

Alliance District Designation

By: Marybeth Sullivan, Senior Legislative Attorney
September 27, 2023 | 2023-R-0229

Issue

Describe how public school districts are designated as alliance districts.

Summary

Connecticut's State Department of Education (SDE) designates alliance districts as required by law. Most public school districts receive this designation based on a scoring system known as the accountability index (AI) with a small number of additional districts getting the designation due to their previous AI scores from an earlier cohort of alliance districts. The index is based on several student-centered measures, including statewide assessment results and high school graduation rates, among others.

Once designated, a district maintains its alliance status for five years. There are currently 36 districts designated by the department as alliance districts, a number which has grown under state law since the program's inception in FY 13.

State law allows the education commissioner to withhold some of an alliance district's Education Cost Sharing (ECS) state aid until the district has submitted a satisfactory application and improvement plan for the funds' expenditure.

Alliance District Designation Criteria

State law defines an alliance district as either (1) a public school district in a town that has one of the 33 lowest accountability index scores as calculated by SDE or (2) a district that was previously designated as an alliance district in FYs 13-22 ([CGS § 10-262u\(a\)\(1\)](#)). We discuss both criteria, scores and cohort status, in greater detail below.

Accountability Index Scores

By law, the “accountability index score” for a school district or an individual school is the score resulting from multiple weighted measures that (1) include the mastery test scores (i.e., the performance index score) and high school graduation rates and (2) may include academic growth over time, attendance and chronic absenteeism, postsecondary education and career readiness, enrollment in and graduation from higher education institutions and postsecondary education programs, civics and arts education, and physical fitness ([CGS § 10-223e\(a\)](#)). In practice, SDE uses all of these measures, plus “progress toward English proficiency,” to determine the AI scores. SDE explains each of these indicators in its publication “[Using Accountability Results to Guide Improvement](#)” (December 2022, Sixth Edition).

Accountability index scores are publicly available on SDE’s public data dashboard, [EdSight](#). These scores specifically are housed in the [Next Generation Accountability Dashboard](#) and are available by district.

Cohorts

The number of alliance districts has grown since the program’s inception. When the program began in FY 13, state law instructed that the first five-year cohort consist of 30 districts. Then, for the cohort beginning in FY 18, the law was amended to require the education commissioner designate 33 districts.

Most recently, for the cohort beginning in FY 23, the law requires the commissioner to designate 36 districts as alliance districts ([CGS § 10-262u\(b\)](#)). This current cohort consists of three additional districts that were not among the districts with the 33 lowest accountability index scores. The law requires SDE to include the districts that were named alliance districts in a previous cohort. The table below lists the three five-year cohorts throughout the program’s history.

Table 1: Alliance District Cohorts by FY

FY 13-17	FY 18-22	FY 23-27
Ansonia	Ansonia	Ansonia
Bloomfield	Bloomfield	Bloomfield
Bridgeport	Bridgeport	Bridgeport
Bristol	Bristol	Bristol
Danbury	Danbury	Danbury
Derby	Derby	Derby
East Hartford	East Hartford	East Hartford

Table 1 (continued)

FY 13-17	FY 18-22	FY 23-27
East Haven	East Haven	East Haven
East Windsor	East Windsor	East Windsor
Hamden	Groton	Enfield*
Hartford	Hamden	Groton
Killingly	Hartford	Hamden
Manchester	Killingly	Hartford
Meriden	Manchester	Killingly
Middletown	Meriden	Manchester
Naugatuck	Middletown	Meriden
New Britain	Naugatuck	Middletown
New Haven	New Britain	Naugatuck
New London	New Haven	New Britain
Norwalk	New London	New Haven
Norwich	Norwalk	New London
Putnam	Norwich	Norwalk
Stamford	Putnam	Norwich
Vernon	Stamford	Plainfield*
Waterbury	Thompson	Putnam
West Haven	Torrington	Stamford
Winchester	Vernon	Stratford*
Windham	Waterbury	Thompson
Windsor	West Haven	Torrington
Windsor Locks	Winchester	Vernon
	Windham	Waterbury
	Windsor	West Haven
	Windsor Locks	Winchester
		Windham
		Windsor
		Windsor Locks

* Indicates an alliance district that does not have an accountability index score among the lowest 33

Designation Impact

By law, the comptroller must withhold from an alliance district town any increase in ECS funds that exceeds the amount the town received in 2012. However, for districts designated as alliance districts for the first time in FY 23, the comptroller must withhold ECS funds over the FY 22 amount.

The comptroller transfers the money to the education commissioner to withhold until she approves the district's alliance district application and plan to improve academic performance.

The alliance district's school board must apply to the commissioner to have its alliance funds released. Applications must include objectives, performance targets, and a plan developed, in part, on the strategic use of student academic performance data. Upon approving the plan, the commissioner releases the alliance funds to the town, which then pays the funds to its local or regional board of education for expenditure ([CGS § 10-262u\(c\)\(1\)-\(2\) & \(d\)](#)).

An alliance district's school board must spend its released alliance funds on any of the following: (1) according to the plan submitted with their alliance district application; (2) on the minority candidate certification, retention, and residency program; (3) on ECS spending requirements; and (4) for any other items allowed under SDE guidelines. The law includes a list of things that may be included in the plan such as (1) a tiered system of interventions for the district's schools; (2) ways to strengthen the foundational programs in reading through the intensive reading instruction program; and (3) additional learning time, including extended school day or school year programming.

The school board must submit an annual expenditure report to the education commissioner. If she determines that the board spent alliance funds on expenditures unrelated to its approved application, she may either (1) require the board to repay these funds or (2) reduce its alliance funding in a future FY. Any alliance funds unspent by the board carry forward to its next FY ([CGS §§ 10-156gg & 10-262u\(d\), \(g\) & \(h\)](#)).

The commissioner may withhold alliance funds if a school board does not comply with these requirements. She also may renew the funds if the board gives evidence that the school district is achieving the objectives and performance targets in its approved alliance plan ([CGS § 10-262u\(f\)](#)).

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