

Report on the Alliance District *Reimagining District Improvement*

CONNECTICUT'S MISSION: EMPOWER EVERY LEARNER'S JOURNEY

SCHOOL YEAR 2026-27



CONNECTICUT
Education

Inspired by the Artemis II mission

“NASA has been talking about this since 1972. I’m really excited for it — for the agency and for our country, and for the planet — humanity gets to do this...I really think it’s poetic; whenever we do something really big, we call it a moonshot. It’s become a common phrase, but it’s an uncommon action. I really think it’s neat that our generation gets a chance to do this.”

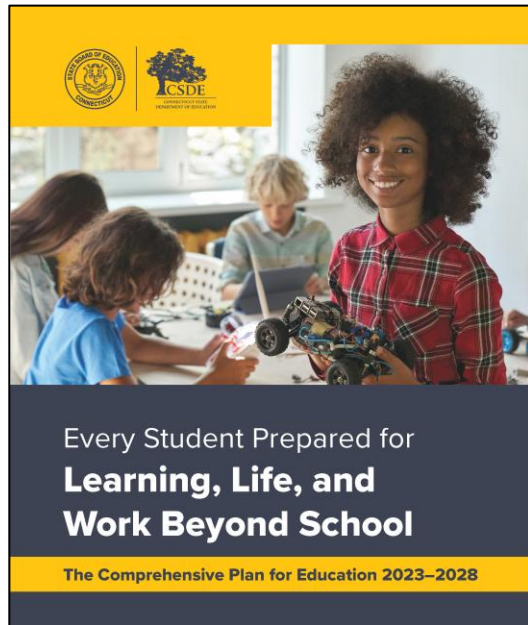
— Victor Glover, Pilot for the Artemis II Mission



Photo: NASA



Every Student Prepared for Learning, Life, and Work Beyond School: State Board of Education Comprehensive Plan (2023-2028)



Ensure Equitable Access to Education

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



Ensure Safe and Healthy Learning Environments

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

Elevate Curriculum Frameworks

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



Create Multiple Career Pathways

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



CSDE Strategic Focus Areas

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



Expand our Educator Workforce



Support Safe and Healthy Learning Environments



Ensure Students are Present and Engaged



Elevate and Support High Quality Instructional Materials



Modernize and Expand Post-Secondary Pathways



Improve Outcomes for All Students, including Students with Varying Abilities



Strengthen and Promote School, Family, and Community Partnerships



Connecticut Education Landscape



School Districts: 202



Schools/Programs: 1,564



Certified Staff FTE: 53,158



Non-Certified Staff: 50,865



PK-12 Students: 497,764

- 55.3% Students of Color (275,040)
- 44.7% White Students (222,724)
- 44.2% Eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch (219,819)
- 19.1% Students with Disabilities (94,960)
- 11.1% English Learners/Multilingual Learners (55,385)
- More than 180 languages spoken
- 4,875 students experienced homelessness and housing instability in 2025-26



Adult Learners: 18,960



Scan the QR code to access EdSight, Connecticut's education data portal.



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Connecticut Test Scores and Attendance Continue to Improve

*Math and Science Scores Improve for the Fourth Consecutive Year
Nearing Pre-Pandemic Levels*

English Language Arts Continues Upward Trend

Academic Performance Index Improvements Since 2021-22



ELA
0.8 ↑



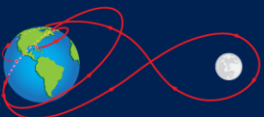
Math
3.1 ↑



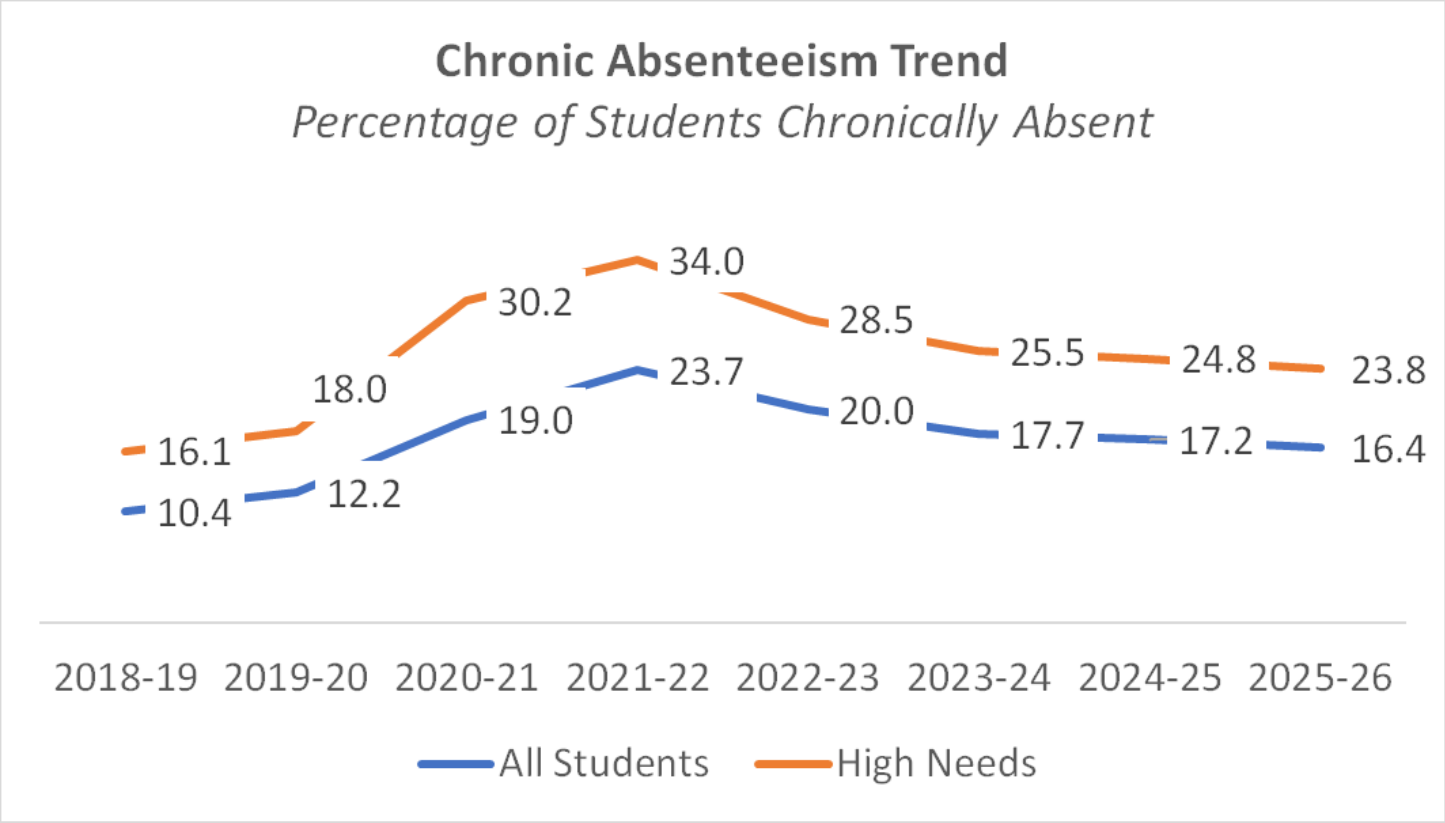
Science
1.7 ↑

Small improvements at the state level translate to thousands of students statewide performing at a higher level

Performance improved across nearly every student group



Attendance Improvements Since 2021-22



All Students
7.3↓



High Needs
10.2↓



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Background

How is a Town different from a School District?

Town

1-169

Student *lives* here

Elected Local Government

Fiduciary -- Works with BOE to
maintain schools

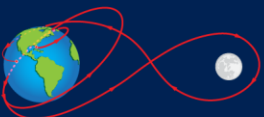
School District

1-200+

Student *learns* here

Elected Board of Education (BOE)

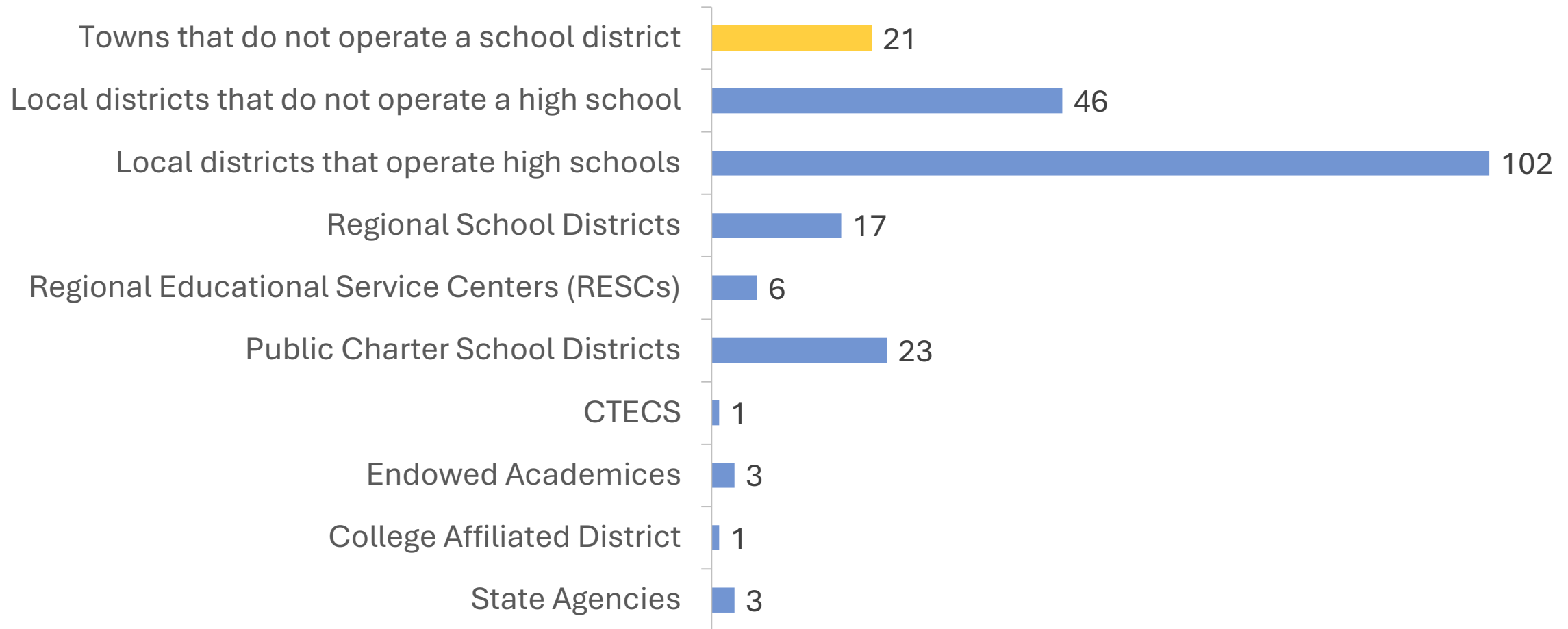
Maintains schools and implements the
educational interests of the State



Why do we have 169 towns but over 200 school districts?

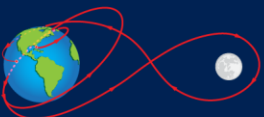
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Types of School Districts

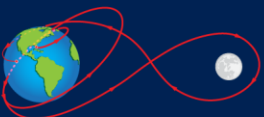


What about Magnet Schools?

- Magnet schools are schools, **not** districts
- Magnet schools are operated by different types of districts
 - Local districts (e.g., Hartford, Bridgeport)
 - RESCs (e.g., CREC, LEARN)
 - College-Affiliated District (i.e., Goodwin University Educational Services)



Federal Plan → Accountability → District Improvement



What are Alliance Districts?

- An approach to identifying districts in need of improvement
- Outlined in Connecticut's federal plan in 2011 (ESEA Flexibility)
- Established through Public Act 12-116 and codified in C.G.S 10-262u
- Originally 30 districts with the lowest district performance index (DPI) scores (DPI is based only on test scores)



Evolution of Alliance Districts

2012

- Originally established
- 30 districts
- Based on DPI
- Identified for 5 years until June 30, 2017

2015

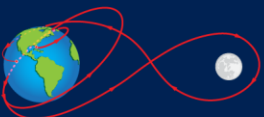
- 30 districts
- Based on holistic Accountability Index

2017

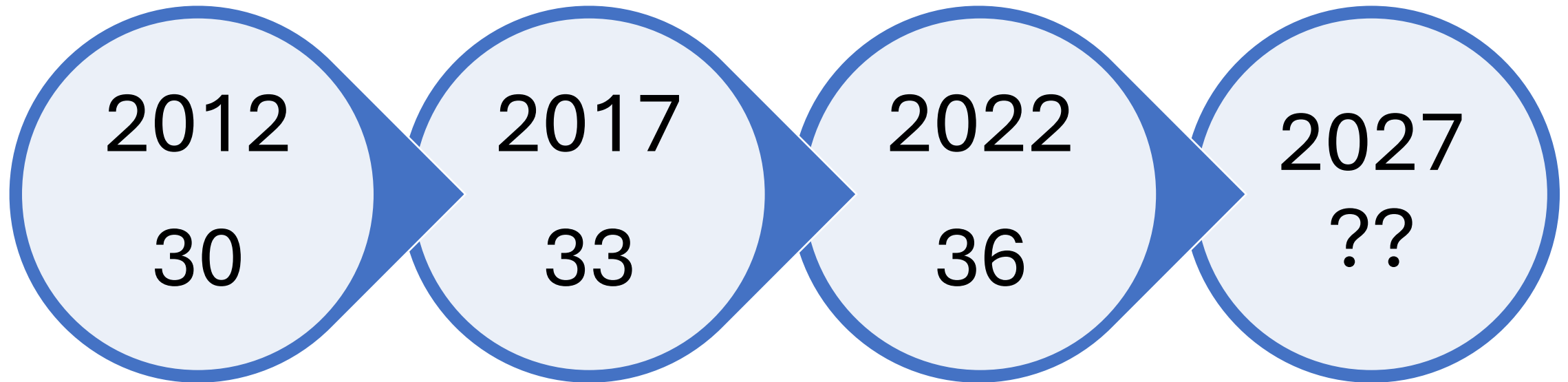
- 33 districts effective July 1, 2017
- All previously identified districts remain even if some improved
- Identified for 5 years until June 30, 2022

2022

- 36 districts effective July 1, 2022
- All previously identified districts remain even if some improved
- Identified for 5 years until June 30, 2027



What Next?



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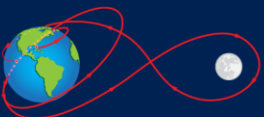


The Alliance District Report

Alliance District Report



- Required by C.G.S Section 10-262w
- Conducted focus groups with Alliance District superintendents, school business officials, and municipal leaders.
- Analyzed quantitative data sources (e.g., fiscal, student enrollment, accountability)
- Examined policy and procedural documents, and legislative reports



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Essential Fiscal Facts

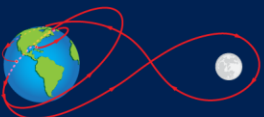
What is ECS?

Education Cost
Sharing (ECS)

State education
aid to the 169
towns

~\$2.5 billion in
2026-27

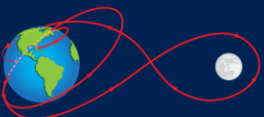
~1.9 billion or
76% goes to 36
Alliance Districts



How does ECS relate to the Alliance District Grant?

The Alliance District grant funds
are a portion of ECS...

Not a separate appropriation



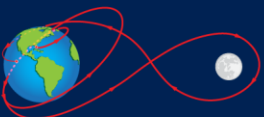
How is the Alliance District grant amount determined?

For 34 Districts

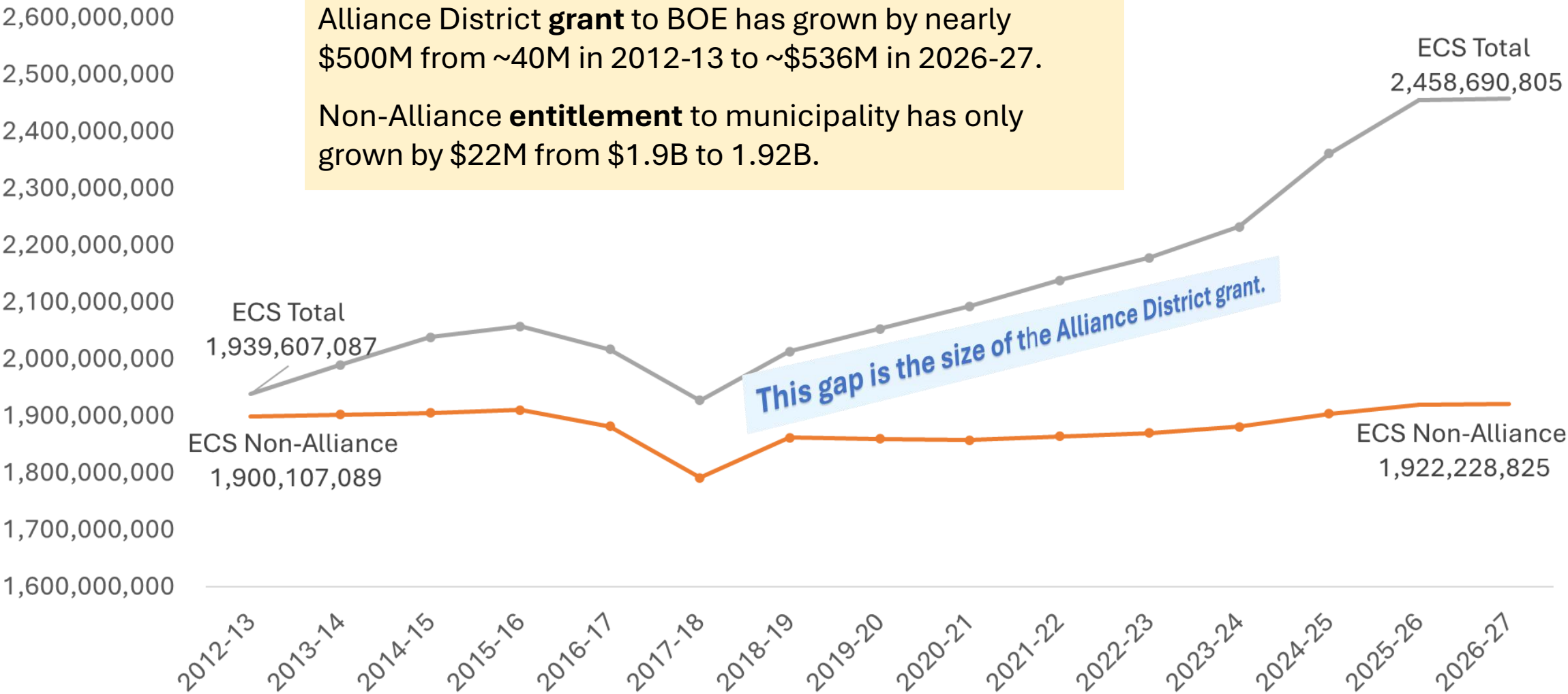
Any increase in
ECS over the
town's 2011-12
ECS allocation

For Two Districts

Any increase in
ECS over the
town's 2021-22
ECS allocation



ECS and Alliance District Grant Over the Years



Entitlements and Grants are Handled Differently

Entitlements

No application necessary

Paid automatically on a set schedule

E.g., All ECS prior to 2012-13

Paid to municipality after CSDE calculates the allocation

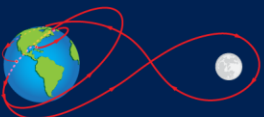
Grants

Districts must apply through eGMS

Requires CSDE approval before payment

E.g., Alliance District; After School; FRC

Paid to municipality after CSDE approves the expenditure



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Findings

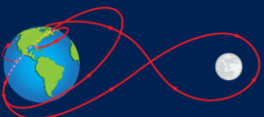
Direct ECS funding to BOEs prioritizes proven educational strategies

- Unanimous sentiment of superintendents
- Alliance District grant funds have helped to preserve critical services for students and staff
- Examples:
 - Academic coaches, interventionists, and tutors
 - Social-emotional learning screeners
 - Social workers
 - School safety staff
 - Expanded career pathways
 - Full day kindergarten and expanded pre-K
 - An ROTC program, after school clubs, etc.



Alliance District grant provides flexibility and stability for long-term planning

- Sustained, multi-year funding allows for continuity and development of critical organizational capacity
- Examples
 - Coaches, and attendance staff
 - New programs in areas such as welding, kitchen and culinary, and aerospace
 - In-district alternative and special education programming to reduce the cost of outplacements



Alliance Districts Improvements Since 2021-22



ELA
22↑

Math
31↑

Science
21↑



Attendance
34↑

4yr Grad Rate
24↑



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17 Alliance Districts



are Exceeding Pre-Pandemic Levels



in at least one subject

Other Notable Successes Among Alliance District Schools



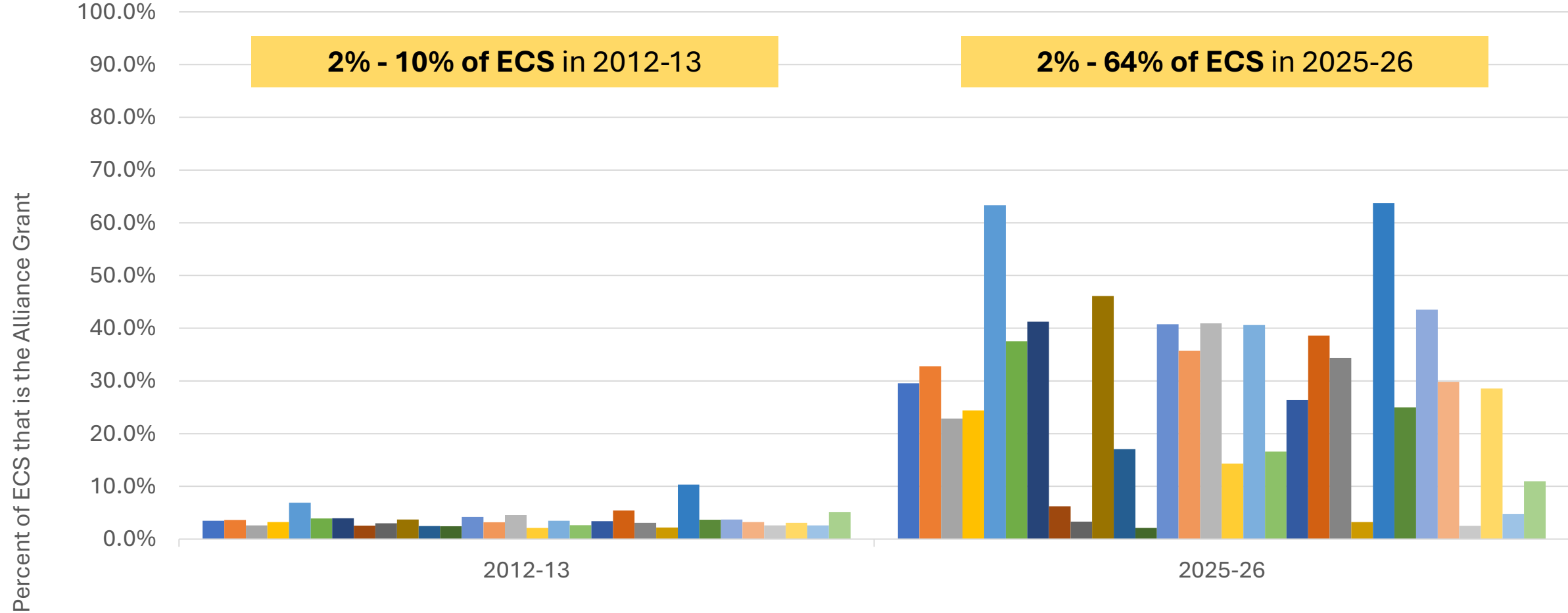
30-40
schools
annually



16 out of 44
schools
since 2015

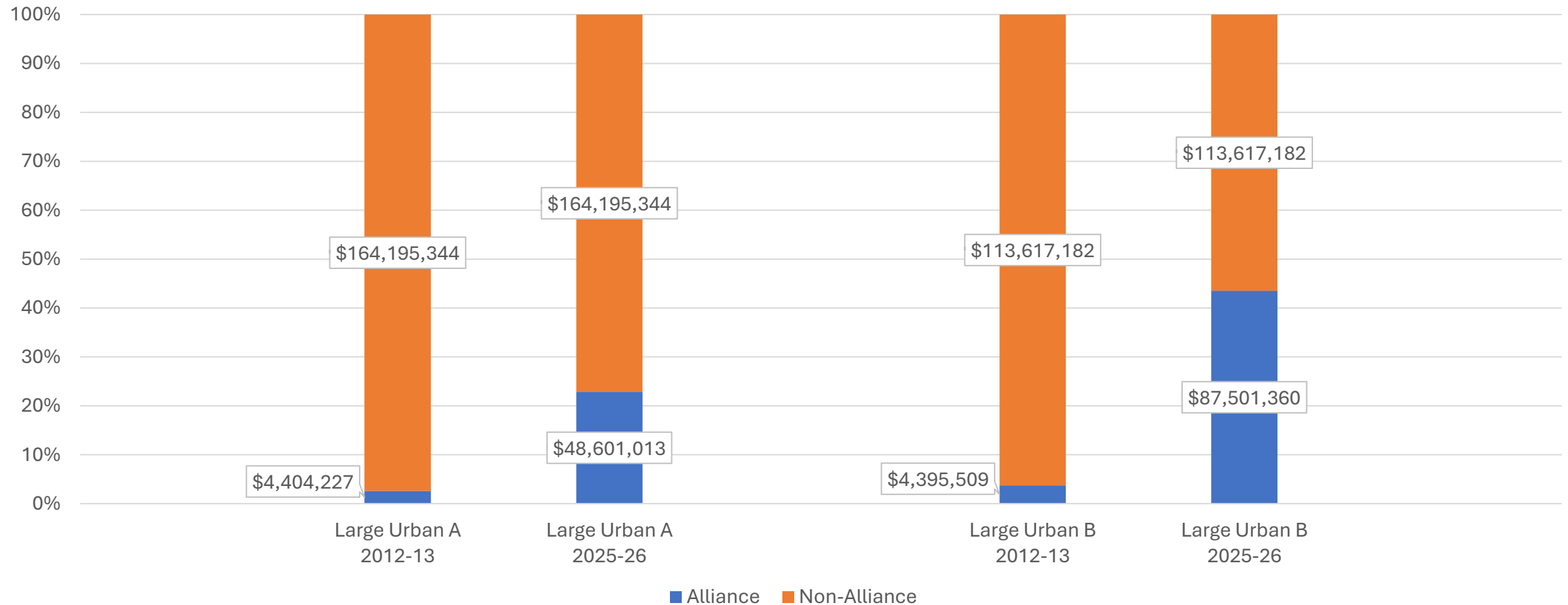


The Alliance Grant as a percent of ECS varies greatly among towns... and that variance has increased over the past 13 years

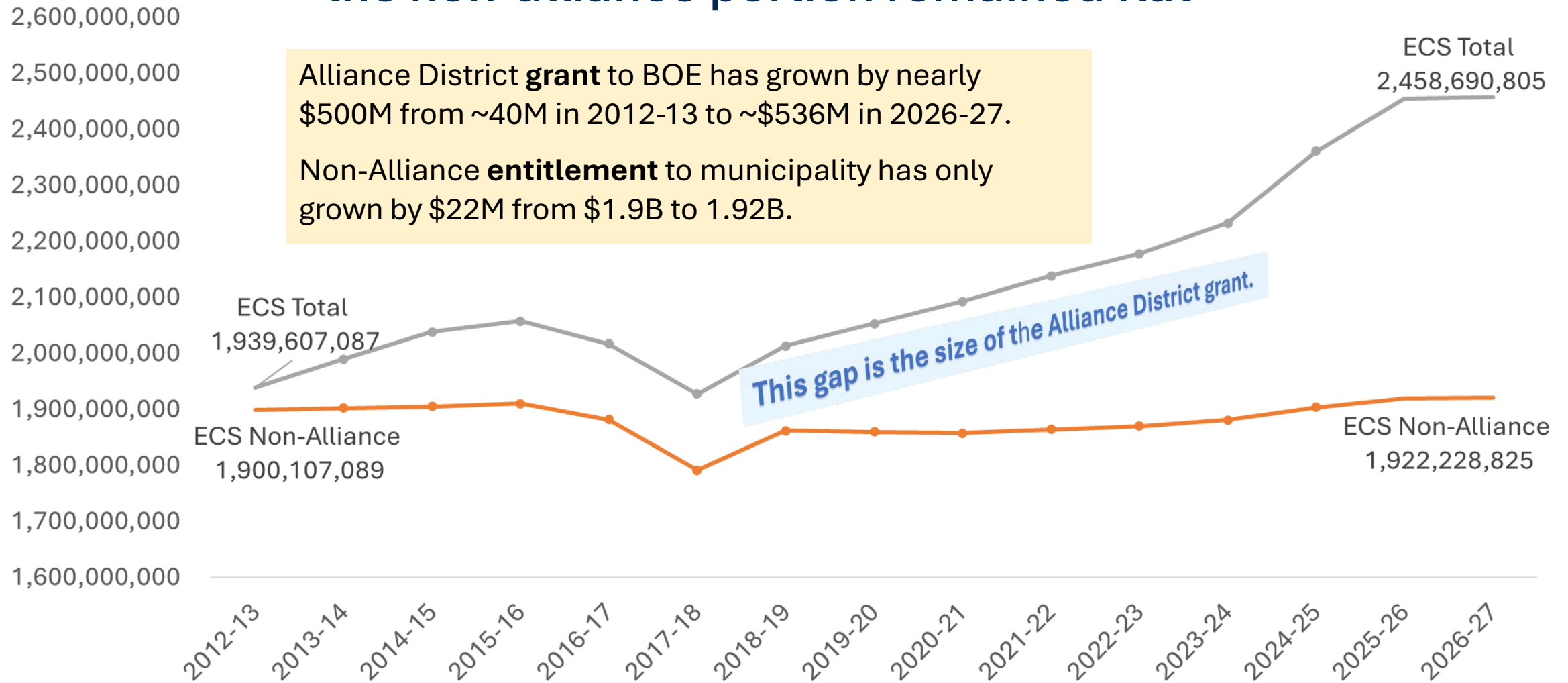


A Tale of Two Large Urban Districts

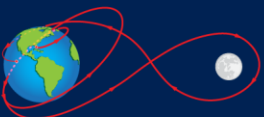
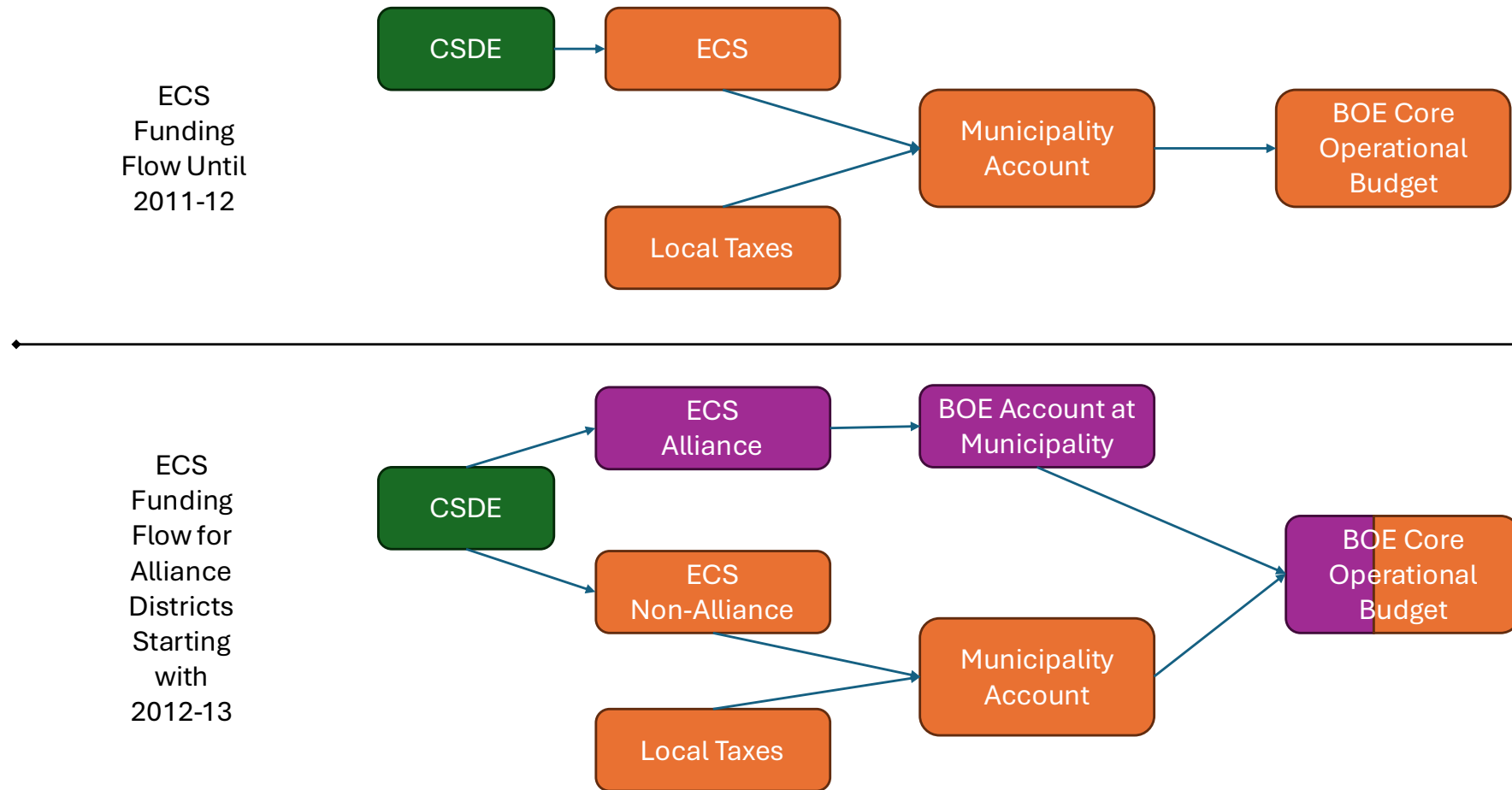
Change in ECS and Alliance Grant Amount over 14 years



While the Alliance portion of ECS increased, the non-alliance portion remained flat



Local operational budgets may now display two sources of funds



Minimum Budget Requirement (MBR)

C.G.S. Section 10-262j

- Designed to ensure that towns budget no less than what they did in the prior year (very limited exceptions)
- Only applies to the non-Alliance portion of ECS that is sent to the municipality
- Flat funding of the town contribution to education is permissible to satisfy MBR



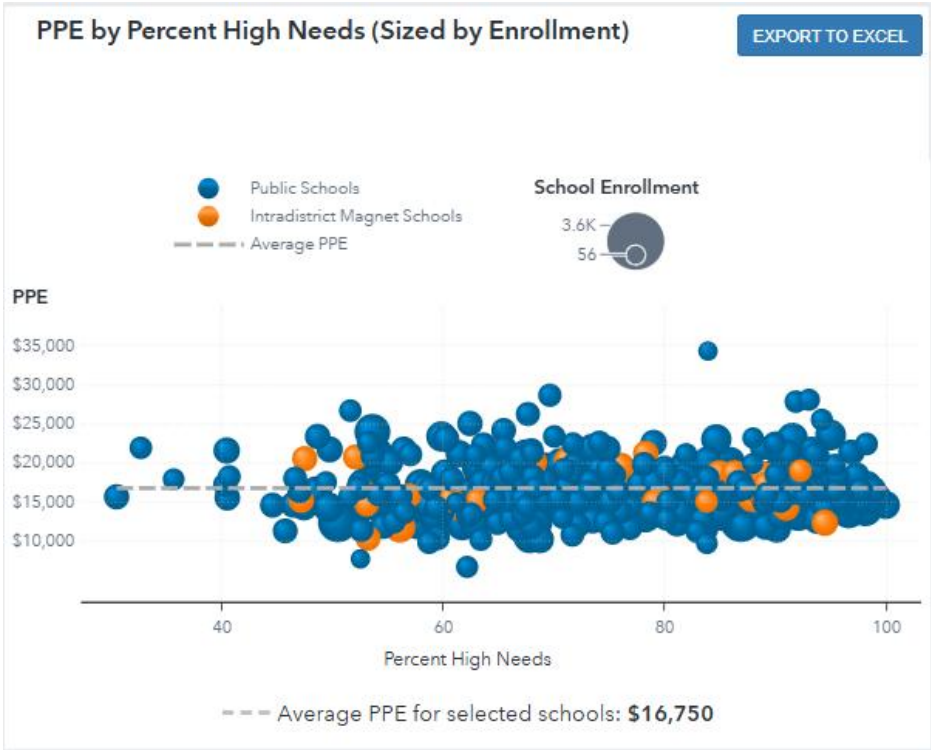
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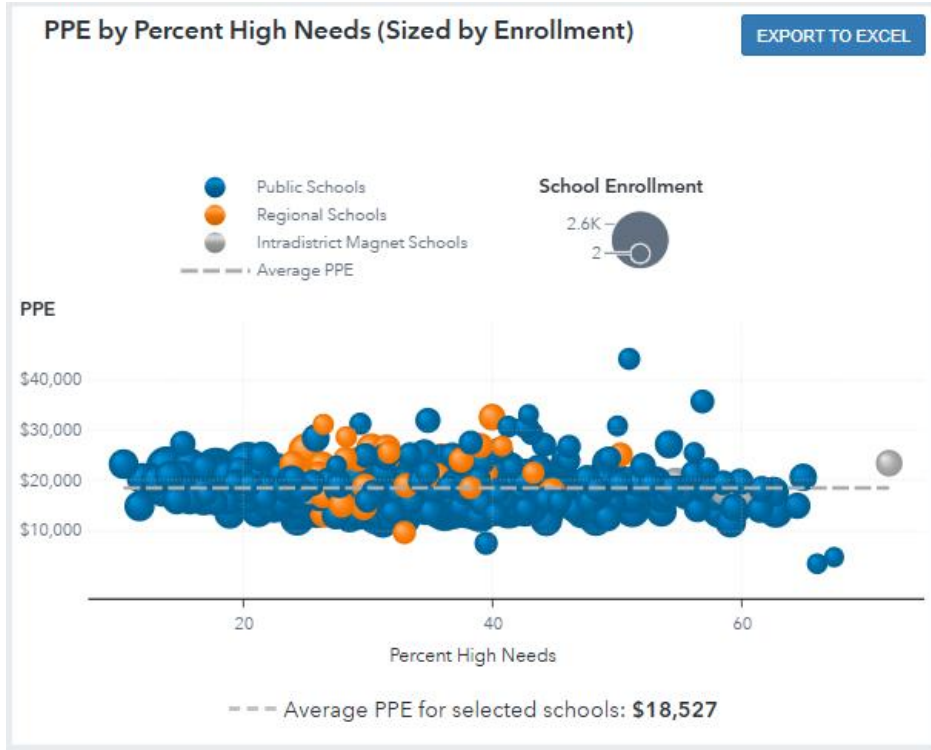
*Alliance District grant funds are increasingly being used for
core operational expenditures*

Alliance District schools spend about 10% less per pupil than other schools in the state

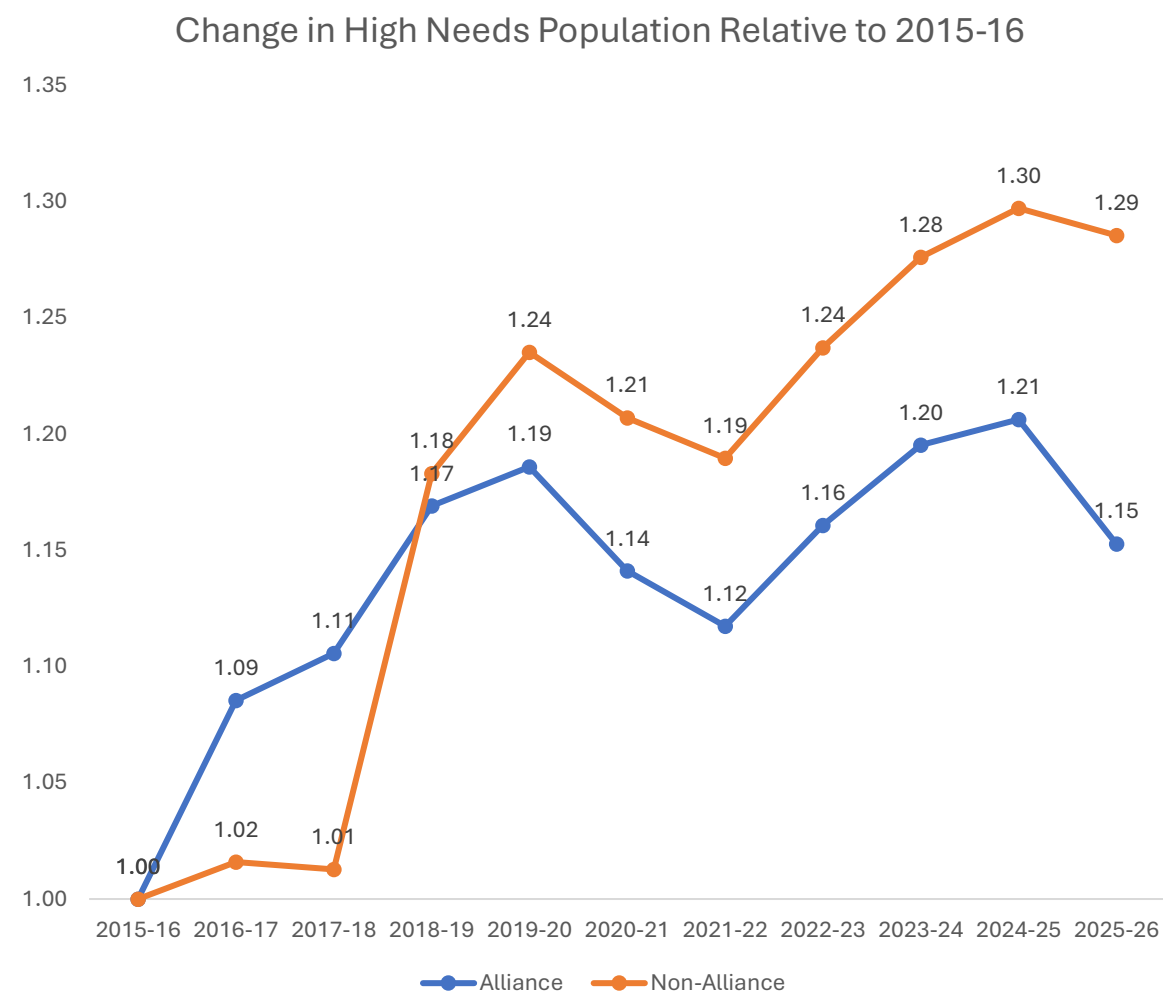
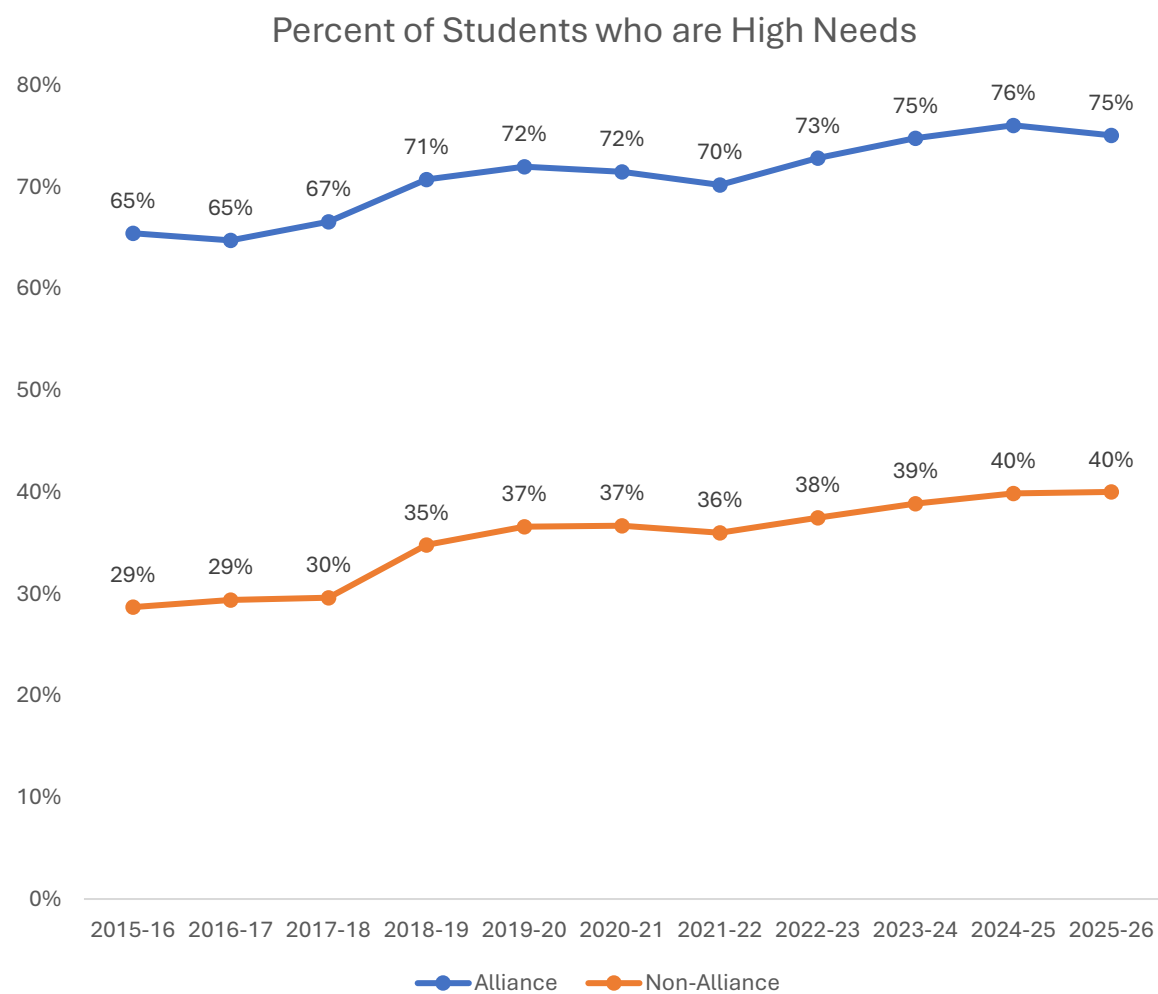
Schools in Alliance Districts
Average 2023-24 PPE: \$16,750



Schools in Non-Alliance Districts
Average 2023-24 PPE: \$18,527



Alliance Districts students are disproportionately high needs... but high needs students are growing faster in non-Alliance Districts



CSDE implements a comprehensive system of oversight and support

District Improvement Framework

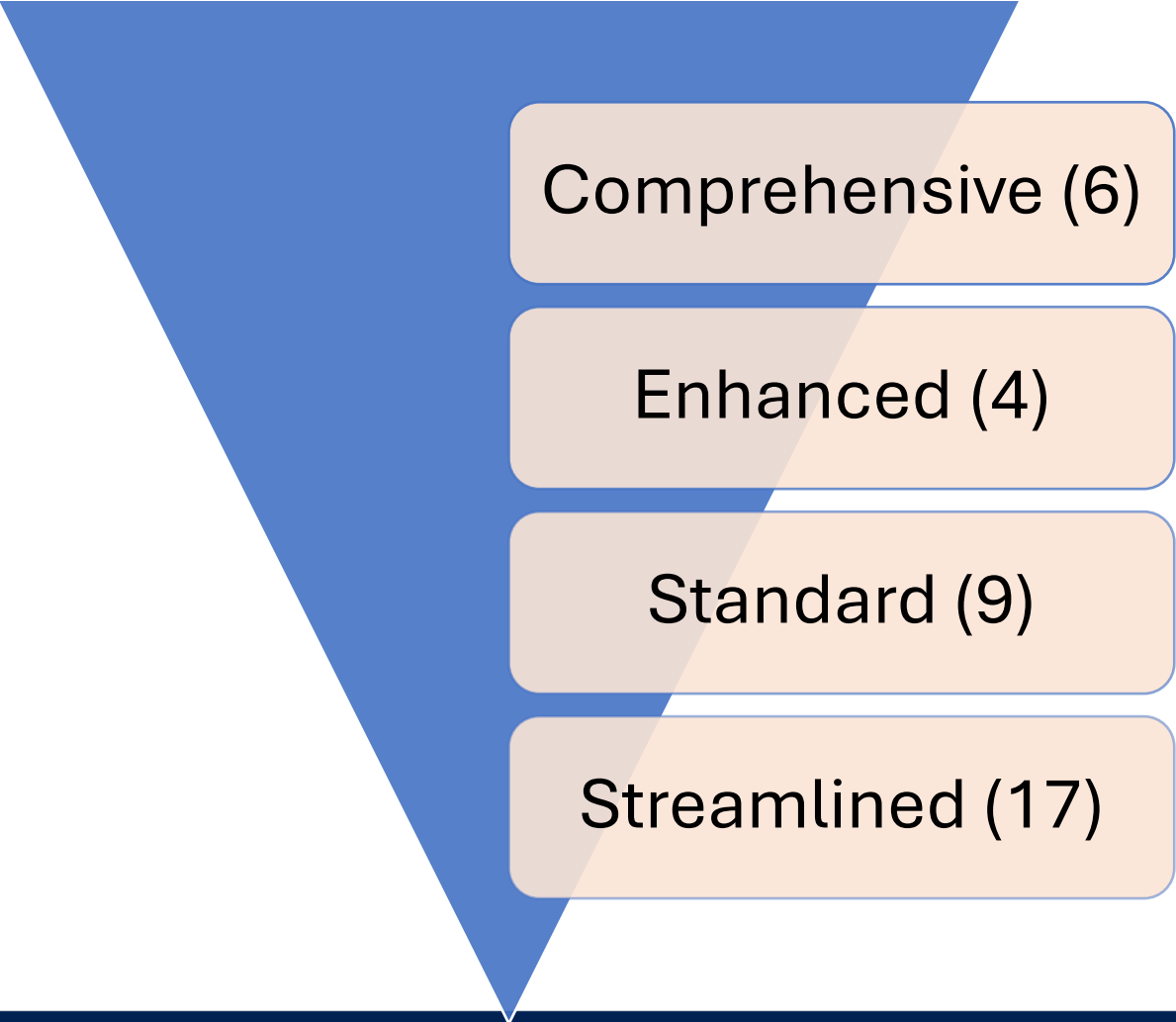
Academics • Academic rigor • Student engagement • Differentiation • Curriculum and instruction aligned to CCS • Supports for special populations • Assessment system and data culture	Talent • Instructional practice • Evaluation and professional culture • Recruitment and retention strategies • Professional learning • Leadership effectiveness • Instructional leadership
Culture and Climate • School environment • Student attendance • Student behavior • Interpersonal interactions • Family engagement • Community partners/Wraparound strategy • Restorative Practices	Operations • Adequate instructional time • Use of instructional time • Use of staff time • Routines and transitions • Financial management

Differentiated Supports

- Detailed plan and budget
- Onsite/virtual monitoring
- Data reviews
- CSDE Cross Divisional Team
- Symposiums/trainings



Differentiated Supports Based on Data Per Federal Plan



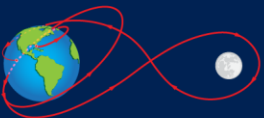
Comprehensive (6)

Enhanced (4)

Standard (9)

Streamlined (17)

91 monitoring
meetings in
total



CSDE Supports Overall Beneficial But Sometimes Burdensome

Strengths

- “Critical friend” with a “balcony view”
- Connection to resources and strategies
- Pushed them to seek more actionable data, utilize data in different ways, remain equity-focused, review resource allocations more closely
- Change practice

Challenges

- “Tracker” submissions a big lift
- Meetings time consuming and paperwork sometimes onerous
- Cash flow issues due to timing of funding
- Needs support with carrying forward unused funds



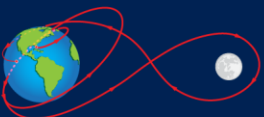
30 Ancillary State Statutes that Benefit Alliance Districts

23
Education

2
Higher Ed.

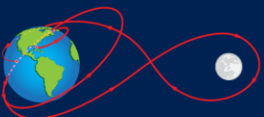
5
Other

- “Hold harmless” provision for ECS
- Greater reimbursement of certain municipal grants
- Designation as a Tier 1 in the state’s PILOT formula
- Educator loan subsidy program
- Reemployment of retired teachers
- Intensive early literacy intervention
- Teacher residency program partnerships
- Priority in school nutrition state grants
- Facilities improvement grants



CSDE Authorities with Respect to Alliance Districts

- District must apply for funds in manner prescribed by the Commissioner
- Application must include objectives and performance targets and an improvement plan
- Improvement plan must demonstrate collaboration with key stakeholders
- Commissioner can require changes to the improvement plan before approval
- The Commissioner may withhold funds if the local or regional board of education fails to comply with the law but renew such funding if district is achieving the approved objectives and performance targets
- The Commissioner may seek repayment of funds if they are not expended in accordance with the approved application or reduce subsequent year funding.



State Board Authorities in C.G.S 10-223e(e)(2) Relative to Districts Identified for Improvement i.e., Alliance Districts

- Require operations audit to identify savings and instructional audit to identify deficits, and direct development and implementation of a plan to address those deficits
- Require district to implement model curricula or other materials
- Direct use of state and federal funds
- Provide incentives for hiring teachers and principals, and direct their assignment
- Require training for all district and school staff, and parents
- Assign a technical assistance team to guide local initiatives and report to the Commissioner
- Require appointment of superintendent approved by the Commissioner
- Require board members to under training improve operational efficiency and effectiveness
- Identify schools for reconstitution or for management by an entity other than the local BOE
- Provide funding to any proximate district for students to attend public school in that district



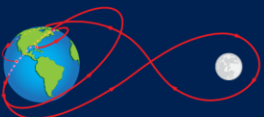
CSDE is Already Leveraging these Authorities to Intervene in Two Districts

District A

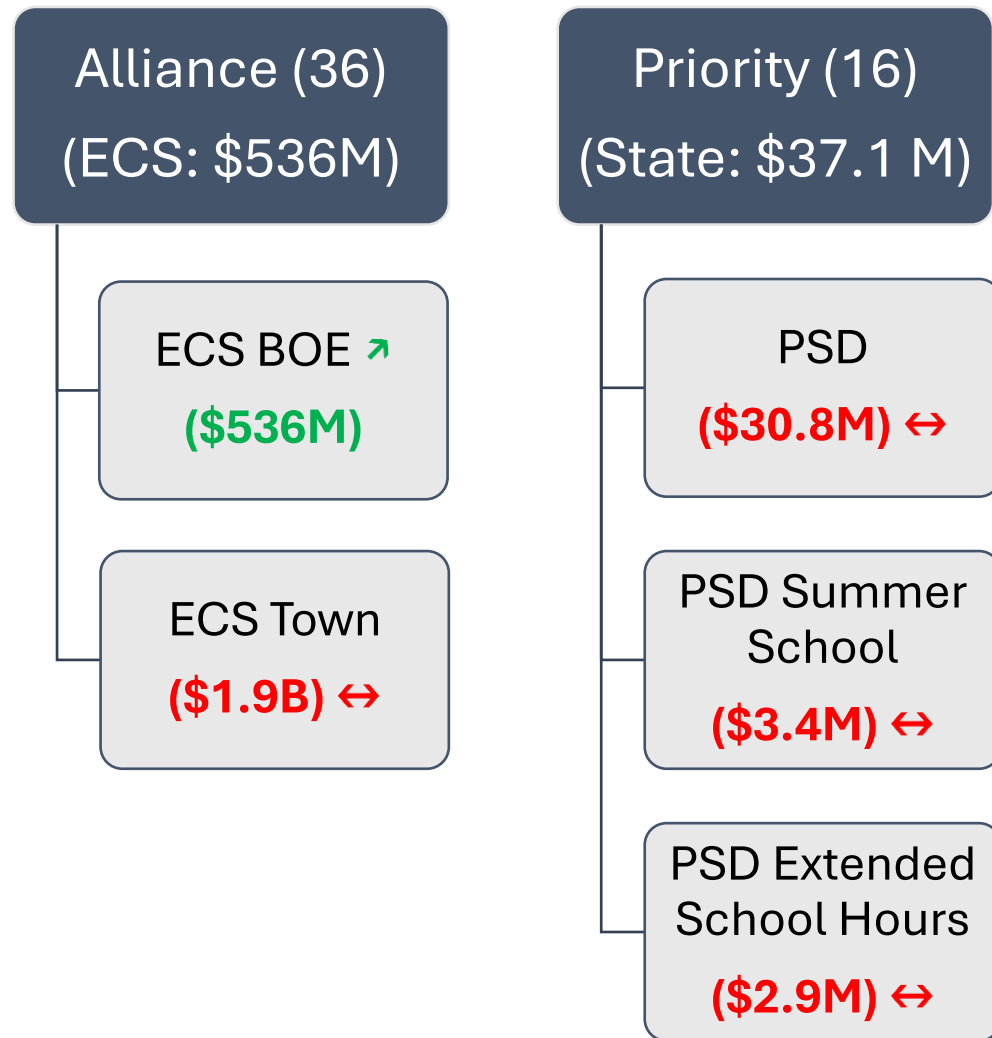
- 46 findings and recommendations for improving financial systems
- 6 findings and recommendations for enhancing special education services
- 3 findings and recommendations for optimizing the use of funds relative to magnet schools

District B

- More structured and transparent budget process
- Stronger oversight of special education services
- Continuing improvement in staffing and instructional systems
- Strengthening Board governance and school operations

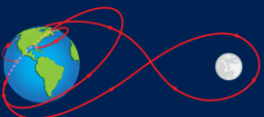


Current Model for District Improvement



Many successes but...

- Siloed funding
- Different rules
- Redundant paperwork
- Town increase not encouraged
- Small districts excluded
- CSDE supports spread thin
- Improvement discouraged
- Funding status quo operations



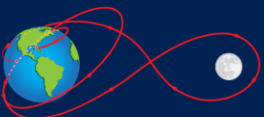
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Recommendations

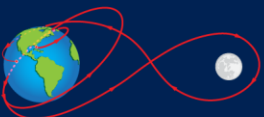
#1: Reimagine the Alliance District Program as the *Opportunity Network*

- Rebrand the program as the Opportunity Network
- Identify districts based on a combination of district performance and student need (e.g., districts in bottom 30 in terms of Accountability Index performance (or) bottom 40 in terms of proportion of high need students)
- Continue directing a portion of ECS (based on an established percentage) to the BOE through the Opportunity Network grant



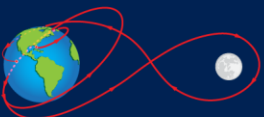
#2: Limit CSDE Supports to a Subset of Districts

- Limit intensive CSDE supports such as monitoring meetings and site visits to a subset of districts in the Opportunity Network e.g., around 12 to 15 districts
- Conduct primarily desk monitoring for all remaining districts
- Utilize existing data collection systems such as the CSDE's monthly attendance dashboard and interim assessment secure reporting portal for oversight during the year



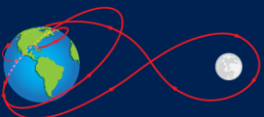
#3: Consolidate Priority School Districts into the *Opportunity Network*

- Designate a subset of districts within the Opportunity Network that exhibit a combination of the greatest student need and the lowest overall performance as the Priority School Districts (e.g., these could be the same 12-15 districts mentioned under recommendation #2 that are identified for intensive CSDE supports)
- Establish a single, logical set of rules and time periods for identification (e.g., every four years) and phased exit of all districts in the Opportunity Network (including PSDs)
- Consolidate disparate grant funds into a single grant to increase alignment and reduce redundancy



#3: Consolidate Priority School Districts into the *Opportunity Network* (continued)

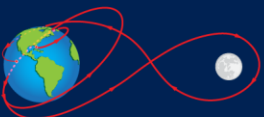
- Allow CSDE to retain up to 10 percent of the non-ECS funds appropriated for the Opportunity Network for oversight, evaluation, technical assistance, and grants administration
- Retain a portion of the PSD funds (e.g., 20 percent) to implement an incentive grant program for districts that show among the greatest overall improvement in the prior year, and expect leaders of improving districts/schools to serve as mentors for other Opportunity Network districts.



Recommendations #4 and #5

#4: Incentivize districts in the Opportunity Network to use a portion of their grant toward one or more evidence-based activities implemented by the CSDE (e.g., the Learner Engagement and Attendance Program – LEAP - home visits to improve student attendance, high dosage tutoring in middle school mathematics, dual credit expansion, K-3 approved curricula aligned to the Science of Reading)

#5: Stage the implementation to give planning time for local/state staff to implement the recommendations



New Vision for District Improvement

NEW Opportunity Network (~50) ECS BOE + State (~\$600M)

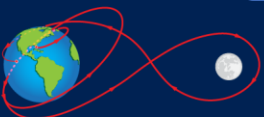
Single Streamlined Grant

ECS set-aside to BOE based
on percentage

Incentive grants for districts
showing improvement

CSDE supports and matching
funds for 15 priority districts

- Student Success Prioritized
- Streamlined funding
- Consistent rules
- Reduced paperwork
- Town increase encouraged
- Small districts included
- CSDE supports focused
- Improvement incentivized
- Funding is evidence-based



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**Big changes require
collaborative and
thoughtful
implementation**