



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION



State Level Priorities: Sustaining Local School District Capacity & Providing Equity and Access to a High Quality Education for All Children

Connecticut's local education agencies and educational partners are facing the unprecedented situation of having to deliver education outside of the school building walls in a way that is equitable and meaningful for the over half a million children they serve. The road to recovery for school districts will in many ways be unique to the district and most likely include delivering education with a mix of traditional classroom settings along with continuing online, distance learning. We acknowledge that considerable resources will be required for this recovery at the same time as communities and the state are facing significant declines in revenue. We have urged districts to take a comprehensive look at the federal, state, and local resources available to them in meeting the priorities outlined below.

At the state level we have the opportunity to support these efforts through a strategic alignment of the federal resources the state will be receiving. With this pool of funds we hope to fill funding gaps for districts and assist them in maximizing all resources to successfully meet the known and yet unanticipated costs of educating students over the next 12 months.

Our Focus is on Four Priority Areas:

❖ **Equitable Access to Technology** — Equity and access for students in Connecticut is a top priority for the Connecticut State Department of Education. At the forefront of providing equitable access, are our most vulnerable students including students with special needs, EL students and those students who do not have access to high quality materials to support their learning. We will continue to work to provide access to technology and connectivity for our most vulnerable populations.

To find these gaps the department will survey districts to determine outstanding needs for devices and connectivity. Depending on the outcome of these surveys a pool of funds will be dedicated to:

- Assisting districts in purchasing hot spots and implementing other measures to achieve district-wide connectivity; and
- Assisting districts in purchasing laptops, handheld devices and adaptive technology.

❖ **Equitable Access to High Quality Online Curriculum including necessary supports** — to ensure equity and excellence in learning, the Connecticut State Department of Education will:

- Develop and/or purchase a comprehensive high quality K-8 standards aligned curriculum with formative assessments that will be accessible statewide at no cost. This high quality online curriculum will cover the content areas of literacy, numeracy and science and be developed through a lens in which our most vulnerable students are prioritized including students with disabilities and EL students;
- Utilize the RESCs and SERC for delivering professional development for teachers around more effectively using online learning with a focus on reaching high needs populations; and
- Utilize the RESCs and SERC for developing and delivering a toolkit for parents to assist them in successfully accessing and assisting their children in using the district's online learning platform.

❖ **Education Recovery & Reopening Schools** — Statewide school closures due to COVID-19 has impacted all students, particularly our high needs students and students with disabilities. As students return to school, districts will need to assess where they are in respect to the base of learning required for their new grade. Plans will need to be developed to determine how best to restore any educational loss while continuing to provide the learning essential to their current grade. Plans for students with Individualized Education Programs (IEP) will require individual determinations as to whether and to what extent recovery services may be needed and how they will be delivered. The CSDE is committed to financially support LEAs' efforts to provide appropriate recovery services for all students, including students with IEPs and to prepare students and teachers to reenter the school building when it is safe to do so. The CSDE will phase its supports for LEAs with consideration for students' individual circumstances, e.g., students who are graduating, aging out, or at varying levels of transitions. Financial supports may include, but not limited to the following:

- **Education Recovery:**

- Funding for staffing for extended day/afterschool remedial programming.
- Funding for summer school or extension of the school year.
- Funding for instructional supplies/equipment.
- Funding for additional assessments of students present levels of performance.

- **Reopening Schools Safely:**

- Funding to support a year of modified scheduling to support social distancing. For example at the elementary level, schools can create modified schedules for K-2, 3-5 learning groups on a flex schedule, or a rotation of M,W,F and T, TH;
- Funding additional protective wear/health and hygiene equipment, like the purchase of thermometers in the event schools will be required to take every child's temperature each day; and
- Funding to support a one year plan to reduce class size to support social distancing. This may include paraprofessional support or long term substitutes to support alternate class settings, which could, by design support students with access to supplemental learning.

❖ **Social and Emotional Well-being** — The CSDE had established social and emotional well-being as a priority pre-COVID-19, given its relationship to improving conditions for learning and ultimately improving students' school and life outcomes. The COVID-19 related trauma, anxiety, and distance from the relationships formed at school during the long period of class cancellation, have intensified the need for quality social emotional supports for students as well as educators.

- CARES Act funding will augment the development of a statewide social and emotional learning (SEL) framework that will support educator professional learning and implementation of evidenced-based programs.
- Provide professional learning through RESCs and SERC to support educators in providing social and emotional supports;
- Provide resources to districts for delivery of general behavioral and mental health screening;
- Promote implementation of universal SEL curriculum/programming at the district level and secure resources for outreach or professional learning on Equity, Implicit Bias and Inclusion.