Blue-Ribbon Commission on K-12 Education Funding and Accountability

ECS Working Session

MEETING MINUTES

October 6, 2026 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Zoom Meeting
Available for Viewing HERE.

Pursuant to notice filed with the Secretary of the State and posted on the agency's website, the members of the Blue-Ribbon Commission on K-12 Education Funding and Accountability (hereinafter "Commission") held a meeting on Tuesday, October 6, 2026 through Zoom video conference. The Zoom meeting was livestreamed to the public via the Connecticut Network.

Present:

Natalie Wagner, Deputy Chief of Staff in the Office of the Governor, Chairperson
Charlene M. Russell-Tucker, Commissioner of Education, Vice Chairperson
Mary Calorio, Council of Small Towns (President), Northeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (Regional Town Administrator & Director of Transit)
Kate Dias, Connecticut Education Association (President)
Justin Elicker, Mayor of the City of New Haven
Lisa Hammersley, School and State Finance Project (Executive Director)
Jenita Hayes, Children's Leadership Training Institute
Julie Kushner, State Senator, Senate President Pro Tempore Designee
Jennifer Leeper, State Representative, House Speaker Designee
Joseph Macary, Vernon Public Schools (Superintendent), Middletown Public Schools (incoming Superintendent)
Hamish MacPhail, ConnCAN (Deputy Director) (designee for Steven Hernández, ConnCAN)
Joshua Martin, East Granby Public Schools (Director of Student Support Services), Connecticut Council of Administrators of Special Education (President-Elect)
Joseph Martino, Pomperaug Regional School District 15 (Director of Finance and Operations)
Teri Merisotis (designee for Jan Hochadel, State Senator, AFT Connecticut)
Jeffrey Newton, East Lyme Public Schools (Superintendent)
Eric Protulis, EASTCONN (Executive Director)
Toni Walker, State Representative (designee for Gary Winfield, State Senator, Chief Deputy Majority Leader)
Hyclis Williams, New Haven Public Schools (Family Advocate), New Haven

Paraprofessionals, AFSCME Local 3429 (President)
Joshua Wojcik, Secretary of the Connecticut Office of Policy and Management

Staff: Elizabeth Chu, CPRL
Andrea Clay, CPRL
Devika Gurung, CPRL
Jess O'Connor, ERS
Hayley Bacon, ERS

Absent:

Eric Berthel, State Senator, Senate Minority Leader Designee
Casey Cobb, University of Connecticut (Neag Endowed Professor in Educational Policy)
Tina Courpas, State Representative, House Minority Leader Designee
Damon Lewis, Ponus Ridge STEAM Academy (Principal)
Leonard Lockhart, Windsor Board of Education (Vice President & Finance Chair), National School Boards Association (President)
Hilda Santiago, State Representative, House Deputy Speaker Pro-Tempore

I. Welcome and Opening Remarks

Chairperson Natalie Wagner gave opening remarks, explaining that the third ECS working session would build on the previous session by examining the combined effect of several ECS changes and the resulting need to prioritize. She noted that the special education option discussed at the previous session would move to the Special Education Working Session.

Andrea Clay, CPRL, introduced designees, previewed the agenda, instructed Commission members to post any questions to the online platform Slido, and reviewed upcoming meetings, including the October 29 full Commission meeting, at which members will review the ideas generated across all working sessions and discuss how to prioritize which to advance for further development. She recapped the first two ECS working sessions and reminded members that the working sessions generate problems and potential solutions for the full Commission, not recommendations.

- **Choice Working Session**: The next Choice Working Session will be held over Zoom on October 8th, 2026 at 1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.
- **Accountability Working Session**: The next Accountability Working Session will be held on October 13th, 2026.
- **Special Education Working Session**: A three-hour Special Education Working Session will be held on October 15th, 2026.

- **Full Commission Meetings**: The next full Commission meetings will be held in person on October 29th, 2026 and November 12th, 2026.

II. Follow-Ups from Previous Sessions

Jess O'Connor, ERS, responded to questions from the previous session about how education revenue and ECS funding have changed over time, including trends in total education revenue and ECS funding per pupil relative to enrollment.

Commission members asked questions regarding modeling of a rural or sparsity weight, and Elizabeth Chu, CPRL, noted that it remains under consideration. Members also discussed the context needed to interpret the revenue trends, including the phase-in of the ECS formula, the effect of last year's across-the-board increase on hold harmless, and the timing of any increase to the foundation.

III. Hold Harmless: Current Policy and Approaches in Other States

Jess O'Connor, ERS, reviewed Connecticut's current hold harmless policy, including the share of ECS distributed through it, how it affects districts' effective per-pupil funding, and the phase-out schedule in current law.

She then provided an overview of enrollment count adjustments and hold harmless policies used in other states, including New Jersey, Tennessee, and Rhode Island, noting that states generally treat these policies as temporary bridges and phase them out or narrow them over time. ERS shared considerations for Connecticut, including exploring enrollment loss protections, phasing out hold harmless, modeling the current phase-out schedule by district, and reinvesting hold harmless dollars into the ECS formula.

Commission members asked questions regarding the state share of education funding in other states and the temporary protections that could accompany a phase-out. Members discussed whether eliminating hold harmless is politically realistic, the need to protect communities with limited tax bases or high mill rates, the importance of a simpler and more transparent formula, the effect of changes to Alliance District hold harmless on high-need, low-wealth communities, and the pros and cons of pairing a phase-out with protections.

IV. Combined ECS Scenario

Jess O'Connor, ERS, presented a combined scenario that builds on the three individual scenarios reviewed at the previous working session. The scenario applies the current law hold harmless phase-out, uses a three-year average of resident student counts, incorporates funding appropriated outside the formula last year into the foundation with annual inflation adjustments, reinvests dollars recouped from the phase-out into the foundation, and increases the poverty and concentrated poverty weights. She presented the scenario's estimated additional state investment and its effects on districts by wealth

quartile. The scenario does not include a special education weight, which will be revisited in the Special Education Working Session.

Commission members asked clarifying questions regarding how the scenario accounts for last year's supplemental funds, how the three-year enrollment average is calculated, the effect on the state share of education funding, and the availability of district-level runs. Members also asked that the state share of funding be analyzed for the lowest wealth quartile districts, and asked the Commission to continue considering a higher weight for multilingual learners.

Members discussed prioritizing among the proposed increases given their combined cost, competing state priorities, and federal instability, and noted that some measures could be phased in over time rather than funded up front.

V. Small Group Discussion and Share-Out

Elizabeth Chu, CPRL, reviewed the Commission's guiding principles and asked members to discuss in small groups their views on the scenarios presented, what they would prioritize, and what questions and concerns remain. She noted that the rural sparsity weight, multilingual learner funding, and special education funding are being tracked. Commission members then met in three small groups.

Following small group discussions, members shared their perspectives with the whole Commission. Members discussed equity and closing the funding gap between districts, the cost of educating a student in Connecticut and the potential value of an adequacy study, and support for an annual inflation adjustment. Members also expressed interest in district-by-district runs to understand impact, discussed the total cost of the proposals relative to what is feasible and the tension between property tax relief and ensuring state funds support education, and emphasized the importance of rural sparsity and concentrated poverty weights.

VI. Cross-Cutting Discussion

Secretary Joshua Wojcik, Office of Policy and Management, discussed the tension between an ideal funding amount and what may be achievable, emphasizing the importance of recommendations that can be achieved within the state budget and implemented soon after they are made.

Commission members discussed the Commission’s role in recommending an appropriate level of funding to achieve its agreed-upon priorities, the gap between Connecticut’s state share of education funding and that of comparison states, and the need to address funding disparities between the highest-need and highest-wealth communities. Members also discussed the limits of comparing education funding across states without accounting for other state investments, the influence of local funding on disparities between high- and low-wealth communities, the importance of keeping the Commission’s thinking open

before narrowing to priorities, and the timing of the Commission's recommendations relative to the state budget process.

VII. Next Steps and Closing

Commissioner Charlene Russell-Tucker thanked members for the discussion and expressed confidence that the Commission will reach actionable recommendations grounded in its guiding principles. Chairperson Natalie Wagner summarized what she heard as the themes of the discussion and noted that future analyses will aim to show how each option affects the equity of the funding distribution and how it compares with competing priorities.

Andrea Clay, CPRL, reminded members to complete the exit ticket and noted the dates of upcoming working sessions and full commission meetings.

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- **Accountability Working Session**: The next Accountability Working Session will be held over Zoom on October 13th, 2026.
- **Special Education Working Session**: The next Special Education Working Session will be held over Zoom on October 15th, 2026.
- **Full Commission Meeting**: The next full Commission meeting will be held in person on October 29th, 2026.

VIII. Meeting Adjourned

The meeting concluded following closing remarks from Andrea Clay, CPRL at 12:00 p.m.