SENATOR Osten (19TH): Good afternoon, everybody. We're going to start the afternoon education meetings. Commissioner, if you want to start with your testimony that would be great.

DIANNA WENTZELL: Thank you so much, Senator Osten and good afternoon. My name is Dianna Wentzell and I am the commissioner of the Department of Education and I am accompanied today by Cathy Dempsy, our Chief Financial Officer. I appreciate being given the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss Governor Lamont's proposed biennial budget as it pertains to the Department of Education.

I'd like to start by saying how thankful I am to Governor Lamont for maintaining the state's commitment to education and to the legislature for continuing to make education a priority. We live in fiscally challenging times and the decisions that you will have to make over the next few months will not be easy. I am committed to working with you and with the Governor through the budgetary process on behalf of the department.
Two weeks ago in the budget address, the Governor said that education is the opportunity engine for all of our young people and I could not agree with him more. Education is a great equalizer. There is nothing more crucial to setting up a child for success than that child's education. For these reasons, it's important that we remain child-centered when engaging in discussions that pertain to education and education funding, because our adult decisions directly impact the lives of children. Keeping that in mind, we are supportive of the Governor's commission on shared school services. We are no longer living in a time where it's practical or feasible for the state to have over 200 independently operated school districts. This is our reality, and it's the education of our kids that's at stake. Already some of our smaller school districts are unable to offer a full complement of educational programming. To be clear, we are not in favor of a forced regionalization as proposed in some other bills that are being discussed. The Governor still uses an incentive approach to encourage shared services.

The conversation about new ways of collaborating must happen in earnest, and we are happy to have a seat at the table. We are also grateful to the Governor for increasing funding for the educational cost sharing grant, as well as for the Alliance District Grant. This continued investment in our Alliance Districts reaffirms our commitment to revitalizing high-needs districts. This impacts over 200,000 of our 540,000 students in more than 400 schools across 33 districts in the state. The Governor's proposed budget also maintains funding for the commissioner's network schools which
represent a pledge between local stakeholders and the department to dramatically improve student achievement in up to 25 schools.

We understand the ongoing need for shared sacrifice during these difficult times, and we stand ready to do our part while continuing to implement policies that work towards closing the achievement gaps, elevating learning, and acting in the best interest of the children of the state of Connecticut. Having said that, I would caution that if any further reductions were to be proposed by the General Assembly that go beyond the Governor's recommendations, we will need to reevaluate the programs we currently offer to determine if any of them would have to be suspended for us to maintain our core mission to the children of our state and to carry out our responsibilities.

The Governor's budget proposal is step one in a very long process and as we move forward, the department is prepared to work with the legislature to provide whatever information or guidance you need to make informed decisions and ensure equity and excellence in the education of all our students, and I'm happy to answer any questions and thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): So thank you very much, commissioner. I'm going to take a little bit of time to ask a few questions while we're getting other committee members in who I know are going to want to have their share of questions too, and so you may see some overlap that happens. The first thing that I wanted to talk about was the full-time positions and so you have 1,819 and the agency requesting 1,822 full-time positions, and so I'm
curious on the full-time positions, how many of them are funded in your personnel services line item?

DIANNA WENTZELL: Well I think all of them would be funded in the personnel services, no?

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): No, they're not. (Laughing).

DIANNA WENTZELL: So, Cathy, do you want to break down the number that are at CTECS and then the number that are at CSDE Proper and then answer for Senator Osten which are through personal services and which might be attributed to other line items? So, the vast majority obviously are through CTECS because, yeah so but within our own -- with CTECS it's more in the CTECS line item.

CATHY DEMPSY: So the agency's authorized position count is the 1,819. We currently have 1,578 filled and that includes SD, Central Office and the Technical High School System. Within the Technical High School System, we are running a vacancy rate of about 149 positions. We have funds to fill about 127 of them.

DIANNA WENTZELL: Sixty of those are certified positions, which is less than 5 percent, so we're running a better vacancy rate than any of our city school systems.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): So and how many, do you have positions that are not showing up here that are federally funded?

CATHY DEMPSY: Yes. These are just, so what we provided to OFA was our general fund account.
SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): So to the work group, could you please bring the federally funded positions and where they are, and which of the areas that they are?

CATHY DEMPSY: Certainly.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): So we had an unfortunate circumstance happen and I can talk about Sprague forever, but I'm not going to talk about Sprague right now. I am going to talk about lead in pipes in Hebron, and so I'm a little concerned that because what I was told is because it's a standalone water system it’s checked all the time by the Department of Public Health, so they caught it early. And I think that this is something that we should start being prepared for and I know that in some of our schools that are in a more urban area where they have a water and sewer authority and not the independent smaller water systems, that there may be problems in schools that people are not necessarily aware of. Do you have any idea, are we testing the water in schools, every school, regularly? How are we handling that?

DIANNA WENTZELL: Because water quality is a Department of Health responsibility and then a local public health responsibility, it's not something that the department would have reliable information down to the school level on.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): So I'm a little bit concerned by that because, and I think DPH does a great job, and I've been working with DPH on this particular issue, but for other issues with water they are really fabulous and we do a lot of work on children that have high lead in their bloodwork. So I'm a little bit, I think that this is something where
there is a pot over here doing some of it and a pot over here doing some of it and a pot over here doing some of it and I think that this is as this directly, we know that no amount of lead is good and I know EPA is changing their standard to say no lead is good. I think that this is something that we should be paying attention to in particular in our larger school districts where they may not be testing every single school for lead and if those areas have a large number of students that are testing high in lead, it may not just be the home that is the reason why and I just think that that's something that we should be looking at and so I just want to put that on your radar so that we can, because I am going to want to talk a little bit more about that as we move through the process. I am very concerned about that piece of it. Adult Education, do you have responsibility for Unified School District #1?

DIANNA WENTZELL: For Unified School District #1 we have some regulatory responsibility, but not as complete as with the LEA's USD 1 and 2 function uniquely, so for instance, educator evaluation things like that, certification, that all falls under us.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): IF you wouldn't mind, I'm sorry, commissioner. If you wouldn't mind just saying what they are, because I don't know that everybody else --.

DIANNA WENTZELL: Okay, so USD 1 is our Corrections School System and USC2 is our Department of Children and Families School System, so there are many aspects of the education that occurs for school age students in those agencies that does fall under the
regulatory authority of the department, and then there are some things that are unique to the special populations that are served, particularly with USD1.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): And do you test in both of those schools systems, do you test for special needs? I am being told in national studies, in particular in corrections, that a lot of the students that end up in corrections have diagnoses of both autism and dyslexia that have gone unrecognized, and so when they end up into a system like this that is looking for things that why has this person not completed their high school education, why are they in the position that they're in, and so it ends up that many, and I don't know about USD2, I'm not certain about that, but I would pause that it's probably the same or very close to that. So, I'm just wondering, how, is that something that would be your responsibility to find out? Is there is a tracking system for --.

DIANNA WENTZELL: In a sense there's a tracking system through IDA, so because of the large federal law, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act that covers all special education for all school age students, the same kind of, all of the same laws apply. So if the educators in either USD2 or USD1 suspect that there is an undiagnosed learning disability, they are bound by all the same laws and all the same prophecies as if it was happening in a regular traditional school district. So they would need to do the same kind of diagnostic assessments, have a PPT that follows all of the same rules. If the student is over 18, the rules are a little different.
SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): So you would have a PPT for the children that are in DCF custody?

DIANNA WENTZELL: Or if they're in corrections.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): So, if they're in corrections, what if they don't have any family that's associated with them? Who comes to that PPT?

DIANNA WENTZELL: Well, even sometimes in regular, you know, traditional LEAs, the family may not choose to be part of the PPT, but, if, they need to be invited, 'cause that's the law. So there are PPT guidelines that the department disseminates about who needs to be there and an administrator needs to run the PPT process. There should be a representative from the general education team and a special educator needs to be involved and depending upon what kind of challenges prompted the request for PPT, there might be other professionals involved as well. So, for instance, if it seems to be a social/emotional/behavioral issue, there might be a school psychologist involved as well.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): So, seeing as you are tracking some of this, can you possibly bring to us the number of identified with a learning disability in both of those school systems and if you have it over the last five years so that we can see if there is a trend in that and that would be, you know, I would really appreciate that and if you could bring that to the working group. That is not necessary to talk about right now.

I want to talk a little bit about transportation. So we've stopped funding a lot of transportation. We don't fund really much of any transportation right now, and in our more rural areas, a lot of
young people are unable to participate in after school sports because we no longer have the transportation available and I know that you didn't pay for necessarily after school transportation before, but because regular transportation is no longer funded in the same mechanism, it has put some pressures on other transportation needs that students may have, so that has slipped away and I was wondering on both public and nonpublic, what are your, what funding mechanisms do we have in here for transportation at general and then specifically? Is there is any funding left at all for transportation?

DIANNA WENTZELL: Well the transportation line item was eliminated two years ago, so that was, and it had been not adequate anyway to reimburse school districts for the cost of transportation in general. There is a Sheff transportation line item still for transportation in the Sheff region to comply with our desegregation issues in the Hartford area. Is there any other transportation in the budget?

CATHY DEMPSY: And for the inter district Magnet school programs, there is a reimbursement. If you're in the Sheff region it's $2,000 per pupil. Elsewhere in the state it is $1,300 per pupil. The Open Choice Program also provides a transportation subsidy and that's 3250 per child. I believe those are the only programs where we still offer a subsidy.

DIANNA WENTZELL: The choice and the Magnets are the same line item, or separate?

CATHY DEMPSY: Sheff is now, in the proposed budget would be out of the same, but if it's non Sheff, it
still remains in the open choice in the Magnet school line item.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Okay, and I just, you know, I think we are doing a disservice in some of our communities not allowing any trans --, it's put a significant pressure on, you know, I talked about some things for the urban communities right now, but for rural communities, it's not like a student can walk to school, and so that's made it very hard to get them to any of the after school programs that are available, and even if they stay at school they can't get home because they can't walk. I just point it out, so it's just a concern of mine, sort of in general.

One more, I'm trying to get more people in the room. Toni wants to ask some questions, one second please. On the regional, the Bow Tech schools, do the position numbers, they're all in the position numbers up here? Are you transferring away from the category of taking Bow Tech schools into college bound and working more towards the trades, because a lot of the Bow Tech schools have, seems to me that they're more interested in college bound and not necessarily interested in the trades level.

DIANNA WENTZELL: Right well, our superintendent's here, so he can join and elaborate, but I would say that we really worked hard over the last several years to regionalize our strategic planning to be attuned to the regional workforce needs in the state, so that which trades are phased in or phased out are really focused on the jobs in that region, and the recruitment certainly focuses on the unique career opportunities of our CTECS system. Some of the kids that come to CTECS choose to go on to
college, but the focus is on career training and frankly, the kinds of academic skills kids need for career and college have become more similar over the last few years, so some of our kids change their mind and decide to go on to college and for some of our kids, they wanted the style of education, but perhaps they always intended to go to college.

JEFFERY WOODSBY: Sure, and I'd like to even add to some of those trade areas also even require further education with our community colleges, so many of our kids even start taking dual enrollment and courses in many of our community colleges here in Connecticut as high school juniors and seniors. They also take University of Connecticut classes, ECE classes as well while they're there, because as the commissioner said, we really want to make sure that the kids have the opportunity to be career and college ready because many of them we hope would go directly into the workforce and be able to work their way through a community college education or a four-year, you know, diploma education after, you know, post grad from leaving CTECS as well, so I would say yes.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Thank you. Representative Walker.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. Good afternoon. Just to let you know, did you transfer your testimony over to us because we did not have it? We usually give it to our members when we do that, so it would be appreciated if you would do it now so that we could get copies to all our members. Thank you.
I want to start with the ECS formula where you change the low income measure. Can you explain to me what it is and why?

DIANNA WENTZELL: Sure. And Cathy'll do, I'll do a general review, and Cathy'll probably handle a lot of the questions or do the specifics, but we have struggled for a long time to really try to find the best possible variable to represent need among our kids for the ECS formula, and the free and reduced count had some inherent instabilities in it. One of the issues with the free and reduced lunch count was that it is self-report data and some children or families may be reluctant to file the paperwork for free and reduced lunch count. Also you may know depending on how familiar you are with the way this works, the school, that actually changes every month, you know, because families might be doing better and then they're doing worse again and things like that, so that's not a very stable variable, and it's not verifiable 'cause it's self-report. So, the direct certification relies on a, for the school meal program, relies on a multifaceted approach that includes more variables including the TANF, SNAP and HUSKY data, so one of the things that's great about it is it's verifiable data. It's more likely to be steady and durable data and then it's also, in terms of year over year, and then it's also less stigmatizing for the student in that it can be, it's data we already have that can be drawn invisibly without asking the families to put in paperwork. There's more to it. There's a couple more variables in it that I have not yet fully [inaudible], but I ask Cathy to take over from here.

CATHY DEMPSY: Actually, she's got most of them.
REP. WALKER (93RD): So it's SNAP, TANF, HUSKY?

CATHY DEMPSY: SNAP, TANF, foster children, homeless, head start, and then HUSKY and about a year ago we had had a conversation with the Education Committee and with yourselves about possibly moving to direct certification, which is still as a poverty measure, free and reduced lunch, I mean, it's still about feeding kids. So in that sense, the measure itself didn't change. What is changing is the data source for that measure.

A year ago we did not have the ability at that time to include the Medicaid data and the Medicaid data allowed us to reach the students who would've been eligible for reduced price meals and those were not being captured under the previous, which was just the SNAP temporary family assistance, foster, homeless, and so the advent of HUSKY actually enabled us to capture almost another 77,000 students and those students now, some of them are actually free Medicaid eligible, and so they would be eligible for free meals and the balance are reduced, what we call reduced Medicaid, and so they are eligible for the reduced meals. So, we feel we are at a much better place with this data than we were a year to 18 months ago with the addition of the HUSKY data to the data set.

REP. WALKER (93RD): So I guess, I remember when we started this a couple years ago and part of the problem was when we then looked at the HUSKY data, it was flawed. If you remember, that was so, we are now using it again, so I'm leery on that. The SNAP data, I mean, everybody, most, everybody doesn't apply for SNAP, so I'm just, I mean maybe you can explain it to us later 'cause it probably will take
a long time, but I'd really like to understand how this whole formula is derived because I know, I know Massachusetts uses it. That doesn't necessarily mean that it's the reason why I would use it, but I'm just, I'm concerned that we are not getting everybody. That's what, I mean the free and reduced, you're right, it's self-report, but it has an end result for everybody for families. Families that want their kids to have lunch and food while they're in school, they tend to apply for that a lot faster than some of the other entities that you mention. So I really worry about that. Especially, I will be honest, especially ELL students, ELL families. They will do the lunch, the free and reduced lunch, but the others, they don't necessarily apply for, for fear of other issues. So I'm very concerned and I'd like to know how the wait is with this new measure. I'm trying to go on opposite side of Representative Porter's head. The measure, and where are the changes that are effected by whether we use the free and reduced lunch versus the low income measure, whichever you use, so please come with that to the hearing.

Then the other question or, the reductions that you have in the various accounts. One of the big things that I'm really looking at and I've looked at is our reduction for after school and those things are critical for our, especially for kids that, elementary and middle school. High school, they, they sort of have some things that can get through through sports and things like that, but elementary and middle school need those after school programs more than anything. Otherwise they just end up in the wrong places. So, I asked OFA to look at some of the, and there are some significant reductions in
after school in some of the line items that are in there and one of them that I mean, it does happen to be in New Haven, but LEAP, LEAP is, it's always on the chopping block and yet it serves more than 1,200 kids within the region and I just don't understand what the thought is, or, you know, it just happens to be some low-hanging fruit or whatever, but we have to fund these programs. It's not an option. Otherwise we're going to be paying for them in the court systems and our suspensions and expulsions are going to start to go. You guys are doing a great job of addressing it and providing direction with that, but we've got to extend the day. We've got to give these parents an extended day so that they one, can work, but they can also be secure that the kids are in school. So I really want to talk about that more in the working group and with that, I'll come back. I'll wait and let other people have conversations and if they don't, I'll bring my questions back. Thank you.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Representative Candelaria.

REP. CANDELARIA (95TH): Thank you, Madam Chair. Hello, Commissioner, how are you today? I have multiple questions, but I'm just going to focus now probably on two questions, bilingual education. We have seen as you know, I'm not saying something that you're not aware of, an increase in students that have arrived from Puerto Rico and in last budget year we put in dollars to address those specific students, but now that they are part of the enrollment, right, they are included in ECS. But the question here is on bilingual education, we have, I think that we don't have enough dollars in that particular line item to address the needs of
those students. So what I would like to see for the working group is how are those dollars, the bilingual ed line item, how do we spend those dollars? How are they spread out? How many students does this serve? So I want to see how that works out. Also, I'm looking at one of the policy's revision where we are accelerating but yet we are not doing to counterpart of that, we are accelerating, those sources are overfunded, but we are not funding those that are underfunded. My question to you is within doing that, I see there's some savings. There's some dollars that we're seeing, about 15 million dollars. I just want to know where those dollars are being applied to. Are those dollars applied somewhere else within your budget? Do you have the answer now? Could you just come back and provide me the answer, because once you do one side, but we are not seeing nothing on the other side, those dollars are, [inaudible 29:36] somewhere. So if you can provide that for me, and those are my two questions, so I'll come back at some other point later. Thank you, thank you Madam Chair.

DIANNA WENTZELL: Thank you representative, we will do our best on that.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Representative Abercrombie.

REP. ABERCROMBIE (83RD): Thank you, Madam Chair. Good afternoon, commissioners. It's nice to see you again. Thank you for the meeting that we recently had and kind of talked me through some things, so I really appreciate you taking the time. So I have two questions for you. My first question is on the youth bureaus, how many do we currently have?
DIANNA WENTZELL: It's about 20, just under 20 or over 20, but we'll bring that information and the location.

REP. ABERCROMBIE (83RD): Yeah, that would be really helpful because I'm trying to figure out, I know in the budget there's, to add one to a district and I'm just looking at the dollars to see if it's an equal amount that all of them are getting and what it's based on, so if you could bring that to the work group, that would be really helpful. I'd appreciate it.

CATHY DEMPSY: We can do that. And it is, it is an equal amount that is provided to all of them.

REP. ABERCROMBIE (83RD): Okay, that's great thank you.

CATHY DEMPSY: And we can bring the locations of those.

REP. ABERCROMBIE (83RD): The second question is to follow up on what a couple of my colleagues have asked about: the direct certification. So what would make a district's numbers go down; because when we were working with OFA, there were some districts and I'll be honest, mine was one of them where it said that our numbers would change. Because it seems to be a more accurate way of looking at a community, I don't understand how the numbers could go down. So could you kind of explain that a little bit?

CATHY DEMPSY: Sure, so the comparison that OFA had provided to you was based off of the self-report NPSIS by the districts versus direct certification. So, one of the things that, yes and it was based on
the October one count, correct. So we kind of have an apples, no longer an apples to apples situation going on because for the purposes of reporting for PSIS, depending upon the kind of district you are, depends upon what you report to us. So districts that are, where the entire district is community eligible so we feed everybody, all they are supposed to report back to the department is the direct certification number. They are not supposed to add additional numbers to that. However, that doesn't seem to be the case depending upon which district you look at. We also have districts now that are--.

DIANNA WENTZELL: So I can see that that's confusing. Community eligibility is relatively new to us within the last five years and I'm looking around and some of you have community eligibility and some don't and that means that the entire, enough of the community is eligible for the meals program that it makes more sense just to feed all the kids and not just spend a lot of money and time in the admin of it. And the, in community eligibility, the way were initially able to do that and continue to do that is through direct certification, so we've actually been doing direct certification for about five years limited. Direct cert communities are not supposed to add to the number that they're getting, but sometimes they have been. So that would indicate, you know, so basically we might have overfed some, well everybody gets fed.

CATHY DEMPSY: Everybody gets fed in those communities anyway, but yeah. That's true.

DIANNA WENTZELL: And I think that's one of the confusing things about this, is is that these
numbers don't necessarily reflect whose getting fed. In the districts, more kids get fed, they err on the side of feeding children versus the not feeding them.

And I apologize, let me back up a little bit. So, what's happening now is in the collections that we get through PSIS, so based upon the students who are enrolled in the districts on October 1, the districts are asked to identify to us those that are eligible for free or reduced price meals. Some of their student populate, depending on the districts, some of their student population may be directly certified, okay, and some may not. So in those districts we have a combination going on of reporting back to us the directly certified kids which is a number that we provide to them and in addition to that doing, providing information based upon what they receive from the families in terms of filling out the income surveys to be eligible for lunch. You then have our districts that are 100 percent direct certification in the sense that we feed everybody, so we don't, and as part of that the district cannot ask the family for an income statement in order to provide that meal. So for those districts, what they should be submitting to us is just the direct service site number because it doesn't impact the feedings.

DIANNA WENTZELL: There is a percentage that they have to reach of direct cert before they can be community eligibility, so right?

CATHY DEMPSY: Correct. (Laughter). It's a little over 60 percent because there's a factor that's also provided by the federal government to make up any
differential to get them to feeding, but we will get you the exact statistic on --.

REP. ABERCROMBIE (83RD): Yeah, that would be helpful because I do believe that it's a tool that we could use to really look at all of the districts and get exact numbers, but I don't believe that everybody's interpreting it the same way and for that reason I have some concerns, especially in a district like mine, I represent Meriden, there's no reason why our numbers should be going down. So I have concerns with that and how we get there you know, is maybe just as simple as explaining how the data should be coming in. So that would be helpful, so I appreciate that.

And then my last question is can you bring to the work group because you may not have it now, to meet all the statutory obligations, do you have enough staff and if you don't, how many would you need. 'Cause I know with the cuts, I'll just DSS as an example, you know with all the cuts that we've done over the last six years, these agencies are at a tipping point and if we cannot meet our statutory obligations, you know, we need to really look at that. So if you could bring that to the work group, that would be really helpful. Thank you, Madam Chair.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Thank you, representative. Representative Rosario.

REP ROSARIO (128TH): Thank you, Madam Chair. Good afternoon, commissioner. And again, I apologize if this question was already asked. OFA provided this committee, this subcommittee with a document. It shows that currently there are 26,000 more students
under the free/reduced price lunch count than last year's. Can you explain the discrepancy, please?

DIANNA WENTZELL: Sure. I'm going to ask our Chief Financial Officer, Cathy. Cathy Dempsy is our Chief Financial Officer. I'm going to ask her to explain that. She'll do it better than I can. (Laughter).

CATHY DEMPSY: So, when we originally saw that discrepancy, one of the things that the data office did was go back to the districts there were seeing significant increases. All of them without fail actually came back to us and said it was because now there were HUSKY kids included in direct cert. And I don't think that that's probably necessarily the answer. So one of the things that we are doing right now is an audit of the districts that have the largest discrepancies, because 26,000 students, it just doesn't seem reasonable, so back at the office that is something that they are working on right now, is to try and figure out what happened, is it a matter of the fact that the districts didn't understand the instructions.

Again, as the commissioner said, direct certification while it's been around for a little while, with the addition of HUSKY it's significantly extended the population that's included and depending upon the proficiency of the district with their data cleanup and you know, whose reporting from the district and do they report at each individual school versus central? There are a variety of reasons why with the addition of HUSKY this year we could've ended up seeing this increase. So we will get back to you with a response to that.
DIANNA WENTZELL: We will, yeah, we will prepare that and give our best reasoning for why we think there is this discrepancy of, you know, so many more kids being eligible. One of the things that we have learned every time we've had a data collection, we have hundreds of data collections that we draw from our districts as you know that are required by statute. And any time we have a situation that makes a data collection more consequential than it was in the past, we seem to go through a data integrity bump and I think that may part of what we're seeing that people weren't following the directions or you know, they're still struggling with this particular data collection.

Additionally, we did have a lot of kids that came to the state, you know, this only accounts for about 10 percent of what we're talking about in the discrepancy, the kids that entered the state as the result of hurricanes last fall that would be in this data collection that were not in the last data collection, many of whom may be eligible for the meals programs.

REP. ROSARIO (128th): Is this going to impact children from actually receiving that free/reduced lunch?

DIANNA WENTZELL: No.

REP. ROSARIO (128TH): Okay. I have no further questions, but I do have some concerns. Representative Walker touched on a point because there are some ELL families that, this number may be higher for all we know. They have some ELL families that might not have wanted to report, so I look
forward to hearing that in the work group. Thank you.

REP. GILCHREST (18TH): Thank you, Madam Chair. Hi, commissioner. I have a question about the Sheff transportation. Am I understanding this correct that now Open Choice and Magnet schools will be under Sheff transportation? That's what is being described here?

CATHY DEMPSY: So, what the budget proposes to do is remove from the Magnet school account and the Open Choice account and also a small amount that was currently funded for Vo. Ag. students through the Sheff account. Move those transportation costs into a budget line item that is specific to Sheff transportation. So that was in an effort to try and frankly better track the expenditures that go along with it.

DIANNA WENTZELL: This gives higher transparency to what amount of the money in this particular effort is going to transportation and what amount is going to other programmatic educational aspects and we also at the urging of the legislature have embarked upon a number of transportation efficiencies in the Sheff region that we believe will reduce the cost of transportation to yield more funding to go into educational programing directly effecting kids.

REP. GILCHREST (18TH): Wonderful because my second question then applies to more of that transparency. You mentioned the reimbursement and the subsidy? Who currently gets reimbursement and subsidy dollars?

CATHY DEMPSY: So it depends upon who transports the child actually. In the Sheff region is part of the
state's obligations. The regional transportation system was created. That system is administered on behalf of the state by the Capital Region Education Council. So they contract directly with the bus vendors on our behalf. We reimburse the actual expenditures based on an audit, a year end audited amount and so in that case while statutorily there may be set aside the $2,000 per pupil in the Magnet account, the actual cost of transportation is higher than that, which is why the legislature has provided us each year with some relief by allowing us to pay supplemental so we can pay the actual cost of transportation. For other districts that participate in this program, if they're transporting the students themselves to out of district, then they receive a transportation subsidy for that.

REP. GILCHREST (18TH): Does this also include reimbursements to individual families who where there is not transportation provided?

DIANNA WENTZELL: Yes, it can.

REP. GILCHREST (18TH): And is there a way to break that number out?

DIANNA WENTZELL: Yes. We can certainly get that for you.

REP. GILCHREST (18TH): So, I'll give a personal example. I live in a sending community, West Hartford, and we won the lotto and had our daughter in preschool and we would get reimbursed to drive her to preschool, which I find absurd because I would have to pay to drive her to private preschool, so I'm just interested in knowing how much of this money is going to families who might be able to pay and if there's a way for cost savings there.
DIANNA WENTZELL: Certainly. We can get that information for you.

REP. GILCHREST (18TH): Thank you.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Representative Case.

REP. CASE (63RD): Thank you, Madam Chair. Good afternoon, commissioner. Just a few questions and a few comments. So we always talk about Alliance and commissioner's network dollars. I see them in the budget. I just want to thank you. The program does work if it's done properly. After three years of being an Alliance district we went from a category 4 to a category 2 school, which I think is phenomenal with Mel as the superintendent. How do those dollars go moving forward? I see that they're in the budget, so from my understanding from working with you, the Alliance dollars stay with the school, but the commissioner's network, the dollars are in there and they're flat-funded straight across. I don't see any decrease in those. Can you just explain that or bring that back to the working group?

DIANNA WENTZELL: Sure and we can bring that to the working group and the rules around the commissioner's network because it's a three to five year program and I believe you have two schools in the program, right?

REP. CASE (63RD): We have two of them actually, correct. Two of the, of the split from one district.

DIANNA WENTZELL: So we can show who's in the program and at what year they are, because then you can see where their funding cliff is.
REP CASE (63RD): And then once you're an Alliance district, that Alliance money is always in the budget.

DIANNA WENTZELL: Once you're an Alliance district, you're always an Alliance district and what's in the budget is up to you all. (Laughter).

REP. CASE (63RD): But you're not considered an Alliance district, but you're still funded.

DIANNA WENTZELL: They're still an Alliance district. Yeah, there's no mechanism for leaving that program.

REP. CASE (63RD): Okay. I thank you for that. I just can't say how much that really helped out. So, we also have charter school. I see the charter numbers in this budget. They're all over the place as far as the funding from the Governor's office to yours. Where do we stand with the funding on the charter schools? They all don't just match up.

CATHY DEMPSY: So in the Governor's proposed budget, the funding that was added was for schools that have new grades coming online, so there are four schools that had opened I believe four years ago now and those schools are still adding grades. They haven't reached their full grade configuration, so the Governor's budget funds additions in those schools for the new grades. Beyond that what is funded is the kids who are currently enrolled in the system.

REP. CASE (63RD): Okay, so what you're looking for, I mean, it's much higher than what the Governor's office is looking for as far as agency recommendations.
CATHY DEMPSY: The agency request included places where schools had wanted to do what is called the backfilling, so to the extent that they may have had a dip in enrollment one year in one of their classes and that class is now several years along and they would like to fill those seats, those were included in the department's request, but they are not included in the proposed budget.

REP. CASE (63RD): Okay. It's always been a pleasure working with you guys and just to reiterate and make sure, so the commissioner's network dollars were up to here for either the commissioner to decide or the appropriation to decide what money is left in that line item. Is that correct?

DIANNA WENTZELL: I think the commissioner's network line item is funded in the Governor's proposal at the same level and then the actual funding to schools depends upon what year they are in the program and the actual cost of the plan that they've proposed as well as we interact with fiscal to make sure that it's appropriate to the population, you know, that we're not under or over funding based on how many kids we're serving in that school.

REP. CASE (63RD): That's fine, the reason why I ask you to bring it back to the working group on how it's being done because last year's budget is the same as what the agency asks for, is the same as what the Governor has, so from my understanding is some districts go down 25 percent after a certain amount of years and they go after that and they're weaned off, but I see the dollars are the same.

DIANNA WENTZELL: 'Cause new ones come in. So we can serve up to 25 schools in the commissioner's
network. Right now I think we're about 17, but they cycle. We might be 15 right now and then they'll take two more in. So the eligibility, we'll bring all that so you can see what the eligibility is. Because there aren't that many schools luckily because we're doing better. There are fewer schools eligible to apply, which is a good thing.

REP. CASE (63RD): And when does the commissioner come back with that?

DIANNA WENTZELL: With who is eligible? We just released that like two weeks ago, so we can bring that to the work group. That's what our accountability results.

REP. CASE (63RD): Appreciate it. Thank you very much. Thank you, Madam Chair.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Thank you. Representative Hall.

REP. HALL (59TH): Thank you Madam Chair. Good afternoon, ladies. Just a couple of quick questions probably along the lines of my good representative to my left. The Governor's budget basically cuts the Magnet schools 40 million from what the agency's request was. Can you talk to a little bit of that number and also a little bit about the enrollment. Has the enrollment been going up or down?

DIANNA WENTZELL: Well we can bring more detailed information, but basically there have not been new Magnet schools other than in New London in recent years because of the moratorium on new Magnet schools and one of the challenging schools we're seeing across the state with Magnet schools is that the idea behind the Magnet schools and the
additional funding is to create a more diverse student population. But many of our Magnet schools are struggling to be compliant with the goals for diversity. And so some of our Magnet schools have struggled to the point that it's effecting the reimbursement we are able to give them because they are not currently compliant. In terms of how many kids are attending, we can bring that information. We do have some Magnet schools that are new enough that they're still growing and so that's where you would see an increase. Most Magnet school operations plans have class size caps in them, or school size targets that kept them small. The issue over whether we could serve more kids is challenging because the line item at its current funding amount divided by more kids means that all of the operators are getting a little less per kid each year. Did I explain that appropriately, Cathy?

CATHY DEMPSY: Actually you did. And so the 40 million dollar reduction actually is not a reduction to the Magnet line item. It was the removal of the Sheff transportation funds from the Magnet line item and into the Sheff transportation line item.

REP. HALL (59TH): Okay so, it moved from that line item into the transportation?

CATHY DEMPSY: The line item increases slightly because of additional enrollments in New London and Stanford had one new school that is still continuing to enroll new kids. But we can give you the exact.

REP HALL (59TH): Okay, and maybe for the working group we can talk a little bit about why they don't seem to be hitting their targets that have been set
forth for the numbers that you're looking for, so I would like to hear more about that.

The other question I have is in regards to the budget which is eliminating the funding for Health and Welfare Services. Can you explain just for the folks that are watching what that is used for and talk about the impact on our private schools that that's going to have? Thank you.

CATHY DEMPSY: So currently the department reimburses a portion of the cost of school districts providing a school nurse to nonpublic schools that are within their district boundaries. There is statute that requires them to provide that service. The reimbursement method is on a sliding scale depending upon the wealth of the community and that grant like many of our entitlement grants has been capped for a very long time so we are probably funding somewhere in the range of 50 to 60 percent of what we would've if the account had continued to remain uncapped. The Governor's proposal is to eliminate that funding and essentially shift that cost to the private school so the sharing of the cost would be between the municipality and the private school versus the current arrangement which is the state picks up a piece and the district picks up a piece.

REP. HALL (59TH): Now does that effect their transportation dollars as well, or no?

CATHY DEMPSY: No, that is separate.

REP. HALL (59TH): Just the nurse portion, then the health portion?

CATHY DEMPSY: Correct.
REP. HALL (59TH): Okay, all right. And just with the indulgence of the chair, just one quick question and I know the good Senator Summers would probably want this question asked. With the new formula for ECS, and you talked about the HUSKY being a part of the figuring in of that formula, what considerations were given to districts with heavy military enrollment in the schools for the children so obviously they don't get HUSKY, they would get TriCare care and other benefits that wouldn't be accounted for in your formula. So, were those districts taken into consideration and that will finish my questions. Thank you.

CATHY DEMPSY: Yes. So, I will go back and check. It is something we did take a look at and I will confirm for you at the work session exactly how we accounted for it.

REP. HALL (59TH): Okay, thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you, Madam Chair.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Thank you, representative Dathan.

REP. DATHAN (142ND): Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you very much, commissioner, for your testimony. I'm just, there are so many ins and outs I have some homework I need to do to kind of understand how things are moving around so I don't ask silly questions. But my big question here is we're about 100 million dollars underneath the agency requested total funding. I know we're pretty much even with where we were in 2019. Do you think we're going to meet all of our students' needs with 102, 112 million dollars less funding than we were asking the Governor for?
DIANNA WENTZELL: I recognize what difficult times we're in and the hard decisions that you all have and I've often said before this group and before the Education Committee that I wish, I wish you could all have the luxury I have, which is the only thing I have to think about is the children's education and I know that you all and the Governor have to balance so many statewide needs. So I wouldn't presume to look at the total balance in that way. There are areas where and we've been asked in another question to represent those, where we are at risk, I think of not being able to meet our kids' needs and we need to make sure that we make you aware of them so that as you're thinking about how to make it all work you know where sort of the pressure points are and we certainly like everyone hope that the revenues get better so that we can be making sure that all of our kids have the excellent education that we've promised them.

REP. DATHAN (142ND): Okay, that's very helpful. Do you have any sort of analytical data where you take all of our schools and maybe analyze them by the type of school they are? Whether they are an Alliance, a Magnet school, charter school, secular schools? Do you have a schedule of that that might have the total number of schools in each category with a total number of students in each category with a total number of teachers in each category with a total number of administrators in each category with the total funding for each type of school. Do you have any sort of dashboard like that?

DIANNA WENTZELL: We do. We have a system that we've with your support been able to bring forward
called Ed Sight. It's a data platform about all the datas that we draw regarding our kids or educators, our schools and all of that. Increasingly there is more and more that we are able to put forward in that platform so that you can analyze it in personalized ways that you want to look. So you can create the report that you're imagining and then ask for the answer. What I make the mistake of is asking it too many things at once, so as I'm becoming a more sophisticated Ed Sight user, I recognize that sometimes I better look at two things together before I add on the third, but and we're happy to provide any support to utilize the tool.

REP. DATHAN (142ND): So where would I find this tool?

DIANNA WENTZELL: On the state Department of Education website. If you go to the CSCE website and then on the left hand side we have our hot buttons and Ed Sight is currently a hot button for us. It's relatively new. We've had it for about two years and our Chief Performance Officer, Ajit Gopalakrishnan, and his team have really done this frankly, you know, with bubblegum and you know, two strings and stuff. We've kind of just kept on it til we have it. We think it's really important both for all of you in the General Assembly, but also for parents and families to be able to access information freely about our education system and compare schools in districts.

REP. DATHAN (142ND): Great, that's super helpful. Thank you so much.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Representative Lavielle.
REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Good afternoon, thank you both for being here. It's good to see you. I have questions in a couple of areas. The first one has to do with our vocational technical schools, so technical high schools. Over the past, we know the various things that have come up. The various issues that came up within the technical high schools over the past two-three years and there was this decision to make them a separate agency, which was supposed to be phased in rather quickly and the Governor has postponed which I sort of know why I would have don't that, but I don't know what your view of that is and also I want to ask whether you have enough resources to do what you're supposed to do if they are not spun off and what are you doing at the moment? That was a lot of questions, I'm sorry.

DIANNA WENTZELL: Yes, so, but they all are about CTEC and we have our superintendent here too, if I don't adequately cover it. In the Governor's budget, the independence, the career and technical education system, the Connecticut Technical Education Career System, CTECS, which is our technical high school system with a couple of adult programs as well is pushed out by two more years to 2023. It was originally 2020, then 2021 last year it was now pushed out to and now 2023. And the reason is primarily the resource intensity of creating an independent agency.

So, the positions and other kinds of resources, but were mostly positions that we had identified as being critical so that they could be their own agency, are just too expensive right now for the state, you know, to be part of the Governor's
proposal, so that's being delayed in the Governor's proposal.

What we have been doing in collaboration with the career and technical education system is preparing them for independence by identifying what the critical parts that we've done historically that they need to do are. And in some areas we've already basically stacked them up for independence. So for instance, Mr. Woodby is in full leadership now of the IT needs. So it used to be that State Department of Education IT, about 10 of them had responsibilities in the technical high schools, but they were housed at state Department of Ed. So all of the employees as you see on the sheet of our positions are state Department of Ed employees, but now the IT unit and their manager have been fully moved over to CTECS. So we're staffing up in other areas like that. The big important areas would be fiscal and HR and then also Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity. And we'll do it a little bit more slowly and continue to support them as we have historically in the meanwhile.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Thank you. If you could for the work groups provide, you know, an accounting of how many employees are over there in the systems or, and probably the categories of what they do and in the breakdown if there are any people in your place who are you know currently performing some of that work and what that comes to as well.

Have you, has some of the problem with filling the teaching positions at the technical schools been resolved? What's the, how many are still hanging open that you still want to fill?
DIANNA WENTZELL: Yes, Mr. Woodby and I were just looking at that before coming in here and right now there are about 60 certified staff vacancies throughout the system and I believe 1,100 staff, or is it 1,700 staff? 1,100 certified staff total, so it's about 5 percent. And that's not, you know, we'd like to have 0 percent vacancies, but that's unrealistic in any school system and our vacancy rate is less than in our major urban districts now, which is where most of our schools are located. So we all struggle in shortage areas and the technical schools, the vocational technical educators is a shortage area and we have some unique challenges in some of our trade educators in that by the time they're eligible to achieve certification to teach in our technical high schools they make so much money that it's extremely difficult to entice them to be teachers and we just, you know. And then we have other staff vacancies as well, about 60 others. About another 60 that are not instructional vacancies.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Okay, I think it would if you could provide us that, that would be great and I think also if you could because this is such a huge issue for the state and a huge focus for the administration and all of us. If you could also get us an idea of how many are graduating in the more advanced technical systems, then so you know, so we can see what that lineup is. Thank you.

And then the other area where I had some questions. So you were clear in your testimony the other in education and you’ve repeated some of that here and what you've given us in writing. You've got some money budgeted for educational consultants to assist
districts in sharing services. And I wondered if you could describe in a little more detail what you expect them to do. My impression is that given the possibility to do it, there are a lot of districts who would love to share services but there are some barriers in their way. Like binding arbitration and so on that could be perhaps tweaked to help and some municipal charter steps that could be facilitated. But anyway, I just wonder what they might do that would go beyond that. What's their job?

DIANNA WENTZELL: In the Governor's proposal, there's I think 800,000 dollars, is that accurate? What we have envisioned for that really is three staff people and staff people at the state Department of Education are called education consultants, so it's not that $800,000 would go to consultants, but we do think that we also will need consultant services and I think this would be a really good use of our RECS. What we'd like to do with our Regional Educational Service Centers, develop a protocol for how to support shared school services, whether it's between a municipality and their school district or among municipalities. What we've seen in the last five or six years is when communities seek our help in order to try to regionalize is the only option we've had. We've kind of not had the continuum that this approach would allow but to develop a plan to regionalize. It's a very intensive process and we need to support them with fiscal support and with legal support. And so very likely two of those staff members, one would be a fiscal person and one would be a legal person. There's so much to manage in those areas.
And then the other would likely be somebody who begin to specialize in the programmatic aspects of what is the playbook, what are the continuum of shared services, how do we work through very likely our Regional Educational Service Centers to provide people with what it takes locally to develop a plan. And what we’ve seen so far is that some of our Regional Educational Service Centers do have that capacity and we would go first to where we know that the capacity is very likely, but I think it's critical that all six regions have the ability to support their districts in developing plans that then the commission and shared school services would work with to help them, you know, first of all, figure out if the plan really was going to save them any money and then what should the implementation plan be. Currently, the few that we've worked with over the last five years, it takes, you know, a long time. Hopefully we can identify what some of the barriers and some of them might be statutory to this kind of work is and address them and bring them forward to you through the reporting mechanism that is in the bill. 'Cause we have found some places that it crashes and burns, so some of our efforts with municipalities, and it can take two or three years to get a plan together, and then because of the current statute the plan needs to be approved in all of the communities and you know, sometimes it's four communities and one mows it down and it's over, you know?

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): How many towns do you envisage having to work with? How many districts?

DIANNA WENTZELL: Well, I think a lot of that depends on getting a couple of good plans successful
first. I think a lot of helping people do this is making sure that you pick the right projects first and then that you help them with the right combination of incentives and flexibility to be successful and then to demonstrate that the result is efficiency but also effectiveness. Because ultimately this needs to not only be an efficient use of our kids' money, it also needs to result in better education for our children.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Yeah, that's absolutely essential that if it's only a money thing it'd be a shame. Just a couple short questions. So these aren't new people, these are people who are already in the --?

DIANNA WENTZELL: we would need additional staff to do this more.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): You would need additional people. And, and finally, just looking at the wording in the OFA sheet, are you speaking of regionalization only involving consolidation or are you speaking of sharing services as well?

DIANNA WENTZELL: I think we see this as a continuum of sharing services and a lot of it is shining a spotlight on things that are already going on that are really going well. Whether it's sharing services around for instance a special education need between two communities that build a program together and send their kids, you know. So we already have a lot of that going on and we'd like to promote more of it and we think this will be an opportunity to demonstrate how collaboration can result in a more efficient, effective outcome and especially in some particularly expensive areas.
REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Okay, that’s the particularly expensive areas, meaning?

DIANNA WENTZELL: One of the things that I would recommend people look at first is programs that they know, sometimes programs that they’re running at very small capacity that their neighbor might also be running at very small capacity where they could collaborate on a more efficient program together. And a lot of times that’s going to be in special education.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Yeah, okay. All right, well thank you very much. Any detail you want to provide us is welcome. Thank you.


SENATOR ABRAMS (13TH): Good afternoon. There was an elimination of funding for some programs: LEAP, Connecticut Writing Project, Parent Trust Fund, Bridge to Success, Young Parents Program. Can you speak to that as to whether or not, you know, what the policy reasoning was behind eliminating that funding?

DIANNA WENTZELL: I think in some of the cases there are areas where because of the way we've been doing our work in the last several years through the Alliance districts and the commissioner's network schools, some of the smaller programs are filling a redundant need and it would be better to keep the money together.

For instance, our commissioner's network program already does a lot with extending the school day, so we'd rather see our extended day programming running primarily through Alliance district or
commissioner's network, because that's a highly accountable funding source, whereas these other line items would push the money out and it's relatively low accountability.

SENATOR ABRAMS (13TH): I just have one other question. There's 1.1 million line items for the Ed Sight website that you referred to before and I'm just wondering if that money to pay for a private contractor, or what is that money about?

DIANNA WENTZELL: It goes to a variety of sources. There are staff in that line item, you know, department staff. Also one of the things that happens every time that there is a data collection created is that code has to be written to make that work and some of the work that we're doing is requiring us to rewrite code in, so it could be programmers as well as people doing data collection. We could be paying contractors sometimes to do data coding if it's short term rather than bringing on staff and then we also house a significant amount of the analytics through staff, so that's a contract.

SENATOR ABRAMS (13TH): Can you bring that breakdown to the work group? Thank you very much. Thank you, Madam.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Thank you. Representative Currey.

REP. CURREY (11TH): Thank you, Madam Chair. Good afternoon. Nice to see you, commissioner, Cathy. I came in at the tail end of the direct certification conversation, so I apologize if this was clearly asked or not. But I just want to add, do you believe that the 2018 FRPL count that shows that 26,000 increase in students that are lower income,
or more students are lower income that were than last year. It does not accurately reflect the actual number of low income students and that the direct certification is actually going to capture that more accurately?

DIANNA WENTZELL: We do believe that the direct certification is going to capture that more accurately and especially over time and Cathy will add to this, but one of the things we've seen with any of our data collection is when a data collection becomes more consequential in some way we seem to have a bit of a data integrity bump where we hear from our locals "Oh, we weren't really paying as much attention as we should be and now we're going to pay a lot of attention." And that's been true with things like absence now that we've made absence much more consequential in the accountability system. We have people saying "Oh, you really wanted to know that?" Yeah, we really did. You know, we actually really want to know about all of the couple hundred data things we ask you. But we get a lot better data integrity when there's high consequence and therefore better checking as well. Cathy, do you want to elaborate on --?

CATHY DEMPSY: Yeah, so the data staff is actually taking a look and auditing some of the districts that had the most significant variances over the two years. What we have heard from actually all of them that had a discrepancy is that it was due to the advent of the addition of Medicaid dated to direct certification, which is not particularly, we have questions about why that would be the case. And so I think to the commissioner's point, whenever we change how we collect data and supply that data,
there is an opportunity for it to not necessarily align in a way that we would have expected and so we are going to, we are in the midst of reviewing those numbers to see what exactly caused the differences. But I would've expected, you know, one of the things that I would say about this is that if you look at the October 1, 2017 free and reduced price lunch counts which was before direct certification included HUAKY, all right. And you compare, so everybody was being, unless you were directly certified through SNAP, TFA, or homeless and foster, then it was the old forms, so it was where families were filling out income forms. That data is about 700 kids lower than the data that we have this year through the direct certification collection now that we actually are able to capture the HUSKY kids in direct certification.

So, if I look at those two, there's not that huge anomaly. There are some districts within there that we have a couple of questions about because they are lower than I would've thought that they would be. But I think there are other measures to address that. So I think we are less off or there is less discrepancy than there seems to be because of the anomaly in the self-reported free and reduced price lunch 17 and 18 data.

REP. CURREY (11TH): Yeah, and I assume we'll have a more extensive conversation when we're back together again. I just also want to follow up on Representative Dathan's question with regards to the differences between the agency's ask and the Governor's recommendations and I appreciate the commissioner giving a very political answer, as I understand you have a boss that you also answer to.
But I just want to say to colleagues, make no mistake, the state Department of Education is running on a skeleton crew and if we truly are going to want to invest in the future of the students in the state of Connecticut, we have to be willing to invest in the state Department of Education. I mean the Chief Academic Officer is not even a filled position at the state Department of Education right now. That is atrocious and I know there are a number of people over there who are wearing multiple hats right now doing tremendous work and not being able to provide 100 percent to each of those positions, so I'm hoping that my colleagues on this committee will take that into consideration as we continue to work through this appropriations process. Thank you.

SENATOR OSEN (19TH): Representative Kokoruda.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): Thank you, Madam Chair. Good afternoon. Good to see both of you. And I'm sorry if you answered this already, but I know there a question about Youth Service Board and I just want to clarify I don't know what the answer was but there are 102 Youth Service Boards in our state and 146 communities are effected by them. So, I know I don't know what the number that was given, but I think there was some concern it might be a little off. But anyway. My, and you can double check. Just double check that.

When we do have our working group together, I looked per pupil expenditure. We've been using that term forever and I know there's a formula and I know it's set, but when I talk to my finance director, I can see that all the sudden some questions have creeped into her mind if she's really getting it right and
she starts bringing up the potential for grants to be included and whatever. So can we just in the working group just really take a look. Is there a better formula than just what's in the statute? Is there something better we could be looking at to clarify and is there more flexibility with that than most of us are aware of?

And then my final question which you know I always bring up is MVR. With what's happening to the majority or potentially going to happen to the majority of our communities with major cuts between the pension being cost being diverted to them, with cuts in ECS. It’s significant and I think the one thing I've been told by more than one community that you really can't figure out your MVR. You really have to go to Cathy Dempsy to get the number. We should be able to figure that out. That should be a formula. So, Cathy, we don’t want to make you totally indispensable, but I do think we need a formula for it.

DIANNA WENTZELL: We can bring, we can bring to the working group, there is a formula, but we can also bring a chart that we did make because there's a formula and then there are a number of things that have been added to statute to address special circumstances. So there's kind of three or four main scenarios to fall into and to know which group you fall into unless it's obvious, like the Alliance district, for instance, you do sometimes need to have a conversation with Cathy and just for the record Cathy Dempsy is indispensable. The state wouldn't work without her, so.

But we will bring that chart that we use because it would be great for everybody. You know. We've sent
it to the districts and we should share it with you as well of how we guide districts through what the rules are that apply to them currently.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): And commissioner, could you also give us some information on how many towns/communities have requested relief? And how many towns have gotten it, because I think there's a lot of misinformation out. Because I know we've done a lot of work with that and I know you've worked hard with it too. But when I attended my last cave meeting, you know, the regional meeting, it happened to have two regional schools there, districts there. I was surprised I was hearing things I haven't heard in a couple years. I thought we had kind of turned a corner on people. It used to be that I think this was even before you were here, that people felt, towns felt that when they requested MVR relief they were told "We don't want to have a conversation. We don't want to go there." And that's what I think we worked on the last few years and I've been happy about it. But I heard those comments again this time and it was discouraging to hear it. So I'm hoping for more information on that.

You know, one of the towns I represent never felt worried about MVR. They were a growing community that had, were fortunate enough to be able to want to put and could put, afford to put money into education. But that's changed and you know we got to a certain per pupil expenditure kind of the middle and all the sudden we've have an incredible decline, 25, almost 30 percent of our students and we've closed those schools. Matter of fact we
closed one school 14 years ago preliminary and now we're just getting ready to close one next year.

MVR is now all of sudden a major issue and I wonder how much we're at an inflated level. That was by our own choosing, no one's fault but ours before and now that we've gotten there we've gone from being middle of the road to being one of the highest per pupil expenditures, which I don't know how to explain that to my senior citizens and I just think that's what we've got to start looking at.

I remember a superintendent saying to me years ago "We don't worry about MVR. We always put more money into education." We can't do that anymore. Our declined enrollment is so significant. As I said we're closing a school next year and we're talking about closing another one. So I just think as times have changed especially with the decline, I hope that your department would be more open to working with these groups that really, really cannot afford to be really high per pupil expenditures. We just can't afford it.

DIANNA WENTZELL: Well, thank you for that, Representative Kokoruda. And we have supported a number of, first of all we support everybody that calls and wants to work through whether they qualify for an MVR reduction with us. I think you represent Durham Middlefield, right? Yeah, we have helped them. They closed a school and we helped them take the maximum reduction that they could. Closing schools in a way is an easy one. I mean, nothing's easy about closing a school ever, I know. But closing a school is an easier situation with regard to the MVR than some other declining enrollment situations.
Because unfortunately you know, the first graders don't just get up and leave. You know, you might lose 30 kids but they didn't all lose, you know, first grade didn't move to the next town so you still have to have the first grade teacher. So helping them scale, we have a whole system for that and Cathy can explain it better than I can, so if you want to. But we can bring you who's asked and what we were able to do for them.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): 'Cause you know, I think in most towns this declined enrollment is ten years old. We've got ten years of it now. It used to be every seven years you would see something change, so I think that's why we need to work together more than ever because the declined enrollment in Madison is in ninth grade this year and it's going all the way down to kindergarten and we've got a high school we built for 1,200-1,300 kids and there's a good chance in three years we'll have less than 800 children in that building. And you know what, those costs don't go away, especially if we're limited with this MVR. So thank you, but I'd really appreciate all that information.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Thank you. Representative Johnson.

REP. JOHNSON (49TH): Thank you, Madam Chair and thank you, commissioner, for your testimony and your work. I just have some questions regarding the technical schools in general. First of all, I'm wondering, do we have any information on if there are waiting lists for students to get into technical school and --.
DIANNA WENTZELL: Mr. Woodby, the superintendent of the technical high schools is here with us, so I'm going to need his help to answer the current status of whether there are students, whether we have schools that are at capacity.

JEFFERY WOODSBY: That's a complicated question because each location's got a little bit of a different story. So we're currently finishing, you know, the enrollment offer acceptance period right now for next year, so certainly by the next time we come back we'll have some pretty hard fast numbers in that area.

REP. JOHNSON (49TH): I was wondering if you could bring information, what you have? I don't want to hold you here any longer but if you have information, if you could bring it to the group we could chat about that. The other question I have about the tech schools is some of the tech schools like Meridan and Linden are also housing the community colleges and I wondered if that's going out in any other way and how that's being handled and how the impact on the, you know, enrollment in those circumstances.

JEFFERY WOODSBY: Certainly. Off the top of my head and I just want to preface this that it could be a little bit mistaken, but I seem to recall we have about 17 programs running with the community colleges at our different sites. Now we have 17 high schools. That doesn't necessarily mean that each one has one. Some might have more than one, but you know, just some of the ones that we're proud and we want to highlight as being new is the Three Rivers is a newer program this year with Grasso Tech and it has to do with welding obviously to help meet
the needs down there with Electric Bolt with their employment needs there.

But we certainly have that and I will certainly bring all the specific programs that we house across the state. You know, Windham is a great example of one. We also have Precision Manufacturing with Middlesex College at Wilcox as you referenced as well.

REP. JOHNSON: Great. Thank you so much for that and also just how this coordinates perhaps with early college opportunity in the tech schools might be another way to look at this. I don't know if this is something you've discussed or something that's in the works, but if you have thought about that, that might be another way to you know, address some of the issues that we're facing either with respect to regionalization or you know just making sure our students get into jobs that pay well when they finish school.

So I want to also thank you for the Alliance district being funded. I am very, very happy about that and then if you have anything, a little bit of an update on the emotional intelligence trainings that we're doing with the superintendents so that they can, how they're bringing that back to the schools would also be very much appreciated. Thank you very much for your work and I look forward to seeing you in the group meeting.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Thank you. Representative Walker.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you and I just want to come back to the Magnet schools and excess costs because when you look and I think Rep. Dathan
brought this up, it's 100 million dollar difference and even from the numbers that you requested before the Governor's budget came out, it was 46 million dollars between that and the Governor's number for Magnet schools. And I understand 30 million came up for transportation, but that still means 16 million dollars difference between your original number and the Governor's number. I need to know what that impact is. Because these schools do a fantastic job and I want to make sure I understand about the numbers and the enrollment and the classrooms are capped and a variety of other things, but they have enormous waiting lists, especially in my city and I just, I do not want any more children turned away because of the fact that we are underfunding these programs.

And then excess costs, can you explain to me the dramatic difference between the two, between the Governor's number and your number please?

CATHY DEMPSY: Certainly.

REP. WALKER (93RD): And in the Magnet school, that one.

CATHY DEMPSY: Yes. And I will go back and take another look at the Magnet schools and I was thinking the number was lower than that. I do know the 30 million has gone for the transportation but let me take a look.

REP. WALKER (93RD): The difference between what the Governor's proposing and what you proposed. You proposed 345 million. He came in at 298. That's 46 million dollars difference.
CATHY DEMPSY: Yes, and actually I will bring it to the work session.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Okay, excess cost?

CATHY DEMPSY: So excess cost is as one of our entitlement grants we calculate it based upon what we think if it was uncapped, what we estimate the cost would be over the biennium. So, the Governor's recommendation essentially holds it level to the current appropriation and that is the reduction, is just to hold the current.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Then I guess my question is why did you go up to 202 and are settling at 140? (Laughing.)

DIANNA WENTZELL: Based on the actuarial costs, you know, there's a couple of things that come up perennially that sometimes we try to resolve through saying "Well this is what it really costs", and this was based on actuarial numbers.

REP. WALKER (93RD): The cost from the year before, right?

CATHY DEMPSY: Yes, it is based on the cost from the year before. It's an estimate.

REP. WALKER (93RD): The cost from the year before.

CATHY DEMPSY: Yes, so we would take the excess cost amounts that were paid, let me back up. We would take the high cost student costs from fiscal 2018 and we do an estimate off of that, because you have to remember while we're paying it supposedly at 4.5 times, that amount is, the grant is capped, so we're not actually paying it 4.5 times. So as for the department's budget proposal, we always recommend
what current services would be if we paid the full amount under current law. So we don't anticipate the cap.

DIANNA WENTZELL: So our request is based on an estimate based on last year's actual.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Okay. All right. The other thing to the committee, would you bring the statutory formulas for adult ed, health and welfare and excess cost, could you bring that to the committee, 'cause I want to understand how those formulas are derived.

And I guess my last comment was on the USD1 and USD2, I'd like to know how many PPTS have we had in that?

DIANNA WENTZELL: We might not know how many PPTS. We would know how many new identifications and how many students are in special services. If the PPT doesn't result in an identification, the department may not know that the PPT occurred necessarily. We likely wouldn't know. We know when a student is identified and you know, so for instance, if the PPT did not result in an identification for special services, but resulted in a different type of plan for the student which may or may not be documented under Section 504, that wouldn't be reported to us.

REP. WALKER (93RD): So, okay, so let me as you this: under USD1 and under USD2, do we have a per-student cost that we pay the corrections in DCF?

DIANNA WENTZELL: They have line items that you know, they have budgets directly as separate agencies. So it's not a per-pupil in the same way
and I haven't seen how they break down their costs within their budgets.

REP. WALKER (93RD): So they determine their education costs, not you?

DIANNA WENTZELL: Right. We don't, they're not, you know, they're not in the ECS formula.

REP. WALKER (93RD): But you're the education commissioner. (Laughing.)

DIANNA WENTZELL: We are, and many of our regulatory responsibilities extend to the educational components of children in care through DCF or incarcerated students through corrections, but the funding mechanism is through the agency.

REP. WALKER (93RD): I understand, 'cause I mean your funding mechanism to the towns is through the towns. But you have oversight over the Magnet schools. Do you have oversight over the charter schools? Do you have oversight over the inner district schools and these are two school systems, so you should be getting the data and the information on who's being served in those two entities.

DIANNA WENTZELL: We do, yes.

REP. WALKER (93RD): And then making determination if they are adequately meeting the needs of those kids during that time.

DIANNA WENTZELL: And they are. They have an accountability index. They are part of our accountability system and they are subject to all of the data draws that all of the other LEs are subject to, so we are monitoring them in the same manner. They're also subject to the regulations around
teacher evaluation and administrator evaluation, teacher certification, all of those things.

But the funding is through their agency budgets. So their education is funded through their agency budgets. They unlike CTECS which is the other state school system, they're not part of our department. So the funding is independent, I guess similar to the way it will be when CTECS is an agency.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Okay. I will say that I do not like that. Mainly because I've seen the educations that have been provided in corrections and for DCF what they did for juveniles in the system and now they're in court supported services division. I think that USD2 is probably going to have to incorporate CSSD in there because those are the kids that came from DCF. We need to make sure that we have a uniformity in the process and the same thing with corrections. I've been to the schools. I've seen what they're teaching. I've seen how they're doing it and it needs to be improved dramatically. I mean if we send them out unable to read and calculate, then they are going to end up having the same problems continuously. So, I will say that that will be a big issue for me in working for. So we need to look at that and I'm talking with the agencies and it's not just me, there are about 20 other state reps who are talking to them. So it's a group of us that are very concerned about what's going on in these two USD1s and D2 as far as adequately serving the kids and the adults that are in there that need to get an education and it should be under your umbrella because that is what your agency does. Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Representative Lavielle.
REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Thank you, Madam Chair.
Just one quick question. What is included in the line item called Inter District Cooperation?

DIANNA WENTZELL: So those are inter district grants that support our desegregation efforts throughout the state, you know. I think we prioritize the Sheff region because of the --.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Okay. Thank you very much.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): So, I'm going to wrap it up and I have about five or six things that I need data on. So one, do you get the money for military children and Native American children that we get? Are those going directly to the schools, or does that pass through the state Department of Education? So, do you get a list of, not of the list of the children themselves, do you get numbers from the schools that are getting grants from the federal government for both military children and Native American children?

DIANNA WENTZELL: We'll check on that.

CATHY DEMPSY: Yeah. I don't believe we get it broken down at the children level. What we'll get is an aggregate for the district for that particular grant.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): So you'll get, I don't what you call it now. It was EDOO1. I don't why you changed the name, 'cause I thought everybody got it down to EDOO1, but now we call it ESF. So, but I would, is that incorporated into the ESF, the number of military children and the number of Native American children?
DIANNA WENTZELL: The expenditures for the education of those kids, yes, they would be incorporated into that.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Is the revenue that's coming from the federal government on that form too? Should there not be a block on that so that you get the revenue on that form?

CATHY DEMPSY: Yes.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Okay, so you can get me the revenue that we're getting by the schools that are getting that. That would be great. Under the, representative Abercrombie talked about the YSBs and I want to make, and so did Representative Kokoruda, and I want to make sure that we're incorporating all of the funding that's done under YSBs both federal and state and so you have some federal dollars that come in, FQHCs are handling some of the YSBs and we're funding some of the YSBs. I'd just like to know what federal dollars we're getting in and how we're doing that.

How many schools are below the 100 percent of the ECS formula? I don't need the number right now, but I know there's still schools that are under the 100 percent and we're dramatically taking money away from some of the schools that are over, so I guess I would like both numbers. How many schools are over and how many schools are under and see where we are.

I notice that you took three million dollars from the, you had requested ten million dollars for the American School for the Deaf and the Governor gave you seven million, I know it's 7.8 and 10.3. But, what is going to be the impact on the American School for the Deaf with a three million dollar
difference? That's a pretty large percentage of that budget.

You talked about private schools and what you're doing with healthcare. Is this that slippery slope? Are we going to start taking away OT and PT and other things that we're funding that the local school is paying for the local private school, whether it be a religious school or another school? Are we looking to take away those particular functions from some of those schools and how many dollars are going into the private schools? So I'd like to have that. Do you understand that piece of the --?

CATHY DEMPSY: Yeah, I understand that.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): And when we talked about the free and reduced lunches, is everybody applying to USDA for the free and reduced lunch?

DIANNA WENTZELL: The program does come through the USDA, so it is an agriculture program administered in Connecticut by the state Department of Education. So all of the data no matter how we're sourcing it comes through the state Department of Education. We don't run data about the kids through agriculture in Connecticut.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): And on the certification, thank you. And on the certifications, you have certifications for business managers and I would like to know when somebody gets a certification as a business manager and the school goes up to and checks to see if they have it, is there a way to let the schools know when that business manager has absolutely failed the private, the previously appointed position. Because what we're doing is we
do a lot of work in this organization in the, up here in the General Assembly to not pass the trash on teachers and I pause that we've done nothing to the people who handle most of our taxpayer dollars both on a local level and on a state level and they have made critical errors that have put towns in significant jeopardy and I could probably name 25 schools right now today that have had a bad business manager who has made bad decisions and who has put those towns at significant risk and you know most of those towns. So I just think that there needs to a way to remove that certification or to let towns know when they're hiring somebody that is incompetent.

So, and then, MVR. I still have the same concerns that Representative Kokoruda talked about. But we took a lot of money away from schools last year. Not this current year that we're in, but last year. And MVR is being significantly impacted and schools are being told they owed money on when we have been the ones that have put them at jeopardy on some of this stuff, and so I'm a little bit concerned on this and I've had many of my towns sending me letters that they didn't quite make MVR this year, but it's a direct reflection of what they lost last year when you added in an aggregate and I'd just like to have that better sort of more flushed out discussion on that, on MVR.

And then on the ECS change when you talked about the formula for ECS, the grand list is included into the computation. When we know that the grand list is going to significantly change in a town, so for example the town of Lisbon has an authority that is now coming up at the end of its 20 year assessment
on their property and now it's going to be about 50 percent less. So we know in two years that that's what's going to happen. But they're going to see a significant drop. They're a town that's over 100 percent. They're going to see a significant drop in their grand list as a result of that and so I'd like to know what is the policy or what can they possibly do to ameliorate this problem in regards to the grand list and what.

DIANNA WENTZELL: That should result in more funding.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): It should result in more funding, absolutely. But it might be a year behind. So the town is going to have to raise the money and then have to change their, you know. It creates, there must be a way that we can figure out how we're doing this because the grand list is always a year behind and we so we know this is going to happen and there are some cases where we know that a grand list is going to change and so I just think that we should come up with a methodology on fixing that piece of it. I'm happy to talk about that.

And lastly, the positions that are being filled most of them are management positions. The P3A bargaining unit has indicated that there are some positions of theirs that have not been filled recently at all and I was wondering, are they bargaining unit positions that you're filling, or are they management positions and I know that management is loosely defined.

DIANNA WENTZELL: Thank you, yeah the P3, we have filled some, I mean we've had such limited hiring in the last several years but we have hired into all of
our different bargaining units including the P3A bargaining unit. In the technical high schools in preparing them for independence, they did not have a central office because they were part of the department, so they have had some administrative hires, so they're pretty well staffed I would say now in terms of assistant superintendents and things like that. So that is an area where we have hired some P3A in replacing people, but usually used the vacancies in order to create a central office for them.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Okay, thank you very much. I think that's it for now. I appreciate you coming and I know we will be seeing you at the working group and I think we gave you a ton of questions and so I look forward to getting the information. Thank you very much. We'll see you all at 4 o'clock.