean (SD)
Related Services Professionals	22.33% (23)	46.60% (48)	15.53% (16)	15.53% (16)	1.92 (0.67)
School or District Administrators	17.76% (19)	44.86% (48)	30.84% (33)	6.54% (7)	2.14 (0.71)
Special Education Teachers	27.82% (74)	42.48% (113)	14.66% (39)	15.04% (40)	1.85 (0.69)

Note. Percentages were calculated using the total number of survey respondents by role. For example, 33.33% of general education teachers selected “Somewhat Effective.”

Open-Response Items

The survey contained two open-response items. The first asked respondents to share details of any “bright spots” or areas related to CSDE’s effectiveness in serving students with disabilities in Connecticut. The second asked respondents to share any additional information about special education services in Connecticut.

Responses to each item were read several times to gain familiarity with the data, then coded into topic areas. Each topic area was then grouped into themes. Below, Results Table X25 provides each topic area, a brief definition, and a percentage of how many responses each topic area was present in item X7 and item X8.

Results Table X25. Survey Results—Thematic Coding of Open-Response Items

Code	Definition	X7 % (n)	X8 % (n)
Action	This code captured respondents’ desire for CSDE to do something, whether that be looking for or enacting new solutions or seeking feedback from relevant parties (e.g., SPED teachers, parents). This code also captured respondents’ experiences or beliefs that some actions are taken due to budget restraints. For example, providing (or not providing) special education services based on available money within a budget.	5.12% (15)	6.50% (23)

Code	Definition	X7 % (n)	X8 % (n)
Bright Spot	This code was applied to responses where specific individuals or positions were identified as “bright spots” in serving students with disabilities. Specific examples include Bryan Klimkiewicz and Commissioner Russell-Tucker.	5.46% (16)	0.00% (0)
Collaboration	This code captured interactions between or partnerships with different groups of individuals as well as different groups of individuals working together.	5.12% (15)	14.69% (52)
Communication	This code captured quality, avenues, and content of communication, such as whether communicating with CSDE was helpful or transparent, how CSDE communicates with stakeholders (e.g., email, notices, Twitter), how information trickles down from CSDE to teachers, and additional communication needs from CSDE.	17.41% (51)	13.56% (48)
Compliance	This code captured adherence to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, including experiences with the dispute resolution process and school or district monitoring and oversight.	6.83% (20)	14.12% (50)
Consistency	This code captured respondents’ desire to have uniform special education services, resources/supports, and experiences across schools, districts, and educators.	5.12% (15)	10.45% (37)
Connecticut State Department of Education	This code was applied to specific comments that mention the Connecticut State Department of Education, departments within CSDE, and its overall mission or purpose.	10.92% (32)	4.24% (15)
CT-SEDS	This code captured respondents’ experiences with CT-SEDS, including day-to-day use and rollout.	11.26% (33)	9.32% (33)
Disconnect	This code captured respondents’ observations and frustrations with the lack of connection or cohesion between (1) CSDE’s policies, expectations, and roles/responsibilities and (2) what schools and districts experience or need.	3.07% (9)	9.60% (34)

Code	Definition	X7 % (n)	X8 % (n)
Identification & IEP Services	This code captured respondents' experiences during the eligibility process, obtaining special education services, and receiving FAPE within the LRE.	9.90% (29)	15.82% (56)
Impact on Educators	The code captured effects on educators, including workload, salary, burnout, and dedication.	6.14% (18)	19.77% (70)
Impact on Students	This code captured respondents' observations about the impact of CSDE on students, including celebrating student successes.	3.75% (11)	4.52% (16)
Resources & Supports	This code captured resources and supports, including funding, staffing, instructional materials and practices, and professional development.	25.26% (74)	38.42% (136)
Suggestions	This code captured specific recommendations for CSDE to improve communication and meaningful involvement with different stakeholders, compliance with IDEA, and user experiences with CT-SEDS.	3.41% (10)	6.50% (23)
Remaining Codes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little to no experience with CSDE • Miscellaneous • No bright spots • Non-answers • Unsure 	18.77% (55)	5.93% (21)

Note. Item X7 asked respondents to share detail of any “bright spots” or areas related to CSDE’s effectiveness in serving students with disabilities in Connecticut. Percentages were calculated using the number of respondents that answered item X7 (n = 293). Item X8 asked respondents to share any additional information about special education services in Connecticut. Percentages were calculated using the number of respondents that answered item X8 (n = 354).

Themes

Three primary themes emerged from the open-response items from the survey. Each theme is presented below along with supporting quotes from respondents. Quotes are in italics and have been lightly edited for spelling and clarity.

Appreciation and a Call for Transparency and Guidance from the CSDE

The first theme centers on communication and guidance from the CSDE, with an appreciation and call for transparency and guidance. When stakeholders contact the CSDE or its

departments, the CSDE is typically accessible, responsive to needs, and knowledgeable. However, respondents still called for transparency and guidance, including knowing who to contact and receiving direct communication from the CSDE about legal topics.

From a school or district administrator: *Sometimes it is hard to know who to go to for support on certain topics related to special education. The directory is helpful for who to contact for non-specialized areas (e.g., school climate, MTSS, social work, etc.). It would be great if there was more clarity on who to go to for more topics related to special education.*

From a special educator: *I find the most helpful information is when the district is speaking direct language to use from the state, so there is NO room for confusion or debate. We want to do things legally and correctly, and need direct, correct guidance from the state to ensure we are following the law and procedures correctly, especially when there are constantly new special education teachers being hired, etc. Not all know the same level of information.*

Special educators in particular appreciated direct communication from the CSDE when they experienced a disconnect or a lack of communication from their school- or district-level administrators.

From a special educator: *Special education teachers should be a direct line to receive updates regarding special education laws and changes in state initiatives. Often, this is put on administrators to forward the message—and the message does not get properly dispersed to the appropriate people.*

From a special educator: *I think the breakdown is that without effective special education leadership in a district, the information isn't disseminated the way it should be. While I know it is cumbersome, it would be helpful to have direct communications (at times) from the CSDE to special educators or at least making sure that we are receiving effective communication from our district leaders about the things you are sending their way.*

For parents/guardians and families, guidance and communication from the CSDE was typically limited or difficult to access. Many voiced a desire for communication about their rights and the rights of their children, what to expect in the eligibility process, and what special education services are available.

From a parent: *I have found the CSDE website difficult to access and not user-friendly. As a parent, I am not aware of how CSDE can assist families with navigating the special education process, and there seems to be a lack of clear, accessible guidance.*

From a parent and general educator: *From both an educator and parent perspective, I do not feel as though the CSDE is communicative enough with parents or teachers. There are many things that are on the website, but it is difficult to access and not communicated to anyone very well. There are many ways to disseminate information that is accessible to ALL, and it does not seem to be happening.*

From a parent: *There are never enough notices/guidance to navigate a system of services. All research is laid on parents' shoulders. If we don't ask, we don't receive.*

Desire to Be Seen and Heard by the CSDE

The next theme addresses collaboration and communication. While collaboration and communication among stakeholders is occurring, respondents noted a disconnect between the CSDE, district and school administrators, boots-on-the-ground personnel (e.g., general and special educators, related services professionals, paraprofessionals), and parents/guardians and families. Across each of these roles, there was a desire to be seen and heard by the CSDE, especially when considering disconnects between what the CSDE expects schools/districts to do and what schools/districts can do with the resources they have.

Some individuals, such as related services professionals, felt completely excluded from communications or that the CSDE did not value their contributions *"In our state, special education tends to emphasize academic achievement more than functional performance. There is also limited understanding of how related services support students. Additionally, because occupational therapy practitioners are not recognized as certified staff, they are often excluded from state data on staffing shortages, performance evaluations, contributions to student outcomes, and participation in state initiatives."*

Related to this desire be seen and heard by the CSDE, respondents also noted disconnects between expectations set by the CSDE and what districts, schools, and educators were able to do based on the resources they have. Across stakeholder groups, respondents expressed frustration that the CSDE was implementing initiatives without providing clear guidance, resources, or training for educators and administrators to properly implement the initiative in question.

From a special educator: *They are usually very slow to issue guidance on implementation of initiatives or new laws leaving school staff confused and unsupported.*

From a special educator: *We need more trainings, workshops, conferences, etc. on all topics related to special education and with actionable, realistic information that makes sense in real time. Policy change can be a good thing, but it has to be realistic to implement. Approved outplacements also need to be treated as a valuable*

member of the education system and not thrown to the side and forgotten about for everything.

From a related services professional: *More support for students with IEPs is needed in districts. There is a disconnect from what the SDE wants and what is actually happening in districts. Resources and money for the resources are drying up by the day. Because of that, kids are getting what they truly need.*

From a related services professional: *Significant gaps in information and resources - lack of guidance about special education classifications and eligibility criteria leads to inconsistencies across districts and schools, often leading to confusion or mistrust from families. Often expectations or initiatives are rolled out prematurely with lacking resources, information, or training (huge example was CT SEDS). Website is poorly organized and has become substantially less useful than it was many years ago.*

Additionally, there was a desire for the CSDE to know what actually happens in schools and districts, seek input from individuals that are directly working with students and families, and act on that input.

From a school or district administrator: *Current SDE leadership seldom has solutions for the problems districts encounter. They talk the talk with catchy phrases at the Back-to-School Meetings but it's all show and no go.*

From a special educator: *The State has a completely broken special education department. Start talking with the special education teachers and the related service providers. We all know how to solve the problem without the State creating more problems. The State continues to make our careers even more stressful and are driving novice and veteran teachers out of the field. Listen to us!!!!*

From a related services professional: *The CSDE does not talk to the people doing the work. The people in schools.*

While some respondents noted the CSDE has, in the past, sought feedback from educators, many noted that the CSDE should continue to do this across different stakeholder groups and areas.

From a special educator: *When CT-SEDS came out CSDE invited teachers to a round table meeting to discuss and problem solve problems of practice. There needs to be more of that. We need to feel like someone at the state level knows what is really going on the ground.*

From a general educator: *CSDE Special Ed leadership needs to (1) collaborate MEANINGFULLY with other leaders at CSDE, and LISTEN TO THEIR INPUT; (2) instruct*

your district Special Ed leaders to collaborate MEANINGFULLY with other departments. This is a statewide problem that Special Education leadership thinks it's okay to work in a silo and dismiss important input and collaboration with others in the interest of students with IEPs and 504s. Work as a TEAM. People outside your department need to learn from you -- and YOU need to learn from THEM because you do not have expertise in every area, just Special Education areas.

Tension and Challenges in Providing FAPE within the LRE

The final theme addresses respondent experiences in obtaining or providing a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) within the least restrictive environment (LRE). Respondents tended to focus on tensions and challenges arising from (1) the eligibility process and (2) available resources and supports.

During the eligibility process, families described difficulties in getting their children the special education services they believed were needed. Some felt they were only able to get special education services by bringing an advocate or lawyer to school meetings or by filing an official complaint. Others felt they were taken advantage of when the school or district did not keep them informed of the process. Still other families avoided the eligibility process by taking matters into their own hands by hiring private help. Additionally, parents/guardians and families felt the dispute resolution process did not necessarily consider all relevant information and felt hearing officers tended to believe districts over parents.

From a parent/guardian or family member: *It is infuriating that school districts routinely get away with not following the law and relying on parents to not know their rights in order to serve the district's interest over what is appropriate for the child.*

From a parent/guardian or family member: *I am extremely disappointed in how hard parents have to fight to get the proper services in our town. We had to hire a lawyer.*

From a parent/guardian or family member: *I feel like with any system, it is a have and have not situation. Those parents who can afford advocates get better services/IEPs than those who can't. I would love a cadre of SDE workers whose job it would be to represent families/students through the PPT/IEP process. Much like public defenders. The advocates I reached out to, all thought my district was unreasonable/uneducated, but all wanted a \$7,000 retainer of which I would not get any money back even if it was just one strongly worded letter that fixed the matter. As a result, my child is getting good services where their peers with the same or greater needs are being left behind.*

From a parent/guardian or family member: *The system does not work for families. The school district we are in will not help our son. We've accepted that because we have the means to support him. We are paying thousands of dollars each month for additional supports out of pocket because the district will not qualify him for services. They continue to provide tier 3 intervention, he is in 4th grade, and they he has been in tier 3 intervention since 1st grade, yet he has never once reached grade level expectations. The system is broken and there is too much discretion left up to the individual in the district who is providing oversight.*

Conversely, school personnel described feeling like the system was stacked in favor of parents/families.

From a related services professional: *Schools have all of the responsibility, and it feels like no rights, whereas families have all of the rights with what feels like minimal responsibility.*

From a parent/guardian or family member: *When the districts are reminded that parents can contact the state, the districts work for the students with disabilities.*

Ultimately, stakeholders acknowledged a common goal of meeting student needs, but methods and processes of actualizing that goal were often affected by resources or supports and differences in vision.

More specifically, when providing FAPE within the LRE, school personnel noted a tension between the volume of student needs and the resources or supports needed to meet those student needs. For example, general educators noted high percentages of their classes containing students with disabilities or high needs while special educators noted high caseloads of students with disabilities and not enough time to provide special education services in addition to completing paperwork and meeting requirements. School and district administrators noted that shortages in resources or staff led to difficulties in maintaining compliance. These challenges were noted with observations that not all districts could provide the same resources and that it felt like some decisions were made solely based on budget or resources constraints, instead of student need. Adding to these challenges were differences in opinion in how to best meet students' needs, including role confusion between general and special educators.

From a special educator: *The current interpretations of FAPE and LRE are driven by expense rather than student needs.*

From a special educator: *I think we can always get better. I think it is hard because there are definite differences district to district in what services are offered and received. Philosophies differ, etc.*

From a related services professional: *Teachers and school staff work extremely hard given limited resources to fulfill all the legal requirements...Staff work really hard to do all the right things, but it seems like an impossible task. Between special education, 504, and MTSS, it's getting to be over 50% of students have individual plans for staff to implement, and considering that, they do very, very well.*

From a paraeducator: *It would be better if support services were provided in every school district, not just in the more affluent ones. I think there is a greater need for support services in low-income districts.*

From a parent/guardian or family member: *It is kind of a mess because everything is left to the local level. Funding and what kind of services are offered vary wildly between districts for student who have needs related to dyslexia, mental health, autism, etc., which is unfair.*

From a school or district administrator: *There are significant disparities from town to town.*

From a special educator: *In our district, significant equity concerns remain in the delivery of special education. A persistent divide exists between general education and special education teachers, particularly around clearly defining roles and responsibilities in supporting students. This divide is compounded by building leaders who often lack a full understanding of student needs and the respective roles of both general and special education staff. When key leaders such as the director of special education and the superintendent do not share an aligned vision, leadership challenges emerge. This lack of cohesion can pit special education supervisors and building administrators against one another, creating a culture of finger-pointing rather than collaboration and allowing some to avoid the difficult but necessary work of doing what is best for children...there is a lack of cohesive vision and shared understanding regarding disability categories and aligned expectations, leading to inconsistent practices across the district.*

Lastly, respondents noted burnout, workload, and recognition.

From a special educator: *Working with students and supporting them has taken a back seat to endless paperwork, spreadsheets, "next big thing" practices that take time away from our caseloads. Every year we are asked to do more and more with less and less time and then we are looked at as failing our students when they don't perform well on state testing, etc. There is a reason that people are leaving the profession in droves and enrollment in teacher prep programs are at all-time lows. We are undervalued, underpaid and given an increasingly impossible task every year.*

From a special educator: *Special education is at a crisis level in CT. Special education teachers are expected to perform twice the workload of general ed teachers, with little to no support or material. They often don't get lunches or preps due to constant PPTs or the incredible amount of paperwork. There is a reason there are so many job postings. Please work on resolving this.*

From a general educator: *There are so many classes with well over 50% of students with special education needs. The lack of attention to this creates unfair educational environments*

From a related services professional: *Caseloads are currently too large to allow providers to effectively meet student needs. In addition, paperwork requirements are extensive, yet there is minimal to no designated time to complete them.*

From a school or district administrator: *We are greatly, greatly, greatly struggling with the ever-increasing numbers of IEPs, autism, the level of need. We can't afford to keep up the staffing needs to meet this growing number.*